

The Voyage of the *St. Louis* Revisited

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The story of the *St. Louis*, as that narrative has evolved over the decades, often includes as much myth as it does history. Focusing on American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee negotiator Lawrence Berenson, the author brings to light the often overlooked influence of key actors' attitudes and demeanor on the episode's outcome. He then traces the diplomatic exchange that followed the failure of negotiations to land the *St. Louis* passengers in Cuba. In conclusion, he calls for the *St. Louis* crisis to be read in a way that takes into account the United States' domestic and international political context at the time.

The first part of this article, "A Case of Refuge Denied," might be viewed as the Cuban chapter of the *St. Louis* episode.¹ Was the Cuban government's refusal to disembark the MS *St. Louis*' passengers a foregone conclusion in May–June 1939? The leadership of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) thought so. In a June 27 letter, executive director Joseph Hyman wrote: "Our small committee, which worked twenty-four hours day and night, was in constant touch with Havana . . . and is quite convinced that the Cuban authorities never intended at any time actually to give asylum to these people."² Considerable evidence suggests that Hyman was right. Yet, Lawrence Berenson, the JDC's negotiator in Havana during the *St. Louis* episode, may have missed an opportunity to land the passengers in Cuba. Is it possible that he not only mishandled his mission, but also in his naïveté precluded an alternate, perhaps better, result than that ultimately achieved for the *St. Louis* passengers?

The second part of the article, "A Case of Refuge Achieved," focuses on the outcome of the *St. Louis* voyage once the passengers were denied refuge in Cuba. On June 6, after maneuvering the ship in circles for four days between Cuba and Florida, Captain Gustav Schröder learned that talks with the Cubans had been suspended. He immediately set a course for Europe. The story then shifts to the efforts of a handful of individuals determined to prevent the *St. Louis* from returning its passengers to Nazi Germany. Their success is too often overlooked. Taken as a whole, the article aims not so much to provide definitive answers to the complex questions generated by the voyage of the *St. Louis* as to challenge widely held suppositions about the leading actors: Berenson, the Cuban government, American government officials, and the JDC.

A Case of Refugee Denied

Central to the first part of the *St. Louis* story is Lawrence Berenson—especially his interactions with Cuba’s President Federico Laredo Brú. While in Havana (May 29–June 6), Berenson met regularly with both the American ambassador and the consul general until the *St. Louis* departed Caribbean waters. From June 1 he was in almost hourly communication with a special committee of the JDC (he complained to American Consul General Coert du Bois that his handlers were constantly pestering him). The failure of many observers to appreciate the importance of his role is evident even in contemporary reportage and in the numerous telegrams that inundated the U.S. State Department, the White House, and the JDC in early June 1939.³ But a number of historians also have failed to address the impact of the JDC’s lead negotiator.

Arthur Morse, whose book *While Six Million Died* first focused postwar attention on the *St. Louis* episode, notes accurately that Berenson eventually “found himself in an utterly confusing tug of war with shifting Cuban factions.”⁴ But by claiming that the American ambassador had “urged [Berenson] to keep the offer” to the Cubans “as low as possible,” Morse laid a foundation for the now widespread view of the American response to the crisis as coldhearted. In fact, his representation of American involvement in the negotiations does not correspond with State Department records.⁵ Appearing soon after Morse’s publication, David Wyman’s *Paper Walls* seeks to provide “a full and accurate picture of American refugee policy in the years 1938 through 1941.”⁶ Wyman generally provides a solid and balanced analysis of American refugee policy in the three-year period leading up to Pearl Harbor. Yet, in the half-dozen sentences he devotes to the *St. Louis*, he neglects to mention either Berenson or Laredo Brú.⁷ Given Wyman’s overriding focus on American refugee policy, one might have anticipated fuller coverage of this pivotal issue. Henry Feingold, in his acclaimed treatment of refugee policy during the Roosevelt administration, briefly mentions Laredo Brú’s significance to the *St. Louis* affair, but he neglects altogether Berenson’s role.⁸ Like Morse and Wyman, Feingold reinforces an overly simplified understanding of the event. In 1974, Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan-Witts published *Voyage of the Damned*, a popularized and fast-paced approach to the topic that, despite its commitment to entertain, provides more robust coverage of the complex Berenson-Laredo Brú exchanges than any of its predecessors.⁹ Nevertheless, by blending well-documented discourse with unsubstantiated and speculative commentary, Thomas and Morgan-Witts compromise somewhat their treatment’s value to scholars.

Irwin Gellman, a student of 1930s and 1940s American-Cuban relations, contributed the first in-depth examination of Berenson’s negotiations in Havana.¹⁰ In a 1971 article, Gellman notes that, having arrived in Havana on May 29, Berenson retained his boundless optimism until as late as June 4. Berenson was convinced, Gellman writes, “that the Cuban government would reverse its earlier decision and

allow the refugees to land once a bond of \$50,000 had been placed in a Havana bank.”¹¹ But Gellman neglects to analyze the impact of Berenson’s optimism on the JDC and American government officials in Havana. In their 1987 study of American refugee policy between 1933 and 1945, Richard Breitman and Alan Kraut cover the *St. Louis* crisis briefly, arriving at conclusions roughly similar to Gellman’s.¹² Their account’s complexity is enriched by references to the Wagner-Rogers Bill. This legislation, introduced in February 1939, proposed to admit to the United States 20,000 German refugee children outside the legal quota limits for 1939–1940. After three hearings and significant lobbying both for and against, the bill failed to win congressional approval. Breitman and Kraut do not note that the final closed-door deliberations on the Wagner-Rogers bill took place while the *St. Louis* was attempting to disembark its passengers. The coincidence bears reflection: might the deliberations have influenced the administration’s public response to the *St. Louis*?

Two recent studies add to our understanding in important ways. The first, *Refuge Denied* by Sarah Ogilvie and Scott Miller, while not attending to the Cuban negotiations, offers an admirable investigation into the fate of the passengers following their disembarkation in Belgium. Working from a long-held assumption that the majority of the passengers who were not placed in Britain lost their lives in the Holocaust, Ogilvie and Miller establish that of the 620 passengers who returned to continental Europe, 365 survived the war.¹³

Of greater import to the present study is Diane Afoumado’s *Exil impossible*, a careful assessment of the circumstances impinging on the voyage.¹⁴ Afoumado justifiably asserts that those traveling on the *St. Louis* were “not refugees during their voyage to Cuba, [but became] so during the return trip”—that is, once the Cubans declined to honor their landing permits.¹⁵ Regarding the complicated Berenson-Laredo Brú negotiations in Havana, she dissects the critical documentation, reaching a conclusion in keeping with Gellman’s: Berenson was handicapped by his optimism. Also like Gellman, however, Afoumado neglects to underscore the adjoining implications of Berenson’s naïveté. Nor does she analyze the broader concerns impinging upon American foreign policy. Much scholarship to date is hampered by a failure to consider adequately the *St. Louis* episode within its historical framework. One key element of that complex framework was the growing threat of war related to Nazi Germany’s escalating demands on Poland. Another was the delicate negotiations—taking place simultaneously in London under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR)—aimed at the overseas placement of German Jews. In regard to America, one must account for the significant influence of a vocal group of congressmen resolved to block the entry of *any* additional refugees into the United States, as well as Roosevelt’s growing conviction that Germany posed a mortal threat to the Western Hemisphere. As he saw it, his primary responsibility was to nurture judiciously a

similar conviction among congressmen often antagonistic to his administration—even if it meant compromising on issues related to refugees and the New Deal.¹⁶

The facts surrounding the voyage of the MS *St. Louis* in May–June 1939 are familiar to most Holocaust scholars. The ship departed Hamburg on May 13 with 937 passengers on board, almost all of them Jewish.¹⁷ Bound for Cuba, on May 27 the ship was denied the customary privilege of docking in Havana’s harbor at the Hamburg-America pier (the *St. Louis* was owned by the Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt-Actiengesellschaft, generally abbreviated as Hapag). The ship anchored for more than six days in the middle of the harbor, departing on June 2 to travel slowly in the waters between Cuba and Florida as negotiations ensued over entry to Cuba. On June 6, with negotiations deadlocked, ship’s captain Gustav Schröder set a course for Europe. During the return voyage, the governments of Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom consented to provide the passengers refuge, precluding the horror of disembarking in Germany. Once one advances beyond these basic facts, however, supposition often displaces knowledge.

Of the 937 passengers aboard the *St. Louis*, 909 held tourist landing permits that Manuel Benitez Gonzalez, Cuba’s Director General of Immigration, had issued for a fee of roughly \$160 each. On June 2, while the ship still was anchored in Havana harbor, twenty-eight passengers were allowed to disembark: four were Spaniards and two were Cubans; the remaining twenty-two were Jews holding immigration visas, having paid the \$500 fee required of immigrants prior to embarking.¹⁸ One passenger, Professor Moritz Weiler, had passed away at sea on May 23 from congestive heart failure. Bedridden from the moment he boarded the ship, Weiler was buried at sea. Another passenger, Max Loewe, slit his wrists on May 30 and jumped into Havana’s harbor.¹⁹ Roughly 80 percent of the passengers—a total of 734 of 909—held quota numbers for eventual entry into the United States.²⁰ Traveling officially as German tourists to Cuba, these passengers intended ultimately to immigrate to the United States. Some held quota numbers that would mature within a few months; others would be compelled to remain in Cuba for two or more years.²¹

The use of landing permits raises some questions. Why were these permits, which were designed for tourists, used for passengers intending to remain in Cuba for more than two years? The answer is linked, in part, to both the July 1938 Evian Conference and *Kristallnacht*. Shortly after the November 1938 pogrom, Col. Fulgencio Batista, Cuba’s army chief-of-staff, met with delegates representing both the JDC and the National Coordinating Committee for Aid for Refugees (NCC). He promised that “Cuba would cooperate in providing a haven for refugees from Nazism.” Referencing the conference at Evian-les-Bains, which highlighted the crisis generated by “political refugees” fleeing Nazi Germany, Batista told Lawrence Berenson (representing both the NCC and the JDC) that “he and

Cuban officials would heartily cooperate with President Roosevelt in his plan to relieve the terrible situation abroad.”²²

Colonel Batista may have outlined Cuban refugee policy, but the man controlling its day-to-day implementation was the director general of immigration, the aforementioned Manuel Benitez. Also an army colonel, Benitez was a Batista protégé who appreciated the profit to be gained by exploiting the tragedy of Jews desperate to flee the Reich. Rather than bring them in as legitimate immigrants—a procedure requiring individuals to post a \$500 bond, a fee that went directly into the government’s coffers—he evolved a practice of selling tourist landing permits through Hapag offices. Thus was Jewish misfortune translated into a windfall for both Hapag and Benitez.²³

By May 1939 approximately 6,000 Jews were living in Cuba. Most of these lived in Havana, approximately a third having arrived as “tourists” since the beginning of the year.²⁴ Like most of the Jews traveling on the *St. Louis*, roughly half of those residing in Cuba held American quota numbers and hoped eventually to immigrate to the United States. But by May, the Batista-Berenson accord of November 1938 was unraveling. Gellman writes that other Cuban officials, who probably were jealous of Benitez’s lucrative business in landing permits, pressured President Laredo Brú to put a stop to it.²⁵ Laredo Brú, whose office was never entirely protected from Batista’s machinations, was likewise annoyed by Hapag’s collusion in Benitez’s corruption.²⁶

A further factor inducing President Laredo Brú to take action was a marked rise in domestic antisemitism. Although opposition to Cuba’s role as a haven for Jews had existed for some months, it reached a peak in the spring in a press campaign traceable to newspapers controlled by the Rivero family. Most important was *Diario de la Marina*, Cuba’s oldest active daily, edited by Dr. José Ignacio Rivero. Gellman identifies Rivero as “an avid admirer” of Europe’s three fascist dictators.²⁷ A May 4 *Diario de la Marina* report, forwarded to the U.S. State Department by Consul Harold Tewell, read as follows:

In Habana shipping circles they have been receiving reports that there is being organized in Europe an expedition of more than a thousand Jews, which will leave from a German port the middle of this month. It will arrive in the early part of June. Many Hebrews who reside in Habana have received letters from their relatives and friends stating that they now have found a vessel on which they can come, there being many steamship companies that do not sell passage if [the passengers] do not have prior authorization to disembark. . . . The Department of Labor, aware of the anticipated arrival of those thousand Hebrews, proposes to intervene, since there are denouncements that those passengers get to disembark as transients without filing a bond, by means of an affidavit, and once they land they look for and obtain work, displacing Cuban workers.²⁸

The heightened antisemitism troubled the American consulate, which believed the phenomenon was linked with the recent appearance in Havana of several Nazi agents. Posing as refugees upon their arrival, these Nazis often were employed in the local offices of Hapag or the Bayer Company.

On May 5, 1939, one day after the article appeared in *Diario de la Marina* and eight days before the *St. Louis* departed Hamburg, President Laredo Brú signed a law designated Presidential Decree No. 937. The measure stipulated that, from then on, aliens wishing to travel to Cuba must acquire, in addition to visas, permits signed by the secretaries of state and labor. These permits were to be obtained from the steamship company through which they booked their travel. Prospective passengers were warned not to embark for Cuba without such authorizations.²⁹

Decree No. 937 took effect when it was published on May 6 in the *Gaceta Oficial*, the government press organ. Copies were forwarded to steamship companies with offices in Havana. One might assume that Hapag officials, upon receipt of the law, would at least delay the upcoming voyage of the *St. Louis*. But attached to the decree was a crucial instruction from Director General Benitez:

Disembarkation permits issued by this Bureau in accordance with its authority and in accordance with the provision of Decrees No. 55 and No. 2507 [earlier immigration rulings, dated January 15, 1939, and November 17, 1938, respectively] prior to May 6, 1939, the date of Decree No. 937, will be valid but from this date none will be issued unless applicants first obtain the required permission of the Secretaries of State and Labor The shipping companies should transmit with all urgency to their principal offices the provisions of Decree No. 937 and the instructions of this Bureau in order that they may be carried out by the said companies and avoid difficulties with the Cuban authorities.³⁰

When Tewell read the Director General's instruction, he concluded that landing permits issued prior to May 6 remained valid. "It appears," Tewell wrote Washington, "that landing permits that have already been issued to refugees who have not yet arrived in Cuba, will be honored."³¹ Officials at Hapag received the same instruction. While one might question the company's ethics in proceeding with the voyage, Hapag had profited from its collusion with Benitez for several months. Its judgment that the *St. Louis* passengers would be disembarked in Cuba was based on this fruitful history and the presumed authority of the Director General.

In fact, the *St. Louis* passengers passed through most of the leisurely Atlantic crossing free of anxiety; there seemed little reason for concern. American officials in Havana also were complacent. U.S. Consul General Coert du Bois's optimism is evident in a May 26 cable he sent to the State Department just hours before the ship's arrival: "Benitez [is] conferring with [the] President [at] five PM today

regarding landing. In spite of opposition from certain Government forces, [I] believe landing of all will be effected. Benitez [is] remaining on job."³²

Elsewhere in Havana, the mood was not so calm. Indeed, on May 23, the office of the Joint Relief Committee (JRC)³³ had received an anxious cable from the *St. Louis*. That morning, Hapag's home office in Hamburg wired Captain Schröder: "[most of] your passengers [are] in contravention of new Cuban Law 937 and may not be given permission to disembark." Schröder was ordered to maintain course and speed as the situation was "not completely clear."³⁴ Not wishing to panic his passengers, Schröder discreetly assembled a five-man passenger committee that afternoon.³⁵ The committee, alive to the prospect that the ship might still land its passengers, chose to hold the information in strict confidence—but it immediately cabled Havana's JRC. The JRC's Laura Margolis thereupon drafted a note to Cecilia Razovsky, executive director of the NCC, explaining that "this morning all of the steamship companies received a letter from the Dept. of Immigration, signed by the new commissioner [*sic*], that no boats will be allowed to unload here which sailed more than 24 hours after May 6th."³⁶ The note was followed on May 25 by a phone call from Milton Goldsmith, Margolis' colleague. Speaking with Razovsky and Berenson, both in New York City, Goldsmith referenced the cable from the passenger committee and reported that they "are panic-stricken and implore" the JRC to ensure "that they will be permitted to land."³⁷

By the time the *St. Louis* arrived in Havana's harbor early in the morning on Saturday, May 27, the situation was beyond Benitez' control. Although disembarking procedures were initiated—e.g., officials from the health department came aboard to examine the passengers—President Laredo Brú stipulated that the *St. Louis* should not be allowed to dock. The ship dropped anchor in mid-harbor. In fact, Laredo Brú had little room for maneuver; his labor secretary advised him to initiate a showdown with Hapag because the company had allowed the *St. Louis* to sail. Laredo Brú therefore denied the validity of the landing permits and stressed that those holding them had come without either visas or proper authorization *after* the effective date of Decree No. 937.³⁸

Upon receiving the JRC's confirmation that the *St. Louis* had been required to drop anchor in mid-harbor, the NCC called an emergency meeting for May 28 at the New York home of Joseph Chamberlain.³⁹ That day, the American consulate in Havana received a cable from Secretary of State Cordell Hull, noting that American groups who had paid fees for landing certificates were requesting information and asking the consulate to "report on available facts."⁴⁰ It was the first of numerous governmental communications over the coming three weeks testifying to the off-the-record involvement of American diplomats and the State Department in the *St. Louis* crisis.

The NCC sent Berenson and Razovsky to Havana on May 29 with the dual JDC mission of maintaining contact with American relatives of *St. Louis*

passengers (Razovsky's task) and negotiating entry for the ship's passengers (Berenson's task). Handicapped from the outset by the escalation of domestic Cuban antisemitism and the controversy surrounding Benitez, Berenson was further impeded in his task by a deepening of the power struggle between President Laredo Brú and Colonel Batista.⁴¹ Batista might have shielded a besieged Benitez in other circumstances, but the Cuban official who had forged the agreement with Berenson the previous November now distanced himself from the *St. Louis* affair. Reportedly bedridden with influenza, Batista chose not to challenge Laredo Brú.⁴² Thus, from May 29 until June 5 (the day before the *St. Louis* headed back to Europe), Berenson negotiated on behalf of the passengers without formidable Cuban support. The arrival of additional refugees on two smaller steamships, the *Flandre* and the *Orduña*, exacerbated these difficulties.⁴³

Berenson's predisposition is no less important than the obstacles he faced. His character is evident in a letter he drafted before leaving New York for Havana. Writing to Laurence Duggan, chief of the State Department's American Republics Division, he stated that President Laredo Brú was "furious with the Hamburg-American official in Havana" for failing to prevent the *St. Louis* from sailing, but went on to say: "I hope I shall have the matter settled once [and] for all."⁴⁴ Not only was his self-assuredness folly, but its impact was exacerbated when he convinced others—the leadership of the JDC in New York, American officials in Cuba, and Razovsky—that he was in control of the negotiations. From the outset, the JDC left matters in the hands of an overly optimistic Berenson.⁴⁵ He had closed a fruitful refugee agreement with Batista and, as president of the Cuban-American Chamber of Commerce, he had a history of successful business dealings with the Cubans. The JDC thus saw little reason to question his preparedness in the current crisis.

Berenson initially was scheduled to meet with Laredo Brú on Tuesday, May 30.⁴⁶ For whatever reason, that meeting was postponed—a delay that Berenson apparently did not view with suspicion. In New York, meanwhile, the JDC held no formal meetings from Monday through Wednesday (May 29–31). If there were reason for concern, it was not obvious.

American officials in Cuba, meanwhile, were not idle. On May 30, J. Butler Wright, the U.S. ambassador, met with Juan J. Ramos, Cuba's secretary of state.⁴⁷ Friendly with neither Batista nor Benitez, Ramos confessed to being "deeply concerned" about allegations that Cuban consular officials were suspected of corruption. Breaching protocol, Ambassador Wright confessed to the Cuban his concern "that unpleasant repercussions would almost inevitably arise from the very practice to which he had himself referred." It seemed to him, he said, "almost inevitable that the refugees would lose little time in acquainting the press with the situation" in a manner that would be "most derogatory" to the Cuban government. Ramos replied that he shared Wright's apprehension. "I gained the impression," Wright

concluded, “that the awkwardness of the situation was becoming increasingly evident” to the Cuban authorities.⁴⁸

The following day, Wright and Consul General Coert du Bois lunched with Dr. Mario Lazo, a well-connected Cuban attorney.⁴⁹ During their conversation, the Americans asked Lazo if he could get word to them about that day’s cabinet meeting. Lazo later called du Bois twice, first to relay a report that so far as the *St. Louis* was concerned, “it was a closed case (*caso cerrado*), then to indicate that the cabinet “had voted unanimously to exclude the Jewish refugees.” Secretary of State Ramos had, in fact, broached the humanitarian issue, but “the President was distinctly *intransigent* [*sic*].” Laredo Brú argued that Hapag had “deliberately slapped the President of the Republic in the face” and needed to be taught a lesson. While he expressed sympathy at the passengers’ “pitiable situation,” he believed that sending the ship back to Germany “was the lesser of two evils.”⁵⁰ In addition, Lazo told du Bois that, according to his source, “the person whom the President held most responsible was Lawrence Berenson, who had definitely been told several months ago that refugees arriving” in circumstances such as those of the *St. Louis* “would not be admitted. Evidently Berenson elected to disregard the warning and play the game of Colonel Benitez and the Hamburg American Line.”⁵¹

At this point, on May 31, Wright and du Bois concluded that Berenson’s mission had failed. But the next morning they were startled by a headline in a Cuban newspaper: “Hope Is Seen for Homeless on SAINT LOUIS.” The accompanying article claimed that the refugees would be permitted to land in Cuba. Du Bois called Lazo directly, and learned that the latter’s contact in the cabinet had just called to say that he, too, had seen the paper but had no official word to vouch for its accuracy.⁵² He next phoned Havana’s JRC to hear what Goldsmith or Margolis knew of the report. No sooner had Goldsmith answered than Berenson took the receiver to report that he had been in touch with government insiders Amadeo Lopez Castro and Dr. José García Montes during the night. They had assured him that everything was fine—they were scheduled to meet with Laredo Brú at 9 AM to get parameters for the guarantees upon which the president was insisting. Berenson reported that he was scheduled to see Laredo Brú at noon. “He said,” du Bois concluded, “that he felt very much encouraged and that he thought it was all over but the shouting, since it was now simply a question of guarantees.”⁵³

President Laredo Brú’s reversal astonished du Bois. Twelve hours earlier, the decision to send the *St. Louis* packing had seemed a done deal, an outcome likely greeted with satisfaction by the Cuban public. Du Bois appreciated Laredo Brú’s delicate position. Aware of the endemic threat posed by Batista, Laredo Brú wished to nurture a broad constituency; having press support was an asset. Yet, there was a possibility that he could devise a scheme whereby he both ensured his

political backing *and* addressed the humanitarian crisis. Berenson evidently believed that this was precisely what Laredo Brú had in mind.

Berenson met with Laredo Brú as planned at noon on June 1. The JDC representative intended to focus on the humanitarian issue by stressing the horrors the *St. Louis*' passengers faced should they return to Germany. But Laredo Brú interrupted, exclaiming that "no one was more fully aware of or more sympathetic with the situation than he." To check Hapag's abuses and maintain the government's prestige, he was ordering the ship out of harbor as soon as it was "able to get up steam." Once the *St. Louis* was outside Cuba's territorial limits, however, he would listen to a "plan of guarantees" to cover the passengers' maintenance in Cuba.⁵⁴ Thus, Laredo Brú seemed amenable to a plan whereby, after "saving face" by forcing the ship to leave Cuban waters, he might allow the *St. Louis* to disembark its passengers—though "not in Habana."⁵⁵

At this point du Bois attempted to assess Berenson's situation. When he asked Berenson what might be relayed to the press, the response was unsettling: Berenson said that "he did not know." Du Bois learned, moreover, that when Berenson asked Laredo Brú what assurance he might give the passengers, the latter was not just noncommittal; he refused permission to board the *St. Louis*. Yet Berenson's optimism was unshaken.⁵⁶ He shifted his center of activities temporarily from the Sevilla-Biltmore Hotel in Havana to Lopez Castro's villa, where, together with García Montes, the men began framing guarantees for the president.

Meanwhile Razovsky, having been informed by Berenson of the specifics of the meeting, called the JDC in New York. Taking hope from her report, the JDC immediately formed a committee "to take charge of [the] situation" by maintaining regular communication with Berenson.⁵⁷ JDC Executive Director Joseph Hyman's sense of the situation is evident in a letter he wrote the following day to a supporter in Dallas. He noted that President Laredo Brú "would not permit the Hamburg-American Line to contravene the laws of Cuba by bringing people in who did not bear the regular approval of the Central government," but also that negotiations were proceeding through Berenson, "a New York lawyer, who is President of the Cuban-American Chamber of Commerce." Hyman observed that Berenson "knows most of the personalities and leaders of Cuba intimately" and was well positioned to achieve a good outcome through negotiation.⁵⁸

After six days at anchor, the ship steamed out to sea on June 2, remaining outside Cuban waters in the hope that further talks would alter Laredo Brú's position. Meanwhile, with the ship cruising slowly between Cuba and Florida, Berenson completed a document that he assumed would settle the issue and land the passengers. The JDC maintained "almost hourly telephone communication" with its self-assured representative. Also awaiting word from Berenson were Wright and du Bois, both of whom were inclined to give his efforts the benefit of the doubt. Berenson submitted his offer to Laredo Brú's negotiating team on

June 3. It included a \$50,000 surety bond guaranteeing for six years that the passengers would not become public charges, as well as assurance that males over 21 years of age who were not occupied in productive activities would leave Cuba within three years at the JDC's expense. In exchange, passengers would disembark in Havana and be granted nine months in which to settle elsewhere in the country. Berenson phoned Wright that evening to inform him that Laredo Brú was accepting the proposal with a few modifications: the surety bond must be increased from \$50,000 to \$150,000, the period covered would be extended from six to nine years, and all males 21 years and over would be required to depart Cuba as quickly as possible. Sensitive to political fallout in the capital, Laredo Brú stipulated that the passengers disembark at Matanzas, a port city about sixty miles east of Havana.⁵⁹

While the JDC was meeting on June 4 to address the expanded demands, the Cuban government inflated its requirements yet again. At 9 PM that evening, Wright contacted du Bois to report that Berenson had phoned in a panic, requesting an immediate audience with both men. Berenson reported that Laredo Brú and his advisors were insisting that guarantees previously outlined must be *in addition* to a cash bond of \$500 for each refugee on the ship—that is, \$450,000—to be deposited into the Cuban Treasury.⁶⁰ In du Bois' judgment, the JDC's legal representative in Havana, Dr. Arturo Bustamante (in whom Berenson had been confiding from the outset) had “double-crossed his employers and [was] now advising the President and his advisers to insist on the \$500 cash bond requirement.” The consul general's report evokes the image of a once-confident negotiator suddenly at his wit's end. Berenson had hoped, du Bois surmised, that the consul and the ambassador would advise him to contact Colonel Batista and convince him “to instruct the President to accept the surety bond plan and waive the individual case bonds.” Instead, they urged Berenson to contact Luis Clasing, the local Hapag official, to learn how much longer the *St. Louis* would be allowed to remain in Caribbean waters and then, more pointedly, to act on an offer extended on June 3 by the Dominican consul, Nestor Pou, to disembark the passengers in Santo Domingo. Du Bois reported that it “was evident that Berenson himself was very reluctant to accept the Santo Domingo solution and that he believed his principals in New York would be also. Although he was repeatedly asked the reason for this reluctance, he was exceedingly vague in his replies. It was pointed out to him that the Santo Domingo scheme was his ace in the hole, and it seemed that the time had come to play it.”⁶¹

The JDC executive committee gathered in special session on June 5, its members struggling with their limited choices. To the proposal of one member that Berenson be furnished “all sums that might be requisite in the circumstances,” another argued that “under the pressure of public emotion,” the JDC was being “virtually blackmailed into ransoming one boatload of refugees,” with the likelihood “that there will be many similar instances.” Ultimately, the concern that the

St. Louis had become a *cause célèbre* captured the deliberations, and it was decided to do whatever the Subcommittee on Refugee Aid in Central and South America “deemed necessary and proper” to resolve the crisis.⁶²

But the JDC’s status in Havana now was further compromised because Berenson had been virtually cut out of the negotiations. When he spoke on the evening of June 5 with du Bois, his information seemed suspect. Informing the consul general that a meeting was under way at which Laredo Brú, Batista, and García were determining the fate of the *St. Louis* refugees, Berenson noted that the ship had to begin its return voyage no later than midnight the following day. Du Bois reported: “[The] President’s statement in the afternoon Spanish press, Berenson said, seemed to indicate that a solution had been found.” No longer granted an insider’s role, Berenson now relied upon “statements in the Spanish press,” du Bois observed. He added that Berenson had failed to “indicate whether he had seen the Dominican consul.”⁶³

If the passengers were to gain safe haven in Cuba, June 6 was the drop-dead date.⁶⁴ Du Bois recorded that at 1:30 PM on that day, Berenson requested an urgent meeting. Aggrieved, he told du Bois that the guarantee of support for the *St. Louis* passengers had been presented to Laredo Brú at 4 PM on the 5th, but that Laredo Brú’s statement setting a deadline of noon on June 6 was released at 3:30 PM on the 5th, “before [Laredo Brú] had had an opportunity to read and consider the attached proposition.” Du Bois goes on to report that at 1 PM on the 6th—roughly an hour before Berenson met with du Bois—Finance Secretary Ochotorena released a statement declaring that the President’s conditions “had not been met.” At this point, Du Bois ventured his own opinion: “I told Berenson to the effect that his *confreres* in New York had better prepare for the worst. I also told him that in my opinion he and his co-religionists in New York had gotten this matter off the plane of humanitarianism and on[to] the plane of horse-trading.”⁶⁵

Evidently, Berenson had failed to relay to New York with sufficient clarity that any prospect of landing the *St. Louis* passengers in Cuba would evaporate at noon on June 6. The JDC made one final effort on June 7 to disembark the passengers by authorizing the manager of the Chase National Bank in Havana to schedule a meeting with Laredo Brú in which to guarantee whatever funds were necessary to permit the passengers entry. The JDC also informed the State Department that negotiations were at a crisis point—information that was relayed to the White House. President Roosevelt asked Sumner Welles to call Ambassador Wright with instructions to assist however possible in facilitating the bank manager’s meeting with the Cuban president. But by June 7, negotiations had been terminated; the *St. Louis* already was steaming back to Europe.⁶⁶

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that primary responsibility for both the failure of the negotiations and the refusal to consider alternatives rests with Berenson. Cecilia Razovsky soon flew to Miami, where on June 11 she met with

two members of the JDC's executive committee. In a memo recording the substance of that meeting, Razovsky complained that she had been kept in the dark in Havana: "I tried frantically to get Berenson; that was Monday" (i.e., June 5). Finally, on "Tuesday between 1 and 2 o'clock," she wrote, "two unfavorable statements [were] issued. The first one, we thought, was not final." But then it became clear that "the time having expired, the deal was ended. That was a shock because I had not heard of any 48-hour time limit. Was it possible that Berenson had failed to tell me?"⁶⁷ A marked shift in the JDC's opinion of Berenson is evident also in a letter Hyman wrote to Paul Baerwald on June 27. In a prior communication, Baerwald had confessed that he had gained a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the *St. Louis* from reading accounts in the *New York Times*. Responding with evident irritation, Hyman declared that neither coverage by the *Times*, "nor that of any other papers, told the whole inside story, nor can it be told." Hyman went on to observe that Berenson "may not have been the best man to send down to negotiate with these people. Undoubtedly he committed a number of errors in judgment."⁶⁸

In assessing the Cuban chapter of the *St. Louis'* episode, observers tend to evaluate key players not on the basis of what they knew, but on the basis of what we believe they should have known. Given the significance many Holocaust scholars attach to the episode, this distinction is far more than simple nuance. Officials at the Hapag offices in Hamburg can be faulted for the eagerness with which they booked Jewish passengers, at considerable profit to themselves, to various destinations in Latin America, including Cuba. But, should they be blamed in the specific instance of the *St. Louis* for failing to foresee that this voyage would end differently from those preceding it? In light of the May 6, 1939 instruction from Manuel Benitez to the effect that passengers who had acquired landing permits prior to May 6 would not be subject to the prohibition against disembarking, Hapag officials were justified in letting the *St. Louis* sail. Only on May 23, ten days into the voyage, did Hapag receive a follow-up instruction indicating that the passengers *might* be prevented from landing. The ship was then so close to Cuba that Hapag ordered its captain to proceed to Havana.

When Berenson departed for Cuba, he took with him a boundless optimism that the roadblock the *St. Louis'* passengers had encountered would be removed easily. He was, after all, the president of the Cuban-American Chamber of Commerce, and his efforts already had resulted in about 2,000 German Jews landing in Cuba since December 1938. But Berenson failed to appreciate Batista's centrality to his prior success and the fact that Benitez held his position as a result of Batista's largesse. That neither Batista nor Benitez played any role in the negotiations surrounding the *St. Louis'* passengers undermined whatever negotiating power Berenson may have had.⁶⁹ Blinded by earlier accomplishments, Berenson did not realize until a full week into negotiations that he was facing insurmountable

odds. To make matters worse, assuming that President Laredo Brú in fact had considered sincerely the possibility of landing the passengers, Berenson's blithesome demeanor may have nullified that disposition.⁷⁰

Other individuals who played crucial if behind-the-scenes roles during the days when the *St. Louis* remained in Caribbean waters were equally influenced by Berenson. The account Berenson's handlers received was confident and optimistic: "Don't worry, be patient, leave it to me." JDC director Joseph Hyman relayed this confidence to officials in Washington, DC. Similarly, Ambassador Butler Wright and Consul General Coert du Bois, while at times doubting Berenson's ability to accomplish his task, were ultimately forced by his repeated assurances to conclude that he was in control and that the passengers would, indeed, find refuge in Cuba. Accordingly, the State Department received little intelligence—from either New York or Havana—that might have led it to believe the negotiations were doomed to failure. To be sure, anxious telegrams arrived in abundance from relatives and friends of the passengers—indeed, from the passengers themselves—urging either the State Department or President Roosevelt to inject the power and prestige of the United States into the negotiations. But from the position of the State Department and the White House, the information that counted—that coming from the JDC's "man on the spot" in Cuba—remained too hopeful to risk accusations of official American meddling. Only on June 5, the day before the *St. Louis* was forced to steam back to Europe, did Berenson's failure become evident—both to himself and to those relying on his judgment.

It is understood that history should be written not as a tool to cast sweeping generalizations but as an exercise for reminding readers that human affairs, both past and present, are complicated. Yet, with respect to the *St. Louis*, a story has evolved that is at times as much myth as it is history. The goal in revisiting the Cuban chapter of the *St. Louis* story is not to overturn all that we believe we have understood to date, but to muddy the waters and demonstrate that the history of this episode—as with so much else—is a process that rarely produces final answers.

A Case of Refuge Achieved

The Cuban government's refusal to grant the passengers temporary refuge closed the first chapter of an emotion-laden drama. But it triggered ten remarkable days of transatlantic activity aimed at precluding the return of the refugees to Germany. What follows is the story of those ten days. While Mr. Findley of the Chase National Bank was engaged on June 7 with President Federico Laredo Brú in a final, fruitless attempt on behalf of the JDC to land the *St. Louis* passengers in Cuba, the JDC was drafting a cable to Paul Baerwald—chairman-on-leave of the JDC and member of the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees. At that time, Baerwald was working in London with the Intergovernmental

Committee on Refugees.⁷¹ The telegram laid out the crisis confronting the organization: “All hope [of] landing [the] St. Louis passengers [in Cuba is] fading.” Baerwald was asked to approach both the British and the French with requests for permission to disembark passengers—those on the *St. Louis* as well as those on the *Flandre* and the *Orduña*. The JDC was prepared to guarantee that it would provide for the welfare of all 1,100 refugees, among them more than 200 children under sixteen. Urgency was stressed, not simply because all three ships were now en route to Germany, but because the press was replete with heartfelt sympathy for the passengers, and the JDC was being bombarded with every conceivable proposal to forestall disembarkation at Hamburg.⁷²

When talks with Cuba’s president were definitively terminated on June 8, the JDC’s executive committee gathered in extraordinary session.⁷³ Hyman informed his colleagues about various proposals for landing groups of passengers in one or another Latin American country, but each had proven impractical. Sensitive to one specific offer, he focused on the Dominican Republic, pointing out that “a payment of \$500 per person would be required, not as a returnable bond but as an outright landing fee.” It was especially contemptible that the fee was imposed only on Jews. He added that inquiries regarding “the suitability of settling in Santo Domingo also disclosed some unfavorable information.” The executive committee decided that the JDC “should not consent to any procedure where a special indemnity for admission was required for Jews only.”⁷⁴

The meeting’s central focus was on finding a haven “in some European port before the boat returned to Germany.” Calls already had been made to Baerwald urging haste in communicating “with important British and French Jews, as well as with other influential personalities” who might help gain admittance. Baerwald, in turn, stressed the hurdles he faced, noting “the deep feeling of the leading personalities” in Europe that Germany “should not be permitted to dump refugees in this way.” James Rosenberg implored his colleagues to engage Morris Troper, chairman of the JDC’s European Executive Council in Paris. He further urged them to appeal to Sir Herbert Emerson, League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—and, since March, director of the Intergovernmental Committee. “The JDC must leave no stone unturned,” Rosenberg argued.⁷⁵

During the June 8 meeting, Hyman was summoned to a transatlantic call from Baerwald. He returned with information and instructions from the chairman. First, given the delicate negotiations in London, the JDC had to minimize its publicity regarding the *St. Louis*. Baerwald anticipated British opposition to harboring further refugees; the country was in the process of admitting several thousand Jewish children via *Kindertransport*. Baerwald remarked that Harold Linder—a JDC executive-board member who had accompanied Baerwald to London—already had contacted Troper, “who was exerting virtually superhuman efforts” with “the most influential persons in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.”⁷⁶

The JDC had maintained regular communication with the State Department throughout the *St. Louis* crisis; from June 7 the State Department was fully engaged in helping to find an alternative haven for the passengers.⁷⁷ On June 10, responding to instructions from Washington, vice director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees Robert Pell wired the State Department that “Emerson and I have been doing our utmost to find a place of temporary refuge for the passengers on the ST. LOUIS.”⁷⁸ That same day, Undersecretary Welles cabled John Erwin, U.S. Minister to Honduras, indicating that the State Department had received information from a group in touch with the Honduran Consul General in New York regarding the prospect of the passengers’ “admittance to Honduras . . . under adequate safeguards and guarantees. This group,” the cable noted, “is reported ready to deposit a bank guarantee of five hundred dollars for every refugee admitted.”

By June 10, however, redirecting the *St. Louis* to Honduras had become unlikely. In any case, Erwin wired on June 12 that Dr. Gonzalo Carias, Honduran Consul General in New York, was known to be interested, but that “no effort on the part of the [Honduran] President or the Foreign Minister to obtain the view of the United States” had been initiated. When the issue was “discussed by the Honduran Cabinet . . . a sharp division arose,” thereby ending any prospect of Honduras serving as a safe haven.⁷⁹

By then, as indicated, the JDC and the State Department had shifted their attention to Europe. On June 8 Welles had cabled Pell, telling him that talks “with Cuba have ended in flat refusal to allow [the] refugees to land” and asking him on behalf of the JDC “to confer in London with Baerwald and to assist him if possible to make arrangements for the admission into England, France, or some western European country of [the] 907 refugees” on board the *St. Louis*.⁸⁰ The next day Baerwald wired New York, informing the JDC that he was “making every conceivable effort” and noting that Pell was providing his “fullest support with high government officials.” He said that, according to Otto Schiff, president of the Jews’ Temporary Shelter in London, the Home Office had insisted that the refugees were not eligible for admission “without [an] examination [by] British representatives in Germany.” Baerwald feared that this position likely would not change, but disclosed that “influential government people continue” to advocate a more liberal approach. From Troper he relayed that France might accommodate the children while allowing refuge for 150 adults in Morocco. His cable concluded: “[I] must emphasize that despite same humanitarian instincts motivating all of us, [I] feel you should understand [that the] negative aspect [is] strongly affected by [the] feeling of our friends and government officials here that to submit again to pressure would insure [a] recurrence. In any publicity please omit names.”⁸¹

Fortune had placed Pell and Baerwald together in London when the *St. Louis* crisis emerged. The American diplomat and the JDC chairman worked

in harmony, both being committed to some alternative to disembarking the passengers in Germany. Their prospects were initially bleak. Cabling the State Department on June 10, the day after Baerwald's wire to New York, Pell cautioned that the "British take the view that to admit refugees under pressure would create a most unfortunate precedent for Palestine, where Jewish organizations acting in concert with German and Italian [shipping] lines are attempting to force their hand."⁸² Echoing Troper, he suggested that the "French may take the children" and were considering a "special arrangement in Morocco with regard to a limited number of adults." More important, however, Pell revealed that he was "spending the weekend with [Conservative MP Lord] Winterton and, using a letter guaranteeing the support of these people which Baerwald will give me, I hope to persuade him at least to place the position before the Cabinet committee which at present he is reluctant to do."⁸³

On Friday, June 9, Baerwald telephoned Troper to swap ideas and counsel. Troper suggested that Baerwald consult with the British Council for German Jewry and the ICA (Jewish Colonization Association) "to see what could be done for the passengers" (including those on the *Flandre* and the *Orduña*). Baerwald related his new hope of getting into camps in Britain "those refugees who have affidavits and other documents for emigration to the United States." Schiff had surmised, optimistically, that given the JDC's assurance of financial guarantees and the likelihood that refugees with quota numbers ultimately would emigrate, the Home Office might prove amenable to this solution.⁸⁴

During these days, the JDC expended around-the-clock efforts in New York, London, and Paris. Aside from managing the emotional response that the *St. Louis* crisis generated in the United States, emphasis shifted to shaping an argument that the voyage be viewed not as a case of "illegal dumping" but as a special exigency involving legitimate refugees. Unanticipated support arrived when Hapag-New York telephoned the JDC on Saturday morning, June 10, to relay the following wire from corporate headquarters in Hamburg: "On inquiry we learn from St. Louis [that] all passengers considered Cuba [a] transit country. 743 passengers have affidavits for the United States. This may help [with] negotiations if the United States [is] willing to accept them."⁸⁵ Although the information was known to virtually everyone associated with the JDC, it was passed to Troper within an hour of Hapag's wire. "If the 743 passengers are allowed to enter other countries," the telephone record specifies, "there will remain a little under 200 persons, and Mr. Troper is making further efforts to find places for some of them."⁸⁶

Troper's pivotal role is reflected in separate cables he received on June 10 from Hyman and Rosenberg. Hyman mentioned the "extraordinary emotion sweeping throughout" the United States, with many people holding the JDC "responsible to find a solution" to the *St. Louis* emergency. He told Troper: "Time is of the

essence [as] the boat has completed more than half of [its] trip.” Rosenberg asked Troper to cable the JDC a detailed report that specified the number of refugees that France or any other European country might be prepared to absorb. Finally, Rosenberg requested confirmation that Troper had received a copy of the following telegram, sent earlier by the JDC to Baerwald:

We here feel strongly [that the] St. Louis constitutes [a] special situation as all passengers had landing permits heretofore recognized by [the] Cuban Immigration Commissioner on which they relied and therefore [this is] not a case [of] illegal dumping. For this reason we have been willing here to make an unusual and extraordinary commitment[,] not regarding same as precedent and urge you [to] impress this [view] as forcefully as possible upon all concerned.⁸⁷

The telegram to Baerwald was pivotal; immediately upon its receipt, Baerwald wired Pell with JDC authorization to provide all “necessary financial guarantees in order to insure that refugees on St. Louis, Flanders, and Orduña [would] not be returned to Germany.” Pell, who was spending the weekend in the country with Lord Winterton, had been awaiting the message, believing it crucial to British cooperation. To augment its impact, Baerwald included the following note: “You know a good deal about the composition of our Board and our Executive Committee. They are not in the habit of lightly committing themselves to expenditures of vast sums of money.”⁸⁸

The impasse began to weaken on Sunday, June 11. Troper called New York to report “that the Belgium [*sic*] Government will allow 250 of the passengers on the St. Louis to land in Belgium.” He was hopeful that Tangiers would permit a further 400 to 500 refugees in that city, and noted the possibility that either the Netherlands or Luxembourg might also accept refugees. Believing that such agreements would cover all passengers holding American quota affidavits, Troper asked that the Jewish Agency for Palestine be contacted to secure permission for those without affidavits to enter Palestine under “the emergency refugee quota.”⁸⁹

The JDC relayed the substance of Troper’s report to Baerwald, who then called Troper. Regarding the idea of appealing to the Jewish Agency for assistance aimed at landing refugees in Palestine, Baerwald contended that “it would be unwise to pursue the matter,” indicating that “the UPA [United Palestine Appeal] in New York were fully aware of the excitement [the *St. Louis*] had caused, and yet made no effort of any kind to be of any help whatsoever in the situation.” Baerwald surmised that “if we were to discuss it at this end, we would immediately get into Palestine English high politics,” which was inadvisable.⁹⁰

Meanwhile, Pell’s weekend had gone well. Cabling Washington on Monday, June 12, he reported that he had passed the JDC’s guarantee to Winterton and provided a detailed memorandum on the circumstances faced by the *St. Louis* passengers. He had asked Winterton “if he would be willing to intervene with the

British Government to receive some or all of these people here.” Winterton was moved, telling Pell that he would interrupt his country visit to raise the issue Monday morning with Home Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare. Pell then described a Monday afternoon meeting—chaired by Home Office permanent Under Secretary Sir Alexander Maxwell—at which various private organizations and British ministries were represented. Among others in attendance were Baerwald, who restated the JDC’s willingness “to guarantee the maintenance and emigration of these people,” and Linder, who outlined progress in negotiations with Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. According to Pell, Maxwell “agreed to recommend to the Home Secretary that approximately 300 of the passengers should be admitted temporarily to the United Kingdom on condition that other countries take their share.”⁹¹

A report of the London deliberations was forwarded immediately to Troper, who soon relayed to Linder the results of a cabinet meeting at which the French government agreed to permit 250 of the *St. Louis* passengers to disembark at Boulogne. Troper asked that someone in London communicate Britain’s position to Alexis Léger, the French General Secretary of Foreign Affairs. At Linder’s request, Troper agreed to secure the names of comparable officials in the Netherlands and Belgium with whom the British could communicate and who, in turn, might also wire informing “the French Government of their readiness to accept a specific number of passengers.” Pell served again as a necessary conduit to government officials. The following morning—i.e., June 13—Linder furnished Pell with the names received from Troper. Pell arranged to have the British Foreign Office communicate to these officials London’s commitment.⁹²

The London deliberations of June 12 were decisive to the outcome of the *St. Louis* saga. The next day Baerwald and Linder drafted a letter to Hyman, expressing great relief. “By the time this letter reaches you,” they began, “we hope that the entire ST. LOUIS matter will have been settled, and that the 937 [*sic*] passengers will have been permitted to enter England, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.” Troper received special tribute: “Merely in passing, we wish to say that if it were not for Mr. Troper’s untiring and persistent attempts, we doubt whether these favorable results could have been accomplished.”⁹³

Since June 6, when the return journey to Europe began, the *St. Louis*’ passengers had been tormented by the prospect of disembarking in Germany. Although the JDC wired regular encouragement, it was unable to provide the passengers any concrete information. The passenger committee felt compelled to create a suicide watch to prevent refugees from leaping overboard. Finally, as the ship neared Europe, Schröder resolved, if necessary, to steer the *St. Louis* onto the sand on England’s south coast rather than return the refugees to Germany; the ship, he determined, would be set ablaze and the passengers landed with life boats.⁹⁴ Had Schröder followed through on this plan, with war clouds gathering

over Europe, it would have been viewed widely as a stunning and courageous act. But Schröder received positive, albeit tentative, word from Rosenberg on June 12 that Troper was making important progress. “Through an arrangement made by the European Director of the JDC, Mr. Morris B. Troper, and others . . . I can now state with reasonable definiteness, although I cannot at present give details, that all of the refugees will receive a haven in Belgium, the Netherlands, and other countries.”⁹⁵ Neither Troper nor Rosenberg could yet guarantee this outcome; both believed, however, that the glimmer of hope was sufficiently bright to be relayed to the *St. Louis*. Then, on June 14, news broke in the *New York Times*: “Refuge Is Assured for All on Liner: Belgium, Britain, France, and the Netherlands to Admit 907 on a Temporary Basis.” The *Times* recounted the agreement negotiated by Troper and Baerwald through which the Netherlands would admit 194 of the refugees, and the other countries up to 250 each.⁹⁶ The precise distribution was yet to be determined; nevertheless, all 907 refugees would receive a temporary haven. After further negotiations, Troper announced that 288 would go to Britain, 224 to France, 214 to Belgium, and 181 to the Netherlands.

Press reports on Wednesday, June 14, were universally celebratory. One statement from Paris described Troper as “chained to his desk continuously for five days and five nights,” appealing to “all the democratic governments of Europe” and “all relief agencies,” until he at last “succeeded in rescuing all the refugees” on the *St. Louis*. Making clear that haven came with a price, the statement emphasized that permission to land was given “thanks to the assurance” that “the JDC was ready to post a bond of \$500 for every refugee, and that none of them [would] become public charges.” The report’s closing line came closest to reflecting the mood of the great majority of actors and observers on June 14: “This deed will be inscribed in golden letters in the history of the JDC, and Jews everywhere will be grateful.”⁹⁷

A similar assessment, issued by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, highlighted the effort and commitment of the JDC in general and of Troper in particular in securing the rescue of the passengers.⁹⁸ Such press reports served as balm for the harried leadership of the JDC. Not only had the likes of Hyman, Rosenberg, Baerwald, Linder, and Troper invested enormous time and energy in the *St. Louis* crisis, but they had been berated by Jewish organizations that attributed the Cuban fiasco to the JDC. In the June 9 issue of *The Congress Bulletin*, the publication of the American Jewish Congress, the effectiveness of the JDC had been brought into question in an editorial entitled “Tragedies on the Seas.” The unidentified author questioned the “effectiveness of Jewish leadership” and, quoting a June 2 editorial in a publication identified only as the *Day*,⁹⁹ declared that “if the Jewish leaders are so helpless that they can do nothing at such a critical moment, let them go and make room for others.” To the relief of the JDC, the *Jewish Daily Forward* in its lead editorial on June 16 came to the organization’s defense, claiming that the

“rescue work of the JDC is an important chapter in Jewish history,” and that “to attack the JDC at a time when the most complicated and the most delicate negotiations about refugees were going on” was not only “wrong, but irresponsible.”¹⁰⁰

On June 14, Troper cabled the *St. Louis* passengers with news that the final arrangements for disembarkation had been completed.¹⁰¹ Upon receipt of the wire, the foreboding atmosphere aboard the ship dissipated; there was celebration that evening. The next day Josef Joseph, chairman of the passenger committee, responded to Troper, expressing the universal sense of relief and joy among the refugees: “Accept, Mr. Chairman, for you and for the American Joint Distribution Committee and last but not least for the governments Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and England, the deepest and eternal thanks of men, women, and children united by the same fate on board the *St. Louis*.”¹⁰²

On Saturday, June 17, 1939, the five-week voyage of the *St. Louis* ended in Antwerp, Belgium. Troper boarded the ship early that morning at Flushing, the Netherlands, accompanied by eighteen representatives from various refugee organizations in Belgium, the Netherlands, England, and France. Shortly after 6AM he entered the ship’s main hallway, where two hundred children were formed up—one hundred on each side—to greet him. One child, eleven-year-old Liesl Joseph, stepped forward and said, in German: “Dear Mr. Troper, we, the children of the *St. Louis* wish to express to you, and through you to the American Joint Distribution Committee, our deep thanks from the bottom of our hearts for having saved us from a great misery. We pray that God’s blessing be upon you.”¹⁰³ It was a moment of jubilation. Later, when interviewed in Antwerp by George Axelsson of the *New York Times*, one passenger remarked: “Eighty percent of us would have jumped overboard had the ship put back to Hamburg.”¹⁰⁴



Mr. and Mrs. Morris Troper meet with passengers on board the refugee ship MS *St. Louis*. USHMM, courtesy of Betty Troper Yaeger.

Some points require emphasis in evaluating this episode. That the JDC is widely credited with achieving an inspiring outcome to the *St. Louis* crisis is well deserved; the organization's role was crucial. Yet, Baerwald and Pell worked in tandem. A well-placed official in the State Department, committed to his role as vice director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees and working on instructions from Undersecretary Welles, Pell served as an indispensable conduit for the JDC.¹⁰⁵ The protocol attached to opening official doors in Britain, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands necessitated the involvement of a competent and respected diplomat. Important as it was, Pell's effort on their behalf was unknown to the *St. Louis* passengers, and that was precisely as he and the State Department wished it to remain.

Another point bears notice. Some observers remove the saga of the *St. Louis* from its historical context and represent it much as a morality play. Looking backwards through the lens of the Holocaust, they interpret the effort and financial resource expended in June 1939 as futile at best, cynical at worst. In *Refuge Denied*, the product of a lengthy endeavor to track the fates of the 907 *St. Louis* refugees returned to Europe, Sarah Ogilvie and Scott Miller relate words from a 1997 interview with Michael Barak, a surviving *St. Louis* passenger then living in Israel. Known in 1939 as Michael Fink, Barak had accompanied his parents on the ship. He recalled how the ship sailed in circles between Cuba and Florida, its passengers hoping for the unlikely prospect of gaining entry into the United States. "My father," Barak reflects bitterly, "like the other nine hundred passengers on the *St. Louis*, was off the coast of Miami, and he ended up at Auschwitz. How did that happen?" Barak continues: "I hold the United States responsible for the death of my father."¹⁰⁶

Yet, the realities policymakers faced in June 1939 did not include a second world war, Nazi conquest of Western Europe, or mass extermination at Auschwitz. Of those coming developments, only the outbreak of war may have appeared probable in June 1939.¹⁰⁷ Certainly, no one could discern how a war might unfold; indeed, most military leaders would have regarded as unimaginable the collapse of France under the weight of a tactic later labeled *Blitzkrieg*. Ernest May writes that had Western leaders "anticipated the German offensive through the Ardennes, even as a worrisome contingency, it is almost inconceivable that France would have been defeated when and as it was. It is more than conceivable that the outcome would have been not France's defeat but Germany's and, possibly, a French victory parade on the Unter den Linden in Berlin." Indeed, May stresses, the German generals "believed to a man that Hitler had gotten the country into a war for which it was not prepared and which it might well lose."¹⁰⁸

Although his assignment of guilt is flawed, Michael Barak's question—i.e., how did his father end up at Auschwitz—remains important. One might surmise, in hindsight, that an opportunity was missed. But saying so still reflects a widespread inclination to view the past via the context of what is now known. Jörn Rüsen

contends that, with respect to the Holocaust, this inclination is understandable. Labeling the Holocaust “the most radical experience of crisis in Western history,” Rüsen argues, “destroys even the principles of its historical interpretation.” The result, borne out in accounts by survivors and scholars alike, is that every “attempt to apply comprehensive concepts of historical development and every attempt to integrate it into a coherent historical narrative has failed.”¹⁰⁹ Although this verdict may overstate the case, Rüsen identifies a serious difficulty in attempts to come to grips with the Holocaust. Its magnitude is so great that attributing the crime simply to Hitler or Himmler, or to Nazi Germany generally, or even to Europe, can seem insufficient. Despite empirical problems tied to chronology, geographic congruity, or documentary substantiation, observers generally feel that the guilt simply *must be* more widespread, even encompassing the United States. By embracing this insupportable judgment of the voyage of the *St. Louis*, they slight the significance of what was accomplished in June 1939.

For similar reasons, another point regarding this episode is generally overlooked. Clearly, had the great majority of passengers *not* possessed quota numbers for eventual immigration to the United States, the safe haven brokered on their behalf would not have been achieved. The decision of the governments of the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Britain to grant *temporary* refuge was founded on an assurance that most of the passengers intended to establish themselves in America. The United States stood alone in 1939 in its commitment to accept 27,370 *permanent* German immigrants annually. In hindsight, the number was insufficient; yet, at that moment, and in the long term, the quota was key to the *St. Louis*' passengers. Ogilvie and Miller's research confirms that of the 937 *St. Louis* passengers, roughly 650 survived the Second World War; approximately 450 of these settled ultimately in the United States.¹¹⁰

Finally, the effort to present the story of the *St. Louis* as it unfolded is apt to provoke two complaints. One, covered in some measure in the first part of this article, relates to the American government's stance. How should one view Roosevelt's apparent silence as the ship sailed aimlessly in the waters between Cuba and Florida? Why did he not pressure the Cuban government of President Laredo Brú? Irwin Gellman explains the U.S. government's restraint in terms of its evolving “Good Neighbor” policy, in place since 1933, which paid “rich dividends [by 1939] in hemispheric cooperation and defense.” If in the menacing summer of 1939 such pressure jeopardized the country's overall foreign policy vis-à-vis Latin America, would the potential repercussions have been justified? At a moment when the United States feared Nazi inroads into the Western Hemisphere, the danger perceived in such a move must be acknowledged.

In relation to Cuba, action on behalf of the *St. Louis* refugees posed a further risk. In a May 3, 1939 letter to Cecilia Razovsky, Laura Margolis of Havana's Joint Relief Committee remarked: “Antisemitic propaganda in Cuba is very strong. Not a

day passes without the Committee and its officers being commented on in the papers and over the radio. The slightest slip on the part of the Committee causes tremendous reaction.”¹¹¹ Margolis’ remarks were not unfounded; legislation introduced in early July in the Cuban House of Representatives indicates just how endangered were those refugees already in Cuba. The bill called for “deportation of ‘undesirable immigrants’ who [had] arrived [in Cuba] since January 1, 1933, and [for] flatly forbidding their future entry.”¹¹²

A second complaint likely will animate more debate. Hinted at earlier in Michael Barak’s critique of the United States, it rests on the conviction of some observers that President Roosevelt should have permitted the passengers entry, even if doing so breached America’s quota law. For such critics Roosevelt symbolized universally held humanitarian principles; his failure to act undermines his moral leadership. Again, the grievance minimizes historical context, political realities, and the consequences that likely would have been triggered by such action in the summer of 1939. As an example, at the moment when the *St. Louis* was circling in the Straits of Florida, the immigration committees of both houses of Congress were in executive session, engaged in a contentious hearing on the Wagner-Rogers Bill—the joint resolution aimed at relaxing temporarily the country’s immigration quota to allow 20,000 “German refugee children” into the United States.¹¹³ Immigration was a polarizing issue in the late 1930s, and nothing had so provoked anger toward erosion of the country’s quota system in the spring of 1939 as the Wagner-Rogers Bill. After several years of recovery, the depression had deepened in late 1937 and Americans fearful of either losing or not finding jobs were overwhelmingly opposed to any resolution that allowed more immigrants into the country; indeed, powerful forces sought to curtail dramatically the existing quota, which they viewed as far too generous. Advocates for the entry of refugee children believed, nonetheless, that they held the moral high ground; they were stunned when their bill failed to be reported out of committee. Clearly, the political environment precluded congressional support for landing the *St. Louis* passengers in the United States.

Congressional opposition aside, what if, as chief executive, Roosevelt had ordered disembarkation in the U.S., subtracting the 907 total from Germany’s existing quota? Theoretically, one might argue, there was no need to violate the immigration laws since the United States was, at the time, allowing entry for as many as 27,370 Germans each year. But this hypothetical raises a troubling question: at what cost would such action have been taken? Who, scheduled for a later voyage to New York, would have been ensnared in Germany? The proposal unwittingly disregards the 907 quota immigrants displaced by such a decision—individuals who, given their low quota numbers, were preparing to leave Germany. According to popular historian Marc Aronson, “Roosevelt knew that if he let the passengers of the *St. Louis* into America, others who had already been told they

could come would be shut out. If that exchange had taken place, my mother might well have been trapped in Europe and sent to her death.”¹¹⁴

Hypothetically, Roosevelt could have used his executive authority to land the *St. Louis* passengers. But the President’s isolationist and anti-New Deal Congressional foes—not necessarily the same people—might then have eagerly unified in an anti-Roosevelt campaign. The consequences of the President having been so embattled in 1939–40 are, hypothetically, enormous. Would he have run for reelection in 1940? Would someone other than the internationalist Wendell Willkie have been elected president? Might that individual have been an isolationist? What of the looming Churchill-Roosevelt relationship and America’s determination to prevent Britain from going down to defeat? This is all, of course, speculation. While our understanding of current events is inherently ambiguous, clarity in hindsight is also never guaranteed.

The outbreak of war on September 1, 1939 refocused attention and diminished the overall commitment to refugees.¹¹⁵ It is important, nonetheless, briefly to consider the impact of the *St. Louis* crisis. As shown, it was essential that the JDC post a maintenance guarantee of \$500 per refugee and meet the proviso that no passenger become “a public charge.” Georges Bonnet, French Foreign Minister, emphasized in a June 14 conversation with Troper that while he sympathized with the *St. Louis* passengers, the maintenance guarantee was key to influencing France’s decision.¹¹⁶ The same was true for Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands. It bears repeating, moreover, that what was achieved was a “temporary” haven. Everyone touched by the *St. Louis* episode—whether JDC officer, government official, or passenger—understood that there could be no repetition of the events. A policy statement issued on June 21 by the JDC is unequivocal:

The emergency is over. It is essential, however, to take into account the bearing that this incident may have on the future It must be obvious to all that, aside from the fundamental questions of policy which are involved, the financial and administrative burdens of such “dumped,” chaotic, forced, and disorganized emigration are entirely beyond the scope of private philanthropic resources or the facilities of existing organizations Under these circumstances, the Joint Distribution Committee must place on record that it cannot regard its action in behalf of the *St. Louis* passengers, and the enormous sacrifices it has made in the financial commitment undertaken for this relatively small number of persons, as constituting a precedent for any similar action Conscious of its responsibilities in all of the vital necessities of the Jewish populations overseas, the JDC, as a trustee for the funds turned over to it by contributors throughout the country, cannot undertake to expend huge sums for a comparatively small number of refugees in any such type of enforced and disorderly emigration. In the circumstances, the *St. Louis* must be regarded, as in fact it was, as a special problem that required special treatment.¹¹⁷

Viewed with the luxury of hindsight, these words sound cold. They should be judged, however, within their historical context. As perceived in June 1939, a crisis

had been resolved and refuge achieved. The closing words of a JDC report are especially germane: Thus “ends one of the most stirring episodes in the work of the refugee committees.”¹¹⁸

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Notes

1. The research required for this article was made possible by a 2007–2008 Pinchas and Mark Wisen Fellowship. Excellent archival assistance was provided at the USHMM as well as at the United States National Archives or National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the Center for Jewish History, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Critical readings by Richard Breitman, Jeffrey Diefendorf, Irwin Gellman, Geoffrey Giles, Anna Tilton, James Waller, and Gerhard Weinberg markedly improved the manuscript, as did the editorial assistance provided by Claire Rosenson. I am especially grateful to Nancy for her unflinching patience and encouragement. Responsibility for any errors rests entirely with me.

2. Letter of June 27, 1939, Hyman to Baerwald, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis. At the time of the *St. Louis* episode, Baerwald, the JDC's chairman, was on extended assignment in London; the organization's acting chairman was James Rosenberg. The committee to which Hyman refers was formed by the JDC on June 1, 1939 to maintain regular communication with Lawrence Berenson, then in Havana. The ad hoc group was chaired by Alfred Jaretzki and comprised, in addition, David Bressler, Edwin Goldwasser, and Hyman.

3. Diane Afoumado writes that in NARA she found 233 messages, most of them telegrams, addressed to the White House and in some fashion expressing concern about the passengers on the *St. Louis*. See Afoumado, *Exil Impossible: L'errance des Juifs du paguebot 'St. Louis'* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2005), 120.

4. Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Random House, 1967), 278. No book influenced postwar perceptions of American refugee policy during the Second World War as powerfully as Morse's. His chapter on the voyage of the *St. Louis* is the only one of twenty-one chapters without footnotes; Morse indicates in a brief statement under “Source Notes” that details for the chapter were drawn from newspapers, files from both the JDC and the Wiener Library, and interviews with Razovsky and Berenson. His apparent failure to examine U.S. State Department documents is troubling and should have led scholars to question some of his conclusions.

5. *Ibid.*, 281. Morse goes on to say that the State Department had told Ambassador Wright “that the Cubans [were] bluffing in their demands.” The statement, not in evidence in official dispatches, serves to shift responsibility from Berenson to the State Department and its leading representative in Cuba.

6. David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938–41* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), vii.
7. *Ibid.*, 38.
8. Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938–1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 65–66.
9. Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts, *Voyage of the Damned* (New York: Stein and Day, 1974). Lacking footnotes and with the historical-fiction writer’s propensity for fabricating dialog and ascribing motives, the book is exciting but of little use for scholars. The Hollywood film by the same title is worse, placing Morris Troper, for example, in Havana (Lawrence Berenson makes no appearance); Troper never left Europe during the *St. Louis* episode.
10. Irwin F. Gellman, “The *St. Louis* Tragedy,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 60 (1971): 144–56. See also Gellman, *Roosevelt and Batista: Good Neighbor Diplomacy in Cuba, 1933–1945* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973). Although failing to treat the *St. Louis* crisis *per se*, *Roosevelt and Batista* remains among the best studies of Cuban-American relations during the period 1933–1945.
11. Gellman, “The *St. Louis* Tragedy,” 152. Laredo Brú, it should be noted, had ordered the *St. Louis* to leave Cuban waters on June 2.
12. Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 70–73.
13. Sarah A. Ogilvie and Scott Miller, *Refuge Denied: The St. Louis Passengers and the Holocaust* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 175. Passenger deaths in Britain were due to natural causes. Referencing Arthur Morse, Gordon Thomas, and Max Morgan-Witts, Ogilvie and Miller note the likelihood that passengers landed on the European continent were presumed to be in far greater peril (p. 13). Indeed, in the epilogue to their book, Thomas and Morgan-Witts write that no one “can say with certainty how many of the *St. Louis* passengers eventually perished. One estimate states that of the 907 who returned to Europe only 240 lived” (*Voyage of the Damned*, 303). At the conclusion of the film *Voyage of the Damned*, viewers are informed that over 600 of the passengers lost their lives in the Holocaust. It was in part due to encountering several *St. Louis* passengers in the 1990s that Ogilvie and Miller decided “to track down the fate of each and every *St. Louis* refugee” (p. 14).
14. See note 3, above.
15. Afoumado, *Exil Impossible*, 228. This important distinction is too often overlooked.
16. For the work of the Intergovernmental Committee, see Richard Breitman, Barbara McDonald Stewart, and Severin Hochberg, eds., *Refugees and Rescue: The Diaries and Papers of James G. McDonald, 1935–1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009), chapters 7 and 8. Among the sources useful in gauging Congressional attitudes to refugees, see especially “Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Immigration, United States Senate, 76th Congress, First Session.” The hearings took place on March 21–23, 1939, and deliberated on several bills, including S. 407, “A Bill to further Reduce Immigration, to Authorize the

Exclusion of any Alien whose Entry into the United States is Inimical to the Public Interest, to Prohibit the Separation of Families through the Entry of Aliens Leaving Dependents Abroad, and for Other Purposes.” For Roosevelt’s struggles with Congress in 1939, see H.W. Brands, *Traitor to His Class: The Privileged Life and Radical Presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 519–20; and Jean Edward Smith, *FDR* (New York: Random House, 2007), 432–33.

17. To be accurate, thirty-eight of the 937 passengers boarded on May 15 at Cherbourg.

18. Six of the twenty-two passengers were relatives of a Mr. Annenberg. According to Razovsky, their release was secured by a Miami attorney named Pete Harris. See *Archives of the Holocaust: An International Collection of Selected Documents*, vol. 10: Sybil Milton and Frederick D. Bogin, eds., *American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, New York* (New York: Garland, 1995), 264–72.

19. Loewe was rescued from the harbor and taken in critical condition to Havana’s Calixto Garcia Hospital. Upon his recovery he was transported to England.

20. Since the annual Austrian quota of 1,413 had been added to Germany’s annual quota of 25,957 in the wake of the March 1938 *Anschluss*, 27,370 Germans were allowed permanent entry into the United States under the Immigration Act of 1924.

21. As an example, Johanna Jordan, among the *St. Louis* passengers, arrived in New York on December 2, 1939 as one of over 900 Jewish immigrants on the SS *Rotterdam*.

22. “Haven for Exiles in Cuba Pledged,” *New York Times*, November 19, 1938. Memorandum dated November 18th, 1938, Miss Saymon to William Rosenwald, JDC Archives 33/44, file 505—Countries: Cuba. Batista’s commitment belies the common assertion that Evian was a travesty. The National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees and Emigrants Coming from Germany (NCC) was founded in 1934 by James G. McDonald, who was then serving as the League of Nations’ High Commissioner for Refugees Coming from Germany, Joseph P. Chamberlain (professor of public law and political science at Columbia University), and Razovsky. Razovsky, who had been active with the National Council for Jewish Women since 1921, became the NCC’s executive director in July 1934. The NCC worked in tandem with the JDC.

23. On March 17, 1939, Harold S. Tewell, American consul in Havana, informed the State Department that refugees “entering Cuba to make application for visas for admission to the United States” would be “classified as tourists.” To obtain such a classification, “involving no visa or bond, it is understood that payment of an unofficial fee of from \$100 to \$150 is necessary.” In a further memo dated May 9, 1939—a report evidently triggered by news of the forthcoming sailing of the *St. Louis*—Tewell noted that it was “understood that the Director General of Immigration has not issued in his official office letters or certificates authorizing tourist status for such refugees, but that such letters have been issued in a private office maintained by him, upon payment of an unofficial fee of as much as \$150 for each such document.” See “Report by the American Consul in Havana on European Refugees in Cuba, March 17, 1939,” and “Supplemental Report by the American Consul in Havana on European Refugees in Cuba, May 9, 1939,” in *The Holocaust*, vol. 7, *Jewish Emigration: The S.S. St. Louis Affair and Other Cases* (New York: Garland, 1982), 11–12 and 38–40. Coert du Bois, serving at the time as American consul general in Havana, estimated Benitez’ fortune at between a half-million and a million dollars, an enormous sum in the depressed

economic circumstances of 1939. NARA, RG 59, 837.55/39, "Jewish Refugee Situation in Habana," June 7, 1939.

24. Perhaps as many as 2,000 of Cuba's Jews had arrived in the 1920s and were reasonably content to remain on the island.

25. Gellman, "The *St. Louis* Tragedy," 146–47.

26. In *Roosevelt and Batista*, 3, Gellman writes that the "rise of Batista was more than just the ascendancy of a new personality in Cuban politics; the military establishment for which he spoke had taken on a new role. While [Gerardo] Machado ruled, the civilian government directed the military's operations, but after Batista assumed command of the military, this relationship was slowly reversed."

27. Gellman, "The *St. Louis* Tragedy," 145.

28. Report from Tewell to the State Department, "European Refugees in Cuba, May 9, 1939," NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/51, box 5969, folder three. In two prior reports, Tewell warned of growing resistance to refugees.

29. Laura Margolis, one of two JDC representatives running the Joint Relief Committee in Havana, wrote that "Mr. [Milton] Goldsmith and I have analyzed the situation as follows: The President and some of his secretaries are getting very tired of having Col. Benitez get all the graft so the Presidential decree of May 6 was a means of stopping the immigration on the landing permit basis." See JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis.

30. Report from Tewell to the State Department entitled "European Refugees in Cuba, May 9, 1939," NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/51, box 5969, folder three.

31. *Ibid.*

32. NARA, RG 59, 837.55J, box 5969, folder three. The final sentence is of interest in that Decree 937 was a severe blow to Benitez' prestige and position, and one might have expected him to be sacked. He did, in fact, submit his resignation, which appears to have been accepted in early June. Meanwhile, someone else fulfilled his duties.

33. In response to the looming refugee crisis, the JDC established joint relief committees in several countries in the late 1930s.

34. Quoted in Ogilvie and Miller, *Refuge Denied*, 19.

35. Josef Joseph chaired the committee, whose membership included Arthur Hausdorff, Herbert Manassee, Max Weiss, and Max Zellner.

36. Letter from Margolis to Razovsky, May 23, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis. A new commissioner had yet to be appointed.

37. Transcript of conference call, Goldsmith to Berenson and Razovsky, May 25, 1939, *ibid.*

38. Incidentally, 200 Cuban nationals were welcomed home from France on May 27; they had recently been fighting with Spanish Loyalists against Franco.

39. See Chronology, *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10:262. The May 27 contact from Havana was a phone call to Razovsky from either Goldsmith or Margolis, the JDC's two principal

workers at Havana's JRC. See "Telephone Call from Havana to Miss Razovsky," May 27, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis.

40. NARA, RG 59, 837.55J, box 5969, folder three. While Cordell Hull's name appears on much of the State Department's correspondence to Cuba, Sumner Welles or Laurence Duggan (Welles' designee and chief of the Department's American Republics Division) authored virtually every memo.

41. The Batista-Laredo Brú controversy that spring was focused on Juan J. Ramos, the secretary of state. Batista demanded his dismissal; Laredo Brú refused to let him go.

42. According to American Consul General Coert du Bois, Batista was confined to his bed throughout the *St. Louis* episode and, under doctor's orders, prevented "from even receiving reports on current happenings." See "Jewish Refugee Situation in Habana," June 7, 1939, in NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/39, box 5969, folder three. But Batista's political aspirations may have played into his silence during the *St. Louis* affair; he ran for and was elected president in 1940.

43. In the transcript of the May 27 telephone call to Razovsky, the following appears: "The *Orduna* pulled into the harbor a half hour ago (the call is made at 1:20 PM) with 160 passengers. The *Flandres* is coming tomorrow." See "Call from Havana to Razovsky," May 27, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis. The ninety-seven German and Czech Jews aboard the *Flandres*, a French liner, were later granted refuge in St. Nazaire, France, arriving on June 19, 1939. See "500 Refugees on Way to Temporary Homes," *New York Times*, June 20, 1939. Passengers aboard the British steamer *Orduña* were transferred to the SS *Orbita*, which then returned to Liverpool, England. Although not directly related, a British White Paper of May 17, 1939 had closed Palestine to Jewish immigration.

44. NARA, RG 59, 840.48 Refugees/1643-1/2. Berenson had attempted unsuccessfully to reach Duggan by phone. The "Wright" referred to in the final sentence was Joshua Butler Wright, U.S. Ambassador to Cuba since 1937.

45. In the JDC's chronology of the *St. Louis* episode, there is no entry from May 28 through June 1. See JDC Day-by-Day Chronology, *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10: 262.

46. NARA, RG 59, 840.48 Refugees/1643-1/2. In his letter of May 29 to Duggan, Berenson wrote that "the President asked to see me tomorrow."

47. "Memorandum from the Embassy dated May 30, 1939, of conversation between Dr. Juan J. Ramos, Cuban Secretary of State, and the Ambassador," labeled "Enclosure No. 3 to Despatch No. 1017" in "Jewish Refugee Situation in Habana," June 7, 1939, in NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/39.

48. *Ibid.* Ramos was the official whom Batista asked Laredo Brú to replace. Ramos' sincerity is suspect. In a conversation with the author in September 2010, Irwin Gellman stressed "the baseness of the Cubans" at this time. Corruption, Gellman believes, must be viewed as a key factor in the context of the negotiations.

49. Gellman suggests that Lazo had been a respected confidant of American officials for some years. Troubled especially by the dictatorial influence of Batista, Lazo was "disappointed by the perversion of the democratic process" in Cuba. See Gellman, *Roosevelt and Batista*, 153.

50. "Memorandum for the Files of May 31, 1939," in NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/39, "Jewish Refugee Situation in Habana," June 7, 1939. As the documents have the same dates and titles, the first is distinguished as "Enclosure No. 4 to Despatch No. 1017," while the second is "Enclosure No. 5 to Despatch No. 1017." The second memo includes an entry for "June 1, 1939" and probably was composed in full on that date.

51. "Enclosure No. 5 to Despatch No. 1017."

52. See *Ibid.* One might imagine the story's impact on the *St. Louis* passengers. One finds the following in a June 15, 1939 letter from Joseph Chamberlain to friends of the NCC (Cecilia Razovsky Papers, American Jewish Historical Society Archives at the Center for Jewish History, call number P-290, box 3, folder 7): Over the course of "twelve very difficult days and nights, Razovsky was in constant communication with the Chairman of the Immigrants Committee on the SS *St. Louis*, appointed by the passengers, so that every effort was made to keep up the morale and the courage of the passengers. Even after the steamer left Cuba, telegrams were sent to the ship three times each day by Miss Razovsky[,] and the Committee aboard the ship sent cables to Miss Razovsky three or four times daily."

53. "Jewish Refugee Situation in Habana," June 7, 1939, "Enclosure No. 5 to Despatch No. 1017," NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/39. José García Montes was then agricultural secretary while Dr. Amadeo Lopez Castro was formerly both treasury and agricultural secretary. Both men, whom Berenson knew by virtue of his position with the Cuban-American Chamber of Commerce and described as honorable and highly regarded, remained in close contact with Berenson over the next few days. Berenson's own account of the events of May 31 and June 1 is in accord with that of du Bois. See Minutes, Joint Distribution Committee, June 15, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, File 378—*St. Louis*.

54. NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/39, box 5969, folder three. Coert du Bois labels the document, dated June 1, 1939, "Enclosure No. 6 to Despatch No. 1017." It appears that Cuba claimed a three-mile territorial limit in 1939 (President Reagan would increase the U.S. limit from three to twelve miles in December 1988). According to Berenson's later report, Laredo Brú said to him on June 1: "Three miles is all that is necessary and the minute it is out come on back with the plan and I will be ready to go over it with you." See Minutes, Joint Distribution Committee, June 15, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—*St. Louis*.

55. *Ibid.* Berenson used this opening to recommend the Isle of Pines as a temporary refugee haven, an idea that had been bandied about for some months (one proposal suggested that as many as 25,000 people might reside there). Laredo Brú neither accepted nor rejected the suggestion. The Isle of Pines, known since the 1970s as the Isle of Youth, is a small island off the southern coast of Cuba.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10: 262. The committee was chaired by Alfred Jaretzki; its other members were David Bressler, Edwin Goldwasser, and Hyman.

58. Letter of June 2, 1939, Joseph Hyman to Herbert Mallinson, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—*St. Louis*.

59. "Enclosure No. 8 (dated June 5, 1939) to Despatch No. 1017," NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/39, box 5969, folder three; Letter and Proposal, June 3, 1939, from Razovsky to Jaretzki, Hyman, and Bressler, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—*St. Louis*.

60. "Enclosure No. 8 (dated June 5, 1939) to Despatch No. 1017," NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/39, box 5969, folder three. This dispatch suggests that Major Bernardo García, Cuba's national police chief, was also at the June 4 meeting. García was a confidant of Benitez; he also was friendly with Batista. Certainly Laredo Brú knew this. At the JDC meeting on June 15, Berenson reported that the new demands were made at a gathering that included Ochotorena, García, and Bustamante at the president's palace on Sunday afternoon. See Minutes, Joint Distribution Committee, June 15, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis.
61. "Enclosure No. 8 (dated June 5, 1939) to Despatch No. 1017," NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/39, box 5969, folder three. While the Dominican offer remained open, its terms evolved from June 3 to 5, becoming more financially onerous. In *Exil Impossible* (p. 97), Afoumado also expresses bewilderment at Berenson's response to the Dominican offer.
62. Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, June 5, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis.
63. "Memorandum for the Files," June 6, 1939, in NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/39, box 5969, folder three, also labeled "Enclosure No. 10 to Despatch No. 1017." Berenson's information regarding the *St. Louis* came from Luis Clasing, the Hapag agent in Havana, indicating that he had followed the advice of Wright and du Bois in contacting him. In Berenson's report to the JDC, he said that García called him at 8 PM on June 5 to say that "he had just come from Batista, who sent affectionate messages and said everything was going to be allright" [*sic*]. Minutes, Joint Distribution Committee, June 15, 1939, *ibid*.
64. *Ibid*. Berenson told du Bois on June 5th "that Mr. Clasing had informed him that he had until tomorrow (i.e., June 6) to make final arrangements," meaning that the *St. Louis* would begin steaming back to Germany on June 6.
65. "Enclosure No. 12 to Despatch No. 1017," dated June 6, 1939, in NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/39, box 5969, folder three. Included with this enclosure is a copy of Berenson's budget sheet, itemizing at \$500 per refugee the money to be deposited into the Cuban Treasury for passengers on the *St. Louis*, but also on the *Flandre* and *Orduña*. The sheet subtracts from the totals those passengers under 16 years of age. Without including the *Flandre* and *Orduña*, neither of which were mentioned in prior proposals, but including all 907 *St. Louis* passengers, including those under 16 years of age, the total comes to \$453,500. Regarding the press report of June 6, Berenson said something curious to the JDC: "I didn't have the report until about 3. What happened at that point was that when I came back to the hotel Miss Razovsky showed me the statement. *One of the American reporters came over and translated the statement* [italics added]. It was timed 12 o'clock. I couldn't believe any such thing as that but there it was." Remarkably, the implication here is that Berenson was less than fluent in Spanish. Minutes, Joint Distribution Committee, June 15, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis
66. Ambassador Wright reported that the bank manager "had informed his principals [i.e., the JDC] by telephone on the 7th the instant that he believed that this well-intentioned effort [i.e., his own] had unfortunately been made too late." See report from Ambassador dated June 8, 1939 and labeled "German-Jewish Refugee Situation," in NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/43, box 5969, folder three. One should note from this report that, through Undersecretary Sumner Welles, President Roosevelt became engaged in the *St. Louis* affair

on June 7. This seems late only if one ignores the optimistic reports coming from Berenson until June 5. Even on the 6th, Berenson was providing too little evidence either to the JDC or, through its representatives in Havana, to the State Department that he was not in control of the negotiations.

67. "Account of Cecilia Razovsky of negotiations in Havana over *St. Louis*," June 11, 1939, in *Archives of the Holocaust*, 102: 64–272. Because of Razovsky's inaccuracies when it came to dates and specific details, her report is at times at odds with what is well known. She states, for example, that on Friday, June 9, a Miami attorney named Pete Harris chartered a private plane to Havana in order to secure the release of six *St. Louis* passengers before the ship left harbor. These six, reportedly relatives of a Mr. Annenberg, were certainly among those twenty-two Jews allowed to disembark in Havana. But Razovsky had the date wrong; their release took place one week earlier, on June 2.

68. Letter of June 27, 1939, Hyman to Baerwald, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis. Hyman's opinion here differs sharply from his June 2 appraisal of Berenson in his letter to Herbert Mallinson (see note 58 above).

69. Was Batista involved in the negotiations? Berenson seemed convinced that he was, at least from June 5. The source for his information was Bernardo García, chief of the Cuban police. Du Bois believed, however, that Batista was never involved. See "Jewish Refugee Situation in Habana," June 7, 1939, in NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/39, box 5969, folder three.

70. After being told on June 1 by Laredo Brú that the passengers could not disembark in Havana, why did Berenson specify such disembarkation in his offer of June 4? Moreover, why did that offer include reference to both the *Flandre* and the *Orduña* when his efforts should have been limited to the *St. Louis*? Without access to the specific instructions he was receiving from the JDC (not included in the JDC files), these concerns cannot be answered.

71. In June 1939, efforts by the Intergovernmental Committee to find refuge for Germany's "involuntary immigrants" overshadowed the emergency represented by 907 passengers on the *St. Louis*. Coverage of its work is provided in Breitman et al., *Refugees and Rescue*, 139–83.

72. Telegram, June 7, 1939, JDC to Paul Baerwald, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis.

73. See JDC Day-by-Day Chronology, *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10: 262.

74. Quotations from the JDC executive committee meeting are in Minutes of JDC Executive Committee meeting, June 8, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis. Regarding the Dominican Republic, the finding aid to the Razovsky Papers includes the following in a description of the Evian Conference: "Out of all of the thirty-two nations there represented, United States included, only the representative from the Dominican Republic offered to accept large numbers of Jewish refugees. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, Dominican Republic's dictator who, between October 2–4, 1937, murdered 20,000 poor Haitian workers, all of them black, had motives aside from benevolence. His desire to make his Republic 'white' was coupled with his need to improve his image with the United States. Trujillo hoped to settle 100,000 German and Austrian refugees on 24,000 acres of agricultural property, and the first six settlers arrived in Sosua in March 1940." Ultimately, only 472 Jews found refuge in the Dominican Republic by the end of the Second World War.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

77. See JDC Day-by-Day Chronology, *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10: 262.

78. NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/54, folder three. Pell was on leave from the State Department's Division of European Affairs. He explained that "Emerson was informed more than a month ago by the Cuban authorities that the papers of the refugees who proposed to sail on the *St. Louis* and also on the *Orinoco* were not in order, and that they would not be allowed to land at Habana. He at once notified the Hamburg-Amerika Line and the Jewish organizations. Both, however, disregarded his warning . . . In fact, the Jewish leaders from Berlin . . . said that since virtually the rest of the world with the exception of the United States was now closed to legal immigration they would be forced to resort to shock tactics of their own and oblige the outside countries to take account of their situation. Of course the organizations in turn are under pressure from the secret police."

79. Telegram of June 12, 1939, Erwin to Hull, *ibid.*

80. NARA, RG 59, 840.48, Refugees/document 1659.

81. Telegram of June 9, 1939, Baerwald to JDC, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis. Schiff served as president of the Jews' Temporary Shelter, a charity organization in London, and was among the founders of Britain's Jewish Refugee Committee. He was a partner in the banking firm of Bourke, Schiff, & Co.

82. At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, Palestine was declared a British mandated territory. A British White Paper, made public on May 17, 1939, closed Palestine to further Jewish immigration.

83. NARA, RG 59, 837.55J/54, folder three. Baerwald had sailed from New York on May 31 to assist the Intergovernmental Committee in its ill-fated negotiations with German international economics specialist Helmut Wohlthat aimed at completing a refugee agreement with the German government. Troper's report back to the JDC echoed Pell's information. France was offering a possibility, he said, but only with respect to landing some of the passengers in Spanish Morocco. "Efforts are . . . being made to arrange, at least for those who have American possibilities, for admission to Tangiers . . . They have been in touch with the French Consul in Tangiers and they expect that they will have an answer soon—perhaps today." Winterton, a long-time Conservative Member of Parliament, had headed the British delegation to the Evian Conference in July 1938. He had been a member of Chamberlain's Cabinet since 1938. See "Record of Telephone Conversation with Mr. Troper, Paris, June 10, 1939," JDC Archives 33/44, File 378—St. Louis.

84. June 9, 1939, "Record of Discussions re. St. Louis," in *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10: 257. The ICA was a Paris-based, but British-registered, charitable society focused on Jewish migration. An equivalent group in New York was HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society).

85. Memo on contact from Mr. Diedrich of Hapag in New York, including cable from Hamburg, June 10, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis.

86. "Record of Telephone Conversation with Mr. Troper, Paris, June 10, 1939," in *ibid.*

87. Telegrams from Hyman to Troper, Rosenberg to Troper, and JDC to Baerwald, all June 10, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis.

88. Letter from Baerwald to Pell, June 10, 1939, *ibid.* Amidst this activity, Hyman remained sensitive to the anxiety the *St. Louis* passengers felt. He wired the chairman of the passenger committee, also on June 10, indicating that the JDC was “doing everything humanly possible to come to your aid We ask you for your own sake and for the sake of your relatives and dear ones here to keep up your courage and to realize that all our organizations here and abroad are working day and night every minute in your behalf. We are in touch with cooperating organizations and colleagues throughout the world.” Telegram from JDC to Herbert Menasse, June 10, 1939, *ibid.* Hyman believed, incorrectly, that the chairman of the five-man passenger committee was named Herbert Menasseh; in fact, Josef Joseph held that position. Herbert *Manasse* was a member of the committee.

89. “Further Telephone Message [from Troper], June 11, 1939,” *ibid.*

90. “Memorandum of Mr. Baerwald’s Telephone Conversation with Mr. Troper, Paris, Sunday, June 11, 1939, 12:00 Noon,” in *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10:279–80. Troper reported in turn to Baerwald that the ninety-six refugees aboard the *Flandre* would be disembarked at St. Nazaire in France, while the approximately 100 aboard the *Orduña* had been transferred to the *Orbita* and were heading for Liverpool.

91. “Memorandum of Discussions and Meetings Re: S/S ST. LOUIS, June 12, 1939,” (*sic*; memo should be dated June 13) JDC Archives, 33/44, file 378—St. Louis. As noted above, Linder had accompanied Baerwald to London. In *United States Government Policy on Refugees from Nazism: 1933–1940* (New York: Garland, 1982), 452–67, Barbara McDonald Stewart describes the interminable negotiations going on in London over establishment of a foundation to finance refugee relocation from Germany. Lord Winterton was among those presenting serious difficulties for Myron Taylor and Pell in creating a foundation acceptable to both the American and British governments, and to Jewish leaders in both the United States and Britain. Although Stewart does not say as much, it may have served as a small token of cooperation on Winterton’s part, given the far greater and more difficult issues confronting the Intergovernmental Committee, to recommend Britain’s acceptance of a contingent from the *St. Louis*.

92. “Memorandum of Discussions and Meetings Re: S/S St. Louis, June 12, 1939” (*sic*; the memo should be dated June 13), JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis. In Amsterdam, Gertrude Van Tijn was instrumental in gaining Dutch acceptance for taking in some of the *St. Louis* passengers. Head of the Joint Relief Committee in Amsterdam, Van Tijn managed to present the JDC’s case in a personal audience with both the justice minister and Queen Wilhelmina. See letter, Van Tijn to Troper, June 12, 1939, *ibid.*

93. Letter, Baerwald and Linder to Hyman, June 13, 1939, *ibid.* Regarding the special Monday-afternoon conference at the Home Office, Baerwald and Linder wrote that “some of those present strongly indicated that it might have been preferable to return a few of the refugees to Germany. We ourselves were of the same opinion, feeling fairly certain that nothing would happen to those who had to go back. This was confirmed to us later in the afternoon by Dr. Otto Hirsch, who came to see us and who intimated to us that it might even have been helpful to return some of the passengers to Hamburg.” As with any historical fact, one must evaluate Hirsch’s perspective on the basis of its context. As chairman of

the Reich Association of Jews in Germany (Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland), he assumed responsibility for evaluating future prospects for all German Jews—himself included. He was unable to perceive an emerging catastrophe. Hirsch was sent to Mauthausen in February 1941 and was murdered there in June 1941.

94. Gustav Schröder, *Heimatlos auf hoher See* (Berlin: Beckerdruck, 1949), 23–25. At one point during the return voyage, the passenger committee forestalled a mutiny among some of the younger refugees.

95. “JDC Statement, 6/12/39,” *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10: 261.

96. “Refuge Is Assured for All on Liner,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1939. One reads further that “Belgium will receive her quota of émigrés only on the conditions that they leave immediately when they receive United States immigration visas and that meanwhile they shall not accept work.” The same news was cabled by Troper to Josef Joseph, chair of the passenger committee, on the morning of June 14. See “Memorandum on S.S. ‘ST. LOUIS’—HAPAG,” June 27, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis.

97. “How the J.D.C. Rescued the 907 Refugees on Board the SS St. Louis,” June 14, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 378—St. Louis. The title of the publication was cut off in the archived copy, but the byline was Paris. It is possible that the document was a press release.

98. From Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Paris Refugees,” June 14, 1939, *ibid.*

99. Perhaps the Yiddish-language daily *Der Tog*.

100. “Tragedies on the Seas,” editorial in *The Congress Bulletin*, June 9, 1939; and “The Vicious Attacks Against the J.D.C.,” editorial in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, June 16, 1939, in JDC Archives 33/44, file 379—St. Louis. Such attacks highlight the divisions that plagued the American Jewish community beginning in the 1920s. The JDC enjoyed close ties with the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the organization that had created it in 1914 to aid Jewish victims of the First World War. Founded in 1906 by Jews who had immigrated to the United States in the nineteenth century, the AJC embraced assimilation and in the 1920s struggled unsuccessfully against immigration restriction. Conscious of the threat that Americans might view Jews as an alien culture transplanted to the United States, the AJC eschewed Zionism and maintained a cautious silence during the early years of the Third Reich. Meanwhile, a number of more recent Jewish immigrants, who fumed over the perceived exclusivity of the AJC, founded the American Jewish Congress in 1919. Led by Rabbi Stephen Wise, the Congress openly embraced Zionism and was outspoken in its denunciation of the Nazi regime.

101. Quoted in “Paris Refugees,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 14, 1939, *ibid.*

102. “907 on Liner Radio Thanks for Refuge,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1939.

103. “Troper Report of *St. Louis* Arrival in Europe,” *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10: 285. Liesl was the daughter of the passenger committee’s chairman, Josef Joseph. Ships sailing to Antwerp must travel up the Schelde River, which empties into the North Sea in the Netherlands. A river pilot is required. Thus, in addition to Troper and the other representatives, a pilot was taken on board at Flushing (Vlissingen), roughly 50 miles from Antwerp.

104. "907 Refugees End Voyage in Antwerp," *New York Times*, June 18, 1939. According to the report, that same passenger "branded as too inventive the earlier story about the formation of a suicide club of 250 against the possibility of the vessel returning to Germany."

105. Pell's pedigree is of interest. An uncle, Herbert C. Pell, was U.S. Ambassador to Spain, and a nephew, Claiborne Pell, served as Democratic senator from Rhode Island. According to Stewart (*United States Government Policy on Refugees*, 183–84), Pell had been selected to serve with the Intergovernmental Committee due to "his experience in international conferences, his contacts with the press, and his linguistic abilities. Those who worked with him on refugee matters found him charming, cultivated and sympathetic even though he sometimes seemed to lay too much stress on matters of protocol."

106. Quoted in Ogilvie and Miller, *Refuge Denied*, 48. Although it would not impact Barak's overall appraisal, archival research later revealed that Manfred Fink, Barak's father, died in March 1945 at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp (see *Refuge Denied*, 52–53).

107. An anecdote is instructive here. Alarmed by the growing prospect of war, President Roosevelt struggled mightily with Congress that summer to achieve a repeal of America's arms embargo. With that goal firmly in mind, he invited Congressional leaders to a White House conference in July 1939 to make his case. The effort failed. Senator William Borah of Idaho, powerful senior Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, made the statement "that his own 'private information' was more reliable than that collected by the State Department of the United States, and that his own 'private information' was to the effect that there would not be any war in 1939." See *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1939* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 8: xxxvi.

108. Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000), 5, 7.

109. Jörn Rüsen, "Holocaust Memory and Identity Building: Metahistorical Considerations in the Case of (West) Germany," *History of the Human Sciences* 17 (2004): 252.

110. "Three hundred and sixty-five of the 620 passengers who returned to continental Europe survived the war. Of the 288 passengers sent to Britain, the vast majority were alive at war's end. Around half of the original 937 passengers are known to have eventually migrated to the United States." See Ogilvie and Miller, *Refuge Denied*, 175. One JDC document provides insight into what eventually happened to some of the passengers granted asylum in Belgium. Karlheinz Kochmann—then of Hartford, Connecticut—wrote to James Rosenberg on August 13, 1940: "My parents, Fritz and Alice Kochmann and my sister Hilde were among those sent to Brussels. After May 10 of this year they fled to France, where my father is interned at Camp St. Cyprien, Pyrenees Orientales, together with 50 other members of the Belgian *St Louis* group. My mother and sister were also interned by the French but have been released and expect to join my father at Camp St. Cyprien." According to Karlheinz's son, David Kochman of New Hampshire, his grandparents and Hilde eventually fled to Portugal and ultimately reached the United States. See Kochmann to Rosenberg, letter of August 13, 1940, *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10: 301.

111. Letter of May 3, 1939, Margolis to Razovsky, JDC Archives 33/44, file 506—Countries: Cuba.

112. "Congressman Would Deport Immigrants Landing Since 1933," *The Havana Post*, July 9, 1939, in *ibid.* The article was sent as a clipping to Hyman by Adolph Kates, a Cuban businessman characterized in a July 13 letter from Robert Pilpel, secretary of the JDC's Subcommittee on Refugee Aid in Central and South America, to George Warren of the President's Advisory Committee, as someone who "has not only been active and extremely helpful in the conduct of the refugee aid program in Cuba but has brought a wealth of experience to play on many of the difficult problems which have arisen. We believe the matter which he calls to our attention to be urgent." Letter of July 13, 1939, Pilpel to Warren, JDC Archives 33/44, file 507—Countries: Cuba.

113. The measure, inspired by Britain's acceptance of "German refugee children" via Kindertransport, was sponsored by Sen. Robert Wagner (D-NY), and Rep. Edith Rogers (R-MA). The author is currently researching this topic. For background, see "Joint Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Immigration, United States Senate, and a Subcommittee of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, House of Representatives, 76th Congress, First Session," on S.J. Res. 64 and H.J. Res. 168, "Admission of German Refugee Children." See also Judith Tydor Baumel, *Unfulfilled Promise: Rescue and Resettlement of Jewish Refugee Children in the United States, 1934–1945* (Juneau: Denali Press, 1990).

114. Aronson, *Race: A History beyond Black and White* (New York: Atheneum, 2007), 195–96.

115. Though voiced by a minority in the United States, commitment to assisting refugees from Germany was nonetheless determined and widespread. The NCC served to coordinate the activities of several agencies engaged in service to émigrés and refugees. Among the many organizations—sectarian, nonsectarian, and ecumenical—cooperating with the NCC in 1939 were the following: the American Committee for Christian-German Refugees, American Friends Service Committee, American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, B'nai B'rith, Committee for Catholic Refugees from Germany, Council of Jewish Federation and Welfare Funds, Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Physicians, Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars, Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, German-Jewish Children's Aid, and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS).

116. "Memorandum on S.S. 'St. Louis'—HAPAG," June 27, 1939, JDC Archives 33/44, file 386 Emigration—St. Louis: JDC Report, p. 27.

117. *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10: 299–300. In an August 8, 1939 JDC report (see *ibid.*, 10: 540–42), one learns that this well-managed organization was maintaining at enormous cost tens of thousands of Jewish refugees in 110 different locales in Poland, including large camps in Warsaw, Cracow, Łódź, and Zbąszyń. Desperate people who either had been deported from Germany, the Sudetenland, or the rump regions of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, or had fled these lands of their own accord, these Jews soon would experience the impact of Nazi racial policy in occupied Poland.

118. "Troper Report," *Archives of the Holocaust*, 10: 285.