

ABSTRACT

Refugees in Times of Reelection: An Analysis of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman's Responses to Jewish Refugees During and After World War II.

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Many individuals hold a false notion that America is a safe haven for refugees, but a closer look at the refugee crisis surrounding World War II (1930-1948) tells a different story; Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) and Harry S. Truman faced the difficult decision of if they should help Jewish refugees, and if so, how. In this thesis I argue that presidents' actions concerning refugees are tempered by political concerns and driven by a xenophobic America, and that for a president to act humanitarily and openly in refugees' best interest that they are usually not facing reelection and are in a relatively safe political position. By examining the political correspondence of both presidents, I show that refugees fare best when they seek aid and admittance to the United States under a second-term president, and the examples of FDR and Truman help to shed a light on the more recent Syrian refugee crisis and former President Obama's motivations and dealings with those clamoring at America's gates.

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REFUGEES IN TIMES OF REELECTION: AN ANALYSIS OF FRANKLIN DELANO
ROOSEVELT AND HARRY S. TRUMAN'S RESPONSES TO JEWISH REFUGEES
DURING AND AFTER WORLD WAR II.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: America, Immigrants, and World War II

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

- Emma Lazarus¹

A common misunderstanding among Americans is that the United States is a true embodiment of this quote; it is found on the base of the Statue of Liberty, the iconic symbol for immigrants coming into New York Harbor at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Yet the history of immigration to America, more specifically the history of refugee immigration, proves to be much more complicated than this lofty statement implies, and America is revealed at many points in her history to be less welcoming than many perceive. What is more important than understanding the misleading nature of this perception of an open-armed America is understanding what motivates American presidents to act as they do in specific refugee moments. The modern world has unfortunately seen an immense number of refugee crises, some much bigger than others in terms of the number of people displaced. Specifically, the refugee crisis coming out of Europe before, during, and after World War II still proves to be one of the largest in terms of total number of displaced persons and their complete lack of refuge options, as approximately 40 million Europeans found themselves without hope or

¹ "The New Colossus--full Text," National Parks Service, January 1, 2016, accessed August 26, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/colossus.htm>.

a home.² The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the actions taken by President Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) and Harry Truman and those influencing the two presidents in an attempt to ascertain the motivations behind refugee-related policies and entities during this time: 1933-1948. By evaluating what these men did for refugees and why they chose to act in certain ways, it will allow the actions of these past leaders to potentially inform current and future refugee crises like that coming out of Syria and the Middle East today. In the following chapters I argue that both FDR and Truman's decisions were often tempered by political concerns; both men were upstanding and sought the best for displaced people, but their actions were often restricted by circumstances outside of their control (i.e., war), or they were personally constricted by their own desires to remain in office. A dual analysis of these men shows how political motivations can ruin refugee prospects of aid. I argue that the timing of refugee crises greatly impacts the willingness of presidents to act humanitarily in their favor; if crises occur as presidents are nearing reelection, the refugees are less likely to be admitted to the United States or benefitted in any way that does not benefit the executive.³ Of course, this is not the case in every historical refugee crisis, but it is a trend that emerges when studying FDR and Truman together.

² Lydia DePillis, Kulwant Saluja, and Denise Lu, "75 Years of Major Refugee Crises around the World," *Washington Post*, December 21, 2015, accessed August 26, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/world/historical-migrant-crisis/>.

³ Sometimes aid was sent abroad to avoid admitting refugees, but even this financial allocation could have political consequences.

Historical Context

Before the World War II refugee crisis can be fully examined, it is pertinent to discuss evolutions in immigration policy in the first few decades of the 20th century because the United States saw a new shift toward stricter policy during this time. The first substantial immigration restriction came on February 5, 1917, titled “Regulating the Immigration of Aliens to and Residence of Aliens in the United States.” This 1917 Immigration Act laid out a plethora of restrictions on who could enter the United States; it barred those who were “mentally or physically defective,” draft dodgers, convicted felons, people who traveled by another person’s money, Pacific Islanders and Asians, those not literate in a language (preferably English), and many others.⁴ Among all of these qualifications, the one that proved to be most important for the future and fate of millions of refugees is found in Section 3: “persons likely to become public charges...”⁵ By public charges the act means anyone who is unable to provide for themselves or contribute to the American economy and society. While not originally intended to be the most prominent aspect of the act, in the context of the declining economy in the late 1920s and early 1930s, President Herbert Hoover highlighted this clause as the ultimate reason to restrict those trying to enter the United States because the country could not support its current population, much less an expanding one.⁶ Additionally, isolationist

⁴ “Regulating the Immigration of Aliens to and Residence of Aliens in the United States” in *U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Laws and Issues: A Documentary History*, ed. Michael C. LeMay and Elliott Robert Barkan, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 109-112.

⁵ *Ibid*, 110.

⁶ Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 36.

tendencies and hostile public opinion toward immigrants coming out of World War I persisted to this time, putting further pressure on government and those deciding immigration policies.⁷ Yet even though this act curtailed immigration significantly, the most impactful change was still to come four years later.

With a rise in the public acceptance of racial hierarchy theories and eugenics, the year 1921 saw the beginnings of the most formative immigration restrictions in United States history. The Johnson Quota Act (Emergency Quota Act, Emergency Immigration Restriction Act) of 1921 set the stage for U.S. immigration policy that continues today.⁸ This act would later be built upon and revamped as the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, but initially in 1921 it “limited the number of aliens admitted to the United States to 3 percent of the number of foreign-born persons of the same nationality residing in the country,” based on the 1910 census, and the total number of immigrants allowed was 357,803.⁹ This carefully crafted number of immigrants from each country became known generally as each country’s “quota,” and the debate about these numbers engulfed congress in the years 1923-1924. The act resulting from this further deliberation and conflict was extensive; in its final form known as the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act (National Origins Immigration Act), the total quota percentage was lowered to 2 percent, and it was then based on the 1890 census instead of the 1910 because the 1890 census allowed for the exclusion of more Eastern Europeans. Along with this cut in numbers, the Johnson-Reed

⁷ Bat-Ami Zucker, “American Refugee Policy in the 1930s” in *Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Liberal European States*, ed. Frank Caestecker and Bob Moore (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 153.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, 153-154.

Act capped the number of Europeans inclusive at 150,000 and allowed for absolutely no Japanese entrance. Most importantly, it set each country's quota based on what that ethnicity/nationality could offer to the United States. The new system was based upon consuls abroad, and visa decisions were made by the consuls before immigrants departed for the United States to avoid repatriation of those denied (this power vested in consuls was central to Hoover's crack down on immigration because he could change policy without new legislation).¹⁰ The consuls were to issue visas "specify[ing] (1) The nationality of the immigrant; (2) whether he is a quota immigrant...or a non-quota immigrant...; (3) the date on which the validity of the immigration visa shall expire; (4) such additional information necessary to the proper enforcement of the immigration laws and the naturalization laws as may be by regulations prescribed."¹¹ This subjective aspect of consular power plus the freedom to restrict immigration solely based upon ethnicity made the Johnson-Reed Act the new standard of United States immigration, and the racist views of early twentieth century Americans applauded these "necessary" steps toward a homogenous America.¹² This later greatly harmed the chances of numerous Jewish refugees aiming to enter America's gates because many were from Eastern Europe, and the persecution of Hitler was often concentrated in certain countries, so the quotas could never sustain the number of refugees in need.

¹⁰ Ibid, 154-155.

¹¹ "Immigration Act of 1924" H.R. 7995, 68th Congress; May 26, 1924, 153, accessed August 26, 2016, http://library.uwb.edu/Static/USimmigration/1924_immigration_act.html.

¹² Zucker, "American Refugee Policy in the 1930s," 154-155.

The pertinence of this discussion of immigration acts is twofold. First, it shows the lengths Congress and the Executive branch went to to restrict immigration before World War II, establishing the mindset of America at this time and her lack of an open door. Second, it brings up an important distinction for the purpose of this thesis: the definition of a refugee. The terms “immigrant” and “refugee” were one and the same in American history until the mid-twentieth century.¹³ No special legislation, nor American public opinion, prior to the conflict in the 1940s regarding refugees existed to warrant a separate definition of the two terms. It was World War II and the Jewish refugee crisis that fostered a need for differentiation. The United Nations officially defines refugee as “A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.”¹⁴ For the purpose of this thesis, I will be using the term refugee to mean someone forced to flee or attempt to flee from their home country because of persecution generally, anything from political to religious.

Also, when using the term refugee in this project I am referring specifically to Jewish refugees from Europe, for though they did not make up the entire refugee population in the 1930s and 1940s, they were the overwhelming majority and created the controversy and incited the actions of Americans for and against refugees more generally during these tumultuous years. Before my own analysis of this historical time, it is important to look at the arguments of previous scholars regarding the two presidents who

¹³ Ibid., 156.

¹⁴ "What Is a Refugee? Definition and Meaning," USA for UNHCR, January 1, 2017, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/>.

handled the Jewish refugee crisis during World War II. Both FDR and Truman have generated heated historiographical debate concerning their decisions regarding Jewish refugees, and this thesis will help to open this conversation further by juxtaposing the actions of both men together.

Historiography

The response of the United States government, and specifically President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to the Holocaust and Jewish refugees has been a divisive and heated historiographical topic throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries since the end of World War II. Initially, the analyses of the Holocaust were solely those of Nazi guilt, and did not address the Allied parties.¹⁵ The topic separated itself from the histories of World War II broadly as early as the 1960s, and the conversation has continued to narrow throughout the decades. Scholars have fallen predominately into two ideological camps on the issue: those who vilify FDR and the Allies for standing by while the Jews were murdered, and those who defend FDR saying he did everything he could given domestic and international constraints. Interestingly, these scholars largely draw from the same manuscript collections, like FDR's presidential library. The scholars critical of FDR came first chronologically, but it seems retrospective analysis, moral sentiments and the subsequent rejection of those analyses and sentiments have made the topic a lively conversation that eludes complete resolution. Yet, the tide of scholarship on the issue did not change within a vacuum. The greatest shift in the historiographical conversation and

¹⁵ W. D. Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews from the Nazis* (London: Routledge, 1997), 2.

the creation of the cohort of scholars who defend FDR's actions came in the wake of a book by David Wyman and the subsequent documentary aired by PBS; the book made a new bold claim regarding the possibility of bombing Auschwitz that got every scholar's attention, and then the documentary projected this negative scholarly portrayal of FDR to a popular audience. Wyman's audacious claim and the idea's move into the public mind spurred new scholars on to reexamine the situation and provide a realistic analysis of the refugee and Holocaust situation, not one racked with moral guilt and retrospective analysis. Both these camps fall on the extreme sides of the spectrum, and this thesis will attempt to take a middle ground while also pointing to political motivations of each president that have never been analyzed together.

One of the very first scholars to argue that FDR and the United States were bystanders to the Holocaust who could have acted and rescued thousands was a scholar by the name of Arthur D. Morse. His monograph, titled *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy*, began the conversation and examination in 1968 of what the Allies were doing while the Jews were being exterminated.¹⁶ His goal was to "concentrate on the bystanders rather than the killers or the killed."¹⁷ Throughout the text he points to American isolationism, evasion, and indifference and how these manifested within the historical situation. For example, Morse highlights the obstruction of immigration policy and how the United States broadly interpreted the "public charge"

¹⁶ Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy*, (New York: Hart Publishing Company, 1968).

¹⁷Ibid., 2.

clause of the Immigration Act of 1917 as a way to not grant visas in the 1930s.¹⁸ He also claims that America's participation in the Olympics in 1936, the passive failure of the Evian Conference called to settle international refugee matters, the rejection of the refugee-laden MS *St. Louis*, and Roosevelt's late reaction with the American War Refugee Board obviously showcase American apathy and reluctance to help Jewish refugees.¹⁹ Morse was one of the first to interpret these historical events in this negative light, and others followed in his footsteps soon after.

The most important work to continue the path forged by Arthur Morse was David S. Wyman's *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*. One of his key points and the PBS documentary that followed based upon his book would change the entire historiographical conversation.²⁰ Even before the release of the documentary, Wyman's book sparked debate over FDR's "guilt or innocence," but the later introduction of the ideas to the general public accelerated that debate significantly. Wyman, like Morse, argues that the European Jewry was abandoned by America during World War II, that our country could have done more and did not for a number of reasons.²¹ His most significant points are that the State Department purposefully avoided rescuing Jews because they did not want to admit them to the U.S. or make Britain admit

¹⁸ Ibid., 130-149.

¹⁹ The War Refugee Board was a solely American entity established in 1944 to aid Nazi/Axis victims, Jewish and otherwise.

²⁰ Verne W. Newton, *FDR and the Holocaust* (New York: Saint Martin's Press), 1996, x.

²¹ David S Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews :America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

them to Palestine, that FDR did not act on behalf of refugees for 14 months after he discovered the mass murdering and only did so because of political pressure, and that when he did act by creating the War Refugee Board that he subsequently neglected it. He also questions why the United States did not follow one of the many rescue plans put forth by the American Jewish community.²² But most pertinently, Wyman brings forth a new point not previously argued by scholars of his kind: that the United States could and should have bombed Auschwitz.²³ This idea quickly made its way through scholarly circles and further intensified the villainization of World War II America and FDR. Wyman's interpretation specifically triggered the shift in conversation not only because it added this idea of bombing, but also because it reached the American public directly through the medium of television. Of course, his argument did not stand alone at the time, and he existed in the same thread as others, like Morse, before him.

A few months prior to the documentary release, Wyman's work was already opening up conversation among scholars. A conference was held in Hyde Park, New York City in November of 1993 with all of the top Holocaust historians to see if any resolution could come from a discussion of these difficult questions about American indifference in light of the persistently negative portrayal most scholars painted. Different attendees had different perspectives, but the goal of the conference was “to determine to what extent the controversy over the Roosevelt administration’s responses to the

²² Ibid.

²³ Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, 288-307.

Holocaust endure because the issues themselves have defied scholarly resolution.”²⁴

While the historians discussed almost every point made by scholars up to this point, the most important contribution to the historical conversation was that they ruled the possibility of bombing Auschwitz impractical.²⁵ They concluded by saying that really understanding the context of the time is important to how much FDR did or did not do, but no decision of his guilt or innocence was made, and they emphasized that the historical conversation is never over. This conference shows that the status quo interpretation of United States' involvement in saving or not saving Jewish refugees was beginning to crack, and all because David Wyman's book made a claim that caught everyone's attention.

Wyman's written work sparked such events as the conference, but it was not until his ideas graced public television that an inundating wave of new scholarly research and arguments was born. First came an article by top Holocaust scholar Henry L. Feingold, written, interestingly enough, for a nonacademic magazine. This alone shows how scholars were motivated to counter the negative interpretations of FDR and America that had just reached the public a few months before. In this article he argues that the documentary is problematic, and that FDR responded entirely appropriately and did the best he could given the historical circumstances and constraints.²⁶ He argues that

²⁴ J Gary Clifford. Transcript of the Summary of the Conference on “Policies and Responses of the American Government toward the Holocaust,” 11-12 November 1993, in *FDR and the Holocaust*, ed. Verne W. Newton (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), vii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

²⁶ Henry L. Feingold, "Roosevelt and Europe's Jews: 'Deceit and Indifference,'

“economic and political realities in the United States exercised a palpable influence which were bound to affect the administration’s decisions on refugee matters,” that American Jewry was too divided to be effective, that anti-Semitism was a real hindrance, and that the State Department is more to blame than FDR himself.²⁷ The documentary he is responding to, he claims, reopened scholarly debate, so this article is incredibly relevant to the historical conversation despite being written for a popular audience. The argument of the documentary struck Feingold and other scholars in such a way as to make them reexamine the question and persuade the American people to take all of Roosevelt’s constraints into consideration.

While Feingold's article was written a mere three months after the release of the documentary, other scholars took their time producing academic monographs that countered Wyman's ideas as presented in his book and in the movie. One such work is W.D. Rubinstein's *The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews from the Nazis* in which he argues that no more Jews than were saved even could have been saved based upon “what was actually known about the Holocaust, what was actually proposed...and what was realistically possible.”²⁸ Rubinstein says directly that he is responding to Wyman and thinks that Wyman's work is inaccurate.²⁹ He emphasizes that Hitler and the Nazis are the only ones to blame for the Holocaust, not the

or Politics and Powerlessness?," *Dimensions* 8, no. 2 (July 1, 1994): accessed November 14, 2016, America History and Life [EBSCO].

²⁷ Ibid., 11.

²⁸ Rubenstein, *The Myth of Rescue*, x.

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

democracies who have long been criticized. He bases this argument off what he perceives to be the “generous” refugee policies of Western powers in the 1930s and the myth of closed doors.³⁰ He then goes on to address the plans for rescue. He argues that Hitler wanted to do the most possible harm to Jews, but the capacity evolved over time, making rescue efforts difficult because of a changing understanding of what was happening. He claims the Jews were prisoners, not refugees; they could not flee or be rescued without the fall of Germany. He also acknowledges that the Jewish responses in the Allied countries were weak and never could have saved anyone because they simply raised awareness and did not propose real action.³¹ Finally he argues that the bombing of Auschwitz was logistically impossible until 1943, and it was not even suggested until 1944.³² Rubinstein helped expand the scholarly base and the argument in support of FDR through a medium once again aimed at an academic audience, not just the public who had been exposed to the documentary.

Ten years later, in 2006, a more comprehensive pro-FDR monograph came into the conversation. Robert Rosen's *Saving the Jews: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Holocaust* argues that FDR was a man surrounded by Depression, and then war, and he cannot be blamed because of the circumstances in which he was operating.³³ He claims that scholars who vilify FDR are approaching the sources with “the outrage of

³⁰ Ibid., 15-62.

³¹ Ibid., 63-156.

³² Ibid., 157-181.

³³ Robert N. Rosen, *Saving the Jews: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Holocaust* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006).

retrospective analysis blinded by the enormity human suffering.”³⁴ His main argument is that context is vital and FDR did everything that he could without having the privilege of hindsight that historians view him with today. FDR’s fight to defeat Germany in war was the only way he could save any Jews in Europe, and that he “saved Palestinian Jewry, saved the future State of Israel, and saved twelve million Jews worldwide.”³⁵ He provides evidence that includes FDR’s immersion in the New Deal, the impracticality and late coming of the idea to bomb Auschwitz, his actual success with the SS *St. Louis*, the successes of the War Refugee Board, plus much more.

Finally, after such a dramatic historiographical shift had taken place, two brave scholars stepped back and decided to look deeply at both sides and see if they could bridge the gap between the negative and positive interpretations of FDR and the United States. These men are Richard Breitman and Alan Lichtman, and their monograph *FDR and the Jews* argues that Roosevelt’s response to Jewish refugees “went through four different phases....as conditions of his presidency radically changed.”³⁶ First-term Roosevelt was a bystander to the problems the Jews faced, but after safely winning re-election the second term Roosevelt became increasingly humanitarian and acted on behalf of imperiled Jews through immigration and resettlement plans. The third-term Roosevelt was a president of war, so he had to prioritize defeating Hitler over saving the Jews, and the last Roosevelt (late 1943 and on) did much to help the Jews, including setting up the War Refugee Board, more efforts of resettlement, moves to give the Jews

³⁴ Ibid., xv.

³⁵ Ibid., xxvi.

³⁶ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 3.

Palestine, and denunciation of anti-Semitism.³⁷ The two authors reject the claims of some scholars that FDR should have bombed Auschwitz and that he ignored the MS *St. Louis*. They claim that FDR could have done more in some moments, but that the priority of removing Hitler and winning the war was above, but not divorced from, saving the Jews.³⁸ This is the most recent and most balanced argument that surrounds FDR and the Holocaust. The authors attempt to connect those who cast FDR as indifferent and those who cast him as the savior of the Jews. In the end this interpretation still presents Roosevelt fairly positively, but it works to reconcile the two clearly-set ideological camps.

Even with the most recent scholarship viewing Roosevelt more positively, there are still some unresolved questions and certain occurrences that make him look less than favorable. For example, historians still do not know why Roosevelt did not replace the anti-Semitic Breckinridge Long of the State Department who blocked many of the efforts on behalf of the Jews during the war. What is interesting about all these scholars throughout the decades is that they are using mostly the same sources, the same manuscript collections and archives like FDR's presidential papers. It comes down to interpretation and how much they project the morality of the present time back into the Holocaust situation. FDR did not fare well in the analyses from the 1960s to the 1980s, but then Wyman's book tipped the scales and solicited a reaction from scholars that was all the more strengthened with the documentary created from his ideas. These new scholars sought to defend FDR and emphasize his circumstances and constraints, finally

³⁷ Ibid., 3-6.

³⁸ Ibid.

coming to two men who were willing to acknowledge both sides and argue that FDR was both indifferent and humanitarian when it came to Jewish refugees; it was merely dependent on which term is being analyzed. Though there are still parts of the conversation left unresolved, the major shift in the late 20th century is evident, and it shows the importance of how other academics and the public perceive the work of scholars.

Truman too faces a multi-branched historiographical trend, as scholars argue different reasons for why he decided to recognize the State of Israel as a solution to the Jewish refugee problem. Some scholars, like Michael Benson, argue that Truman recognized Israel because of his strong Christian faith, his moral fiber, and his belief that “God’s Chosen People” should reside in the place of their ancestors. Other scholars, like John Snetsinger, believe Truman was pressed on the issue by many Jewish influences, both tangible and intangible. The controversy persists because evidence exists for both arguments, but it seems the scholars who favor the influence of Jewish Americans are more widespread.

Dr. John Snetsinger argued in 1974 that the recognition of Israel was due to the “successful effort on the part of American Jews to win the president to the cause to which they were so deeply committed.”³⁹ The American Jewish community saw an autonomous state as the only real solution to the Jewish refugee problem after World War II, so they

³⁹ John Snetsinger, *Truman, the Jewish Vote, and the Creation of Israel* (Stanford, Cal.: Hoover Inst. Press, 1974), xi.

had to convince the president to exercise the diplomatic power of the United States.⁴⁰ Snetsinger argued this among the context of the Vietnam War, and he claims that the voting people do tend to influence policy. For the specific context of 1945-1948, Snetsinger points to the strength of American Zionism, the importance of the Jewish vote in the election of 1948, the U.N. endorsement of the partition of Israel, and the strength of Jewish financiers. He argues that these domestic pressures driven by American Jews pushed the president to support the Zionist cause and recognize the new state.

Similarly, in 1979, Zvi Ganin argued that “political decisions and diplomatic moves are usually made far from the limelight by a small number of people, by leaders who shape and influence policies.”⁴¹ He claims that even though American Jewry was hotly divided at the time, they were key to convincing President Truman to support Israel. He claims that “Israeli” or rather Zionist diplomacy was weak, so American Jews had to make America pick up the slack, that Truman reluctantly accepted Zionism despite his strong Christian faith, and the Rabbi Steven Silver “transform[ed] the American Jewry into a veritable political force.”⁴² Thus Ganin and Snetsinger fall largely within the same vein; they both argue that the strength of domestic Zionism and the political implications of this group drove President Truman to action.

⁴⁰ Ibid., xii.

⁴¹ Zvi Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel 1945-1948* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979), xii.

⁴² Ibid., xvi.

A more recent work, published in 1990, follows the same argument, only with more evidence and further removal from the event in terms of years. Scholar Michael Cohen begins his book at Truman's childhood, because he argues to understand a man's motivation the reader must understand his whole life. He is responding the larger question of whether Truman was motivated by his faith, the desire for global democracy, or domestic politics.⁴³ In the end, he argues that Truman was most motivated by politics, and he bases this upon the Jewish vote, Jewish money, the fact that Truman's close Jewish friend Eddie Jacobson was not a Zionist, and that he believes Truman himself to be fairly anti-Semitic in his early political career. Cohen argues that he was a genuine proponent of "refugee Zionism," meaning sending Jews to Palestine as a solution to the refugee problem, but beyond that he did not feel personally responsible for creating a Jewish state.⁴⁴ As is clearly seen here, the arguments for Truman's political motivations are thorough and continuous throughout time.

This does not mean that all scholars espoused this same argument. Historian Michael T. Benson in fact argues quite the opposite of his predecessors. Benson falls into the camp of scholars that argue Truman was indeed motivated by his own personal faith and spiritual values as a Christian man. As he states in his own words, "Truman's decision to grant recognition to the nascent Jewish state was based primarily on humanitarian, moral, and sentimental grounds, many of which were an outgrowth of the

⁴³ Michael Joseph Cohen, *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), xi.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

president's religious upbringing and his familiarity with the Bible."⁴⁵ Benson recognizes that Snetsinger was the "Preeminent revisionist account," but that it must be challenged.⁴⁶ By examining the same sources for Truman's upbringing as his predecessor Cohen, he argues that Truman's Midwest, Christian upbringing made all the difference in his decisions as president. He argues that the American culture that influenced Truman was not the culture of Zionism and American Jewry, but the culture of the Bible. He admits that this is harder to quantify, but sticks to his argument regardless of this fact.⁴⁷ For evidence he points to Truman's education as a Christian, his public statements on issues of morality like a 1946 speech in which he claims Christianity is the solution for all the world's problems.⁴⁸ Benson argues that the 1945 Harrison report detailing the atrocious conditions of European displaced persons camps played so heavily on Truman's humanitarian leanings that the president inevitably supported Israel as the solution to the refugee problem. The academic world did not seem to be overwhelmingly convinced by Benson's new argument because both perspectives still exist, and his work did not halt the historiographical conversation perpetuated by Snetsinger.

More recently, a 2009 work by Allis and Ronald Radosh makes a more nuanced argument. They first recognize that Israel probably would not exist as it is today had FDR

⁴⁵ Michael T. Benson, *Harry S Truman and the Founding of Israel* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), IX.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, X.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

lived, and they point to Truman as a better president for the new state in this context.⁴⁹ The authors recognize the political pressures placed upon Truman, but also some important points such as the fact that Truman did not even win the state of New York in the 1948 election, the one in which he is claimed to have so desperately needed the Jewish vote.⁵⁰ These authors seem to take all of Truman's possible motivations and roll them into one, showing the complexity of human motivation and action. Just as recent FDR scholars have tried to bridge the gap between opposing arguments, Allis and Ronald Radosh appear to be making the same effort.

The historiographical conversation surrounding both FDR and Truman has been continually divisive, and this thesis will attempt to approach the conversation from a new perspective. I aim to analyze their actions within their historical context, as all scholars do, but more than that I look at their actions through the lens of political pressure and times of reelection. Understanding these leaders in times of reelection is almost more important to their legacies than their actions at other times in their presidencies. FDR was politically motivated because he wanted to stay in office to save America through the New Deal and then by defeating Hitler, and Truman wanted to stay in office to see the refugee crisis and disaster of Europe to an end. Political pressures have been more evident in the study of Truman than of FDR, but in looking at them both and drawing parallels to refugee situations today that the further light can be shed upon how much

⁴⁹ Allis Radosh and Ronald Radosh, *A Safe Haven: Harry S Truman and the Founding of Israel* (New York: Harper, 2009), pg. 354.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 351.

presidents will act in times of reelection and how much timing matters in the success of humanitarian solutions to refugee problems.

Sources and Methodologies

This project, while heavily based on FDR and Truman's personal libraries, is limited in the sense that I only had access to files that have been digitized and made available online. Fortunately, vast amounts of primary sources are available online for both presidents, and their papers and collections were accessible to a large degree. I rely mostly on correspondence (letters, memorandums, statements, meeting minutes etc.) between the presidents and other branches of government, most often the State Department. Other correspondence between the president and the American public is utilized at times, and letters to and from other pertinent individuals housed within FDR and Truman's papers proved to be of great use as well. I continually selected sources that I believed gave not only a picture of the historical narrative, but that also gave a possible window into the motivations behind the actions being taken and the *mentalité* of the people involved. I analyzed these men from all angles, as motivation can spring from many sources, so I carefully looked for motivations coming from any area of life.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter two traces FDR's actions during his first two terms as president. I argue that he was largely inactive on refugee matters during his first term because of domestic economic concerns and his desire to win reelection so he could continue this inwardly focused work. His second term then saw humanitarian efforts that were largely

international and also protected his political interests at home. I postulate the extent to which he knew of Jewish persecution in the early 1930s, and then explore his seeming lack of direct response to the dealings of Germany against Jews in this early stage. The conversation about persecuted Jews was driven by others in government and others close to FDR, but not the president personally. I analyze why FDR chose to respond this way and look at the foreign and domestic constraints he perceived around him. Most importantly, I address FDR's persona and actions leading up to his first reelection and how that political pressure played a role in his reticence on Jewish matters. He lets the departments of State and Labor battle over the issues of immigration and refugees and attempts to keep his own political hands clean at this time.⁵¹ I then move on to FDR post-election of 1936 and the continued challenges concerning Jewish refugees that he faced, like virulent anti-Semitism in the American public. It is around this time that FDR opens up about his support for Palestine as a solution/destination for the Jewish refugees, and his motivation for this solution remains elusive. This second term brought serious problems in Europe, specifically the annexation of Austria, and this prompted FDR to act on behalf of refugees internationally for the first time with the Evian Conference. Unrest continued with *Kristallnacht* at the end of 1938, and near the end of this second term, Roosevelt contributed largely to refugee matters through his attempted resettlement plans. The plans show a humanitarian side of the president, but also a side of caution still wary of the political implications of allowing refugees into the country.

Chapter three continues the discussion of FDR with a primary focus on his third and fourth/final terms. I argue that war constrained FDR extensively, more than political

⁵¹ Along with other constraints of course.

concerns at this time, but that the election of 1940 and later 1944 still affected the President's decisions. The swirling conflict surrounding the election of 1940 led FDR to allow the shutting of America's doors almost entirely. He had a country to protect, and he did not have the luxury of pursuing humanitarian efforts for quite some time. Initially the nation was not even sure that FDR would run for reelection, but he did under the legitimacy of continuing the war he started for America. This wartime context led the government and the public alike to be incredibly xenophobic, and the plight of refugees did not trump their desire to keep America safe. For this reason, obtaining a visa was almost impossible during FDR's third term, and much of this was through the direct action of FDR himself. He transferred the control of visas to the notoriously anti-Semitic State Department, among other actions. This gave significant power to the infamous Breckinridge Long, who at times almost single handedly kept Jewish refugees out of the United States with the tacit support of FDR. I move from there to examine bill S. 913 that denied the entry of any immigrant deemed a threat to public safety, which was a legislative manifestation of the American mindset at the time. While a few lone congressmen attempted to pass legislation protecting immigrants, they were greatly the minority. This general hostility toward Jewish refugees and immigrants persists until the end of the war, and only as the conflict came to a close did FDR make moves for rehabilitation; he did so in the form of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. The Administration was tasked with aiding displaced persons along with a myriad of other relief goals, and it was prominently funded and led by the United States. Finally, I examine his brief fourth term through the lofty War Refugee Board. FDR's motivations for establishing this board are ambiguous, as he could have been

aiming for political leverage with Jewish Americans in the upcoming election, or he could have finally felt free to act in the interest of humanity.

In chapter four, I switch gears to look at Harry Truman within a very specific historical moment: the foundation of Israel as a solution to the Jewish refugee problem. While this may seem like a dramatic shift, I chose to examine Truman in this specific moment because it is the time in his presidency in which politics pressed his decisions the most. Having examined FDR's actions with a specific eye toward moments of reelection, it appeared fitting to examine Truman in a very heated political and refugee moment as well. Scholars have tried to understand why Truman moved forward with such a bold decision as that of recognizing the state of Israel among Arab opposition, and I argue the strongest influences were political (more than his Christian faith or close Jewish friends). Truman advocated prioritizing the Allied war effort in his time as a Senator, and he was not an ardent Zionist, making the recognition of Israel an interesting political move. I point to the power of the Zionist Lobby in congress, the muscle of Jewish financiers and voters, and the pressure of the Harrison report in 1945. These factors made Truman a proponent of "refugee Zionism" to begin with, but he would later be directed farther into the Zionist corner by his political advisors. This analysis of Truman is much more focused than the analysis of the events of FDR's presidency, but this heated ideological and political moment surrounding refugees called for attention within the larger refugee narrative between 1930 and 1948.

Looking at the actions of these two presidents together, specifically in times of reelection, a pattern emerges; both executives' actions concerning refugees around election time were tempered by political concerns. Whether it was FDR's relative silence

on refugee issues early in his political career, or Truman's recognition of Israel that shocked many, these decisions were made with the prospect of reelection in the forefront of their minds. This of course does not mean that these presidents were heartless or had no capacity for humanitarian action, it merely shows that they believed in their power to lead the United States of America and believed they had to act in a certain way to maintain that leadership. Historical circumstances, specifically (though not solely) political circumstances, directed the actions of FDR and Truman before, during, and after World War II in their actions toward Jewish refugees.

CHAPTER TWO

FDR 1932-1941

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), four-term president and inspiring image for Democrats everywhere, has come under plenty of fire for his actions toward refugees during World War II. More specifically, historians continue to ask if FDR did all that he could to help the later Holocaust victims, or if he left the Jewish people of Europe to die, presumably not having done much. While this is a valuable question scholars have been asking for decades, it is not one this chapter seeks to resolve totally; I do my best in this chapter to focus on the voices and silences of the sources in FDR's presidential library and archive. In examining what these sources reveal about the famous President in the years 1932-1940, or the "first and second Roosevelts" as Richard Breitman and Alan Lichtman would define, we can better understand how the President dealt with the "Jewish Question" (i.e. where they can be sent safely) before the outbreak of World War II. During his first term, the discussion of aiding imperiled Jews in Germany was a discussion of quotas, consuls, and visas. Then during his second term, it expanded into the Evian Conference and vast discussion of resettlement. With the expansion of the U.S. discussion came more involvement by the President himself. In this chapter, I argue that in his first term, President Roosevelt was mostly removed from the question of Jewish refugees and American immigration because he focused intently inward on domestic problems in the wake of the Great Depression and his prospect of reelection. He wanted to save the United States with the New Deal, and he had to stay in office to make this

dream a reality, so he delegated refugee matters to keep his name away from the issue. Then after 1938 and Germany's annexation of Austria, he saw that the Jewish refugee problem had grown beyond the German government and other countries playing by diplomatic rules, so he had to act on an international scale to save democracy, again requiring he stay in office.¹ FDR's increased involvement comes in the wake of his successful reelection, and it appears the ambitious president was wary of supporting the Jewish cause before his time in office was guaranteed for another four years.

FDR's First Term, 1932-1936

First, it is important to establish FDR's knowledge of Jewish persecution early in his first term. A president surely cannot be held responsible for foreign affairs of which he is ignorant, so to understand FDR's actions the status of his knowledge must be ascertained. In the case of FDR, he was well aware that things had turned sour for German Jews specifically. A letter from Under Secretary of State William Phillips to Secretary to the President Colonel Louis Howe reveals that FDR had some knowledge of the Jewish persecution taking place in Germany as early as March 1933.² The letter informs Colonel Howe of certain telegrams concerning the "proposed boycott of Jews in Germany," and Phillips specifically states that it is for the President's information. This

¹ An important historical component of the rescue or lack thereof of the Jewish people from Germany is the American Jewry. Their divided nature and the effects of this are outside the scope of this chapter.

² Phillips to Howe, March 31, 1933, OF20 Department of State Feb-June 1933, Series 1, Selected Digitized Documents Related to the Holocaust and Refugees (SDDRHR), Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) Presidential Library and Museum, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00002.pdf

letter gives just a cursory mention of the problem that would grow to kill millions, but from it we know FDR was at least informed to the smallest degree of growing Jewish persecution. A memorandum dated May 27, 1933, then sheds further light upon how much of which FDR was aware; Democratic Congressman Henry Ellenbogen wrote,

The persistent and cruel persecution of the Jewish people in Germany and the attempt to destroy Jewish men, women, and children by driving them from public service and professions, and from trade and industry, have made it abundantly clear that Herr Hitler will not accord to the Jewish people the treatment which he demands for the German Nation³

The memorandum goes on to implore the President, as the leader of the peaceful, free world, to act on behalf of the Jewish people in Germany. From this memorandum it is even more clear that President Roosevelt was aware of the beginning hostility against Jews within the first year of his presidency, and there existed a sense by some that he, as “leader of the free world” ought to act either by sending aid or admitting refugees. Not only this, but other branches of government had the same knowledge, as this memorandum comes from a congressman in the House of Representatives.⁴ Drawing attention to FDR’s awareness of a certain level of persecution of the Jewish people in Germany is not meant to vilify him, for at this stage the extent of Hitler’s crimes against humanity could not have been foreseen. This knowledge is established simply to note the beginning of the situation in FDR’s mind and administration, and his actions can be examined from this point.

³ Henry Ellenbogen, “Memorandum on the Persecution of the Jewish People in Germany,” *Congress of the United States: House of Representatives*, May 27, 1933. OF76 Church Matters 76C Jewish, 1933, Box 4, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00008.pdf

⁴ Ibid; Also at this time Congress was restrictive and divided, meaning this statement doesn’t represent all of the feelings in the legislative branch.

Richard Breitman and Alan Lichtman define the “first Roosevelt” as quiet on the issue of Jewish refugees and persecution, and they are more or less correct in this assessment, yet they do not ask *why* he is silent, which I argue is because of political motivations.⁵ This reticence can be seen when a New York lawyer Kolbrenner wrote to Colonel Howe on November 13, 1934 requesting copies of any statements or announcements that FDR had made concerning Jewish or minority persecution. He thought the President “deplored such persecution” and wanted evidence to give people who were upset with the President for his inaction.⁶ The response he received is telling of FDR’s first term. Stephen Early, Assistant Secretary to the President at the time, replied with the approval of Colonel Howe and Chief of Protocol in the State Department James Clement Dunn and said, “In reply, may I advise that the President has made no statements with regard to the subjects to which you refer.”⁷ This reply comes almost two full years into FDR’s first term and a year and half since Ellenbogen’s memorandum, showing the reticence of the president on the issue. FDR had made no such statements because for him to pull America out of the Depression with his elaborate New Deal, he had to prioritize reelection over refugees.

The discussion surrounding Jewish refugees and whether to help them may not have been driven by FDR at this time, but that does not mean it did not exist. Most of the

⁵ We later see FDR delegating immigration and refugee issues to the Labor and State departments, so whether this can still be qualified as silent is debatable

⁶ Kolbrenner to Howe, November 13, 1934, OF76 Church Matters 76C Jewish, 1934, Box 5, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00009.pdf

⁷ Early to Kolbrenner, November 14, 1934, OF76 Church Matters 76C Jewish, 1934, Box 5, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00009.pdf

controversy between Jewish advocates and opposition stemmed from the immigration quotas in place. A certain number of immigrants from each country were allowed into the United States annually under the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, the act discussed in the introduction that established these quotas. The problem, or lack thereof depending on one's perspective, was that the quotas were not being filled. How is it possible that quotas could be in place, designed to let in the right amount of immigrants, and the capacity not be used? This phenomena was due to FDR's predecessor, President Hoover, keeping the consular offices in these foreign countries on a short leash.⁸ The section of the Immigration Act of 1917 about the possibility of immigrants and refugees becoming a public charge was prioritized over humanitarian concerns, and President Hoover had the consuls operating with this possibility in the forefront of their minds.⁹

In a letter from Herbert Lehman to FDR in 1935, Lehman calls attention to this serious lack of immigrants being granted visas by European consuls.¹⁰ He points out that of the 25,000 immigrants allowed annually from Germany, only 2,500 were being admitted. He pleads that the number at least be raised to 5,000 and states, "Because of

⁸ "I have been told of one or more instances where this or that American consul has been so strict in his interpretation of his instructions as to make the granting of a visa difficult or impossible": James G. McDonald to Felix Warburg, October 29, 1935, OF133 Immigration 1933-135, Box 1, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00030.pdf

⁹ "Just as President Hoover, by administrative interpretation, in effect instructed the consuls to block immigration...": Ibid.

¹⁰ Herbert Lehman to President Roosevelt, November 1, 1935, OF133 Immigration 1933-1935, Box 1, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00030.pdf; The Secretary of State, November 1935, OF76 Church Matters 76C Jewish, 1935, Box 5, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00010.pdf

conditions in Germany with which you are familiar and which appear to be getting worse continually, it is imperative that the opportunity for immigration be given to as many of the persecuted Jewish citizens of that country as is possible.”¹¹ The astonishingly low number of refugees admitted was almost solely a product of the strict interpretation of the public charge clause implemented before FDR became president. The fact that the State Department continued to not want more immigrants, Jewish or otherwise, entering the United States at this time led to the department purposefully frustrating various efforts to ease restrictions.

FDR also did not push the State Department to ease immigration restrictions, and it is important to go beyond immigration realities and examine *why* FDR refrains from action and large scale support or condemnation of the Jewish cause during his first term as president.¹² Aside from some general responses made by Stephen Early, FDR does not say much directly on the topic, and there are many possible reasons why this was the case. First, there is the presence of James G. McDonald, High Commissioner for Refugees Coming from Germany under the League of Nations. McDonald was an American who was appointed to the position in 1933, regardless of the fact that the United States was not a member state.¹³ His position led FDR to believe that the issue was being handled, as the office was tasked with “intervene[ing] with governments on

¹¹ Herbert Lehman to President Roosevelt, November 1, 1935, OF133 Immigration 1933-1935, Box 1, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00030.pdf

¹² Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 3.

¹³ Michael Robert. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 161.

behalf of individuals, mak[ing] general recommendations to the League of Nations on refugee matters, and assist[ing] in resettling those in flight.”¹⁴ A memorandum dated December 21, 1934 alludes to such thoughts because it is written by FDR himself to the Secretary of State, and it reads, “Should we not ask Congress for \$10,000 for the Jewish refugee organization of which Mr. McDonald is the commissioner appointed by the League?”¹⁵ After this memorandum, FDR leaves the details to the Departments of State and Budget, seeming to trust their judgment in the matter. The mere existence of this High Commissioner’s office, with an American in it no less, helps explain FDR’s lack of personal action during his first term because not only was the issue being addressed, it allowed him to keep from entangling himself in the issues of other countries, other governments’ citizens, and the problems of Europe.

The High Commission for Refugees could have played a role in FDR’s inaction, but his caution surrounding the issue also stemmed from his domestic focus, his attempts to put off foreign policy during his first term, and the current lack of severity of the refugee crisis itself as it affected the United States. FDR’s priority was the New Deal; when he came into office his focus was pulling the United States out of the Great

¹⁴ Unfortunately, the High Commission for Refugees received virtually no monetary support from the League of Nations, so MacDonald was left to seek outside assistance. He was unsuccessful in this effort as well and resigned in frustration in 1935. See: *The Unwanted* 162-164.

¹⁵ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Memorandum for the Secretary of State,” December 21, 1934. OF1395 Political refugees (European), 1934-1940, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00064.pdf

Depression, not helping refugees.¹⁶ The Depression was also the reason that many Americans were averse to letting refugees, or any other immigrants for that matter, into the country because they worried about immigrants taking jobs and harming their own economic opportunities.¹⁷ These fiscal fears were accompanied by a growing anti-Semitism in both the public and the State Department.¹⁸ Along with FDR's strong domestic focus and desire for economic recovery, he sought to stay within diplomatic boundaries. The citizens of another country were not his priority, and he attempted to work with Germany up until the war.¹⁹ Breaking relations with the country and fighting to save those being oppressed by it would only have brought war sooner, and FDR wanted to avoid international conflict and continue healing at home.

Beyond that, the persecution of Jews was just beginning to increase. From the current economic persecution in Germany during FDR's first term, no one could have known the death and devastation that was to come for the Jewish people. It was not until 1938 and the Anschluss, which I will discuss in detail below, that the refugee problem grew to a size unable to be ignored.²⁰ Until this point, many refugees believed they would be able to return home, but the Anschluss showed the real danger of the European

¹⁶ Robert N. Rosen, *Saving the Jews: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Holocaust* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006), 15.

¹⁷ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 64-65.

¹⁸ Rosen, *Saving the Jews*, 7; Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 60-61.

¹⁹ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 58.

²⁰ Verne W. Newton, *FDR and the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 3.

continent.²¹ While this is a serious simplification of the domestic and international situations during FDR's first term as it refers to refugees, it is enough for the scope of this paper to understand his initial reticence on the Jewish Question.

Given the current immigration levels and the other constraints on FDR that have already been discussed, there is still one important motivation informed by the complicated context in which FDR was operating; he had to control all of the domestic and foreign concerns, while also maintaining political favor and not jeopardizing reelection. This political concern helps to further illuminate FDR's lack of action during the first term, though it is by no means the only consideration. Its underpinnings can be seen in a letter to Felix Warburg, prominent American banker, Jewish refugee advocate, and close confidant of FDR, from High Commissioner McDonald on October 29, 1935. He writes to update Mr. Warburg on current solutions to the refugee problem, and he mentions what he thinks the president could do to help: loosen the interpretation of the public charge clause and thereby allow more visas to be granted, the same request Governor Lehman made to the president a few days later. What is interesting about McDonald's letter is the way he approaches raising the issue to the President. He states, "there is another way in which the President could help...and this without running any real political risk," and he extends his proposition that FDR make the interpretation of the public charge clause more lenient, thereby making it easier for refugees to enter the United States at this time.²² This is a reasonable proposal, but what is more interesting is

²¹ Ibid.

²² James G. McDonald to Felix Warburg, October 29, 1935, OF133 Immigration 1933-1935, Box 1, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00030.pdf

McDonald's acknowledgement of political risk. He thought that the President's actions were somewhat dictated by political considerations, or he would not have mentioned the innocuousness of his request. FDR knew the current status of the economy and the levels of anti-Semitism in America, so if he thought he was the man to fix the country he had to stay in office. His reticence on the issue during his first term can be explained by not only the recent burgeoning of Jewish persecution happening in comparison to later years, but also by his desire for reelection. And while political concerns may sound harsh and shallow coming from the leader of the free world, as he saw it, he was trying to pull America out of one of its worst times in history and maintain its status as a super power. All of this to say, his lack of direct action was not necessarily heartless, but potentially pragmatic.

McDonald's letter ends by saying, "In this matter, as you of course know, it is the President alone who can get the thing done, and only if he is prepared to take personal responsibility to see that it is done," but FDR does not answer this charge.²³ In reply to Lehman and McDonald, FDR did not write them directly; he allowed Cordell Hull, a government-wide known anti-Semite and anti-interventionist of the State Department, to draft and send his response.²⁴ Hull writes on behalf of the President that there are no "arbitrary limitations" on immigration visas being granted, that many German visas are

²³ McDonald to Warburg, October 29, 1935, OF133 Immigration 1933-1935, Box 1, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00030.pdf

²⁴ "Sent to State with notation 'Sec. State, Prep. Reply P.'", November 5, 1935, OF133 Immigration 1933-1935, Box 1, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00030.pdf; for more on Cordell Hull as an anti-Semite and non-interventionist see Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 59.

indeed going to Jews, that 5,117 have been “issued to natives of Germany,” and that consuls have been told to operate with the utmost compassion and humane understanding.²⁵ Knowing Hull’s personal feelings toward Jews and the conflict in Europe, this reply seems to be an attempt to deflect Lehman and buy the State Department more time in answering the Jewish Question. Interestingly enough, Governor Lehman is satisfied with this reply and thanks FDR for his “personal attention to this matter.”²⁶ If FDR prioritized the plight of the Jews at this time, he might not have let Hull handle the reply. The U.S. quotas were concrete and FDR felt constrained by politics and domestic concerns, so he handed the Jewish question to other government officials to battle over in the mid 1930s.

FDR expressly delegated and allowed different departments of the government to more or less fight over how to help or not help the Jewish people fleeing Europe during his first term. Despite all his constraints and concerns, to his credit, the President did not force the government to ignore the issue. The subject became the battleground for the State Department and the Labor Department, with little to no interference by FDR at all. The idea rose within Roosevelt’s administration to possibly issue “public charge bonds” for incoming immigrants, meaning that if the immigrant had a relative or someone willing to sponsor them, then they could more easily get a visa because there was no way

²⁵ Roosevelt to Governor Lehman, November 13, 1935, OF133 Immigration 1933-1935, Box 1, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00030.pdf

²⁶ Herbert Lehman to Roosevelt, November 18, 1935, OF133 Immigration 1933-1935, Box 1, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00030.pdf

that they would become a public charge.²⁷ The State Department vehemently opposed this, as the department was continually isolationist and anti-Semitic, but the Labor Department supported the initiative and “had jurisdiction over the bond.”²⁸ Labor was under the leadership of Secretary of Labor Francis Perkins, and the cause was championed by Charles E. Wyzanski Jr. Yet even the young champion, a Jew himself, began to have second thoughts about the bonding proposal, and the Commissioner of Immigration had the same reservations. Wyzanski feared that helping Jewish refugees enter the country would make the situation for all Jews in the United States worse because it would inflame anti-Semitism and hate groups. He said of the president, “unless the gain is very clear I should not have him champion [the Jewish] cause.”²⁹ Therefore, the State Department won the fight by nature of their intense feelings against Jews and FDR’s lack of direct resistance. In addition, the strict refusal of Congress to change immigration laws or interpretations whatsoever also hindered progress. In all of this, Roosevelt made no moves in either direction. He continued his delegation and impersonal action on the issue until he was safely re-elected.

The United States was a confusing and conflicted place during FDR’s transition into office in 1932. FDR had multiple moving parts of the government, public opinion, and international pressures to handle, and that ended in relative inaction and purposeful delegation on the question of refugees during his first term. The Depression, isolationists and anti-Semites in the government, and the level of persecution Jews were currently

²⁷ Brietman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 72.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Quoted in Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 73. Letter is a private possession of Richard Breitman.

facing made the Jewish question a lesser priority. FDR wanted to fix the economic problems and maintain the greatness of America, and to do that he had to remain in office, which would be impossible if he openly advocated for Jewish refugees. Therefore, FDR's decisions to delegate were largely politically motivated during his first term in office. Once he was safely on the other side of re-election, plus facing the increasing international pressure of refugees, FDR decided to act more directly than he ever did in his first four years, and it is important to ascertain why he changed his tune.

FDR's Second Term: 1936-1940

FDR's election year of 1936 began with an inundation of fresh, virulent anti-Semitism. Letters to the president show a marked increase in anti-Semitic feelings and fear of more Jews entering into the country. These letters are by no means subtle in their discussion of the Jewish people. For example, a concerned citizen named Flora Drusch wrote to the president on January 25, 1936, "Jews do not make exceptionally desirable citizens. Loyalty and gratitude seem not to exist in their collective make-up (or individual make-up)."³⁰ She claims that they as a people "do not want to become Americans," and that they should be going to Palestine, not the United States or England. This is just one example of the feelings voiced to the president around this time. Much of this fear and rejection of the Jewish people came from fears of communism and crime. Another letter to the president stated, "You must be familiar with the fact that 90% of the communists are Jews, that communism is the child of the Jewish brain. Also that 85% of all criminals

³⁰ Flora Drusch to FDR, January 25, 1936, OF76 Church Matters 76C Jewish, 1936, Box 5, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00011.pdf

in these U.S. are Jews.”³¹ The same letter claims that Roosevelt making a public statement to mark Rosh Hashonah was simply a “clever bid for the Jewish vote.”³² It is doubtful that this is true because the Democratic party already had the allegiance of American Jews, and the Republican party was fairly openly anti-Semitic and isolationist.³³ Regardless, the anti-Semitic feelings of a portion of the United States population are strong enough to warrant letters to the president, and in a time when FDR is getting ready for the 1936 election.

FDR also had to balance letters from the other side of the spectrum: those defending Jews and wanting to help save them. A Jewish businessman, E.B. Hamburg, wrote to FDR on June 15, 1937 to plead with the president for the Jews of America. He wrote, “Surely I don’t need to say one thing in the defense of the American Jew to you... no fair-minded person could possibly question our love of country, and our patriotism.”³⁴ This is of course one letter of many, just as in the case of the anti-Semitic correspondence. The American public pressed FDR from both sides, some wanting to help Jews, others wanting them out of the United States all together. How was the President to act in such a situation? This conflict helps to explain the quietness of his first

³¹ One of the forgotten men to FDR, September 4, 1936, OF76 Church Matters 76C Jewish, 1936, Box 5, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00011.pdf

³² Ibid.

³³ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 92.

³⁴ E.B. Hamburg to FDR, June 15, 1937, OF76 Church Matters 76C Jewish, 1937, Box 6, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00012.pdf

term, but quietness would no longer suffice as Hitler's military moved in Europe during his second term, regardless of election years.

Taking this conflict of American opinion in stride, FDR began to express his opinions on Palestine publically during this time; FDR's easiest solution to the Jewish problem was to attempt to keep Palestine open to immigration, thereby making the refugee issue more of a British concern as the region was under British control (mandate). While the president was not completely sold on a Jewish state, he did wholeheartedly support immigration of Jews to the area for this reason.³⁵ Secretary of State Cordell Hull wrote the British government in July of 1936,

It has been brought to the attention of the President by influential Jewish groups in this country that the British Government is contemplating the suspension of Jewish immigration into Palestine. American Jewish leaders fear that such suspension may close the only avenue of escape of German and Polish Jews and that it may prove difficult to revoke.³⁶

FDR feared the closing of immigration to Palestine for a number of reasons. If Palestine were no longer a viable option for refugees, he might have to admit them to the United States and face the opposition of some Americans on election day. If not this solution, they might just remain in Europe and perish, which would evoke criticism from American pro-Jewish groups. His motivation could also stem from a belief that the Jews belonged in Palestine, and maybe even should have a state of their own in the future. The latter was the reasoning FDR espoused, and he wrote in the *New York Times* that the Jewish people deserve to have the land of their faith because, to quote Thomas Jefferson

³⁵ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 92.

³⁶ Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Britain, 27 July 1936, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1936*, vol. III.
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1936v03/d519>

with apt political timing, they deserve life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.³⁷

Whether this was a genuine motivation, or merely one to appease American Jewish groups and Jewish voters, can never be known for certain. Either way, continued immigration to Palestine meant less pressure on the semi- open gates of the United States, which benefited FDR and allowed him to avoid increased controversy.

Even with the success of keeping Palestine open to refugees, once safely on the other side of reelection, FDR's administration decided to lessen the visa restrictions faced by European refugees.³⁸ After a report from Germany claimed that refugees were of good standing, "better-class families," and would not have trouble gaining financial support from distant relatives residing in the United States, the State Department revised the interpretation of the Immigration Act of 1917's public charge clause. The consuls were now to exclude only those "who were probably public charges, not just possible public charges," and affidavits of support could come from any relative, not just immediate family members.³⁹ Because of this change, the number of immigrants from Germany reached an all-time high in 1937: 10,895 in a single year. This is about four times the number of German immigrants admitted in 1933, showing the steady progress and relaxation of the public charge interpretation. What is most interesting is the timing of this interpretation alteration; it came in the wake of FDR's successful reelection. This again means that FDR's quietness in his first term stemmed from fear of political repercussions if he were to support Jewish refugees too strongly. He pushed to keep

³⁷ "President Endorses Palestine Appeal," *New York Times* (New York City), August 6, 1936.

³⁸ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 94.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

Palestine open before the election to waive immigration pressure, and now he eased immigration restrictions regardless of Palestine. No president before him had ever been in office for more than two terms, so he thought he had then achieved all the time as President he ever would, thereby feeling freer to act in response to the refugee plight. Either this or he simply saw an opportunity to act humanitarily and took it, regardless of the ethnic group who benefited. Either way, once on the other side of the election of 1936, he allowed the immigration flows from Germany to increase significantly.

Just as FDR moved to help the visa process, the year 1938 proved critical for Jewish refugees. In March, either by means of terror or a dishonest plebiscite, Hitler brought forth the union of Germany and Austria, known as the *Anschluss*.⁴⁰ Austria was home to about 180,000 Jews who now faced a very uncertain future, and it did not take long for Nazi forces to wreak veritable havoc, including beating, imprisoning, and massacring Jews.⁴¹ This harm, in addition to rising anti-Semitism in Poland, led to an explosion of refugees and visa applicants to the United States.⁴² A letter to the president signed by the Secretaries of State, Commerce, and Labor shows the strong reaction to these events in Europe. The letter informed the president on April 27, 1938 that in light of the combination of Germany and Austria, that the quotas of the countries would have to be combined into one as well.⁴³ Attorney General Cummings signed off on the measure

⁴⁰ Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 166-167.

⁴¹ Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 167.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴³ Hull, Commerce, and Perkins to FDR, April 27, 1938, OF133 Immigration 1936-1941, Box 1, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00031.pdf

and declared it legal, FDR accepted this combined quota, and it subsequently became a reality.⁴⁴

In the wake of the *Anschluss*, President Roosevelt saw a serious need for action despite continued debate concerning refugees in the United States. He decided to hold an international conference in Évian-les-Bains, France from July 6-15, 1938 to address the post-*Anschluss* refugee problem, what came to be known as the Evian Conference.

Historiography shows that this conference has remained a heated topic among scholars over the decades since World War II, as some view it as a passive failure, and others as a step in the right direction. Roosevelt called on the governments of European countries to come together “for the purpose of facilitating the emigration from Austria and presumably Germany of political refugees...no country would be expected or asked to receive a greater number of immigrants than is permitted by its existing legislation.”⁴⁵

This declaration immediately put Great Britain on high alert, as they did not want to expand immigration to Palestine, and they made it a condition of attendance that Palestine not be a topic of discussion.⁴⁶ FDR had great confidence in the event, and he thought that if all the democracies agreed to share the immigration burden that he could

⁴⁴ Cummings to Roosevelt, April 28, 1938, OF133 Immigration 1936-1941, Box 1, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00031.pdf

⁴⁵ "Meeting at Evian, France, to Form an Inter-governmental Committee for Assistance of Political Refugees from Germany including Austria," Foreign Relations of the United States, March 23, 1938, accessed April 03, 2017, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=article&did=FRUS.FRUS1938v01.i0010&id=FRUS.FRUS1938v01&isize=M>.

⁴⁶ Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 170.

get rid of the Jewish problem for generations.⁴⁷ Not only this, but he thought that by dealing with Germany's self-perceived Jewish problem, that war could be avoided and everyone *appeased*.⁴⁸

Yet even with a humanitarian excitement driving FDR, the conference accomplished little. One of the first problems was that FDR expected private organizations to fund all the refugee initiatives decided upon at the conference.⁴⁹ He sent identical letters to multiple influential individuals to help him with this cause, and he received a significant amount of interest in reply, but the conference did not create much action for which the money could be used.⁵⁰ The conference failed mostly because the governments invited refused to budge on their immigration policies.⁵¹ The only tangible result was the creation of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, designed to communicate and idealistically convince the Reich to make the flood of Jews an orderly procession, and one in which Jews could keep their belongings and leave with some dignity.⁵² The Committee was also charged with searching for areas for permanent

⁴⁷ Breitman and Litchman, *FDR and the Jews*, 104.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁹ FDR to Joseph Chamberlain, April 28, 1938, OF3186 Political Refugees, Jan-May 1938, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00068.pdf

⁵⁰ OF3186 Political refugees, Jan-May 1938, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00068.pdf.

⁵¹ Breitman and Litchman, *FDR and the Jews*, 109.

⁵² Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 171.

resettlement.⁵³ In both of these endeavors the Committee virtually failed, as the Germans were not open to reasoning unless they could “expand exports” to America, and the resettlement scheme vague.⁵⁴ Whether this Committee was a political move to appear as if the U.S. was acting, or a genuine product of FDR’s sentiments, it did not make any largescale difference in the Jewish refugee crisis as the world neared the brink of war.

Unfortunately, the *Anschluss* and the Evian Conference were not the end of the crises and disappointments for European Jews in 1938. In November, the Nazi party carried out the infamous *Kristallnacht*, a night when pogroms against European Jews took place throughout the German controlled countries. FDR responded publically to this event six days after it occurred, and he said that the news “deeply shocked public opinion in the United States,” and that he “could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth century civilization.”⁵⁵ Correspondence pleading with the president to act (and those pleading him not to) had been pouring in to the White House for years, and this tragic event further spurred people to voice their opinions. One such man, Ernest L. Klein, wrote to the president with beautiful rhetoric when he said, “You, my dear Mr. President, as a great leader of a cause which is humane, just and fair, can with your

⁵³ Another organization, the President’s Advisory Committee on Refugees, was involved in resettlement projects and led by former High Commissioner James McDonald. See President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees, "Dominican Refugee Resettlement Project," news release, November 6, 1939, accessed March 15, 2017, http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/NY_AR_DORSA/NY_AR_DORSA_00010/NY_AR_DORSA_00010_00150.pdf.

⁵⁴ Ibid.; Breitman and Litchamn, *FDR and the Jews*, 110.

⁵⁵ Statement by the President, November 15, 1938, OF198 Germany, Govt of, 1935-1938, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00036.pdf

wisdom and great leadership render the world a service which will perpetuate the high ideals and principles of our government throughout the world. Your name will ring in every Hall of Fame, and history will record you as the greatest humanitarian of this age.”⁵⁶ The pressure to help European Jews continued to mount with each crisis orchestrated by Hitler. FDR responded quickly to this pressure with another public statement, a proclamation, on the twentieth of November that declared the day “a day of prayer and solemn contemplation.”⁵⁷ The unbelievable events of 1938, culminating in *Kristallnacht*, motivated FDR to act in ways he had not before. He saw fit that it was time to respond, and he did with the Evian Conference, but his actions did not lead to changes in U.S. immigration policy and ended up taking an entirely new direction.

FDR’s feelings, tempered by domestic and international circumstances, manifested most directly in resettlement plans.⁵⁸ He wrote to Undersecretary Welles just over two weeks after *Kristallnacht* from his home in Warm Springs, Georgia with a request that would begin all his refugee initiatives from 1939-1940 and to the outbreak of war. He requested, “Will you send me by return pouch any information the State Department has in regard to possible places for Jewish colonization in any part of the

⁵⁶ Ernest L. Klein to FDR, November 12, 1938, OF198 Germany, Govt of, 1935-1938, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00036.pdf

⁵⁷ FDR, A Proclamation, November 20, 1938, OF198 Germany, Govt of, 1935-1938, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00036.pdf

⁵⁸ The discussion of the Rublee Plan also taking place around this time has not been included in the scope of this chapter as FDR appears to be significantly less involved personally.

world?”⁵⁹ Why would the President choose to pursue resettlement? Under the pressure of humanitarians and American Jews alike, it seemed the president had to do something, but strong anti-Semitism still plagued the country. FDR was receiving telegrams and letters daring the president to act in favor of “Jew War Mongers” etc., so FDR pursued another solution.⁶⁰ He was not shy in his attempts to find a place for the Jews. First and foremost, he pressured the British after the 1939 White Paper on Palestine to continue to let in some Jewish immigrants.⁶¹ But beyond this known solution so opposed by the British, he started to look on every other continent for a new place that Jewish refugees could call home. Among the options explored in conjunction with the British were Northern Rhodesia, Kenya, and British Guiana.⁶² Other ideas included Alaska, other African countries, the Virgin Islands, and Venezuela.⁶³ One of the most important places, because a settlement was actually placed there, was the Dominican Republic. The settlement was started by The Dominican Republic Settlement Association Inc. and the refugees were

⁵⁹ FDR, Memorandum for Undersecretary of State, OF76 Church Matters, 76C Jewish, 1938, Box 6, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00013.pdf

⁶⁰ A Fed Up American Gentile to FDR, November 17, 1938, OF76 Church Matters, 76C Jewish, 1938, Box 6, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00013.pdf

⁶¹ The British White Paper was an attempt to halt all Jewish Immigration to Palestine in an effort to keep Muslim groups appeased and India under control.

⁶² Sumner Welles, Memorandum of Conversation with Sir Ronald Lindsay (British Ambassador), November 17, 1938, Sumner Welles Papers, Box 162, Folder 7, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00413.pdf

⁶³ Robert Rosen, *Saving the Jews*, 128-129.

placed at the former Dominican President, Rafael Trujillo's, Sosua estate.⁶⁴ Samuel Rosenman received a letter about the "efforts on behalf of refugees undertaken by President Roosevelt" in the settling of the first 300 refugees on this estate, and the author voices his frustration with those trying to undermine the effort.⁶⁵ The settlement never grew to any significant size, but it is one of the few settlement attempts that at least saw slight success. Resettlement remained FDR's focus in terms of refugees all the way up to the beginnings of war.

FDR's first two terms have distinctly different rings in the historical conversation. While his first term was shown to be largely a delegation of refugee issues, the pressures coming from Europe and his successful reelection caused him to change his tune after the 1936 election. Even still, he was always careful to keep his own political considerations in mind when pursuing any endeavors, like resettlement instead of immigration to the United States that would inflame anti-Semitic sentiment. Overall, I argue he did not feel free to act humanitarily in his first term because his priority was remaining in office. Then, he did help refugees when he thought his political position was safe. There is a clear pattern of humanitarian concern, but also concern about the political realities of the time if the famous president wanted to stay in power. Therefore, the refugees did not receive much favor when FDR had his own personal political concerns. FDR's priorities

⁶⁴ The Dominican Republic Settlement Association Inc. "Meeting at the Lawyer's Club," New York City, June 12, 1940; "Refugee Colony in West Indies to be Enlarged," January 24, 1941, Henry Morgenthau Jr Papers, Box 237, Refugee Settlement 1940-1941, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00275.pdf.

⁶⁵ Unknown to Samuel Rosenman, January 21, 1941, Henry Morgenthau Jr Papers, Box 237, Refugee Settlement 1940-1941, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00275.pdf

continued to change as war ravaged Europe and the United States was forced to enter as a way of protecting itself and the populations of the free world.

CHAPTER THREE

FDR 1941-1945

The war in Europe continued to deteriorate as FDR was approaching the election of 1940, the election that could grant him an unprecedented third term. Emotions flew high in America and abroad, and the President faced not only a refugee crisis, but impending involvement in an international conflict, intense fears and strengthened isolationism in America, and the prospect of reelection on top of these concerns. Continuing the predominant use of the materials of FDR's presidential library, this chapter will examine the tensions and refugee restrictions put in place on the verge of war, the realities of immigration in a wartime America (FDR's third term), the steps the President took in aiding the crisis abroad, and the actions of the President after his final reelection until his death. Just as his first two terms, FDR's remaining time in office was full of conflicting motivations, priorities, and nuanced approaches to each new wave of crisis. Yet again, in all of his decisions, the President prioritized the interests of the United States and his own position of power. Previously FDR was politically motivated by his dream of a recovered America through the New Deal in the election of 1936, and now his motivation stemmed from the threat of Hitler and FDR's mission to save democracy as the 1940 election approached. Then politics constrains him once again once the war is over and he approaches his fourth term. In these endeavors, the New Deal and the salvation of democracy, the only means by which to achieve them depended upon FDR's presence in the oval office. FDR's actions from 1940 until his death in 1945 were

always tempered with political concerns, though not completely void of humanitarian sentiment and moral drive.

FDR's reelection was not guaranteed, and for some time the nation did not know whether he would run again at all. Republican and Democratic opponents alike hoped that the President would continue the precedent set by George Washington himself and decline to run for a third term. FDR waited until the last moment to announce his candidacy, and scholars debate whether this was a political scheme or FDR's own uncertainty. According to historian Robert Rosen, it was a political move because it allowed the other candidates to smear each other in hopes of getting ahead, while he sat back untouched.¹ With his Democratic opponents undermining one another, the party and the nation would then come to FDR and he would be able to *agree* to run again, thereby boosting his chances of reelection.² Not only this, but Rosen points out the necessity of the parallel success of Great Britain, who was already waging war, and FDR's reelection.³ Should Great Britain and FDR's close ally Winston Churchill fall, the continuation of FDR's presidency would have been in peril because of their joint undertaking to save democracy. The election boiled down to the fact that Roosevelt was a trusted known while the international war swirled in Americans' minds and brought uncertainty.⁴ This possible political motivation speaks volumes about FDR and his actions toward refugees both before and beyond this point. In the previous chapter, we

¹ Robert Rosen, *Saving the Jews: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Holocaust* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006), 135.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 139.

⁴ Ibid., 142.

saw how FDR stayed away from the limelight or taking direct responsibility for refugee matters because it could have jeopardized his reelection in 1936. While politics is not the only constraint surrounding the election of 1940, because of the imminence of war in FDR's mind, it is important to note potentially how strongly he cared about his own political power, his ideas to save the country, and international democracy; to preserve these ideals, he thought he could not prioritize the problem of Jewish refugees.

As FDR allied more closely with Churchill and their idealistic dreams for the war and the world, his mindset moved closer to the idea of war. The president continued to fight Congress over the Neutrality Acts, laws put in place to keep the United States out of foreign wars and repeating the experience of World War I.⁵ In his fireside chats, FDR began attempts to coax the public toward war and reconcile fears with the importance of democracy and self-government.⁶ This is to say, FDR's priorities were beginning to shift. He felt he had to look toward the war and the problems of Europe if he were to defeat the Nazis and save his country and the ideals it held. Therefore, refugee matters, among many other issues, fell by the wayside. More than that, immigration and refugee allowances dramatically reduced as the United States moved towards war and prioritized internal security.

⁵ Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 139. This battle would culminate in the Lend-Lease Act.

⁶ Rosen, *Saving the Jews*, 142.

FDR's Third Term: 1940-1944

The United States effectively worked to bar its gates to all foreign entrants—immigrant and refugee alike on the eve of war. This stage of Roosevelt's presidency, or the "third Roosevelt" returning to the terminology of Breitman and Lichtman, saw a dramatic reduction in visas granted and individuals admitted to the United States. According to Breitman and Lichtman specifically, "war transformed FDR from a sponsor of humanitarian action to a hard-fisted guardian of national security and opponent of Nazi and fascist aggression."⁷ First and foremost, FDR decided to strengthen the Federal Bureau of Investigation because one of the main concerns of both the government and the public alike was the entrance of Nazi spies disguised as refugees and helpless immigrants.⁸ This concern intensified after an immigrant Rabbi informed Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr. that Gestapo agents were stealing the identities of Jews who had been killed in concentration camps, creating fake Jewish passports, and attempting to get spies into Allied countries.⁹ Not only this, but the Swiss government informed the United States that Germany was also trying to sway legitimate Jewish immigrants in favor of Germany and convince them to spy on happenings in the United States.¹⁰ With this rising alarm circling the public and the government, even prominent

⁷ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 159.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

pro-refugee pillars like Rabbi Steven Wise wanted to hold off on refugee issues until the President was safely reelected.¹¹

Practically all refugees were barred from the shores of the United States as war ravaged Europe, even political and intellectual refugees, who in the early 1930s had relative ease fleeing Europe and entering the United States. A letter marked June 29, 1940 from Secretary to the President Edwin M. Watson to Hamilton Armstrong, editor of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, notes that “the President has been deeply moved by the tragic plight confronting some of these great men and that he finds it heartening to see efforts being made by such forward thinking Americans...”¹² This is in reply to Armstrong’s request that these types of refugees be admitted because it was “in accord with our deepest national interests,” but FDR acknowledges this request directly and states that “it most certainly cannot be authorized or abetted by the government of the United States.”¹³ FDR did not see any room for refugees on American soil during this wartime moment, and he would not put Americans or his own position at risk. It no longer mattered whether a refugee could be of use to the United States; people feared foreign subversion and FDR knew he could not jeopardize the safety of Americans at home. News such as

¹¹ Ibid., 173

¹² Watson to Armstrong, June 29, 1940, OF3186 Political refugees July-Sept 1940, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00075.pdf

¹³ Armstrong to Miss Marguerite Le Hand, June 18, 1940, OF3186 Political refugees July-Sept 1940, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00075.pdf; FDR to E.R., July 3, 1940. OF3186 Political refugees July-Sept 1940, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00075.pdf

this hardly bade well for the other millions of legitimate refugees trying to find a safe haven within the Allied countries.

Given this intense fear of dangerous refugees entering the United States, some serious reforms were made to the visa system and how the consuls operated. After the President was safely reelected, he did not ease up on his goal of defeating the Nazis, and this meant refugee matters continued to be cast aside. In March of 1941, a letter to the president again mentions the problem of possible spies and subversion, but with an interesting solution: placing control of all alien visas in the hands of the notoriously anti-Semitic State Department.¹⁴ FDR had already transferred control of Immigration and Naturalization from Perkins's famous Labor Department to the Justice Department, and now there was a call for another transfer of power. With the switch to the Justice Department, FDR also implemented the finger printing of all aliens and immigrants.¹⁵ All of these can be viewed as political moves because the safer Americans felt, the more confidence they had in FDR as their war leader. So even with the previous change of immigration authority, FDR made another move-- he complied with this request to give

¹⁴ "In view of information which has been received from our officers abroad, concerning the known activities of the German and Soviet governments in endeavoring to introduce agents into the United States in the guise of visitors, immigrants, or seamen, it is believed that as a matter of national defense it is highly desirable to centralize all alien visa control in the Department of State at the earliest possible moment" Unknown to FDR, March 21, 1941, OF20 Department of State 1941, Box 9, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00007.pdf

¹⁵ Breitman and Litchman, *FDR and the Jews*, 163.

alien visa control to the State Department.¹⁶ Along with this new authority, the Visa division itself was expanded to 500 people, a figure, FDR notes, that is a 400 percent increase. FDR then writes that he has approved the plan as a whole and instructed the Director of the Budget to settle the logistics.¹⁷ This expands the power of the Visa Division as a whole, making the process more thorough and the country more secure, thereby making FDR's continued presence in the oval office more likely.

Yet the question remains how giving the Visa Division to the State Department changes the proceedings of the division and the control of visas. A departmental order signed by Secretary of State Cordell Hull explains what the transfer of power was meant to accomplish and how the Visa Division will bolster national security. Hull lays out the functions of the division as follows:

To supervise and control the entry of all aliens into the United States and its possessions, to initiate the policy action of the Department and to advise the Secretary of State with respect to the measures necessary for national defense, to exercise the responsibility for authorizing or for directing the refusal of visas in the interest of public safety, [and] to cooperate with the investigative and intelligence agencies of this government to accomplish the foregoing purposes¹⁸

While vague, this order gives a general sense of the mindset of the State Department and their intentions in the control of visas. Just as FDR was concerned with national security, State Department officials were all the more so. The risk of subversion, in addition to preexisting anti-Semitism, led the State Department to crack down even further on

¹⁶ FDR to Cordell Hull, April 21, 1941, OF20 Department of State 1941, Box 9, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00007.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Cordell Hull, Departmental Order, March 1941, OF20 Department of State 1941, Box 9, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00007.pdf

consuls and the issuing of Visas than FDR had advocated previously. Even before it was given formal control of the Visa division, the State Department decided that refugees must not only present consuls with a strong reason for leaving Europe, but that they must also have a similarly convincing argument for entering the United States.¹⁹ It was no longer enough for refugees to be facing persecution and displacement, they must now be able to state why they, over millions of others, deserve to enter America. Presumably the strongest cases for entering the United States would involve blood relations, but there is no specification in the departmental order. Again, these changes go back to the security of America being expressly linked to the security of its political leaders' positions.

These measures, and the feelings of the State Department as a whole, were driven by one strong voice in particular: Assistant Secretary Breckinridge Long. Though not Secretary of State, Long had extensive control over refugee decisions, and many of the restrictions already in place were a product of his work. Historians of all perspectives have not been kind to the legacy of Breckinridge Long, and he was and continues to be viewed as the heartless, anti-Semitic, isolationist force who held as many Jewish refugees at bay as possible during the war years.²⁰ Some contemporary Americans held the same view, and felt strongly enough to voice their opposition of Long's position to the president. One such letter, notably, penned by a Jewish American, exclaims utter shock at

¹⁹ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 168.

²⁰ J Gary Clifford. Transcript of the Summary of the Conference on "Policies and Responses of the American Government toward the Holocaust," 11-12 November 1993, in *FDR and the Holocaust*, ed. Verne W. Newton (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), vii.

the President allowing Long to remain in the State Department.²¹ The letter states, “To think that a man in his position would deliberately bedevil poor humans who have nowhere to turn is beyond any person’s understanding.”²² The reader must be conscious that this perspective is colored by a shared Jewish heritage, but regardless it shows that opposition to Long and his actions in the Department of State did exist.²³ Long not only drove the visa restrictions, he also shut down the entrance of political refugees, put pressure on the President to give the State Department control of the Visa division, and insisted that refugees have a good reason for entering the United States, all examined above.²⁴ Long was not only behind the measures already discussed, his influence impacted another important refugee event, “shut[ing] down the State Department office that dealt with the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees and the President’s Advisory Committee on Political Refugees.”²⁵ Though these groups were not making the most substantial difference in the fate of Jewish refugees, the absoluteness of the action speaks volumes of Long’s commitment to barring the persecuted peoples fleeing Europe.

Long continues to be a puzzling historical figure for historians of FDR and the Holocaust itself. Many question why FDR did not fire such a repugnant man so devoid of empathy. Though hard to see any justification, FDR could have kept Long in the

²¹ Unknown to President Roosevelt, February 12, 1941, OF20 Department of State, Box 9, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00007.pdf

²² Ibid.

²³ “I and every Jew in particular to say nothing of []—Jews demand his resignation;” Ibid.

²⁴ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 168, 173, 174.

²⁵ Ibid., 176.

government for a few reasons. Long was already taking control of the visa process during FDR's election year, and it is possible that the president kept him in his position because it would appeal the isolationists and anti-Semites in the American population and strengthen FDR's political support base. The country remained divided on refugee issues throughout the entire war and for years after, so FDR tried to appeal to the most stubborn anti-refugee Americans with the presence of Long in the State Department and his great influence on the immigration process. Also, Long was most prominent in America's time of heightened security and war measures, so it is likely that FDR did not disagree with his policies as much as he might if the United States was calm and far from the threat of international war. Evidence shows that FDR allowed Long to reply to letters regarding refugee matters on his behalf, interestingly even to James McDonald, formerly of the High Commission on Refugees and Chairman of the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees, and FDR's own wife Eleanor.²⁶ This shows FDR's agreement with and reliance upon Long's anti-refugee perspective to keep America secure and his own position in the White House. FDR appears to have a more humanitarian bend just from a simple scanning of his actions toward refugees, but at this particular historical moment he could be more aligned with Long in an attempt to keep the American people safe and preserve the democracy of the Western free world.

This second possible motivation for maintaining Long's position in the State Department-- FDR agreeing with him on refugee matters as a means of keeping America secure-- becomes all the more convincing when historians examine the legislation passed

²⁶ FDR, Memorandum for Hon. Breckinridge Long, January, 28, 1942, OF 133a Immigration Misc. 1942-1945, Box 2, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00034.pdf

in June of 1941. A certain bill, S.913 of the 77th Congress, is passed less than six months after FDR surprisingly gave Long permission to reply to McDonald and Eleanor on his behalf on the question of Jewish refugees. The bill moved quickly through all sections of government; the Senate committee on Immigration and Naturalization proposed the bill to the Committee House on June 3, 1941, and it was signed into public law by the 20th of the month.²⁷ Avra M. Warren, Chief of the Visa Division of the State Department, was present at the Senate hearing and described the nature of the bill as follows: “once it is enacted into law the Department and its field officers will have the right to deny visas to applicants for immigrant’s visas on the ground that their entry into the United States is considered as inimical to the public safety.”²⁸ Numerous restrictions had already been placed upon the visa process, such as needing a good reason to enter the United States (not just a good reason to leave Europe), but now a bill was officially in place that left visa distribution entirely up to subjective decisions of consuls tasked with keeping America safe. Most tellingly, FDR quickly approved of and signed the bill into law, showing the intertwined nature of his security and political concerns because Americans would not vote for a man they felt jeopardized their wellbeing. No matter if FDR developed some grand humanitarian avenues for refugees at some points in his political career, this bill was not one of them.

In the latter half of the same year, the Japanese orchestrated the unthinkable attack at Pearl Harbor. Concern over the Japanese had been secondary to the threat of Hitler

²⁷ S.913, 77th Cong. (1941) (enacted). ProQuest Congressional.
http://congressional.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/congressional/docview/t03.d04.77_s_913?accountid=7014

²⁸ Ibid.

until that day, and it placed refugee matters even further away from Roosevelt's mind. He now had two possible war fronts and a free country to protect. Luckily, this attack did help him to rally American support for the war for which he had been subtly preparing for months.²⁹ Germany declared war on the United States within days, and the United States was officially in the thick of global conflict.³⁰ This development meant one thing for refugees, especially those from Germany—they were not getting into America any time soon. The tightened security of the pre-war period would only continue throughout the war. The very day after the Pearl Harbor attack the FBI ordered the detention of 4,000 citizens and immigrants of suspect loyalty, and FDR allowed not only their detention but the confiscation of their belongings.³¹ Fears of sedition persisted, not entirely unwarranted as was seen with the use of dead Jew's passports, and the United States and its leader would not budge on refugee issues until the end of the war was in sight.

Despite this hard line against refugees and aliens, some government officials attempted to keep the immigration process reasonable and humane, but FDR's hand is not seen in any of these actions. The chairman of the Immigration and Naturalization Committee of the Senate, Representative Dickstein, tried to fight a bill sweeping the senate that allowed "the indefinite detention of aliens against whom deportation warrants have been issued but who cannot leave the United States because of present [presumably

²⁹ Breitman and Litchman, *FDR and the Jews*, 190.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.

³¹ *Ibid.*

war] conditions.”³² The Senator thought the bill unreasonable, and that its passing would enrage non-citizens and cause more trouble. But Dickstein lost this battle, and the bill went on out of the Senate and out of his control.³³ After this loss, other senators made another attempt to ease the process by passing a bill requiring the United States to at least pay for the detainment, deportation, and overall trouble caused to these migrants.

Intended to be proposed by a Mr. Andrews, the bill states, “No person shall be required to pay any fine or refund any passage money...for bringing into the United States any alien, if such alien holds an unexpired visa issued by a United States Consul, nor shall any person be required to pay for the maintenance of such alien while on land...”³⁴ The United States would shoulder the financial burden. Yet this bill died in the Senate, and the bar of refugees persisted.

The closing of American doors and entrance into the war did not mean that Hitler deviated from his plan of mass destruction. The Final Solution persisted regardless of the change in the war, and the United States government was fully aware of what was happening not long after they broke the ceiling of isolationism and stepped onto the

³² "Dickstein loses Alien Bill Round," Special to The New York Times, *New York Times* (New York City), accessed January 25, 2017, <http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/docview/106261847?accountid=7014>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ S. 1449, 77th Cong. (1942) (enacted), ProQuest Congressional, <http://congressional.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/congressional/result/congressional/pqpdocumentview:pdfannexevent?pgId=35b44d4f-d00c-460d-842c-a0470dbca8b8&rsId=159A85CC2B5&pdf=app-bin/gis-billtext/3/7/f/6/77-s1449-0amds-19420709.pdf>

world stage.³⁵ Even with full knowledge of Jewish (and others) extermination, FDR continued to prioritize the safety and the United States and the defeat of Hitler, which did not include aid for refugee relief. The latter would of course also achieve the former. All the way to August 1942 the question of German spies still weighed heavily on FDR's mind, and he still refused to take any chances.³⁶ This pattern of behavior continued through 1942 and into 1943 until the United States and FDR brought forth a plan for global, post-war rehabilitation.

This rehabilitation plan took the form of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, or the UNRRA, a "policy-determining agency for aid to the invaded countries of Europe."³⁷ From the beginning, this organization was not geared solely toward the care of refugees and displaced persons, but these categories of people fell under the umbrella of repair and peace that the U.S. and the UN wanted to bring to Europe and the world.³⁸ The Administration itself was diplomatically impressive, as it

³⁵ Significant controversy exists over a certain cable, "Reigner's cable," sent to Rabbi Wise in the United States that detailed the Nazi's plan for mass destruction of the Jewish people. The government wavered over the authenticity of the telegram, and the debate continues over whether FDR and the State Department purposefully ignored the message. For this reason I will not discuss it at length, as it would not strongly support an argument in either direction.

³⁶ "Are negotiations underway for the repatriation of enemy aliens, particularly Germans...? All German aliens in America are potential, if not actual, spies..." FDR to Cordell Hull, August 15, 1942, President's Secretary's File, Confidential File State Department: 1941-1942, Box 9, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00123.pdf

³⁷ Abbett Pulliam to Marvin H. McIntyre, November 23, 1942, OF5175, Lehman, Herbert (Director of UNRRA), SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00087.pdf

³⁸ The Marshall Plan is outside the scope of this discussion of relief.

involved forty-four countries and other groups. Scholar Stephen R. Porter calls the Administration a “short term crisis management prerequisite,” and all the aid that was to follow, including the Marshall Plan, benefitted from the intergovernmental cooperation that was already taking place.³⁹ New York Governor Herbert Lehman was selected to lead the UNRRA, and appropriately enough he was Jewish himself.⁴⁰ Executive Vice President of the Citizens Bureau of Governmental Research Inc. of New York State, Abbett Pulliam, expressed delight in this selection and wrote, “since the Jewish people have borne the brunt of the worse persecution in Europe there is something especially fitting in the selection of an outstanding American of that faith to convey for this country to succor that will be so direly needed...”⁴¹ Whether Lehman’s selection was made based upon his ethnicity we do not know, but if it played any factor it shows that FDR did not shy away from recognizing the horror that has taken place for Jews in Europe.

The relief administration had lofty goals, and it accomplished some great feats. The UNRRA helped repatriate and settle twenty-million refugees and displaced persons and provided “food, shelter, medical care, transportation, educational programs, and agricultural and technical assistance.”⁴² Though the administration spread humanitarian aid across the globe in all these different avenues, most importantly it set up displaced

³⁹ Stephen R. Porter, "Humanitarian Diplomacy After World War II: The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration," in *Foreign Policy Breakthroughs: Cases in Successful Diplomacy*, ed. Robert Hutchings and Jeremi Suri (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2015), 23.

⁴⁰ Abbett Pulliam to Marvin H. McIntyre, November 23, 1942.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Porter, “Humanitarian Diplomacy After World War II,” 23-24.

person camps in Germany and around the world, and one camp could hold 715,000 refugees at a time with the ultimate goal being repatriation. If repatriation was not possible, every attempt was made to settle them elsewhere on the globe, just like FDR's attempts to settle all the Jews of Europe on every continent before the outbreak of war.⁴³ The U.S. Office of the Historian displays this wide reach, as it houses correspondence between the U.S. and countries from Europe to South America to Asia.⁴⁴

The United States did indeed have the largest hand in the UNRRA both with leadership and financial support under Lehman.⁴⁵ Why would the United States pour resources into such a collaborative organization like the UNRRA? First, it was probably most capable of humanitarian action economically and financially, but more than that, the UNRRA was a tool for which FDR could exact his grand vision of bringing democracy and order to the world. He might even have thought of it as a "New Deal for the World," as it aimed to build the globe up from nothing, just as he built the United States up from a state of utter despair.⁴⁶ FDR actually signed the UNRRA into existence through executive order, not through congressional bill; he feared that the UNRRA would face the same fate as the League of Nations a couple decades before, and he wanted to ensure that the relief the U.S. was to have such a heavy hand in would be effective.⁴⁷ In this, FDR may have

⁴³ Ibid., 24-25.

⁴⁴ "Office of the Historian," U.S. Department of State, accessed April 2, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/search?start=11&q=UNRRA&within=documents&per-page=10>.

⁴⁵ Porter, "Humanitarian Diplomacy After World War II," 27.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 39.

been careful to avoid the pitfalls of Wilson's League, but his idealism aimed just as highly.

Yet the question still remains, what does the UNRRA and FDR's support for it say about his motivation behind it? In 1942 into 1943 when the Administration was founded, he was not facing an impending election, so any strong political considerations would not have hindered him. He made attempts to resettle refugees in the past to protect his political interests, but now he probably felt more comfortable pledging large sums of money to humanitarian relief because he was mid-term, and the country was still high on the patriotic swell of the war.⁴⁸ As we have seen throughout his terms, FDR was by no means a heartless president, it was just a matter of catching him in secure political moments when he had the freedom to act humanitarily.

FDR's Fourth Term: 1944-1945

As Roosevelt approached yet another election, he was on the cusp of a whole new refugee direction, and with that direction a new organization to handle it: the War Refugee Board (WRB). Just as the title states, this board was created to aid those displaced by the war, but its novelty lay in the fact that it was solely an American group, unlike the UNRRA.⁴⁹ Since the UNRRA had been unsuccessful in many ways due to budget restrictions, FDR created the WRB by executive order, including therein that,

The Board shall be directly responsible to the President in carrying out the policy of this Government, as stated in the Preamble, and the Board shall report to him at

⁴⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Executive Order 9417 Establishing the War Refugee Board.," January 22, 1944. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16540>.

frequent intervals concerning the steps taken for the rescue and relief of war refugees and shall make such recommendations as the Board may deem appropriate for further action to overcome any difficulties encountered in the rescue and relief of war refugees.⁵⁰

A significant amount of controversy surrounds this Board, in terms of its efficacy and FDR's motivation behind its founding. Some historians view this move by FDR as a ploy for the Jewish vote in the upcoming election, and they point to FDR's close confidant Henry Morgenthau, who was both Jewish and the driving force behind the Board.⁵¹ The power of the Jewish vote continues to be hotly debated, and as we will see in the next chapter the concept had a profound effect on Harry Truman when he was running for reelection, so it is possible that FDR thought it a smart political move to show some support for the Jewish cause after the war was drawing to a close and the atrocities of the Nazis were so broadly known by the public. Yet evidence does exist to the contrary. In a letter of June 8, 1944 to Ira Hirschmann, FDR wrote, "The great task of mercy which the War Refugee Board is successfully undertaking is of paramount importance and I am confident that Ambassador Steinhardt and you will receive the support of the governments and individuals [in Turkey] we are seeking in the interest of humanity."⁵² This is not a press release or a public statement, so FDR need not use insincere or motivated rhetoric; he speaks of mercy and humanity in what appears to be a genuine manner, and this was less than six months before the election.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 263.

⁵² FDR to Hirschmann, June 8, 1944, President's Secretary's File, Subject File War Refugee Board, Box 173, SDDRHR, FDR Presidential Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/hol/hol00196.pdf.

The President's statements on the issue did not end here. A *New York Times* article from March of 1944, soon after the President formed the WRB, details a statement made by the President to the people of the United States and the people of Europe. He called upon the people of Germany and all of Europe to reject Hitler, and to see that no evil deed go unpunished, as is in line with his typical "free world" rhetoric.⁵³ The section of his statement that is most interesting is when he turns to the topic of refugees. First he acknowledged the efforts of the WRB and Mr. John Pehle that he chose to head the organization, the man formerly in charge of the Treasury's Foreign Funds Control. Then the President was asked about havens for these refugees the WRB assisted, and he hedges his answer. FDR claimed, "we were taking care of all we can get out now—a great many of them in North Africa," but when asked whether refugees would be brought to the United States he claimed "there were not enough of them yet to make that necessary."⁵⁴ Even in a historical moment in which FDR seemed to be operating humanitarily, it was not enough for FDR to open America's gates.⁵⁵ FDR made this statement in March of an election year, showing that he still had the upcoming election in mind and knew the tide of U.S. public opinion had not changed to a significant enough degree to fully accept refugees. Even in what appears to be his most humanitarily-driven moment, he still

⁵³ John H. Crider, "Roosevelt Warns Germans on Jews," *The New York Times* (New York City), March 25, 1944, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=9D0DEED61030E53BBC4D51DFB566838F659EDE>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Aside from one experiment in Oswego, New York where 1000 Jewish refugees were let in, the gates practically remained closed. These refugees were only allowed to remain from mid 1944 until the War's end. See Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 272.

exercised caution. The constraint of war was quickly dissipating, but the constraint of election increased, so his caution remained pervasive.

FDR's final terms saw a lot of difficult decisions, a country at war, and a change to his refugee outlook. He prioritized security over all during the war, and at this time won an unprecedented third term. He did not aid refugees in the way that many scholars would have wanted because in his mind, he had a war to win, and winning the war would set these people free from their oppressors. But the war was not the only constraint. We can still see glimmers of political motivation leading up to his fourth term after the establishment of the WRB, showing that no matter the international situation, he kept his own position in mind. FDR thought he was the best man to lead the country, so he was intent on staying in office to finish what he had started domestically and internationally. Yet FDR would not live long into his fourth term, despite his best efforts to stay healthy and travel post-war as he always had. This left Harry Truman in the oval office, and as the next chapter will show, like his predecessor, once he was there he did not want to leave.

CHAPTER FOUR

Harry Truman's Solution to the Jewish Refugee Problem: The Foundation of Israel

The United States recognizes the provisional government as the
de facto authority of the new State of Israel.

-Harry S. Truman¹

FDR's death left Vice President Harry Truman with an array of problems to solve as Europe recovered from World War II. This, of course, included the problem of whether or not to help Jewish refugees. His solution became one of his most famous and contentious moments as President: the foundation of the state of Israel. The question has persisted through decades of why President Truman decided to recognize the foundation of the new Jewish state because it instigated fierce conflict and war between the new Israelis and the Palestinians making claims to the same land.² While the recognition of Israel was not the only move Truman made to help Jewish refugees, it is the only aspect of his refugee matters that will be addressed in this chapter because it sheds light on the

¹ Charles G. Ross, Press Release about Recognition of Israel, 1948, TS, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Washington D.C., <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/us-israel>

² "The Arab-Israeli War of 1948," U.S. Department of State, accessed March 23, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/arab-israeli-war>.

political motivations of the president within a refugee context, just like FDR before him.³ Though refugees were dealt with in other ways inside Europe during this time of global recovery, mostly by the United Nations more than the United States, the foundation of Israel proves to be the most heated and political solution faced by the American government and President Truman.

Truman inherited a legacy of equivocation and no guidance on the subject of Palestine from FDR. As discussed in second chapter, FDR viewed Palestine as a pressure valve for immigration to the United States; if he could keep immigration flowing to Palestine under the British, he kept pressure off of the United States. FDR did not want to unleash this conflict and made promises to both sides, so Truman was left to navigate the situation amongst pressures from groups for and against the foundation of a Jewish state.⁴ Unfortunately, the issue was not simply one of national self-determination by the Jewish refugees wanting to settle in Palestine, or even those already living there. The “Jewish question” of where to settle European Jews left destitute by World War II was much bigger than the desires of the people; it was an interest of world powers and Arab states. FDR, Truman, and American Zionist groups made the United States one of the most involved countries in the search for a location for the Jewish refugees. Just as it had been for FDR, the social and political climates of the United States heavily influenced the

³ Other refugee considerations during Truman’s years as president include the establishment of the International Refugee Organization April 20, 1946 and the United Nations High Commission on Refugees on December 14, 1950. These considerations and a further narrative of refugee matters after FDR can be found in Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012).

⁴ Dennis Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 6.

strength of Truman's support for Palestine as a solution, but social and political climates outside the United States greatly affected the feelings of Truman's own State Department to the point that it opposed a Jewish state.⁵ Even so, President Truman was motivated by a mixture of moral, personal, humanitarian, and political forces, and these caused him to press forward ardently toward the foundation of a Jewish state, regardless of the intense pressures and obstacles he faced both domestically and internationally to not infringe upon Palestine and the Arab world.⁶ Some historians argue that Truman was motivated by moral and humanitarian sentiments predominantly, but evidence shows that Truman's strongest motivations toward aiding refugees through the recognition of the State of Israel originated from the Zionist Lobby and its forces that urged Truman forward by influencing his political career and surrounding him with pro-Zion advocates.⁷

Before the political pressures surrounding Truman can be thoroughly examined, it is important to analyze the degree to which his moral and personal convictions motivated him in his actions as a politician. Historians have approached the Truman presidency and

⁵ Truman recalled the arguments of his opponents in the administration: "The U.S.S.R. might replace the United States and Britain in influence and power through the Middle East...Control of oil in the Middle East was a very serious consideration...no action should be taken that would commit U.S. armed forces or turn the peoples of the Middle East away from the Western powers, since we had a vital interest there." See Harry S. Truman, *The Memoirs by Harry S. Truman I* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 149 ; Joint Chiefs of Staff to State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, June 21, 1946, President's Secretary's Files, Palestine-1945-1947, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁶ The Truman administration's anti-Soviet motivations for its interventions in the area are outside the scope of this paper. See Michael Ottolenghi. "Harry Truman's Recognition of Israel," *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 4 (2004): 963-88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4091664>.

⁷ While political career here is stated broadly, it means most directly his desire for re-election and those able to help him achieve it; By Zionist lobby I mean both Jews and non-Jews pursuing the foundation of Israel at all costs within Congress.

recognition of Israel from every angle from personal to political, and some claim his early life and dedication to Christianity drove his decisions, tracing Truman all the way back to his childhood. These scholars reveal that young Truman was a voracious reader, especially of the Bible. It is documented that he had read his Bible in its entirety five times by the age of fourteen, clearly demonstrating his “fundamentalist reverence for the Bible” and versed status in its content.⁸ This childhood ardor for the scriptures led him to join the Masonic Lodge No. 450 at the age of twenty-five, and he remained a practicing member even as president.⁹ Historian Michael J. Cohen, though not a historian that argues for the moral motivations of Truman, does point to the fact that religious morality guided all of Truman’s actions as a public, political figure, and that Truman always had a special place in his heart for the Jews as “God’s Chosen People.”¹⁰ David McCullough, popular historian and Truman biographer also stated in my recent interview with him: “[Truman] was always driven by what was right [stemming from his Christian morals], regardless of consequences.”¹¹ While significant, religious and moral formation is not enough to ascertain the motivations behind Truman’s insistence on recognizing Israel as a new state among strong opposition from the State Department, Arabs in Palestine, and

⁸ Michael T. Benson, *Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 31-32.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Michael Joseph Cohen, *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 6-7.

¹¹ David McCullough, interview by author, September 26, 2016.

King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia himself.¹² While his beliefs shaped his overall worldview and played some role in his decision to support a Jewish homeland, (by nature of the fact that beliefs often pervade all decisions to an extent) an examination of Truman's early political career provides a more nuanced approach by which to explain his actions than a lifelong love and respect for the Bible and perception of the Jews as God's chosen people.

A second factor often cited by scholars in Truman's decisions regarding Palestine and Israel is his close relationship with Eddie Jacobson, an American Jew, but not a refugee himself. Jacobson and Truman were incredibly close; they were army buddies and also former business partners, but Jacobson never pressured Truman to take up the cause of Zionism.¹³ Jacobson himself was not a Zionist, he was "the quintessential non-committed, assimilated American Jew," and the pleas Jacobson made to Truman were either to aid his personal friends in escaping Nazi Europe or to help Jewish refugees in general.¹⁴ Historians arguing that Jacobson was central to Truman's Palestine policy point to a meeting in 1948 that Jacobson arranged between Truman and Chaim Weizmann, the President of the World Zion Organization, but this meeting does not automatically mean that Jacobson was a Zionist. At the time, Truman was not allowing Zionists into the White House because he was weary of their demands, but Jacobson

¹² These parties knew that the foundation of a Jewish state would disrupt the Middle East and bring war to Palestine. They were correct, and the 1948 Arab-Israeli war broke out immediately upon the announced independence. See "Milestones: 1945-1952 – Office of the Historian," U.S. Department of State, accessed November 26, 2016, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/arab-israeli-war>.

¹³ Truman, *Memoirs I*, 133; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 13-15, 62.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

eventually convinced him to meet with Weizmann.¹⁵ This meeting was a critical moment for Jews everywhere because the United Nations had already voted for the partition of Palestine. Because opposition favoring Jewish trusteeship was strong, Jacobson's best option for his people was the United State's recognition of Israel.¹⁶ Therefore, he set up the meeting between Truman and Weizmann because it was simply the best option for the current Jewish refugee crisis in Jacobson's mind.¹⁷

Turning back to the early 1940s, despite his religious devotion from a young age and close friendships with American Jews like Eddie Jacobson, Truman did not exhibit a pro-Israel sentiment in his political career in Missouri and the Senate. He continued to advocate for individual Jews refugees at the request of Jacobson: for instance, Truman helped Jacobson obtain a visa for the son of a close friend, but beyond personal favors Truman clearly prioritized Allied military interests over Jewish interests during World War II in his time as a United States senator.¹⁸ He specifically believed that American meddling in Palestine (because it was an area under British control) would be detrimental to the Allied effort and possibly "alienate the Arab world from the West," showing that a permanent homeland for refugees was certainly not his priority at this time¹⁹ While he tended to support Jewish interests publically, he did not act, a very similar strategy to that

¹⁵ Benson, *Harry S Truman and the Founding of Israel*, 125.

¹⁶ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 62

¹⁷ Jacobson will continue to be addressed as Truman's political career and political pressures are examined.

¹⁸ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 46, 49.

of his future running mate FDR. For example, Truman claimed in 1939 to be in support of the Balfour Declaration, a British statement made in 1917 supporting (in part) movement toward the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. He also denounced the British White Paper on Palestine, a document that foresaw an Arab state in Palestine and called for the restriction of Jewish immigration.²⁰ His actions and letters subsequently contradicted this public support. Whenever Jewish constituencies contacted Senator Truman with pleas for their people, his responses were well calibrated. He wrote to a concerned rabbi in 1943:

I do not think it is the business of Senators who are not on the Foreign Relations Committee to dabble in matters which affect our relations with the Allies at this time. There is nobody on earth who dislikes more than I do the actions of Hitler and Mussolini; but it is of vital importance that the Jewish Congregations be patient and support wholeheartedly the foreign policy of our government.²¹

This response shows stark similarities to the feelings of FDR before him—that the war effort took precedence over refugee concerns. Truman expressed his loathing of the White Paper situation, which given his religious background and close Jewish friends was surely genuine, but he was not willing to fight for the cause if it jeopardized American interests. Another example of Truman’s foundational lack of support when it came to a Jewish state in Palestine is when the Taft-Wagner Senate resolution calling for a Jewish commonwealth on Palestinian land reached the Senate in 1944. This resolution called for continued Jewish immigration to Palestine and the possibility of a Jewish

²⁰ Allis Radosh and Ronald Radosh, *A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel* (New York: Harper, 2009), 48.

²¹ Truman to Smoller, December 12, 1943, Senatorial and Vice-Presidential (SVP) file 71, Harry S. Truman Library.

commonwealth in the area.²² Truman did not support the resolution because he believed it would be an imposition on a British issue, and they were “absolutely necessary to us in financing the war,” and that he might support such a resolution at a later time.²³ Truman’s senatorial political career shows a clear disconnect between his words and his actions regarding Zionism, Palestine, and his commitment to Jewish refugees. His religious, moral upbringing and close relationship with Jacobson could not sway him toward the idea of a Jewish commonwealth at this point in his Senatorial career, so clearly moral fiber was not the main motivation for his decisions as president in the coming years either.

A very strong force had to have caused Truman to change fundamentally his position concerning a Jewish state when he became vice president, and soon after president. That force was the Zionist Lobby.²⁴ The lobby influenced Truman’s political career and engender a loyalty from the future president through financial means when he ran as FDR’s vice-presidential candidate. A powerful lobby member, David Dewey Stone, exerted financial influence over Truman’s career when he paid \$25,000 toward the publicity of Truman’s vice-presidential campaign. Senator Truman was not a widely known name, and Stone shouldered the financial responsibility of making him a success. This gave Stone an advantage when Truman became president because this was a “debt” Truman could not ignore. Stone had special access to the president during his time in

²² Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 46.

²³ Truman to A. M. Levin, February 16, 1944, SVP 71, Harry S. Truman Library; M.J. Slonim to Truman, February 22, 1944, SVP 71, Harry S. Truman Library.

²⁴ Lawrence Davidson, "Truman the Politician and the Establishment of Israel," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 39, no. 4 (2010): 28

office because of this and other later contributions, and Stone's influence was just the first of many pressures that Zionists would direct toward Truman to settle the refugee problem for good.²⁵ Six days after Truman became president, Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, clearly aware of the lobby and its assertive nature, wrote a memo to the President saying, "It is likely that efforts will be made by some Zionist leaders to obtain from you . . . commitments in favor of . . . unlimited Jewish immigration into Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state."²⁶ The Zionist lobby was already at work in Truman's vice-presidential career, and it perceived that there would be no hesitation in trying to sway the green president. To further escalate the situation, other external factors increased pressure on Truman in 1945 when suddenly the entire Jewish community was aflame with knowledge of the Holocaust.

First, the Zionist lobby grew with the publication of the Harrison Report in 1945. Earl Harrison had been sent to Europe to assess the state of refugee/displaced person (DP) camps and the condition of Jews within them, and the report he sent back to President Truman was scalding.²⁷ Harrison reported that the "worst victims of Nazism, are being neglected by their liberators," and "We appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them, except we do not exterminate them."²⁸ Harrison's alarming findings

²⁵ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 70.

²⁶ Edward Stettinius to Harry S. Truman, April 18, 1945, President's Secretary's Files, Palestine - 1945-1947, Harry S. Truman Library.

²⁷ Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 4.

²⁸ "Report of Earl G. Harrison," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed October 30, 2016, <https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/displaced-persons/resource1.htm>.

caused two organizations, the American Council on Judaism (ACJ) and the American Jewish Committee (AJC) to launch a full-fledged campaign to persuade the President to take action-- either allow more Jewish refugees into the United States or put more pressure on the British to open up Palestine to these destitute people.²⁹ The Zionists used this report to turn the Palestine and Jewish refugee question into a “seminal domestic political issue.”³⁰ Truman understood that American feelings toward Jewish refugees and immigrants alike were still hostile after the war, so he began to support the idea of sending refugees to Palestine instead of admitting them to the United States, the same avenue of immigration FDR before him had preferred. He claimed to British Prime Minister Clement Atlee in 1945 that the American people strongly supported the resettlement of European Jews in Palestine.³¹ His chief goal was to have 100,000 Jews admitted to Palestine as soon as possible, and this policy became known as “refugee Zionism” because it did not call for a Jewish state, simply a place for refugees to find peace.³² This policy was based upon the findings of the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry, a joint committee that explored the political, economic, and social situations on

²⁹ Loescher and Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness*, 9.

³⁰ Davidson, “Truman the Politician and the Establishment of Israel,” pg. 30.

³¹ Harry S. Truman, “Statement by President,” November 13, 1945, President’s Secretary’s Files, Palestine 1945-1947, Harry S. Truman Library. In the long run, Truman thought this whole issue was one for the U.N., but he saw an immediate need that could be taken care of. See Truman, *Memoirs*, 140.

³² Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 109-110.

the ground in January of 1946 and the overall “absorptive capacity” of Palestine.³³ The committee recommended that 100,000 be admitted immediately, but with three important stipulations:

- I. That Jew shall not dominate Arab and Arab shall not dominate Jew in Palestine.
- II. That Palestine shall be neither a Jewish state nor an Arab state.
- III. That the form of government ultimately to be established shall, under international guarantees, fully protect and preserve the interests in the Holy Land of Christendom and of the Moslem and Jewish faiths.³⁴

What is most illuminating about Truman’s motivations is that he stood by this committee report unwaveringly in the face of staunch opposition by the British to ease immigration restrictions.³⁵ This effort by Truman was of course not entirely political, and scholars do not question his genuine, humanitarian support for “refugee Zionism,” but his concerns were tempered by political conditions. Truman acted beyond trying to settle the 100,000 refugees (by recognizing Israel) because of the political implications of the public response to the Harrison Report; American Jews and the Zionist Lobby focused intently on this public response to put further pressure on the President. Truman’s humanitarian concerns drove his desire to settle the refugees somewhere, but refugee settlement and the establishment of a new state (especially in light of that not being his original desire and his compliance with the Anglo-American committee’s report) were entirely different situations. The Zionist lobby tipped the scale from “refugee Zionism” to the realization of

³³ Harry S. Truman, “Statement by President”; Truman also later issued Executive Order 9682 calling all government branches and agencies to aid the Joint Committee in whatever way was necessary short of disclosing records that would be against U.S. interests. See Executive Order 9682, January 19, 1946, President's Secretary's Files, Palestine-1945-1947, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁴ Truman, *Memoirs I*, 145.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

ardent Zionist dreams. By illuminating the humanitarian concerns of Americans, both Jewish and not, the Lobby made their case to the President of the need for a Jewish state as the only logical solution to the refugee problem of Europe.

Pressure by groups like the AJC and ACJ subsequently gave a louder voice to the Zionist lobby and further extended its influence over the president in the context of the 1948 election; the pressure and power of the lobby grew with Truman's desire to be reelected of his own accord. Just as FDR's actions altered in the face of reelection, as did President Truman's. Every presidential candidate almost certainly sought the Jewish vote, and the Zionists influenced this bloc immensely because of the two groups' mutual goals.³⁶ Truman had already realized the importance of the Jewish vote by 1946, if not earlier. In 1946 Governor Thomas Dewey of New York, who Truman expected to run for president again on the Republican ticket in 1948, was running for state reelection.³⁷ Truman knew that the Governor planned to publically support Zionism, so he decided to preempt Dewey before he could act. Truman made a declaration known as the "Yom Kippur Statement," which further emphasized his refugee Zionist goals and became Truman's first public announcement in support of Jewish statehood in Palestine.³⁸ With this declaration, Truman hoped to insure that the Jewish vote, consisting of about four percent of the electorate in the 1940s, went his direction.³⁹ This percentage happened to

³⁶ Davidson, "Truman the Politician and the Establishment of Israel," 30.

³⁷ John Acacia, "The Recognition of Israel," in *Clark Clifford: The Wise Man of Washington* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 90, accessed June 26, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcg10.7>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

be concentrated in crucial states with substantial electoral votes, most importantly New York, and American Jews and Zionists knew they had significant power because of this ability to deliver vital states. According to an important Jewish Zionist leader, Bernard Baruch, “You let me have the Jewish vote of New York and I will bring you the head of Ibn Saud on a platter!”⁴⁰ Recognizing the power the Jewish bloc held in specific states, Truman also sought to appease the Jewish electorate because the Jewish bloc notoriously voted Democratic, and FDR held their support, so it was a stronghold he could not betray without substantial political consequences for the Democratic Party.⁴¹ Once Truman occupied the office of the president, it did not take long for Jews and the Zionist lobby to begin exercising their domestic political power in light of Truman’s desire for reelection.⁴² Truman’s aspirations for reelection played him into the Lobby’s hands because they not only controlled the Jewish vote, but also had other ways of bringing Truman onto their side as well.

Truman’s campaign also happened to be heavily financed by prominent Jews because of his lack of personal wealth. Since American Jews were already more or less loyal to the Democratic Party, its candidates depended heavily on Jewish financial

⁴⁰ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 61.

⁴¹ Acacia, “The Recognition of Israel,” 90.

⁴² While it was possible to win without the Jewish vote (and Truman did indeed lose New York state) historian Lawrence Davidson claims that his advisors overplayed the Jewish vote’s importance and told him that all American Jews wanted a Jewish state in Palestine. Regardless of the true power of the Jewish vote, it appears it had all the power in Truman’s mind. See Davidson, “Truman the Politician and the Establishment of Israel,” 30.

contributions.⁴³ Dewey David Stone, who had been one of the first men to finance Truman's political career when he was chosen to run as FDR's vice president, was again a key player in keeping Truman's 1948 election campaign afloat.⁴⁴ Stone rallied other influential Jews who could help Truman's campaign. Among them was Abraham Feinberg who notoriously saved the campaign altogether when he mobilized Jews in eight cities across the nation and raised \$100,000 in a mere two days.⁴⁵ Not only did prominent Jews pick up Truman's slack, his old friend Eddie Jacobson was key in bringing donations when they were most desperately needed.⁴⁶ There were times when Truman was stranded on his campaign tour because he could not afford to pay the train company to take him an inch farther, and Jacobson would always be the one to make phone calls and get the train quite literally rolling again.⁴⁷ But even in this, Jacobson was not doing it with Zionist intentions, though some of the people who donated money through him could have been doing so. Jacobson may not have been helping Truman for his own agenda, but the same cannot be said for the others who made Truman's campaign a reality. Men like Feinberg were happy to help Truman because their money would give them inside access to the president, which they continued to exploit through "quiet

⁴³ Acacia, "The Recognition of Israel," 90.

⁴⁴ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 70.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁷ Series of Interviews with Tom L. Evans, August 8, 1962-December 19, 1963, Oral History Collection, Harry S. Truman Library.

diplomacy” for the Zionist and refugee cause.⁴⁸ The Jewish electorate and Jewish financiers of Truman’s 1948 presidential campaign made the president susceptible to the Zionist agenda, and the lobby was not ashamed to exercise influence over him through these avenues.

Finally, probably the greatest strength of the Zionist lobby in influencing the president and United States refugee policy on the issue of Palestine was its access to him through his advisors. While most people in politics at this point usually had some Jewish refugee or Zionist sympathies, Truman’s main advisors on the subject of Israel were determined Zionists.⁴⁹ Truman often acted upon the advice of his domestic advisors, and one of these advisors was his confidant Clark M. Clifford. It is uncertain whether or not Clifford believed in the Zionist cause or the salvation of Jewish refugees for their own sake, but he constantly emphasized the power of the Jewish vote and Jewish money in affecting the election of 1948. Either way, the Zionist lobby had clearly influenced Clifford’s political thinking, and this was passed on to the president. The purity of Clifford’s motivations may be unclear, but he accomplished his main goal of Truman’s reelection. While Clifford is the exception when it comes to the ideological beliefs of Truman’s advisors on Palestine, his other two key advisors, Max Lowenthal and David Niles, were enthusiastic Zionists and very in line with the wishes of the Zionist lobby.⁵⁰ Lowenthal’s credentials were quite spurious when it came to knowledge of Palestine, but he worked as Clifford’s assistant and was trained in the law at Harvard. He was very

⁴⁸ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 71.

⁴⁹ Davidson, “Truman the Politician and the Establishment of Israel,” 31.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

close with American Zionists and discreetly and consistently pushed the president toward Zionist ends, which included weekly teas at the house of Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis. Brandeis has been credited as the man who “converted” Truman’s vice president Alben Barkley to Zionism.⁵¹ Truman gave Lowenthal immense credit in reflection on the U.S. recognition of Israel and rescue of Jewish refugees in a letter written April 23, 1962, “... I don’t know who has done more for Israel than you have. In fact, you are the one I talked with when we were trying to work out the recognition of the State of Israel, and you know how the Israelites have placed me on a pedestal alongside Moses, and that is the reason I wrote you as I did because I want you to have the credit.”⁵² David Niles also had the ear of the president. Niles was Truman’s assistant for minority affairs and a close friend of militant Zionist Rabbi Stephen Wise. It was even put forth by Alfred Lilienthal, “a politically active anti-Zionist Jew of the time” that “Niles fed confidential information from the White House to the Zionist leadership, and later to the Israeli government,” while serving under President Truman.⁵³ Truman’s advisors were either members of the Zionist lobby or, like Clifford, heavily influenced by the lobby in the same way as Truman. When it came down to true political results, President Truman recognized the potential votes and dollars that he could gain by advancing the Zionist agenda, while still acting humanitarily in the name of refugees, and those around him were prodding him to act in favor of Zionism as well.

⁵¹ Ibid., 32; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 80-81.

⁵² Harry S. Truman to Max Lowenthal, April 23, 1962, *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 402.

⁵³ Davidson, “Truman the Politician and the Establishment of Israel,” 32.

Even though Truman came to fully support Zionism, there were still times he resisted the pressures of the lobby. For example, when he barred all Zionists from the White House in 1948 and only Jacobson could get Weizmann an audience with Truman in hopes of further advancing any pro-Jewish ends, refugee or otherwise. Just as FDR thought he was the best man to lead the U.S. and had to remain in office to do so, Truman had similar feelings and embodied his political concerns. Though there is general consensus that Truman always acted in a way that he thought would benefit the United States, the Zionist lobby clearly clouded his thinking on the issue of Palestine and locked him into supporting a position that in the end would bring years of instability to the Middle East.

The foundation of Israel and Truman's declaration of recognition were immediately followed by a war with Arab states, and it has ever since been the point of most contention in the area.⁵⁴ Only a powerful lobby could have pushed the president to support such actions, regardless of his personal beliefs. Truman was not getting a clear picture of the situation from the Zionists, and he was also married to their cause because of the support it brought him in the 1948 election. Ultimately, all of Truman's motivations combined caused him to act against his own State Department, but above all the influence of the Zionist Lobby led Truman to push for the creation and subsequent U.S. recognition of Israel as a safe haven for Jewish refugees.

While Truman's upbringing, personal religious devotion, humanitarian concerns, and close friendships with Jews had some effect on his choices concerning Israel and Palestine, the sources and evidence clearly suggest they were not the strongest

⁵⁴ "The Arab-Israeli War of 1948," U.S. Department of State, accessed March 23, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/arab-israeli-war>.

motivators. Truman was driven most by the pressures of the Zionist lobby and his own political aspirations to be reelected of his own accord, as seen by his transformation from a cautionary supporter of helping Jewish refugees to a full-fledged Zionist working against the advice of his own State Department and available knowledge about the current status of Arabs in the Middle East. Scholars do not doubt that Truman genuinely desired to help Jewish refugees, it is simply a matter of his chosen solution that perpetuated this debate. The Zionist honed in on Truman at the time when president's are most vulnerable to popular issues within the American public, election time. As I have argued throughout, the success of refugee initiatives etc. is often a matter of timing, and in this case the Zionist's perfectly timed their pressures with the refugee crisis and the election of 1948.

Putting FDR and Truman together in the same analysis serves a greater purpose; it illustrates the importance of timing when presidents are making decisions concerning refugees. Scholars have long examined these men separately to understand their actions, but the pattern that emerges in a dual analysis is more telling; political motivations can ruin refugee prospects of aid. Both FDR and Truman sought to help refugees, as they were not heartless men, but they prioritized their political careers and the needs of the nation over the needs of displaced persons. When they did act in favor of refugees, these actions were in moments of political safety, like right after an election. Safe political moments gave them the freedom to act on behalf of refugees, but otherwise their concerns lay elsewhere. If an election was looming on the horizon, FDR and Truman alike did not help refugees because they thought they must be the ones in charge to improve America. Refugee crises, therefore, unfortunately, have to be well-timed.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Syrian Refugee Crisis, Barrack Obama, and President Trump

The United Nations High Commission on Refugees announced on June 20, 2016 that the number of refugees in the world had surpassed the number of refugees following World War II.¹ The number of people displaced in the world had reached an astounding 65.3 billion in 2015, and the number has surely risen.² A large portion of these refugees are fleeing from the Middle East, specifically Syria, as a civil war has ravaged their country since March of 2011.³ An estimated 11 million Syrians have been displaced since the beginning of the war, both within Syria, neighboring countries, and countries of the European Union.⁴ While Europe is currently most inundated with pleas of Syrian refugees to enter those countries because of geographical proximity, the United States has not been free from the same pressures to allow these displaced people into America and be the humanitarian savior of the world. Some media outlets blame former president barrack Obama for the ills of Syria, claiming his foreign policy created the problem, while others point to the actions of President Donald Trump as the problem on the other

¹ Euan McKirdy, "UNHCR Report: More Displaced Now than after WWII," CNN, June 20, 2016, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/20/world/unhcr-displaced-peoples-report/>.

² Ibid.

³ "Syria: The Story of the Conflict," BBC News, March 11, 2016, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>.

⁴ "Syrian Refugees: A Snapshot of the Crisis--in Middle East and Europe," Syrian Refugees, January 1, 2016, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://syrianrefugees.eu/>.

side of the spectrum.⁵ Regardless of where “blame” is to fall, examining this current crisis through the lens of FDR and Truman’s treatment of the Jewish refugee crisis continues to shine light on the motivations of politicians when dealing with refugee matters and shows a possible lesson to be learned. Throughout this work I have argued that, while not in totality, FDR and Truman were politically motivated in their dealings with refugees, that their actions and initiatives were in part dependent upon the prospect of reelection. The Syrian Refugee crisis has seen this same theme played out, specifically under President Obama.

Syrian refugees have to go through a strict immigration process like Jewish refugees before them in the 1930s and 1940s. Currently the Department of State runs the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), which works alongside the United Nations High Commission on Refugees to resettle refugees in the most dire of circumstances.⁶ Just as immigration for Jewish refugees from Germany was complicated and often has certain requirements, some of these are echoed today in the cases of Syrian refugees as well. For example, the State Department website reads, “Additionally, Syrians are eligible for Priority-3 (P-3) access to USRAP if they are outside of Syria and have immediate family members in the United States who initially entered as refugees or were granted asylum. The following relatives of the U.S.-based family members are qualified

⁵ Walter Russell Mead and Nicholas Gallagher, "When It Comes to Callousness on Syrian Refugees, Obama Trumps Trump," *New York Post*, January 31, 2017, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://nypost.com/2017/01/31/when-it-comes-to-callousness-on-syrian-refugees-obama-trumps-trump/>.

⁶ "U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) Syrian Processing -- Frequently Asked Questions," U.S. Department of State, March 11, 2016, accessed March 23, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2016/254651.htm>.

for P-3 access: spouse, unmarried children under 21, and/or parents.”⁷ This same relationship-dependent process was seen in the 1930’s, only stricter because of affidavit of support was often required from the family member residing in the United States. Fortunately, the process for resettlement under USRAP is free for everyone who applies, but in reality only one percent of the global refugee population will be accepted and receive the benefits of funding.⁸ The applicants then go through rigorous screening, medical examinations, fingerprinting, and cultural orientation before being allowed to enter the United States.⁹

But this very brief discussion of the entrance policy for Syrian refugees is not the main focus; what is most important are Obama’s actions and the timing of those actions. Research did not reveal any large scale actions by the Democratic president toward Syrian refugees during his first term, which may not necessarily tell us much considering the conflict did not start until 2011 and Obama was elected in 2008. Interestingly enough, we see the majority of Obama’s actions toward refugees happening after his reelection, supporting the idea that presidents require an element of political safety to act in favor of refugees. In 2009, a year after he became president, there were 42 million refugees in the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid; Amy Pope, "Infographic: The Screening Process for Refugee Entry into the United States," National Archives and Records Administration, November 20, 2015, accessed March 23, 2017, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states>.

⁹ Ibid.

world, but we do not see Obama making large moves to aid these people.¹⁰ After his reelection, Obama did work intently to admit Syrian refugees, the globally famous refugees, to the United States under the 1980 Refugee Act, an act which concentrates a decent amount of power over refugee issues in the hands of the executive branch, as long as Congress approves the number of refugees admitted each year.¹¹ In the fiscal year 2016, Obama set a goal of admitting *at least* 10,000 Syrian refugees, and he wanted to accept a total of 85,000 of the globally displaced persons.¹² In the end 18,007 Syrians were accepted before he left office, and his administration significantly accelerated the admissions process after the election of Donald Trump, getting as many refugees approved before the new president took office.¹³ Though we have to question why Obama acted as he did because understanding president's motivations can help us to handle refugee crises better than in the past. Was it a coincidence that this surge of humanitarian action came at a time when Obama knew he could not be reelected and

¹⁰ "UNHCR Annual Report Shows 42 Million People Uprooted Worldwide," UNHCR, June 16, 2009, accessed April 02, 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2009/6/4a2fd52412d/unhcr-annual-report-shows-42-million-people-uprooted-worldwide.html>.

¹¹ Leo Hohmann, "Obama's '110,000 Refugees' Only Half the Story," WorldNetDaily News, September 15, 2016, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.wnd.com/2016/09/obamas-110000-refugees-only-half-the-story/>.

¹² Stephen Dinan, "Obama Administration to Go beyond 10,000 Syrian Refugees," The Washington Times, August 05, 2016, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/aug/5/obama-admin-go-beyond-10000-syrian-refugees/>.

¹³ Paul Bedard, "18,007 Syrian Refugees Under Obama," Washington Examiner, January 18, 2017, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/trumps-wall-could-save-taxpayers-money-cut-us-aid-to-mexico/article/2615238>.

when Syrian refugees were internationally recognized? Obama felt free to act as he saw fit on the matter because he was already in his second term and legally had no chance of running for the office again. In the 1930s and 1940s FDR and Truman faced a lot of refugee pressure, but they did not act overwhelmingly humanitarily when reelection was near, and Truman even made an internationally very unpopular decision in the face of political pressure. Knowing this, would Obama have acted differently had he been in his first term at the peak of the Syrian refugee crisis? He certainly did not make large moves to help the 42 million refugees that existed upon his initial election. The Syrian refugee crisis arrived at a very politically fortunate time under Obama for the sake of those eligible to enter the United States.

Yet that fortunate timing did not last. President Donald Trump notoriously has very different views on Syrian refugees and Middle Eastern individuals more generally than his predecessor. Trump specifically questions the background-check process of the United Nations and wants a more rigorous screening process in place.¹⁴ President Trump, already notoriously, ordered a ban on Syrian refugees and other immigrants from the Middle East almost immediately after taking office.¹⁵ Trump announced,

Numerous foreign-born individuals have been convicted or implicated in terrorism-related crimes since September 11, 2001, including foreign nationals who entered the United States after receiving visitor, student, or employment visas, or who entered through the United States refugee resettlement program. Deteriorating conditions in certain countries due to war, strife, disaster, and civil unrest increase the likelihood that terrorists will use any means possible to enter the United States. The United States must be vigilant during the visa-issuance

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Full Text of Trump's Executive Order on 7-nation Ban, Refugee Suspension," CNN, January 28, 2017, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/28/politics/text-of-trump-executive-order-nation-ban-refugees/>.

process to ensure that those approved for admission do not intend to harm Americans and that they have no ties to terrorism.¹⁶

This statement of course rings like a statement that would be made by FDR during the World War II, but that was in a time of global warfare that included the United States. So what does this action by President Trump mean in the context of politics and refugees? The immediacy of Trump's action makes it hard to believe he was motivated by politics and retaining public favor for reelection, but at the same time he was delivering on many promises he made on the campaign trail. He successfully capitalized on people's fears of outsiders. FDR hedged the immense anti-Semitism of the United States during his presidency, but he never cashed in on it as it seems the current president has.

Additionally, President Trump has soured relations with Australia over refugees recently. The United States was set to admit 1,250 refugees from Australia because of the poor conditions in which these persons were being kept off the Australian coast.¹⁷ This deal, set up by President Obama, was quickly broken by President Trump in one phone call to the Australian Prime Minister. He claimed that allowing these displaced persons on American soil would be equivalent to admitting "the next Boston bombers."¹⁸ President Trump sees no room in the United States for refugees, and he is not afraid to make that abundantly clear. Overall, Trump's actions have been inflammatory and drastic, but it is too soon to tell not only what he will do, but where his motivations lie on the matter. He could act in this manner toward refugees to protect his political position,

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "US-Australia Refugee Deal: Trump in 'worst Call' with Turnbull," BBC News, February 02, 2017, accessed April 02, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-38837263>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

or he could simply be ardently xenophobic. America can only hope he does not bend the interest groups in the United States and make unfavorable decisions in international diplomacy like many scholars argue Harry Truman did.

A pattern exists of humanitarian ebbs and flows in the oval office as political concerns increase and decrease regularly. Refugees in times of reelection appear to be less likely to be shown favor, so one can only hope that great humanitarian crises fall in the lap of a second-term, good-natured President. One might think refugees would hold some “humanitarian clout” during times of reelection, but this thesis shows how that is not the case; Americans continue to be xenophobic, and their leaders continue to seek their approval. This does not mean national security should never be the main concern of governments, but there should be room for both compassion and caution. The examples of FDR, Truman, Obama, and potentially Trump show us that president’s actions are always tempered by political concerns when it comes to refugees. They are not evil for this, the leaders of our country simply think they know what is best for America and must remain at the helm to bring forth the change they desire.

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