CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Conference Group for Central European History of the American Historical Association

Review
Author(s): Beth A. Griech-Polelle
Review by: Beth A. Griech-Polelle
Source: *Central European History*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Mar., 2009), pp. 175-178
Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of Conference Group for Central European History of the American Historical Association
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/20457442
Accessed: 16-07-2016 01:45 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://about.jstor.org/terms

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Cambridge University Press, Conference Group for Central European History of the American Historical Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Central European History*

This content downloaded from 178.250.250.21 on Sat, 16 Jul 2016 01:45:34 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Hungary, and Czechoslovakia receiving disproportionately far more attention than the others. This imbalance results in not only insufficient and merely cursory coverage of the Baltic states and Finland, but also errors of fact. For example, the author declares that when in late June, early July 1941 the Germans occupied Latvia, the Latvians created a new government (p. 185)—which in fact did not happen. Also, German and Latvian forces in Kurland surrendered on May 8, 1945, not May 1 (p. 355).

This reviewer can recommend this work for general readers already acquainted with World War II and the states under consideration—only those able to master the fragmented, time-delineated narrative. It would not serve effectively as an introductory classroom text, since students lacking knowledge of the region and the war would have difficulty in following its disjointed flow. The more conversant scholar would find the limited and mostly obsolete bibliography, the imbalance of coverage, and reluctance to tackle relevant scholarly issues somewhat disappointing.

VALDIS O. LUMANS
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA AIKEN

doi:10.1017/S0008938909000193

Dominican Haven: The Jewish Refugee Settlement in Sosua, 1940–1945. By Marion A. Kaplan. New York: Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust Press. 2008. Pp. xii + 255. Paper $19.95. ISBN 978-0-9716859-3-2.

Marion Kaplan's beautifully written book, *Dominican Haven*, investigates the complex and often contradictory story of the rescue of central European Jews by the dictator of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo. Trujillo, a brutal racist in his own right, made an offer to take in 100,000 persecuted Jews in 1935 and again in 1938. Kaplan traces the background of Trujillo's offer, the negotiations with Americans, and the twists and turns that led almost 500 Jewish settlers out of urban, industrialized Europe to the relative safety of an agrarian, fairly isolated region of the Dominican Republic called Sosua.

Why do we need to know the story of such a relatively small number of people resettling in a rather remote part of the world? Other countries certainly took in more Jewish refugees, and we know that 100,000 Jews were not taken in by Dominican officials. Yet the story of the Jewish settlement in Sosua offers us insights into many different, but related, topics. It underscores how most countries were unwilling to open their doors to Jews, even in the face of blatant persecution and murder. It shows the relationship between the United

This content downloaded from 178.250.250.21 on Sat, 16 Jul 2016 01:45:34 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

States and a Latin American island nation. It reveals the expectations, hopes, and fears of new immigrants, grateful to be out of the grasp of the Nazis, but unsure as to their new surroundings. It shows us how Jews came to be welcomed by a local population, and how the two groups of people interacted and, at times, intermarried. Throughout it all, Kaplan deftly weaves the main personalities of the settlers together with the complex network of government representatives, intergovernmental agencies, and private philanthropists trying to make Trujillo's offer of refuge a life-saving reality. At the same time, the settlement of Sosua speaks to issues of current refugee crises; how resettlement can be accomplished; and how governments, agencies, and philanthropies must work together to make rescue feasible.

Chapter one addresses the issues that emerged in the summer of 1938 at the conference held in Evian, France. For Trujillo, the Evian Conference offered him an opportunity at redemption, or at the very least, some good publicity. Nine months earlier he had ordered the brutal murder of between 12,000 and 20,000 Haitians who were living on the fluid border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Now, in 1938, Trujillo could appear as a great humanitarian. Kaplan, however, delves beneath the public relations and finds Trujillo's motivation in his desire to see white people as the dominant population (as opposed to the black Haitians), his wish to expand the Dominican economy in the countryside, and his aim to establish closer business ties with the United States. Here the great irony of racial thinking is brought to the fore. In Nazi Germany, Jews had been classified as "not white," but to Trujillo's mind, Jews were the "right" kind of people to repopulate his nation. He even turned anti-Jewish stereotypes into positive ones by stressing the imagery of Jews as hard-working, connected to money-making enterprises, and possessing high cultural standards. Out of these mixed motives, none of them very noble, came the settlement at Sosua.

Chapter two begins the negotiations that made the new settlement possible. At the age of 65, an American-born Jew, James Rosenberg, embarked on a mission to aid Jews by transforming them into farmers and small craftsmen. His close associate, Joseph Rosen, would serve as the man-on-the-spot in Sosua, working to implement their plan. Rosen found Trujillo eager to take in the 100,000 refugees immediately, but Rosen understood that the project would have to proceed in a more deliberate fashion. After working through a series of negotiations, Rosenberg and Rosen both noted how at each meeting the theme of whiteness recurred. Rosenberg was deeply aware of the irony of working to save European Jews from racism, only to be playing into Trujillo's propaganda blitz that the Dominican Republic was to be a white nation, unlike its neighbor, "black" Haiti. On January 30, 1940, the contract was signed in a ceremony. A U.S. State Department official, Robert T. Pell, hailed it as "the first scientific attempt to bring order out of the existing chaos of uprooted populations" (p. 47).

This content downloaded from 178.250.250.21 on Sat, 16 Jul 2016 01:45:34 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Chapter three explores the arrival of the refugees in the Dominican Republic, with the first "pioneers" arriving in March 1940. Here Kaplan traces the difficulties that mostly urban central Europeans had to surmount: they were accustomed to basic amenities, but now found themselves in a situation in which they were expected to live as farmers, planting crops, milking cows, and building their own homes. In addition to the agricultural challenges, there were the language and climate adjustments. There were also the interpersonal problems that accompanied an uprooted, traumatized people forced to work and live together in an enterprise in which not one of them could claim to be an expert. Ultimately, however, Sosua was endorsed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as "a significant step toward the solution of the world refugee problem" (p. 78).

Chapter four begins the grim descent into the reality of rescue attempts in war-torn Europe. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States sought to limit the number of refugees, not just those coming to reside in America, but also those needing transit visas to pass through Ellis Island on their way to many Latin American countries. Fears of potential "enemy aliens" and "spies," economic insecurities, and anti-Semitism resulted in the loss of U.S. support for the Sosua project. At precisely the moment in time when emigration could mean the difference between life and death, it became less and less feasible for refugees to escape the net of Nazi terror. Kaplan revisits the notoriously anti-Semitic attitudes of the U.S. State Department under the leadership of Breckinridge Long who considered Jews to be "lawless, scheming, defiant—and in many ways unassimilable" (p. 91). Despite the work of Rosenberg, Rosen, and the Dominican government (which had issued more than 2,000 visas to Europeans), most refugees remained stranded in Germany, Holland, and Italy. By the middle of 1941, project officials noted that the U.S. State Department stopped their every move to rescue more people and they were running low on funds. Therefore, the Sosua project refocused its efforts from that of rescue to that of serving as an example of how displaced people could be resettled after the war.

Chapter five covers the years of 1942-1945 in the Sosua community. Here Kaplan uses all of her expertise from her previous studies of gender and cultural relations to examine the types of social relations that existed in Sosua, particularly the expectations held by the European settlers and their new Dominican neighbors. This theme is carried over into chapter six, where male to female ratios created problems for the settlement community as well as the tensions arising from well-intentioned philanthropists and the recipients of those donations. Throughout it all, the new members of the Dominican nation could not help but notice, "Mr. Trujillo was a dictator which, of course, also contributed to a special mood and way of life in the country and even though he was friendly to us, this was an atmosphere we would rather not have been reminded of" (p. 140).

This content downloaded from 178.250.250.21 on Sat, 16 Jul 2016 01:45:34 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

The final chapter details the lives and successes of some of the settlers while providing the reasons that many of the refugees decided to move away from Sosua at the end of the war. For those homesteaders who remained in Sosua, their efforts were paying off, for by 1957 their community was entirely self-supporting and the colony was pronounced a "success." Yet the political turmoil that led to Trujillo's assassination in 1961 led even more homesteaders to leave the country. Today, the Jewish presence in Sosua has all but vanished, but the Dominican Republic saved many lives "and would have saved more had the war and the U.S. government not stopped them" (p. 173). Sosua might not have been the ideal setting, but with all of its contradictions and complexities, it offered a safe haven to those in terrible need. As Luis Hess, one of the rescued settlers, observed, "The person who wanted to help us was not a humanist. But did we have a choice? Hitler, the German racist, persecuted us and wanted to murder us. Trujillo, the Dominican racist, saved our lives. [We] were in the awkward position of having to be thankful to a dictator . . . I was grateful to Trujillo. If a murderer saves your life, you still have to be grateful to the murderer" (p. 27). Kaplan's work serves as a useful reminder that rescue was possible, even from unlikely places and from unlikely people.

BETH A. GRIECH-POLELLE
BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

doi:10.1017/S000893890900020X
The Holocaust: Roots, History, and Aftermath. By David M. Crowe. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. 2008. Pp. xvi + 524. Paper $49.00. ISBN 0-8133-4325-9.

Can any textbook—by its nature a synthesis of disparate events, materials, and perspectives—give students a sense of the depth and emotions of the Holocaust? Works such as Doris Bergen's *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003) and David Engel's *The Holocaust: The Third Reich and the Jews* (Harlow: Langman, 2000), though intellectually sophisticated, are short, focused, and painted in broad strokes. One can use them in a course along with primary sources, literary works, and monographs. In his handsome textbook adorned with numerous photographs, David M. Crowe produces a much more detailed narrative covering perpetrators, victims, rescuers, and some bystanders. It has some strengths, but too many weaknesses in its current form.

At the outset Crowe maintains that a broad overview of Jewish history is necessary, because some students lack exposure to it and might otherwise see

This content downloaded from 178.250.250.21 on Sat, 16 Jul 2016 01:45:34 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms