

GERMANY  
— ON THEIR —  
MINDS

GERMAN JEWISH REFUGEES  
IN THE UNITED STATES AND THEIR  
RELATIONSHIPS WITH GERMANY, 1938–1988

ANNE C. SCHENDERLEIN



## Germany on Their Minds

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## German Jewish Refugees in the United States and Their Relationships with Germany, 1938–1988



Anne C. Schenderlein



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Anne C. Schenderlein  
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## INTRODUCTION



In September 2009, a group of former German Jewish refugees and their families visited Berlin. For most of them it was the first time they returned to the city, their birthplace or long-time residence, since they had fled Germany from Nazi persecution more than seventy years before. They came from various places in Israel, South America, Great Britain, and the United States at the invitation of the city government. Since 1969, West Berlin had run a program, launched in the spirit of *Wiedergutmachung*—literally meaning “making good again” and practically referring to a legislation for material compensation for victims of National Socialism—that sponsored trips for former residents who had fled because of Nazi persecution.

During their week in Berlin, the visitors met city and government officials at special receptions, went on sightseeing tours, attended the opera, and had time to pursue quests into their personal pasts. This could mean visiting the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weissensee or going to see their former home, but also finding out about the fate of family members. On this 2009 visit, Ralph Reuss from Portland, Oregon, for example, learned the date of the deportation of his paternal grandparents and uncles from Berlin and that they had been sent to Auschwitz. After his return to the United States, Reuss reflected on how he had felt visiting the station where the deportation trains had departed Berlin. “On the rainy gray and gloomy day when our group was standing on the railway platform I couldn’t help but think of the fear and hopelessness my grandparents and uncles were feeling on a cold December 14, 1942.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, even as he reflected on such somber matters, a few lines later he also wrote, “All in all Berlin seems like a very livable city about which I have very positive feelings—after all I am German!”

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Notes from this chapter begin on page 8.

Certainly, the Berlin of 2009, with its numerous memorials dedicated to the German persecution and murder of Jews and other groups, changed the image many refugees had of Germany to a more positive one. But why would Reuss identify as German? He had left Germany as a three-year-old child in 1939, spent the majority of his life in the United States, and had lost almost his entire family in the Holocaust. While it may not be too surprising that Jews who grew up in Germany and left several years before the Holocaust might call themselves German, what would motivate Reuss, who had hardly any personal memories of Germany, to do so? Did he just discover his Germanness on this trip, or had it played a role in his life before?

This book seeks to illuminate the apparent paradox that some of those grievously hurt by and driven from Germany, in spite of this experience, have frequently lived with their lives and identities inextricably connected to it. It traces the history of refugees from 1938, the high point of flight and immigration to the United States, up until 1988, when many refugees went to Germany to visit their former hometowns.

About ninety thousand German-speaking Jews entered the United States in the 1930s and early 1940s fleeing the Third Reich. They came not only from Germany but also from Austria, which Germany annexed in March 1938, and in smaller numbers from Czechoslovakia and other eastern European countries. These German-speaking refugees often came together in one organization, though Austrians also formed special Austrian sub-groups within some of the larger ones. The umbrella organization in the United States for all refugee groups from German-speaking Europe was the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, with headquarters in New York City. Leadership positions in the federation were generally held by Jews from Germany. This book concerns itself solely with refugees coming from Germany, who are referred to here as German Jews.

The German Jews who came to the United States were so diverse that they were, as Herbert A. Strauss, the eminent historian of this German Jewish migration stated, “by any standard of social analysis . . . not a ‘group.’”<sup>2</sup> They differed in age and socioeconomic, political, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Most well-known are the stories of the famous artists, scientists, and intellectuals who came to the United States, such as Albert Einstein, Lion Feuchtwanger, Ludwig Marcuse, and Arnold Schönberg.<sup>3</sup> However, most Jews who came from Germany were not famous, and this book examines the lives of these ordinary people who have mostly been neglected by historiographical scholarship on Jewish exile in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

While all of them experienced discrimination and persecution in Germany, the main protagonists of this book left Europe early enough to be spared the deportations to the concentration and extermination camps of the East. They settled all over the United States, with particularly high numbers in New York

City and Los Angeles. In many American cities, German Jewish refugees founded local institutions for the purpose of assisting each other in starting life in the new country, and these institutions, in turn, frequently joined together in regional and national organizations representing German Jewish refugees. In New York City, the German Jewish Club started the newspaper *Aufbau* (Reconstruction), which would soon become the major publication and nationwide mouthpiece for this group of immigrants. While the main purpose of these various organizational ventures was to assist the refugees in rebuilding their lives in the United States, they were nevertheless constantly occupied with questions related to Germany and the group's relationship to that country throughout the many years of their existence.

This topic of discussion was grounded in the centuries-long history of German Jewry. As long as Jews had lived in German-speaking lands, they felt the need to negotiate their position in and relation to the majority Christian society. Their status and self-representation was highly dependent on state and clerical authorities.<sup>5</sup> In the United States, these discussions continued, not always because the Jewish refugees wanted to engage with Germany, but often because the broader political circumstances of their lives in the United States during World War II and the Cold War demanded some sort of engagement, or because Germans in the Federal Republic initiated contact with them, or both. In this way, German Jewish refugees frequently constructed their individual and communal lives and identities in relation to a real or imagined Germany, to the German nation-state and its political systems, institutions, and people, which themselves changed over the period, as well as to memories and imaginaries of Germany. They debated how, as a Jew from Germany living in the United States, one ought to view and position oneself vis-à-vis the German state, non-Jewish Germans, and German culture—concepts that also changed over time. Discussions about Germany, and any kind of engagement with it, were in many ways connected to the refugees' understandings of themselves: for many refugees these considerations centered on who they were and where they stood in the world. While East Germany (the German Democratic Republic, GDR) appeared in refugee discussions about Germany—particularly in the context of visits to West and East Berlin and in communications with Berliners—the book focuses on the community's postwar relationships to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The GDR did not seek official relations with German Jewish refugees, did not offer reparations, and played a relatively small role in the refugee community's discourse on Germany.<sup>6</sup>

In the United States, depending on the situation, Jews from Germany called themselves refugees, émigrés, immigrants to the United States—but rarely exiles. Many scholars have used the term “exile” indiscriminately for everybody who left Germany because of Nazi persecution, but this description neither matches the lived realities nor the self-identification of most German Jews.<sup>7</sup> “Exile” is a description that fit many of those who fled primarily for political reasons, such

as Thomas Mann and Theodor W. Adorno, who considered the United States a temporary safe haven and who returned to Europe after the war, never having fully adjusted to the American way of life. While Thomas Mann was involved in American institutions, such as serving as a consultant to the Library of Congress, he did not make great efforts to familiarize himself and engage with American culture; instead, as one historian has said, he remained “German to the core.”<sup>8</sup> Mann’s famous words, “Where I am is Germany,” demonstrate both his belief that the Third Reich was a temporary aberration of German history and that his role in the United States was that of a representative of a better, humanist Germany.<sup>9</sup> For him, a future return to Germany was both an option and a goal.

In contrast, John Baer, a Jew from Breslau, explained in his memoir that when the Nazis came to power in 1933 “and made [him] a pariah in the land of [his] birth,” he had felt like an exile in Germany. In the “New World,” however, he felt accepted and was determined to build a new life there.<sup>10</sup> The majority of Jews who fled from the Nazis had a complicated relationship to the country of their birth. They arrived in the United States as Germans, sometimes with only a recent consciousness of being Jewish, having just suffered the experience of their fellow Germans becoming Nazis and their persecution in, and exclusion from, German society. A profound sense of their Germanness, on the one hand, and the deep injury that non-Jewish Germans had inflicted on them, on the other, were opposing psychological forces that many refugees tried to reconcile or comprehend after their arrival. Returning to Germany was not what they primarily hoped for nor planned for the future. In a strictly legal sense, being a refugee is often a transitory category. Depending on the circumstances and consequences of flight, however, it can become an integral part of a person’s life. I use the designation “refugee” because it describes the majority’s situation most accurately, even over the long term and through changing political and personal circumstances, and because the subjects of this study most commonly used it themselves.

Nevertheless, at one time or another, different designations could prove more appropriate or advantageous. In the 1980s, for example, when people in the United States and certain Western European countries began to pay increasing attention to the Holocaust, German Jews who had been able to escape before the beginning of deportations to ghettos and camps in the East sometimes also identified as “survivors.” The “Holocaust survivor” became a central figure in the history and memory of the Holocaust in the 1980s. Nevertheless, what defines a person as a survivor has varied in the eyes of those who so designated themselves, as well as among historians and people who became active in Holocaust memorialization.<sup>11</sup> For the most part, the refugee community in the United States reserved the designation of survivor for those, mainly eastern European Jews, who were in Europe between 1933 and the end of the war and thus wound up in some form of concentration camp, in hiding, or were partisans, and who came

to the United States after 1945. When the “survivor” became a person to whom respect and honor was bestowed, German Jewish refugees also began using the designation for themselves more frequently.

After all, identity formation is not an unconscious process entirely driven by its own free-flowing dynamics but one that is also consciously negotiated, fashioned, and performed, producing changing, contingent, and possibly contradictory narratives.<sup>12</sup> Depending on various circumstances, the Jewish refugees in the United States—individually and as a community—actively shaped their belonging and frequently policed identity presentations of the community.<sup>13</sup> At one time or another, it was more beneficial to see or present oneself as German, German Jewish, Jewish, or American, as a refugee, an immigrant, or a survivor, for example. The degree to which this happened and the forms this took could also vary by geographical region.

At the center of this book is the refugee community in Los Angeles, which was the second largest in the country after New York. By 1942, around four thousand German Jewish refugees had taken up residence in Los Angeles.<sup>14</sup> About half of them joined the Jewish Club of 1933, Inc. Because the major refugee organizations, the American Federation of Jews from Europe and the newspaper *Aufbau*, had their seats on the East Coast in New York, the Jewish Club of 1933 soon came to represent *all* German Jewish refugees in Southern California, and in some instances on the entire Pacific Coast. At times, the immigrant experience there differed significantly from that on the East Coast. Living conditions on the West Coast were different due to basic factors like climate, physical environment, and the greater distance to Europe. Some have contended that a distinctly Western form of Jewish community life developed there.<sup>15</sup> The Hollywood studios, which had drawn a number of famous German cultural figures to the shores of the Pacific, also created a cultural scene unlike that of any other city in the United States. During World War II, regional wartime legislation had unique consequences for the German Jewish refugees there, which affected their lives for years to come. This study’s focus on Los Angeles, which is contextualized with examples from other places in the United States, complements the existing scholarship on German Jewish refugees, which has hitherto almost exclusively been told from an East Coast perspective. It does not attempt to be an in-depth study of Los Angeles but highlights differences, particularly to the East Coast and other places, while paying specific attention to the refugees’ position within the United States as it dominates their overall life and relationship to Germany.

The postwar period saw numerous direct and indirect interactions between German Jewish refugees in the United States and West Germany. The majority of studies on the refugees have focused on persecution, flight, and immigration, and on the ways the newcomers adjusted to life in the United States. The relationship to Germany is frequently framed as an immigrant story of letting go in order to integrate. This integration is mostly depicted as happening in

a linear way. The longer the refugees were in the country and the more they were involved in American life, the argument goes, the more tenuous their connection to Germany became, and their lives and identities were less and less affected by it. The point when most refugees became socioeconomically integrated into American life and received American citizenship, generally after the end of World War II, is frequently taken as a sort of completion of the refugee experience.<sup>16</sup> However, expanding the temporal frame reveals that both the refugee experience and German Jewish refugee identity resonated long after the war. This happened in the context of a general rise of ethnic orientation and identity politics in American life over the second half of the twentieth century, when Jews in America began to emphasize their ethnic and religious traditions. While this American context motivated reflections on *Jewish* belonging, refugees' identification with their *German Jewish* refugee identity was largely conditioned by their relationship to Germany—not only by their own recurring awareness of their German past, but also significantly by interactions with West Germans in the postwar era.

In direct or indirect interactions, refugees, together with representatives from major Jewish organizations, demanded justice, restitution, and compensation for the ways they had been treated by Germans under Nazi rule. Thus, reasons for refugees' initial engagement with postwar Germans went far beyond nostalgia. Rather, they negotiated their connections with Germans from a perspective of present and future interests. Officials and members of the general public in West Germany, on the other hand, believed it important to cultivate positive relations with the refugees for a variety of political, strategic, and educational reasons, geared toward improving West Germany's image after the Holocaust.

For German officials, the existence of the small Jewish community in postwar West Germany served as an important legitimator for the country's "new" identity after the Third Reich. While many German Jews who stayed in or returned to the country after the war referred to feelings of attachment to Germany as a major reason for staying, some stressed a certain sentiment of "Jewish resistance" to the Nazi project to rid Germany and Europe of the Jews. Heinz Galinski, chairman of the Jewish community in Berlin and of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said in this vein, "I have always represented the point of view that the Wannsee Conference cannot be the last word in the life of the Jewish community in Germany."<sup>17</sup> The choice to stay was not easy but was a matter of principle and thoughtful decision.

The presence of the Jewish community in Germany, as well as contributions of individual refugees who remained in the United States, shaped the Federal Republic in important ways.<sup>18</sup> Through its actions in the United States and visits to Germany, the German Jewish refugee community in the United States was a vital element of German history, shaping West Germans' democratic ambitions and dealings with the Nazi past. Based on publications and records of refugee



organizations in the United States as well as West German federal and municipal governments, in combination with oral histories, letters, and memoirs, this study examines the transnational interactions between German Jewish refugees and West Germans to demonstrate how the histories of German Jewish refugees and Germany were deeply intertwined over a fifty-year period.

The newspaper *Aufbau* is a key source of the history of German Jewish refugees in the United States and one on which I consistently rely.<sup>19</sup> After starting with a circulation of about one thousand papers the first year of its existence in 1934, *Aufbau* quickly became the main publication for the community, putting out fifty thousand copies in 1950. The paper's readership was estimated to be much greater than its circulation, as it was frequently passed around within the community.<sup>20</sup> Many of the journalists on the editorial staff, largely of a politically liberal persuasion, had been active participants in the cultural life of the Weimar Republic. Among its prominent contributors were commentators such as Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, and Hannah Arendt. While non-Jewish émigrés also wrote for the paper and read it, it was primarily a Jewish publication and the principle forum for public debate on anything concerning the German Jewish refugee community at large. However, with its broad circulation conveying a representative character, and eminent contributors from both within and outside this group, it developed a reach beyond the German Jewish community, and thus also became an organ for the projection of refugee opinion. In this capacity it was used to send sometimes quite direct messages—announcing the patriotism of the community to the American public and officials, for example, or hectoring German officials over restitution.

Since the paper's editorial staff was closely related not only to the German Jewish Club in New York but also the American Federation of Jews from Central Germany, its general editorial stance reflected that of community leaders in New York. However, it included regular pages reporting from different localities, in some cases regional supplements, and letters to the editor columns, and thus displayed a variety of voices and opinions from this group. Consequently, it is the single most important resource for capturing general community sentiment and identifying topics of discontent. Inevitably, however, it also functioned as an opinion shaper within the community and may camouflage diversity of opinion to some extent. I have attempted to remain aware of this characteristic and bring attention to it when I observe it occurring.

Personal testimonies of German refugees make up a significant part of this book. Memoirs provided one source for these individual perspectives, but the greater resource was oral history interviews, conducted in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s by various researchers. In addition, I conducted a number of interviews with German Jewish refugees myself, at first in Los Angeles where I initially met a number of Jewish refugees from Germany and became interested in their stories. I subsequently met others; some had gotten in touch with me after a call I had

published in *Aktuell*, the magazine sent out by Berlin's Press and Information Office to Berliners who had left the city because of National Socialist persecution. Because these interviews were conducted only recently, they mostly feature refugees who were teenagers or younger when they left Germany, with the notable exception of Annelise Bunzel, who was born in 1912. While not all of their voices are found verbatim in this work, their memories and insights informed my writings in the most significant ways.

## Notes

1. E-mail from Ralph Reuss (name is an alias) to the author, 18 September 2009.
2. Strauss, *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period in the USA*, 6:319.
3. Various publications have explored the lives of these eminent refugees—both Jews and non-Jews—often stressing their contributions to the United States in their respective fields. Anderson, *Hitler's Exiles*; Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise*; Taylor, *Strangers in Paradise*. “Driven into Paradise: L.A.’s European Jewish Emigrés of the 1930s and 1940s” was the title of a 2005 exhibition at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles. Other works include Gumprecht, *“New Weimar” unter Palmen*; and Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific*. See also Aschheim, *Beyond the Border*; Goldschmidt, *The Legacy of German Jewry*; and a publication on the symposium “The German-Jewish Legacy in America, 1938-1988”; as well as Coser, *Refugee Scholars in America*.
4. Other books that have done that include Strauss et al., eds, *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period*; Lowenstein, *Frankfurt on the Hudson*; Appelius, *“Die schönste Stadt der Welt”*; Wiener et al., eds, *Lives Lost, Lives Found*. See also Quack, *Between Sorrow and Strength*, which also includes non-Jewish women. Contemporary studies on refugees include Davie, *Refugees in America*; Saenger, *Today's Refugees, Tomorrow's Citizens*.
5. On German-Jewish relations, see, e.g., Morris and Zipes, eds, *Unlikely History*, which draws together some recent interdisciplinary voices. One of the most well-known pieces is Gershom Scholem's essay on the German Jewish dialogue and symbiosis—a symbiosis that he declared, writing in Israel in the wake of the Holocaust, never existed. Scholem, “Wider den Mythos vom deutsch-jüdischen Gespräch”; Schlösser, *Auf gespaltenem Pfad*. Historian Dan Diner adopted this notion of symbiosis and applied it to the postwar period, suggesting that by then the Holocaust had become the central element binding Germans and Jews together in a negative symbiosis. Diner, “Negative Symbiose.” Other scholars have recently departed from this analogy and instead characterized German Jewish history as one of entanglement, avoiding an essentializing binary conceptualization of the relationship and allowing for more complexity. E.g., Baader, “From the History of Integration to a History of Entanglements.”
6. East Germany was important in the Cold War context. An exploration of the refugee community's opinions on the GDR would be tremendously interesting.
7. See also Grossmann, *Wege in die Fremde*, 44ff.
8. Jackman, “German Émigrés in Southern California,” 103.
9. See Mann, “The Exiled Writer's Relation to His Homeland,” 263ff.
10. Baer, *Witness for a Generation*, 91.
11. Yehuda Bauer counts among survivors only those who physically suffered Nazi persecution in ghettos and concentration and labor camps, as well as those who hid or were partisans. People who fled are not Holocaust survivors in his opinion. The United States Holocaust Memorial

- Museum and Yad Vashem use a broad definition, including anybody who lived under Nazi domination and was directly or indirectly affected by it. For a conceptual history of the term, see Bothe and Nesselrodt, “Survivor: Towards a Conceptual History.” See also Goschler, “Erinnerte Geschichte: Stimmen der Opfer”; Taft, *From Victim to Survivor*; Sabrow and Frei, eds, *Die Geburt des Zeitzeugen nach 1945*.
12. See, e.g., Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.”
  13. I draw here on Till van Rahden’s use of the concept of “situational ethnicity” and substitute ethnicity with identity as a more general concept of belonging. See Rahden, *Jews and Other Germans*, 8-9; see also 285n18.
  14. Numbers from Thomas Mann and Bruno Frank, “Are Refugees ‘Enemy Aliens?’” Marta Mierendorff Papers, Collection no. 0214, Box 39, Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
  15. Eisenberg et al., *Jews of the Pacific Coast*; Moore, *To the Golden Cities*; Wilson, ed., *Jews in the Los Angeles Mosaic*; and ongoing projects at UCLA’s Center for Jewish Studies on Jewish Los Angeles.
  16. Lowenstein goes beyond the war in his observations.
  17. Brenner, *After the Holocaust*, 101.
  18. Brenner, ed., *Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*; Greenberg, *The Weimar Century*.
  19. For accounts on *Aufbau*, see, e.g., Schaber, *Aufbau = Reconstruction*; Kotowski, ed., *Aufbau: Sprachrohr, Heimat, Mythos*; Lapp, “The Newspaper *Aufbau*, Its Evolving Politics, and the Problem of German-Jewish Identity, 1939–1955.”
  20. It was also read by German-speaking refugees and emigrants outside of the United States. Kotowski, ed., *Aufbau: Sprachrohr, Heimat, Mythos*, 64-65; see an overview of yearly publication numbers in *ibid.*, 66.

## Chapter 1

# BACKGROUND



In her memoir, Ilse Davidsohn, a Jewish woman from Berlin, used the mythical image of the German oak to describe the attachment many of her German Jewish friends felt for Germany: like a German oak, they felt themselves to be “rooted endlessly deep in German soil, language, art and German thought.”<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, faced with mounting discrimination and persecution in National Socialist Germany, many German Jews found it increasingly difficult to avoid considering emigration. Yet, many felt the notion of leaving Germany absurd, as Davidsohn observed: “One cannot just say to a German oak: From today on, you are not a German oak any longer. Pull out your roots from this soil and go away!”<sup>2</sup> The relationship between Jews and Germany had been a topic of discussion and self-reflection for centuries when the Nazis came to power, and Jews residing in German lands had encountered and reacted to “ever-changing definitions of themselves as public participants” for almost as long.<sup>3</sup> However, the violence and determination with which the Nazis—and, subsequently, the majority of the German population—excluded Jews from all spheres of public social life were unprecedented. Both German Jews’ deep attachment to their German home and violent exclusion from German life marked their experience of leaving. Whether they individually framed it as exile, flight, or emigration, it was both psychologically exhausting and extremely difficult to carry out.

## Leaving Germany

About 530 thousand Jews from diverse economic, social, political, religious, and cultural milieus lived in Germany during the Weimar Republic. They also

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identified with their Jewishness and Germanness in different ways.<sup>4</sup> Although anti-Semitism existed to varying degrees and forms in Imperial and Weimar Germany, it was not a constant focus of Jewish consciousness and life as it later became, and “most of Germany’s Jews felt comfortable and safe enough to consider Germany their *Heimat*, or Home.”<sup>5</sup> The great majority of Jews in Germany viewed themselves as integral to the German nation and culture. While there were smaller groups of secular Zionists and religious Orthodox Jews with very strong religious or cultural Jewish identification, even they saw themselves as Germans by nationality, with various commitments and ties to the Jewish faith, cultural tradition, and heritage.<sup>6</sup>

In the early years of the Weimar Republic, especially, many German Jews felt that they could live as Germans *and* Jews. This was particularly evident in the realms of culture and education, which would play an important role after emigration. *Bildung* (education, intellectual tradition) was crucial to the emancipation of German Jewry in the nineteenth century; education at a *Gymnasium*, a higher German public school with a humanities curriculum, was common for the majority of middle-class Jews, which made up about two-thirds of the Jewish population. They, like the middle class in general—including those who were not Jewish—identified strongly with the German culture of the classical poets, such as Goethe and Schiller, humanist thinkers and writers like Kant and Lessing, and composers of the classical music canon. Jews were also influential producers and consumers in almost every sphere of Weimar cultural life and most especially in the modern arts.<sup>7</sup>

While German Jews admired, immersed themselves in, and created German culture, some also wished to experience a distinct Jewish culture and tradition and aimed to create a “particular Jewish sphere” within the majority non-Jewish German society.<sup>8</sup> Jewish artists and musicians, for instance, composed works intended to convey a distinct Jewish identity. Also, various new projects of Jewish community building emerged, such as the establishment of Jewish schools, Jewish youth groups, and local Jewish newspapers. While these developments must be understood at least partly as reactions to exclusion from non-Jewish German institutions, particularly when they became more frequent toward the end of the 1920s, they also asserted German Jewish confidence.<sup>9</sup>

The takeover of the Nazis destroyed this atmosphere in which German Jews could mostly be, if they pleased, Germans *and* Jews. Beginning in April 1933, Jewish participation in virtually all areas of public life was gradually eroded by government-sanctioned discrimination and new legislation.<sup>10</sup> By 1935, almost all Jews were either prohibited from or extremely restricted in working in their professions. Jewish businesses were subject to boycotts and “Aryanizations,” the forced transfer of the business into non-Jewish ownership, but some nonetheless managed to continue functioning until a law geared toward “eliminating” Jews from economic life was passed in November 1938.<sup>11</sup> Regarding education, some

Jewish students left public high schools and universities even before laws excluded them officially because the anti-Jewish atmosphere made attendance unbearable. This seems to have been particularly true in big cities.<sup>12</sup> The Nuremberg Race Laws of September 1935 intruded further into private life, prohibiting marriages and sexual relations between “Aryans” and Jews. The Reich Citizenship Law deprived Jews of full citizenship status with full political rights, which were from then on only granted to “Aryan Germans.”<sup>13</sup> Increasingly, Jews had to rely on their own Jewish organizations for social, cultural, and recreational services, as they were excluded from state programs.<sup>14</sup>

In this climate of discrimination, Jews hesitantly began to emigrate. Between 1933 and 1938, 140 thousand mostly middle-class Jews left Germany, with many of them heading to neighboring countries.<sup>15</sup> Not only was making this decision difficult, but numerous factors, including obstacles set up by German authorities as well as immigrations restrictions abroad, made carrying it out ever more complicated. Emigration was costly and difficult to organize. If people could find reasons to justify staying, they often did so.<sup>16</sup> Also, as one Jewish woman pointed out, every Jew “knew a decent German,” and many held on to the belief that not all Germans were Nazis.<sup>17</sup> In this vein, many also believed that “the radical Nazi laws would never be carried out because they did not match the moderate character of the German people.”<sup>18</sup>

Within families, men and women often had different notions about emigration, which resulted from the different roles they occupied in everyday life.<sup>19</sup> Men, who seem to have been the principal decision makers, were generally more reluctant to leave Germany.<sup>20</sup> Especially in the years when Jewish men were still able to somehow make a living, many felt it unwise to leave the relative security of their “beloved homeland,” as one refugee put it, for a foreign place with no work prospects.<sup>21</sup> For men, losing their job in Germany also meant losing their status, a primary marker of their identity, and a painful experience for many. Most middle-class women did not work, and even when they did, they seemed less attached to their jobs and more focused on how the new situation potentially affected their family’s safety.<sup>22</sup> Through their children and their daily interactions outside of Jewish circles, they experienced the changing conditions more intimately. Men increasingly worked in all-Jewish environments, as German businesses would not employ them, and thus did not have as much everyday interaction with the potentially hostile and anti-Semitic world. Thus, many continued to hope that what was and looked very threatening would not ultimately be so bad.<sup>23</sup>

The November Pogrom of 1938, known also as the Night of Broken Glass or Kristallnacht, changed this outlook, and more than half of the total Jewish emigration from Germany happened in the two years thereafter.<sup>24</sup> During the night of 9 November 1938, violent mobs, orchestrated by National Socialist leaders, destroyed and burned hundreds of synagogues, more than eight thousand Jewish businesses, and murdered about ninety-one Jews across Germany. About thirty

thousand Jewish men were imprisoned in concentration camps.<sup>25</sup> Their release was made contingent upon proof of prospective emigration, with the result that women from these families had to try to find ways to leave Germany.

Emigration had become ever more difficult, however. First, it became harder to find a place that would accept refugees. The Evian Conference of July 1938, initiated by Franklin D. Roosevelt with the aim of finding a solution for the growing number of people wanting to leave Germany, had failed, as the thirty-two participating countries proved unable to reach agreements that would help the refugees.<sup>26</sup> While the United States and Britain briefly relaxed the rules for Jewish visa applicants in 1938 after Austria's annexation and the Pogrom events, this was insufficient to accommodate the rising tide of emigrants.<sup>27</sup> Worse still, by 1938–39, the Nazi regime had built up a whole bureaucracy of rules and restrictions “to harass and humiliate” even Jews who wanted to leave.<sup>28</sup> They were required to file documents, appear at various offices, receive clearances and exit visas, and pay increasingly higher taxes before they could emigrate.<sup>29</sup> From 1937 on, Jews were allowed to only take ten Reichsmarks with them.

Even when people were able to overcome these obstacles and were lucky enough to obtain foreign visas, they were sometimes unable to depart in the end because the visas turned out to be invalid, or immigration laws or admission requirements were changed, making entry to the destination country impossible.<sup>30</sup> The story of Kurt Herrmann from Nordhausen is emblematic. Herrmann wanted to emigrate to the United States. A prerequisite for a visa application to the United States was a so-called affidavit, a written statement from a person in the United States pledging financial support for the incoming refugees so that they would not become a burden to the country. Herrmann had such an affidavit from a relative in New York, but since his quota number was not up yet, he planned to get out of Germany via Cuba, for which he had also been able to obtain papers, and wait there until he was allowed to enter the United States. When he found out that he needed five thousand dollars to enter Cuba—a sum he did not have—he canceled the trip and returned the steamer ticket he had already purchased to the travel agency. The receipt of his trip to Cuba still in his pocket, he was arrested during the November Pogrom and taken to Buchenwald concentration camp. Upon the announcement that people who had papers to emigrate should report to the head of the camp, he presented the ticket receipt and was released. Fortunate to have gotten out, Herrmann now urgently wanted to leave Germany but was faced with the problem that it was almost impossible to get visas to any country at this point. Shanghai was the only place that took German Jews without visas, but Herrmann had set his mind on going to the United States. Together with friends, he made his way illegally into Belgium and eventually managed to get to New York in November 1939.<sup>31</sup>

With the outbreak of the war in Europe on 1 September 1939, many countries closed their borders completely, while the situation for Jews remaining in

Germany once again grew considerably worse. For those who had emigrated to neighboring countries, the situation was soon not much better. When German troops invaded the western European countries in 1940, the German Jews who had initially found refuge in them were once again in harm's way. Finding a place overseas that would take them in was immensely difficult. Most of these German Jews were ultimately deported to concentration camps, and few survived.<sup>32</sup> Marianne Barbanell, then Rothstein, and her family were able to escape essentially because they possessed sufficient financial assets. The Rothsteins had left Germany in 1938 for Amsterdam, where they spent three and a half years. When the German army occupied the Netherlands, her mother, certain that they would not survive if they stayed, pressed for action. Through the help of the Brazilian consul who lived in the same apartment building, the family obtained visas for Brazil. By the time the Rothsteins were able to get out of the Netherlands, however, these visas had expired. Because Marianne's father—who had been a banker in Berlin—had the financial means to pay the required sum for the family to enter Cuba, they were saved. The Rothsteins eventually arrived in Los Angeles in December 1941.<sup>33</sup>

By that time, Jewish emigration from Germany had virtually ceased. The first deportation train had left Berlin on 18 October 1941, transporting over one thousand Jews to the Lodz ghetto, and on 23 October 1941, the Nazis officially prohibited Jewish emigration from the Reich.<sup>34</sup> Of the approximately 530 thousand Jews who had lived in Germany in 1933, three hundred thousand ultimately managed to make their way out, most of them young people aged sixteen to thirty-nine.<sup>35</sup> While German-speaking Jews ended up in many different locations around the world, the major centers of refuge between 1933 and 1940 were the United States, with roughly ninety thousand refugees (about 132 thousand at the end of the war), Central and South America with around eighty-four thousand, Palestine with sixty-six thousand, and Shanghai with fifteen to eighteen thousand.<sup>36</sup>

The United States was a preferred country of refuge for many Jews from Germany, not least because some had relatives there who could supply them with the financial affidavits necessary for the visa application.<sup>37</sup> Getting into the United States was extremely difficult, however. In the 1930s, U.S. immigration policy was based on the National Origins Immigration Act of 1924, passed under the Hoover administration as a continuation and revision of earlier immigration restrictions, particularly the 1921 Immigration Act. Its purpose was to preserve a white, Protestant majority in the United States by limiting the number of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. By restricting the number of Italians and Slavs, it was hoped that the number of Jews would also be reduced. The act limited the number of people allowed to immigrate to two percent of each nationality that had been present in the United States by 1890, a time before many of the undesired immigrant groups had arrived in the United



States, and it completely excluded immigrants from Japan.<sup>38</sup> When Franklin D. Roosevelt assumed the presidency in 1933, he upheld the Hoover administration's policy of maintaining low levels of immigration, only slightly lessening the restrictions in 1938 in response to the deteriorating conditions for Jews and others in the German Reich. However, the Roosevelt administration began tightening the restrictions again in the summer of 1939, now ostensibly to quell fears of subversive elements among the immigrants. Nativism and anti-Semitism were widespread among U.S. citizens at this time, partly because of the lingering consequences of the Great Depression. These sentiments, combined with "bureaucratic indifference to moral or humanitarian concerns," resulted in the annual quota for these immigrants from Europe never being filled despite massive demands for visas to the United States.<sup>39</sup> By 1941, the war had politically and bureaucratically further complicated this situation, and it had become almost impossible to gain legal entry to the United States.<sup>40</sup>

## Settling in the United States

Most of the refugees had acquired their knowledge of the United States prior to arrival from books, sometimes brochures prepared by Jewish organizations in Germany, and mostly from American movies, which had swept through Europe in the 1920s.<sup>41</sup> One student remarked that he had been taught "quite properly about American geography, etc., but in my head there was a curious mixture of skyscrapers, kidnappers, horses, Indians, guns, Broadway and Hollywood."<sup>42</sup> A contemporary study of the refugees' ideas found that many thought the United States, in contrast to Germany, was a society with no culture and little respect for or interest in the fine arts and music. Instead, many imagined a society driven by business and money, a country dominated by large cities without nature, and criminals and swindlers controlling those cities. More positively, they believed that everything in America was up to the highest technological standards.<sup>43</sup>

What the refugees encountered in the United States greatly varied according to where they went. Most refugees first encountered New York, as they entered the United States there, and many subsequently settled there as well. New York was a bustling metropolis, populated by people from all corners of the world, including approximately six hundred thousand people of German descent. Over decades, a "German infrastructure" had emerged, including a German-language press, German and German Jewish Clubs, and German Jewish synagogues. For the approximately fifty thousand Jewish refugees who had just fled Nazi Germany, the presence of Germans was simultaneously comforting and disconcerting because, while it offered some comforts of home, some groups within this population had also taken on certain National Socialist ideas.

Thus, the German Jewish refugees did not move into the traditional German neighborhoods, such as Yorkville on Manhattan's Upper East Side, as previous German Jewish immigrants had done. Although the German atmosphere in Yorkville may have been soothing to the refugees in one way, because it had bakeries and restaurants providing familiar goods, it may also have reminded them too much of the Germany they had just fled. In the 1930s, these neighborhoods became increasingly Nazi-friendly, with many residents who were members of the Nazi German-American Bund. Therefore, the refugees tended to stay together by moving in great numbers to Washington Heights and to the Upper West Side, and to a lesser degree to Forrest Hills, Kew Gardens, and Jackson Heights in Queens.

In the heavily German Jewish neighborhoods of Manhattan, refugees opened their own bakeries, kosher butcher shops, service companies, and little businesses. Washington Heights eventually became the most German Jewish neighborhood in the United States, a fact some acknowledged by calling it the "Fourth Reich." Many features made it particularly attractive to refugees, including its large apartments—allowing them to sublet rooms to other refugees—affordable rent, nearby parks, and, increasingly, the presence of other German Jewish refugees. Washington Heights differed from the German and eastern European Jewish neighborhoods in New York City in providing a "traditional Jewish and small-town German atmosphere." Manhattan's Upper West Side, a community where German Jews lived in greater density, by contrast, was where "more 'sophisticated'" refugees created a neighborhood, which "became in some ways an inadequate ersatz extension of Weimar Berlin."<sup>44</sup> The company of fellow refugees in New York and their creation of a German Jewish refugee infrastructure made the city an attractive place to settle. The city reminded some of Berlin, and they described it as exciting, full of opportunities, and even as "the most beautiful city in the world."<sup>45</sup>

Most refugees established new lives in New York, yet others were not able to secure adequate employment, or found the large city isolating, too expensive, or just plain unlikeable. Rabbi Joachim Prinz, formerly a rabbi in Berlin who settled in Newark, New Jersey, also lamented that many refugees rarely got to see the "real America" because they spent most of their life in a Jewish enclave. Agencies like the National Refugee Service, an aid organization set up to assist European refugees, the American Committee for Christian Refugees, the Committee for Catholic Refugees from Germany, and the American Friends Service Committee took measures to decrease the concentration of European refugees in New York City and improve their American acculturation and employment. As during previous waves of immigration, representatives of these organizations set up resettlement programs and promoted the opportunities and advantages of living outside of New York in lectures they gave at social clubs and synagogues. These programs offered refugees different choices and allowed them to express a preference for a region. In many cases, this decision was made based on the prospective

employment situation. Ultimately, approximately fifteen thousand refugees were resettled through governmental and nongovernmental resettlement programs in communities of various sizes throughout the United States.

Other refugees left New York of their own accord, mostly when relatives or friends told them about good opportunities in the places they had moved to. As a result, refugees settled all across the United States, from rural areas in upstate New York and Georgia to the urban centers on the East Coast, the Midwest, and California. Depending on the time of arrival, they found Jewish communities of varying sizes and various numbers of other refugees. The American West Coast, and particularly Los Angeles, became a preferred destination for refugees, with L.A. becoming the second largest German Jewish refugee community after New York. While the American East and Midwest were places where the refugees, despite all that was foreign to them there, could find scenery, things, and people reminiscent of Germany, Los Angeles seemed fundamentally different from what they were used to.

Those who arrived in Los Angeles before World War II encountered “an idyllic garden city” that stretched across 451 square miles from the mountains to the Pacific. No building in the downtown area was higher than the twenty-six-story city hall, and the rest of the city was “an agglomerate of suburbs, loosely strung together,” in which apartment complexes and bungalows were surrounded by an abundance of green.<sup>46</sup> Many famous artists who had been forced to leave Germany moved there in the hopes of finding employment in the Hollywood film industry. Some of these famous émigrés were not too enthusiastic about the prospect of living in this city, which was so very different from what they had known in Europe. The writer Bertolt Brecht composed a poem about the “hellish” nature of Los Angeles where “very expensive” water is needed to keep the “flowers as big as trees” from wilting, where “great heaps of fruit . . . neither smell nor taste,” and “houses, built for happy people” stand empty “even when lived in.”<sup>47</sup> For Brecht and some of the other Weimar intellectuals, the beauty of the landscape, juxtaposed with the realities of persecution, exile, and war, may have “functioned like a Hollywood set that produced alienation because of its apparent perfection.”<sup>48</sup> Not all of the famous émigrés felt as Brecht did, that Los Angeles was such a dreadful place to live. Writers Thomas Mann and Lion Feuchtwanger, despite their pain at being in exile, came to enjoy their lives in their beautiful houses in the hills of Pacific Palisades, west of Los Angeles, and their regular walks by the ocean.

To be sure, their descriptions of relatively luxurious and idyllic lifestyles were exceptions in the émigré, exile, and refugee experience, but more ordinary refugees in Los Angeles also appreciated California’s pleasant features. Remembering her arrival in Los Angeles in 1939 after a brief stay in New York, Annelise Bunzel, who had come with her husband from Hamburg, remarked, for example, “It was just ideal . . . it was like a resort. The sun was shining, you had the smell of the orange blossoms when you were driving . . . it was really beautiful.”

Ann Ikenberg, who arrived with her husband that same year, also recounted, “Ach, we thought it was all so unbelievably beautiful! On Figueroa Street—real palm trees!”<sup>49</sup> The young refugee student Heinz Berggruen, writing in Berkeley in 1937, even found that the pleasant environment in Northern California ameliorated the difficulties of the refugee experience:

The beauty of the landscape, which with its harmonic diversity of forests, lakes, the ocean and the mountains often reminds one of the most beautiful parts of northern Italy or Switzerland, and the ideal climate—for nine months it does not rain at all, and at the same time it is never too hot or too dry—make the beginning also easier.<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to New York City, which appealed to many refugees because it offered features reminiscent of home, California represented something less conventional, as it evoked memories and imaginations of exotic places associated with holidays and recreation. In a community newsletter, refugees publicly praised California as a sort of promised land it was a privilege to live in, but they also recommended it privately in letters to family and friends because “the climate and the way of enjoying life have a great influence on everybody” even though “job hunting isn’t an easy business even here.”<sup>51</sup> Unlike New York and cities like Chicago or Cincinnati, Los Angeles had only a small number of previous German Jewish immigrants. German Jews had been the first Jews to settle in Los Angeles in the mid-nineteenth century and were influential in helping to establish urban infrastructures, yet by the 1930s, most of L.A.’s Jewish population was of eastern European descent.<sup>52</sup> A great number of them lived in Boyle Heights in eastern Los Angeles, to which newly arriving German Jewish refugees generally did not move. They tended to settle in close proximity to one another in the western and northern parts of the city and subsequently also in the San Fernando Valley, a then rural area in northern Los Angeles.<sup>53</sup> There was no particular German neighborhood in Los Angeles, though refugees would not have been comfortable moving into one. Even though people of German extraction across the United States were attracted to the Nazi ideology to varying degrees, Los Angeles became a hotbed of the Nazi German American Bund.<sup>54</sup>

New York and Los Angeles were, thus, the two largest communities where German Jewish refugees settled in the United States, yet they were starkly different—in terms of climate and urban structure, as well as socially and culturally. All refugees had to adjust to life in the new country and deal with the loss of the old, as well as the people they had left behind, but their experience could be very different depending on where in the United States they moved. In most places where refugees settled in greater numbers, they founded their own organizations, often initially called German Jewish Clubs. These were often the first local institutions newcomers communicated with after arriving in the United States, which initially assisted in the provision of very basic needs. When the

Bunzels arrived in Los Angeles, for example, they immediately had contact with the German Jewish Club, as was common, according to Annelise. Most German Jews who came to the city heard about the club, she explained, because “whoever you speak [*sic*] or you meet, they mention it.”<sup>55</sup> In addition, these institutions functioned as community-building spaces that represented the public image of the refugee community, gave voice to it, and actively pursued refugee interests.

The largest organization of this kind was the German Jewish Club in New York City (known as New World Club from 1940), with a membership of about two thousand. The second largest was the German Jewish Club, later the Jewish Club of 1933, Inc., in Los Angeles, but there were numerous others, including, for instance, the Social Club in Baltimore, the Central Club in Philadelphia, the New Home Club in Milwaukee, the Friendship Club in Pittsburgh, the New World Club in Atlanta, the New Life Club in San Diego, and the Jewish Unity Club in Newark. Depending on the size of the refugee community, some cities even had several congregations or social organizations—ranging from political groups to knitting circles and sports clubs, at times even with regional or generational subgroups.<sup>56</sup>

Memoirs written by German Jewish refugees, as well as scholarship on their experiences, testify to their attachment to Germany and the trauma that leaving this country behind constituted for them. Both the memoirs and the scholarship elucidate the struggles and difficulties German Jewish refugees faced in trying to build a new existence, and a new home, in the countries they emigrated to. Most frequently, such literature stresses the persistence of German traditions and habits among them, presenting a story in which the “Beiunskis”—those who earned their name because of their frequent lamentations that “bei uns [meaning at home in Germany] everything was better”—appear to have been the stereotypical representatives of that group.<sup>57</sup> However, the picture is more diverse. Having strong feelings for their former home and clinging to certain traditions did not mean that the refugees constantly looked back or completely oriented their lives toward Germany. Jewish refugees from Germany discussed, questioned, negotiated, and practiced how to act and represent themselves in the United States.<sup>58</sup>

## Notes

1. Benz, ed., *Das Exil der kleinen Leute*, 10.
2. Ibid. Also, this translation borrows from Benz’s English translation of the original German from his “Exile Studies: Development and Trends,” in *German-speaking Exiles in Ireland 1933–1945*, ed. Gisela Holfter, 21–35.
3. Gerson, “In Between States,” 184.

4. For scholarship on this topic, see, for example, Niewyk, *The Jews in Weimar Germany*; Kaplan, *Jewish Daily Life in Germany*; van Rahden, *Jews and Other Germans*; Benz, Paucker, and Pulzer, eds, *Jüdisches Leben in der Weimarer Republik*; Meyer and Brenner, eds, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, vols. 1–4; and the *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*.
5. Kaplan, “Changing Roles in Jewish Families,” 15. See also Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites*; van Rahden, *Jews and Other Germans*.
6. Lowenstein, *Frankfurt on the Hudson*, 35; see also Niewyk, *The Jews in Weimar Germany*; Nicosia, “Introduction,” in *Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, ed. Nicosia and Scrase, 8.
7. See Niewyk, *The Jews in Weimar Germany*, 33. Some historians state that refugee scholars—Laqueur was one of them—were motivated to write about significant achievements in order to illustrate Jews’ integration in German life; see Hermand, “Juden in der Kultur der Weimarer Republik,” in *Juden in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Grab and Schoeps, 9. Also see Lowenstein, “Jewish Participation in German Culture,” in *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, ed. Meyer and Brenner, vol. 3, 305–36; Mendes-Flohr, “Between Germanism and Judaism, Christians and Jews” and “Jews within German Culture,” in *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, vol. 4, 157–94; Gay, *Weimar Culture*.
8. Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture*, 2.
9. See Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture*; and Brenner and Penslar, *In Search of Jewish Community*. For a look beyond the bourgeoisie and an exploration of the appeal Jewish themes had to a wider non-Jewish community, see Jelavich, “Popular Entertainment and Mass Media,” in *The German-Jewish Experience Revisited*, ed. Aschheim and Liska, 103–16.
10. In what follows, I merely outline certain steps in this process. For a detailed history, see, for example, Friedländer, *The Years of Persecution*. See also Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*.
11. Nicosia, “Introduction,” 6.
12. Kaplan, “Changing Roles,” 21.
13. There is extensive literature on this process of discrimination and exclusion. For a short list of measures, see Nicosia, “Introduction,” 4–6.
14. Nicosia “Introduction,” 5–6; Strauss, *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period in the U.S.A.*, vol. 6, *Essays on the History, Persecution, and Emigration of German Jews*, 190.
15. Nicosia, “Introduction,” 7.
16. For views on emigration among German Jewry, see Jünger, *Jahre der Ungewissheit*.
17. Theja Sommer, who would eventually emigrate to Los Angeles, said in an interview, for example, “We absolutely did not have hatred of Germans. During the time that we were still in Germany, we had some very good experiences with some Germans who were very nice. I even worried that they might say things that would put them in danger with the Nazis! The problem was Hitler and the group that supported his ideas, not among the regular people. Among the people that we knew in Germany, I don’t know anybody toward who we would have any personal resentment.” In Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 158.
18. Charlotte Hamburger writes this in her memoirs, cited by Kaplan, “Changing Roles,” 29.
19. See Kaplan, “Changing Roles.”
20. Kaplan, “Changing Roles,” 29–30.
21. *Ibid.*, 25–26.
22. *Ibid.*, 27.
23. *Ibid.*, 29.
24. Lavsky, “The Impact of 1938,” in “*Wer bleibt, opfert seine Jahre*,” ed. Heim, Meyer, and Nicosia, 209.
25. Heim, Meyer, and Nicosia, eds, “*Wer bleibt, opfert seine Jahre*,” 11; Kirk, *Nazi Germany*, 184.
26. Heim, Meyer, and Nicosia, eds, “*Wer bleibt, opfert seine Jahre*,” 10.
27. See Lavsky, “The Impact of 1938,” 211.
28. Those are the words of one refugee, Ann Ikenberg, in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, xxiv.

29. Ibid.
30. For details on immigration restrictions for German Jewish refugees, see, for example, Wyman, *Paper Walls*; Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*; Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry*.
31. Interview Kurt Herrmann.
32. For more detail on the situation in occupied countries, see Caestecker, “Jewish Refugee Aid Organizations,” in “*Wer bleibt, opfert seine Jahre*,” 166–91.
33. Interview Marianne Barbanell.
34. On the first deportations, see Löw, “Die frühen Deportationen,” in “*Wer bleibt, opfert seine Jahre*,” 59–76.
35. Herbert A. Strauss, “Jewish Emigration from Germany-Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (I),” 318.
36. The numbers include Jews from annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia. Strauss, *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period in the U.S.A.*, vol. 6, 186–244. Jews also ended up, at least temporarily, in more exotic regions of the world, such as India and Iran, but also the Soviet Union. See Grossmann, *Wege in die Fremde*, 44–60; Franz, “*Gateway India: Deutschsprachiges Exil*.”
37. For more detail, see Falk, *The German Jews in America*, 63–66.
38. Zucker, “American Immigration Policy in the 1930s,” in *Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Liberal European States*, ed. Caestecker and Moore, 154.
39. Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry*.
40. This paragraph is cited from my article “German Jewish ‘Enemy Aliens’ in the United States during the Second World War,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* (Spring 2017).
41. Davie, *Refugees in America*, 48.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 49.
44. Grossmann, “German Jews as Provincial Cosmopolitans,” 158, 165.
45. Davie, *Refugees in America*, 49.
46. Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific*, 10; Kipen and Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration, *Los Angeles in the 1930s*, 4, 6.
47. Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific*, 79, excerpt from Brecht’s poem.
48. Ibid., 11.
49. Interview Annelise Bunzel; Interview with Ann Ikenberg, in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 101.
50. Translation mine. H. Berggruen, “Als Student in Kalifornien, Berkeley, Mitte Mai 1937,” in *Heimat und Exil*, 185.
51. Letter from Felix Guggenheim to Frederick A. Praeger (25 August 1941), Felix Guggenheim Papers, Box 32, USC Libraries, cited from Ullmann, “Felix Guggenheim (1904–1976),” in *Immigrant Entrepreneurship*, ed. R. Daniel Wadhvani, <https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=114>.
52. Wilson, ed., *Jews in the Los Angeles Mosaic*; Vorspan and Gardner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles*; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr, eds, *Ethnic Los Angeles*, 52.
53. Interview Annelise Bunzel. For more, see Schenderlein, “German Jewish Refugees in Los Angeles.”
54. See Ross, *Hitler in Los Angeles*.
55. Interview Annelise Bunzel.
56. List of German-Jewish refugee congregations and organizations, Research Foundation for Jewish Immigration, circa 1975, AR 6638 (Leo Baeck Institute (LBI), <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1642195>).
57. Anderson, “Introduction,” in *Hitler’s Exiles*, 5; Gay, “Moritz Fröhlich—Morris Gay,” 8.
58. Gerson, “In Between States,” 184. I concur with Atina Grossmann’s characterizations of the refugees in her article “German Jews as Provincial Cosmopolitans,” 157–68.

*Chapter 2*

## AMERICANIZATION BEFORE 1941



The early years of the refugees' emigration experience were very much shaped by their memories of life prior to the Nazi onslaught, and they carried the memories of persecution and leaving Germany, family, and friends behind. In addition, they were acutely aware of the Nazi state's actions after they had arrived in the United States in the late 1930s and early 1940s. For the vast majority of the refugees, then, these later experiences resulted in a very strong notion that a return to Germany could not be in their future. Building new lives in the United States became their most important concern.

The refugees had to balance individual and communal efforts to construct themselves as "valuable Americans" with their German Jewish identities. Negotiations about what their Americanization should entail, and especially how much attachment to Germany they should keep, both as Jews from Germany and as new Americans, were shaped by the larger political situation in the United States and Europe. For many German Jewish refugees, Americanization involved not only a pragmatic effort to function in American society but also a desire to symbolically detach themselves from Germany. Almost all pragmatic decisions made to Americanize were entangled in symbolic meanings surrounding Germany and were scrutinized by the refugees themselves, particularly the organized Jewish refugee community. In some sense, the refugee community hoped that Americanization could lift the burden of their difficult German Jewish past and serve as a panacea to the problems of being German Jewish refugees.

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Notes from this chapter begin on page 46.



## The Political Climate in the United States

In 1938–1939, at the height of the influx of German Jewish refugees to the United States, there was considerable anti-immigration and anti-Semitic sentiment. When it seemed apparent that Roosevelt’s New Deal programs had failed to bring the nation out of the depression, propaganda by anti-immigration and anti-Semitic groups (there were over one hundred operating in the United States, the most influential ones led by fundamentalist Christian leaders) blamed Jews for the economic problems and agitated against the arrival of Jewish immigrants.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Catholic priest Charles E. Coughlin, who led the “National Union for Social Justice and the Christian Front,” declared that “Communist Jews” were responsible for the economic problems. An influx of Jewish immigrants, many of whom were professionals and skilled workers, would thus worsen the situation in an already distressed job market.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in November 1938, Coughlin’s speeches were regularly broadcast on forty-seven radio stations and reached more than three and a half million listeners. He also published the magazine *Social Justice*, with a circulation of one million copies sold in every major U.S. city—evidence that anti-Semitism increasingly found adherents in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

American Jews responded to this anti-immigrant incitement in a variety of ways, from open protest to reservation and accommodation. The American Jewish Committee, whose members and followers were mostly Jews of German extraction who had been in the country since before the 1880s, had historically taken a position of accommodation within American society. In response to the refugee crisis, the committee focused its efforts on working behind the scenes, trying to convince important individuals in political office to improve immigration policies for Jewish refugees from Europe. Open protest and agitation on behalf of Jews in Europe, they believed, would only worsen U.S. anti-Semitism. The American Jewish Congress, on the other hand, dominated by more recent eastern European immigrants, did not shy away from open protest to reach the same goal. One measure intended to weaken the German state was the Congress’s participation in organizing and coordinating a boycott movement targeting German products and services.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, the American Jewish community’s efforts to influence government policy with a view to Germany’s and Europe’s Jews and refugees were unsuccessful. The division of the community has often been cited as a reason for this failure, but American Jews accounted for only about 3 percent of American voters, so their influence was naturally limited. However, different U.S. organizations assisted Jews from Germany who had made it into the country, such as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and the National Council of Jewish Women.

Non-Jewish organizations also supported the new arrivals and worked against nativist, anti-Semitic, and anti-immigrant groups. Organizations like

the Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees, the Committee for Catholic Refugees, and even Chambers of Commerce or Better Business Bureaus in various cities published statistical information about the refugees to rebut the notions of anti-immigrant agitators and to appease public opinion.<sup>5</sup> The American Friends Service Committee, for example, a Quaker organization, printed 250 thousand copies of a pamphlet entitled *Refugee Facts*, which were widely circulated. Protestant clergy received a hundred thousand of these, and the rest went to writers, editors, congressmen, and public officials. In addition, more than a hundred newspapers covered the publication in one way or another.<sup>6</sup>

Besides addressing concerns over the sheer number of immigrants, the writers of the *Refugee Facts* also commented on refugees' ethnic and religious identity. Utilizing the fact that certain Americans viewed Germans historically as more desirable immigrants than Jews, they presented the refugees as Germans, playing down their Jewishness while stressing their German, and even Christian, identity. Explaining that Nazi racial laws defined anybody who "has even as little as 25 percent Jewish blood in his veins" as a Jew, regardless of his or her professed religion, the pamphlet stressed that many had been "Christian for generations."<sup>7</sup> By downplaying the religiosity of the refugees and highlighting their high skill and educational level, the pamphlet's creators aimed to differentiate these Jewish refugees from Jewish immigrants who had arrived in previous immigration waves from the shtetls and towns of eastern Europe—popular targets of anti-foreigner agitation portraying them as poor, unskilled, and deeply (and mysteriously) religious. Whereas the pamphlet had been written to fight negative perceptions of the refugees, its content was not only exaggerated but also at least passively anti-Semitic in its pandering to the anti-Semitism of its audience. Even so, the German Jewish *Aufbau* ignored its implied distaste for Jews, welcoming the pamphlet without any objection to its approach. Under the headline "Spread the Truth!" it published a small article recommending that refugees be informed about it and distribute it.<sup>8</sup>

This is somewhat surprising, considering that the refugees had experienced years of anti-Semitism, deprivation of German citizenship rights, and exclusion from non-Jewish German society. However, the brochure's focus on their Germanness might not have seemed that offensive to the refugees. The majority of Germany's Jews had understood themselves to be Germans first until the Nazis denied them that identity. On the other hand, it might have seemed wise, given the anti-Semitism in the United States, for anybody who wanted to advocate for them, or they for themselves, to emphasize their Germanness over their Jewishness, even though this disregarded their complicated relationship to this part of their identity.

## Americanization in Theory and Practice

Acutely aware that they were not “especially welcome,” as one refugee put it, the refugees also tried to craft an image of themselves in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Instead of focusing on their German identity, however, they focused on Americanization, the process of becoming adjusted and able to function in American life. For the majority of refugees, this was the most important goal, and the term Americanization appeared in virtually all contexts related to them.

The concept of Americanization dates back to about 1880, when some native-born Americans became alarmed by and responded to a great influx of immigrants. Americanization initiatives were generally geared to transforming immigrants into “good Americans” by teaching them English and educating them about the country’s history, politics, economy, laws, customs, and ways of life. Organized Americanization efforts remained particularly strong until the passage of the National Origins Act of 1924, which restricted the immigration of eastern and southern Europeans and essentially stopped that of Asians.<sup>10</sup> Americanization was inseparable from discriminatory nativist views about cultural and racial superiority. For American Jews during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sponsoring Americanization programs for new Jewish immigrants was a response to such views in the hope such programs would take away the “ammunition the critics of the Jews could use against them.”<sup>11</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s, the concept and educational practice of Americanization was transformed to reflect a more culturally broad and pluralistic understanding of America. Instead of asking immigrants to completely abandon their culture and traditions, intellectuals and educators then emphasized the diversity of cultures in the United States and the idea that some immigrants’ traits could contribute positively to the country.<sup>12</sup>

German Jewish refugees promoted and discussed Americanization in their own organizations. Some of these had been founded by previous German Jewish immigrants for social and cultural purposes; however, when refugees from Nazi Germany began arriving, these older organizations shifted their attention to helping the newcomers get by without any public support.<sup>13</sup> This was the case with the New York German Jewish Club, which Jewish veterans who had fought for Germany in World War I founded in 1924 after emigrating to the United States. They intended for the club to be a “confession of faith in German culture.”<sup>14</sup> Yet as more and more German Jewish refugees entered New York in the 1930s and 1940s, many of whom joined the German Jewish Club, it changed its primary mission because members realized that its typical social and cultural activities would not serve the newcomers’ needs effectively.

To help refugees become socially and culturally integrated into American life, the club began publishing a monthly bulletin called *Aufbau* (Reconstruction) in 1934, soon the most important refugee newspaper in the United States and

everywhere else Jews from German-speaking Europe had taken refuge. The newspaper included advice on adjusting to the United States—from learning English and finding employment and accommodation to becoming familiar with American politics and culture. Simultaneously, it served as a forum that helped recreate a social and cultural environment close to what refugees had known in their home country. It became an important outlet for exiled, German-speaking writers and intellectuals publishing on matters of current debate and from their newly emerging works. The club itself also offered a cultural program of theater performances, literature readings, and music recitals that catered to its largely middle-class members. While *Aufbau* became an essential medium of Americanization throughout the United States, German Jewish refugee organizations across the country modeled much of their programs on the New York club.

The Los Angeles German Jewish Club became the country's second largest. Three German Jews who had come to the city in the 1920s founded the organization in 1934 because they wanted to help newly arriving refugees. Refugees themselves soon joined, quickly occupying leadership or coordinating positions. The club's primary goal, stated in its Articles of Incorporation, was to promote "a complete program of Americanization."<sup>15</sup> This included club assistance "in learning about the United States, its principles of government, its laws, its institutions, and its customs," as well as "in vocational guidance . . . [and] cultural and social activities" to assist members "in becoming valuable American citizens."<sup>16</sup>

The club publicized this goal within the refugee community and also to the broader public to forestall negative reactions toward their group in their publications, such as in the five-year anniversary edition of *Neue Welt* (New World), the club's press organ. The club sent the special edition to its more than 850 members, and also to at least 400 nonmembers and organizations, including nonimmigrants, and non-Jews.<sup>17</sup> The idea conveyed in the newsletter's first few pages was that the refugees were sincerely grateful for having been allowed into the country and wished to become good American citizens. While most of the publication was in German, the first pages were in English and contained articles with which refugees presented themselves as one group among many in a country built by immigrants. By calling themselves immigrants without drawing attention to their specific background and refugee experience, and likening their story to that of many others who had found a haven in United States from "persecution, humiliation and demoralization" before them, they sought to remind native-born Americans of their own roots.<sup>18</sup> Restrictive U.S. immigration policies and negative sentiments about refugees went unmentioned. Rather, a notion of gratitude prevailed, with the refugees portraying Americanization as their duty, so that they would "leave no stone unturned in accomplishing this goal."<sup>19</sup> One article proclaimed, "If we succeed then we have only paid a small debt of gratitude toward the country which has always given refuge and protection to the

persecuted and oppressed.”<sup>20</sup> This sort of public image-making was most characteristic of the refugees’ public representation at this time.

Nevertheless, Americanization was, above all, a practical necessity, as life in the United States depended on one’s ability to function in the American environment. Unlike some famous intellectual or political exiles, most refugees could not foresee returning to Germany, even if some may have wished to. Their experiences of gradual and violent exclusion from all areas of life in Germany, which they had truly considered their home, made it difficult for them to imagine that they ever would or could return. Thus, the majority, having overcome the various immigration hurdles, saw life in the United States as their most feasible future option. This made Americanization primarily a strongly desired pragmatic goal.

Learning English was their most immediate need. While some cities had enough German infrastructure for refugees to get by using German, some segments of the German-American community embraced Hitler’s ideology. One refugee remarked that when he arrived in Los Angeles in 1940, “every German, former German, who was [t]here, was more or less a Nazi” and that the relationship between the “old German Americans” and the refugees was troublesome.<sup>21</sup> Other refugees recalled positive encounters with German Americans since they “felt much more familiar with them than . . . with strange Americans!”<sup>22</sup> In any case, existing German-language infrastructures were not very extensive in the United States because German immigrants tended to adapt and blend in quickly, and refugees often wished to avoid Germans anyway.

Some refugees had learned basic English in high school or had taken intensive courses in preparation for emigration. Nevertheless, most of them did not know English well enough to work in more than menial jobs.<sup>23</sup> The refugee clubs frequently helped refugees learn English, sometimes via affiliated teachers and commonly via their publications, which included vocabulary for everyday situations, such as shopping, and quizzes allowing readers to test their skills.<sup>24</sup> Younger refugees, in particular, were generally successful at improving quickly, and some even strove to eliminate their foreign accents.<sup>25</sup> Language courses were also offered through municipal adult education programs, some of which were specifically geared to their needs. One administrator in New York City described these refugees as possessing “rather high educational and cultural attainments,” so lessons treated topics like “art, music, literature, government, and sociological problems,” and still other courses catered to the needs of professional groups “of physicians . . . lawyers, musicians, journalists, engineers, and dentists.”<sup>26</sup>

Securing employment was, of course, a clear priority for the refugees, preferably in the profession they had practiced in Germany. Because Nazi legislation had barred many Jews from working in their original professions and emigration was often a lengthy process, some refugees had not had a regular work life for many months. Importantly, most refugees did not have considerable financial resources. They were largely a middle-class group of professionals, businesspeople,

and skilled artisans. Data from the Immigration and Naturalization Service reveals that the majority of immigrants (including non-German and non-Jewish) who arrived between 1933 and 1944 were merchants, physicians, professors and teachers, technical engineers, clergy, lawyers, scientists, musicians, and other professionals.<sup>27</sup> However, immigrants' relatively high qualifications and specializations made it harder for them to obtain employment in their *métier*, and many never did.

Expertise in English and specialized English terminology was just one variable in their attempt to reconstruct their professional lives. Many U.S. states had legal and licensing restrictions and also required U.S. citizenship or at least a declaration of intention to become a citizen for several professions. California required U.S. citizenship for attorneys, for example. To work as an accountant (C.P.A.), registered nurse, or teacher in California, one had to present a declaration of intention or application for citizenship.<sup>28</sup> Thus, once they had acquired the necessary English proficiency, many immigrants still initially had to work in menial jobs, becoming gardeners, dishwashers, or factory workers, to begin anew in the United States.<sup>29</sup>

One great concern Americans had about the refugees was that they would take away jobs in a depressed job market. Thus, the refugee community and national American immigrant aid organizations undertook concerted efforts to help the newcomers secure employment. Chief employment agencies for refugees were associated with the National Refugee Service and such organizations as the American Friends Service Committee and the American Committee for Christian Refugees.<sup>30</sup> In addition, other organizations assisted specific professional groups.<sup>31</sup> Intellectuals and scholars could seek help from the American Committee for Émigré Scholars, for example, while physicians could turn to the National Committee for Resettlement of Foreign Physicians. Lawyers were in the most difficult position when seeking to continue working in the legal profession, but they received assistance from the American Committee for the Guidance of Professional Personnel. In certain cases, the local immigrant and refugee organizations set up employment services themselves and worked closely with local agencies, such as the Jewish Employment Bureau or the National Council for Jewish Women.<sup>32</sup> Also, refugees' needs created jobs for others. In Los Angeles, for example, club members ran several driving schools since the city's large size made it necessary for most people to own a car.<sup>33</sup> In many other destinations with greater numbers of refugees, people became landlords, renting out rooms in their apartments to the new arrivals, sometimes even including "German" or kosher meal service.

Women typically found employment before their husbands, usually in domestic service as maids, janitors, chefs, tailors, or nurses. Ann Ikenberg, for example, immediately got a job through the Beverly Hills Opportunity Placement Office upon arriving in Los Angeles in 1939. She had been a medical student in Berlin

and started working in Los Angeles as a private home nurse for the mother of a Superior Court judge. She had taken that particular job hoping the judge could help secure work for her husband Fred, who had been a judge in Berlin. Nothing came of it though, and it took another nine months before Fred found a steady job.<sup>34</sup> Unlike Ann Ikenberg, many of the women in this immigrant group had never worked before and became wage earners for the first time in America. While this shift may have been hard for some of them, most seemed to have adapted quickly.<sup>35</sup>

The refugee press contained many stories about refugees' hardship in their first years in the United States and difficulties making a living, but also some about refugees' success. While most refugees could not return to their former professions, often because they were too old and could not afford to study for required exams, many succeeded in transitioning to other types of employment. Many former lawyers and judges, for example, became successful accountants. Lothar Rosenthal from the Los Angeles Club said that most people climbed the career ladder quickly, even if they started in menial jobs. For example, he remembered a man who started working at a large manufacturing firm as a janitor but eventually became its vice president.<sup>36</sup> Such success stories were not only important for the refugees personally, especially in motivating those who were struggling, but also to demonstrate to the American public that their group was "not a liability, but actually an asset to the American labor market"<sup>37</sup>

Refugees who apparently lacked motivation to Americanize drew criticism from others in the community, who felt that such behavior compromised the group's image and fed anti-immigrant sentiment. Whereas learning English and learning about the United States were obvious pragmatic tasks, there was much discussion among the refugees about the degree to which Americanization was to be realized, especially in relation to language and culture more generally. These debates were intrinsically connected to questions of how much "Germanness" it was acceptable for them to retain—both as Jews from Germany and as prospective, or new, Americans. Thus, the refugees debated whether and when it was adequate to still use the German language, enjoy German culture, and communicate with people—Jews and non-Jews—still in Germany. These questions were important for refugees for individual moral and emotional reasons and vis-à-vis a Jewish community and American society.

## German Language

A refugee's relationship to the German language and German literature, theater, and art differed individually, depending on factors such as age, social class—prior to and after one's arrival in the United States—and experiences in Germany. Some refugees decided they no longer wanted to use German, making quick

mastery of English essential. For example, Max Bodenheimer recalled, “My mother, in particular, wanted to put the past behind her . . . . There was a rule in our house: we were not permitted to talk any German.”<sup>38</sup> Other refugees also abstained from reading publications in German. A woman who settled in Cincinnati recounted this in an interview: “My husband and I spoke English to each other. We had such [negative] feelings against Germany, against German culture, against German literature. I never even wanted to read German books, German newspapers. Many German Jews, of course, kept on reading the *Aufbau* and so on. I never wanted any part of it.”<sup>39</sup> Those who made that cut were much less likely to join one of the refugee organizations, which, while promoting the use of English, still ran cultural programs predominantly based on German.

Whether to speak German in the home was a personal, private decision, but it was frowned upon to speak the language in public, as several articles and letters to *Aufbau* document. One concerned refugee wrote in his (German) letter, for instance, that it was “completely absurd and not justifiable” for refugees who knew English to use German in public. He found it “truly shameful how much people sin in this regard.” He believed it was a matter of “tactfulness” to use the “language of the country,” at least in public. Most important, he warned that speaking German was a “sign of lacking the will to integrate” and that it would “put in jeopardy the friendly attitude that is being shown to us.”<sup>40</sup> Such concern over the use of German in public grew more serious when the crisis in Europe developed into war in September 1939.

Then, the U.S. government, which had watched European developments initially with distant concern, realized the danger Hitler’s regime could pose to the free world. Fears of fifth columnists, spies, and saboteurs for the Nazis (and for the Communists, for that matter) abounded.<sup>41</sup> The State Department, the White House, and many Americans believed that such persons could have entered the country in the recent wave of immigrants.<sup>42</sup> Thus, using German in public could have potentially led to refugees being mistakenly identified as Nazis or Nazi sympathizers.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, the refugee press advised newcomers to refrain from speaking German in public. The 17 May 1940 issue of *Aufbau* includes this urgent call:

Do not speak German on the street, and if you cannot speak enough English, speak quietly at least! Avoid loud acclamations, building of crowds when leaving eateries, standing about in front of entries! Behave as unobtrusively as it is customary in this country! It is sad that this still has to be said but there are still people who do not want to listen. Do help to bring such people to reason, in the interest of all new immigrants!<sup>44</sup>

Avoiding the use of German in public was here construed as demonstrating loyalty, but the language issue was, in fact, more complex. *Aufbau*’s appeal received both applause and criticism from the readership. A regular *Aufbau* contributor



highlighted that many refugees had lost everything: their health, families, profession, homes, and worldly possessions.<sup>45</sup> In his view, these people—often elderly but also younger ones who had experienced much tragedy in their lives—had no hope for a better future, and some even thought of suicide. After all they had gone through, the author wrote, they lacked the strength, energy, and capacity to learn and engage in new things. He continued:

In many cases, these people have their only real existing relationships with the past. They lost everything but their five senses! Do we have, does anybody have, the right to rob them of three of these senses, to leave them blind, deaf, and mute, by prohibiting them from using the only language they know, from using the only means they have that connects them to the outer world?<sup>46</sup>

How much refugees used German in everyday life also depended heavily on emotional factors, something community spokespeople understood and frequently addressed. In this context, the journalist and editor of *Aufbau*, Manfred Georg, himself a Jewish refugee, warned against the “tendency to ban the German language completely from one’s consciousness and to treat it, as it were, for all intents and purposes as an enemy language [*Feindessprache*].”<sup>47</sup> He understood the motivation behind the warnings—the hatred toward Germans who had so terribly mistreated Jews and the resulting feeling of revenge refugees might have felt—but he believed one should not equate the Nazis with German: “Hitler’s language is not the German language, as little as the German people are synonymous with the clique of murderers that is dwelling in Wilhelmstrasse right now.”<sup>48</sup>

Georg was not alone in distinguishing between the German people and Nazis. Many non-Jewish German émigrés shared this opinion of the Nazis, with Thomas Mann perhaps being the most famous and outspoken of them.<sup>49</sup> Jewish refugees—frequently people who had been politically active in Germany and had fought together with non-Jewish Germans against the Nazis—also drew this distinction. Appealing to this spirit of the fight against the Nazis, Georg wrote that abandoning the German language would mean giving up “the most effective tool in this fight. It would also mean committing treason against all of our German friends who, in their fight against Hitler, have already paid with their lives and their health, and against the hundreds of thousands of determined fighters who will yet bleed on the altar of the true Germany.”<sup>50</sup>

The depiction of the German language—and culture—as a bond between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans engaged in a common fight against the Nazis was not unusual. It was, for example, frequently evoked by the German American Cultural Association (Deutsch Amerikanischer Kultur Verband, DAKV), one of the few German American organizations outspokenly opposed to Nazism and anti-Semitism.<sup>51</sup>

Some German Jews seem to have even viewed knowledge of German language and culture as something that distinguished them from German Americans who adhered to Nazi ideology. Two small examples from the New York community in the mid-1930s demonstrate this: *Aufbau* journalists were closely monitoring the reporting of the *New York Staatszeitung* and the activities of German-American organizations in New York City, both of which increasingly developed Nazi tendencies. A review of a German play published in the *Staatszeitung* received much criticism from an *Aufbau* reporter who believed the bad review resulted from the *Staatszeitung* journalist's—likely an admirer of the New Germany—misunderstanding the play because he lacked knowledge of German culture.<sup>52</sup> Another article denouncing the Nazi efforts of New York City's German Americans mocked them for their poor German language skills in a telegram they had sent to Hitler.<sup>53</sup> At least in 1936, then, some refugees were clearly proud of their German cultural knowledge and determined not to leave the representation of German culture to Nazis. The differentiation between pre-Nazi German culture and the Third Reich made it possible for German Jews to keep practicing German culture.

The arguments for why it was necessary and useful to continue to use German certainly made sense to some refugees. But how could using German be compatible with Americanization, which the refugee organizations emphatically propagated? Georg understood the role that using German played in discussions about Americanization, but he did not believe Americanization should mean giving up German entirely. In fact, he criticized this particular understanding of Americanization by referring to the experience of German Jews highly integrated in German society who were then violently cast out within just a few years. Those refugees who thought it necessary to completely negate and abandon everything German to become American citizens, he argued, should know from experience that “arrogant ingratiating at all cost” or “hyper-assimilation” could have detrimental consequences. Who could guarantee that this would not repeat itself in the United States?<sup>54</sup>

This broader issue about Jews living in a majority non-Jewish society and debates about assimilation and Jewish nationalism preoccupied many at the time. Other articles and readers' opinion pieces in the refugee press echoed Georg's preference for gradual and selective Americanization.

## Culture

The preference for selective and gradual Americanization was particularly widespread among refugees concerned about whether it was still acceptable to feel attached to and practice German culture. This accorded with the general opinion of contemporary American immigration theorists and practitioners, who

viewed immigrants' native culture as valuable. Instead of promoting "mechanical uniformity,"<sup>55</sup> institutional Americanization programs were modified in the 1920s and directed toward educating immigrants about American life and institutions by using the immigrants' knowledge and experiences from their home countries. Immigrants were encouraged to retain their own traditions and customs—for example, celebrating their own native holidays as well as American ones.<sup>56</sup> Instead of abandoning native music, literature, philosophy, and art, one sociologist argued for "the conservation of these creative instincts as a means of accelerating progress and increasing the variability and creative powers of the nation."<sup>57</sup> In this sense, Leopold Jessner, a famous theater producer and director from Berlin who was president of the German Jewish Club in Los Angeles in 1940, communicated to his refugee readership that "America does not expect uncurbed assimilation of her citizens" but rather finds the new and "different souls" to be an "enrichment."<sup>58</sup>

Refugee organizations, which regarded understanding American culture as a vital precondition for celebrating German culture and also as a necessity for refugees to make a cultural contribution to the new country, assisted newcomers in becoming familiar with American life and culture. They published articles on American history, particularly on local city histories, offered trips and walking tours to familiarize refugees with their new environment and "the American Way," and hosted lectures on the country's political system, and even how to dress and cook "like an American."<sup>59</sup>

The Los Angeles Club publication praised the quality and importance of such lectures but also regretted that audience size was very small.<sup>60</sup> While poor attendance could have resulted from lack of interest, it seems more likely that many club members were unable to participate because they were busy making a living.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, in Los Angeles, events with more of an entertainment character, often featuring concerts, plays, or literary readings—programs more akin to what members were used to in Germany—seemed better attended. Club member John Baer recalled that the Los Angeles Club aimed to complement members' integration into American life with this kind of cultural program that "lifted their spirits."<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the gist of several different *Aufbau* articles was that practicing and enjoying German culture was valuable and benefited refugees in America because it made them feel less alienated than they might have in their new environment, providing them with a certain security and thus supporting their wellbeing.<sup>63</sup>

While most refugees believed that practicing German culture was acceptable from the perspective of becoming a good American, another discussion addressed the question of whether it was still acceptable—and why it was still enjoyable—from the perspective of being a good Jew. A letter to the editor that appeared in *Aufbau* in early 1940 declared German culture to be "as dead as that of the old Greeks and Romans." The author believed that making this clear to the world should be the task of every cultured human being [*Kulturmensch*] and

“certainly every Jew who escaped German barbarism . . . tirelessly and until the last breath.”<sup>64</sup>

While many Jewish refugees understandably aimed to abandon German language and culture after escaping Germany, it was very difficult, in reality, for them to give up what they had known all their lives. Moreover, many refugees, as noted above, felt that the culture of American society was lacking compared to Germany, particularly concerning fine arts and music.<sup>65</sup> Besides matters of familiarity and taste, a notion of a certain universal superiority of German culture also accounted for the topic’s importance. Conceding this, *Aufbau* reporter and president of the New York German Jewish Club Wilfred Hülse believed it was not necessary for Jews to give up their attachment to German culture because German culture could not simply be identified with what the Nazis were doing. Rather, he explained, “the German language and German culture have produced timeless and supranational [*übernational*] values, which no people on earth can live without, and which are not the possession of a single people’s community [*Volksgemeinschaft*], but of the human community of cultures [*Kulturgemeinschaft*].” For this reason, he said, “we as Jews have full rights to participate in German culture [*Kulturgut*].”<sup>66</sup>

It is interesting that Hülse believed there was a distinct German culture that Jews participated in; it seemed to have existed separate from a specific German Jewish culture. In these discussions, the refugee press rarely differentiated between German and German Jewish culture. When refugees spoke about German culture in the 1930s and 1940s, they generally meant all the cultural elements they grew up with and experienced in Germany, which included more specifically Jewish elements for some people than for others.

Hülse’s pieces expressed his personal opinion, as he repeatedly emphasized, but as a regular *Aufbau* columnist and president of the New York New World Club, he was a leading figure with many connections in the refugee community and extensive firsthand knowledge of it. His views on German culture represent an apparent consensus reached in the early 1940s within large circles of the organized refugee community. While discussions about the role of German culture in Americanization were frequent among refugees in the 1930s, they trailed off in the 1940s. Even as refugees made ever greater efforts to disassociate themselves from Germany after the war began—such as the organizations’ name changes (discussed below) and more English-language articles in the refugee press—refugee organizations continued to devote a lot of energy to activities for the practice of German culture. While some refugees certainly did not approve of this and let go of their attachments to German culture, such refugees were not likely to join these organizations.<sup>67</sup>

Within these organizations, German cultural events frequently took on a dimension that was indeed antithetical to Nazi culture. Los Angeles was unique in this regard because of the great number of famous German-speaking artists

and intellectuals who found refuge there—more than thirty well-known writers alone—and also a welcoming audience of other refugees.<sup>68</sup> Weimar culture continued to flourish and develop there; Thomas Mann, Bruno Frank, and Lion Feuchtwanger were among the writers frequently appearing at the local German Jewish Club to read from their works.<sup>69</sup> Annelise Bunzel lists the Schoenfeld Trio, Andre Previn, Jakob Gimpel, Victor and Frederick Hollander, and Ernst Toch among the famous musicians who played for the Jewish Club.<sup>70</sup> One famous cabaret artist from Berlin was Eric Lowinsky, known as Elow. After the Nazis closed his *Kabarett der Namenlosen* (Cabaret of the Nameless) and barred him from performing and writing, he left Germany in 1939 and came to Los Angeles.<sup>71</sup> There, he became a member of the Jewish Club and was involved in organizing cultural events, especially cabaret-type programs. Other members, such as Reinhard A. Braun, who founded the *Berlin Kabarett am Abend* (Cabaret at Night), also successfully staged theater productions in Los Angeles. As head of the Cultural Committee of the German Jewish Club in 1939, he supported the establishment of the Theatre of the Refugees, also called *Tribüne* (or the *Tribune*).<sup>72</sup> The clubs' press outlets also significantly contributed to the immigrants' cultural and intellectual life. Besides reviews of concerts and lectures, the *Neue Welt/New World* and later the *Westküste*, the West Coast edition of *Aufbau*, featured book reviews, poems, and contemplations by intellectuals and writers such as Berthold Viertel and Ludwig Marcuse.<sup>73</sup> The richness and quality of cultural events in Los Angeles was rivaled only by what was happening in the German Jewish Club in New York City. However, reviews of such events and also publications by many of the famous exiled authors in *Aufbau* reached interested readers all over the United States, connecting the community.

Refugees could enjoy the cultural productions of anti-Nazi, German-speaking exiles as a form of German culture they had consumed before emigration that did not oppose their own identity as Jewish refugees. In fact, Siegfried Bernstein, one of the first presidents of the Los Angeles organization, observed in this regard that “holding on to German-Jewishness does not separate us from what connects us with other Jews in America.”<sup>74</sup> While offering German cultural events, most of the refugee clubs also aimed to include Jewish culture in their cultural program and to raise interest in specifically Jewish issues among their members.<sup>75</sup> They organized events to educate newcomers on the history of American Jewry, for instance. Rabbis, whether refugees themselves, like Joachim Prinz in New Jersey, or earlier immigrants, like Jacob Sonderling in Los Angeles, frequently wrote on religious topics for refugee publications.<sup>76</sup> Many newcomers joined the Reform or Conservative synagogues formed by earlier German immigrants, especially in places with fewer refugees. In New York City, Chicago, Cincinnati, and San Francisco, there were enough refugees so they could start their own congregations, eventually also holding services in English while continuing some of the social activities in German.<sup>77</sup>

Overall, most of the events German Jewish refugee clubs offered then were more specifically German than Jewish. The importance of the New York and Los Angeles Clubs as major centers of German émigré culture has been noted by numerous scholars, a focus which makes these organizations look like rather isolated islands of German culture in an American setting.<sup>78</sup> This notion is deceiving, however, as the clubs were active participants in the landscape of American organizational life.

### **Refugee Organizations within the American Jewish Organizational Landscape**

Historian Steven Lowenstein argued that the organizations German Jewish refugees founded after arriving in the United States were “profoundly conservative” and that those who joined them preferred familiar things rather than venturing out into the American world of social organizations.<sup>79</sup> This was the image some refugees had of these organizations as well. Edward Newman, who left the New York German Jewish Club after a few years, explains:

I had so many friends that I didn't feel the need to seek companionship in the Club. And then very quickly those of us who became assimilated more easily for one reason or another, and now I speak for myself, didn't want to be identified as foreigners or immigrants or Germans, because some people still looked at us as Germans rather than German Jews; and being a member of a German-Jewish club would very much identify us. I, for one, wanted to get away from this. I wanted to be an American.<sup>80</sup>

Considering the significance these organizations put on the Americanization of their members, Newman's attitude may be somewhat surprising. However, Americanization meant different things to different people and was made to fit different needs and interests. Club members who only went to the German cultural events found themselves in an atmosphere that was like being back in Germany. While this made some feel very good, others felt less comfortable.<sup>81</sup> People who participated in the administration of the refugee organizations, however, cooperated with American community, social, and cultural organizations, and frequently even became representatives in them, thus becoming familiar with new realms of American life. By organizing their own specific interest groups, refugees were able to participate in institutional American life, just like other American groups. Consequently, refugee organizations were not insular with a singular focus on the old country; rather, they were important in giving the newcomers' community a strong and active voice in American society they would not otherwise have had.<sup>82</sup>

Selected editions of *Neue Welt/New World* reveal the extent to which the Jewish Club in Los Angeles was connected to different local community organizations in

the late 1930s and early 1940s. The club's employment office, the *Beratungsstelle*, closely cooperated with the Jewish Employment Bureau, subsequently even moving its office to the bureau's Los Angeles location.<sup>83</sup> The club cooperated with numerous other Jewish and non-Jewish social service organizations such as the Federated Employment Bureau of Los Angeles, the Jewish Community Council, the Los Angeles chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women, the Jewish Family Service, the Jewish Vocational Service,<sup>84</sup> and the Coordinating Committee for Aid to Jewish Refugees.<sup>85</sup> The cooperation between the Jewish Club and these Los Angeles community organizations seems to have been successful and very friendly. In letters on the occasion of the club's five-year anniversary, various representatives of local organizations stressed not only the fine work the club had been doing but also the "splendid character attributes of its members."<sup>86</sup> The General Secretary of the Los Angeles Coordinating Committee for Aid to Jewish Refugees particularly emphasized his appreciation for the club's efforts to integrate its program with those of the other existing organizations.<sup>87</sup> The Director of the Federated Employment Bureau even noted that "constructive suggestions" on how his agency could help more efficiently would be welcome.<sup>88</sup>

The refugees presented themselves as very grateful for the assistance American organizations provided them.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, some refugees warned that they should not let the American organizations dominate them but should always strive to become more independent and capable of providing the necessary assistance themselves.<sup>90</sup> For this purpose, they founded bigger supralocal organizations like the American Federation of Jews from Central Germany—an umbrella organization and coordinating council for most of the German refugee organizations—and the mutual aid and welfare organizations *Selfhelp* of *Émigrés* from Central Europe and *Blue Card*.<sup>91</sup> All of these organizations were modeled on ones that had existed in Germany, and some refugees joined them to continue familiar activities in the new country.<sup>92</sup>

Besides taking care of their own needs, some refugees also focused on understanding American organizational life.<sup>93</sup> One important aspect of American Jewish community life was the fundraising activities of organizations such as the United Jewish Welfare Fund and the United Jewish Appeal. The organized refugee community viewed refugees' contributions as major responsibilities to demonstrate that they were becoming valuable members of American Jewry. In May 1940, the Jewish Club in Los Angeles urged its members to "give not only what we can spare but to dig deeper into our pockets," to exceed the amount collected the previous year because "we owe this to our reputation to make this drive a success."<sup>94</sup> These fundraising drives largely sought to help European Jewry and Jews in Palestine. Consequently, *Aufbau* and the leadership of the New York and Los Angeles Clubs presented their appeals frequently as a task that should be particularly dear and important to the refugees. Nevertheless, German Jewish refugees did not give as much as the leaders expected them to, which

some established American organizations also noted with disdain.<sup>95</sup> This failure, however, did not single the refugees out but made them one Jewish group among many in the United States, considering the different ideological and political factions within American Jewry.

As a result, some German refugees, beyond their efforts to blend in with the American Jewish community, did not shy away from voicing concerns they felt particularly strongly about—issues related to Nazism and anti-Semitism in Germany and in the United States. The refugees believed their special background and knowledge enabled them to better understand these problems so they could help Americans address them more efficiently. In the mid-1930s, several *Aufbau* articles criticized the way American Jewish organizations were dealing with the threat of anti-Semitism and Nazism. Despite differences among the spectrum of American Jewish organizations, they all had traditionally reacted to anti-Jewish sentiments and actions with a strategy of nonconfrontation. They believed that calling attention to their special problems might aggravate issues and threaten their situation in American society, which they perceived as fragile.<sup>96</sup> To some German Jewish refugees, this method did not seem wise.

One *Aufbau* contributor called on his fellow German Jews to take action because he found the American Jewish “neglect” of these issues irresponsible and unjustifiable, considering the efficient agitation work of anti-Semites in New York.<sup>97</sup> Another *Aufbau* appeal to German Jews concerned the work of American Jewish organizations in regard to Nazi Germany. The author, Dr. Hans Martin Meyer, called on *Aufbau* readers to influence the American Jewish Committee, which, he believed, even though “it ha[d] been occupied with the fight against National Socialism for years, completely misjudge[d] the psychology of the Nazi government and the German people.”<sup>98</sup> He maintained that German Jews had firsthand knowledge and experience, which, if they were heard, could “prevent useless waste of energies” in the future and lead to more efficient and practical activities. Such criticism of American Jewish organizations was not always well received. One person warned that it would surely not help the refugees advance in the United States. Rather, he wrote, the refugees should take action first before offering criticism that would only engender intra-Jewish trouble. Such discussions continued in *Aufbau*, and Dr. Meyer consequently called for the establishment of a working group to fight Nazism.<sup>99</sup>

Many refugees saw the scrutiny and monitoring of German American organizations as their main task in this regard. Again, they believed that their German background and their experiences as Jews in Nazi Germany gave them knowledge that was beneficial for analyzing the situation in America. As mentioned before, refugees closely monitored the German-language press, such as the *New York* and *California Staatszeitung*, and *Aufbau* dedicated a lot of space to discussing how these publications reported news related to Germany, National Socialism, and the situation of the Jews in Europe and America. The refugee press also frequently



included articles about the political orientation of the German American community at large<sup>100</sup> and the circulation of Nazi propaganda in these circles.<sup>101</sup> At times, refugees were indeed successful in these monitoring activities, taking pride when they identified Nazi activities in America. This was especially important during this period, when their loyalty to the United States was in question and some in the American public and government believed there might be a fifth column among the refugees. Early in 1940, an *Aufbau* journalist exposed the newspaper *Today's Challenge*, published by a certain Friedrich E. Auhagen, as spreading Nazi propaganda in disguise. The *Aufbau* article initially only made Auhagen and other people affiliated with the newspaper indignant. Half a year later, however, a *New York World Telegram* journalist confirmed the American Nazi connections of the paper and its publisher. *Aufbau* commented on this confirmation of its investigative work as follows: "This is a small example of the fact that the immigrants who fled Hitler for the most part have sharper ears for the whisperings of the real fifth columnists than the residents of the countries, which, because of their lack of knowledge of the tactics, have long been misled."<sup>102</sup>

The refugees' demonstration of loyalty to the United States and of the benefit of their German background to the new country became ever more important as the situation in Europe worsened. Under these circumstances, the U.S. government emphasized the common German background of the refugees and German Americans. In many ways, German Jews were perceived as having more connections with Germans than other American Jews. While this was somewhat true about refugees' self-perception, too, once the war in Europe began, accompanied by changes in U.S. policy, discussions among German Jewish refugees increasingly focused on their Jewish identity. This is evident, for example, in *Aufbau's* declaration that it was a specifically Jewish and American newspaper, dedicated to Jewish traditions and themes,<sup>103</sup> as well as in several contributions reflecting these issues. The newspaper undertook a survey of personal positions on the "Jewish question" among several "leading personalities" of the refugee and émigré community, asserting that the upheavals of the last years must have affected their Jewish identity and that of most refugees. In such difficult times, the paper stated, Jewish artists and intellectuals had a responsibility to guide their fellow Jews. Writer Bruno Frank responded, stating, for example, "Even if one has felt like a German, Czech, Dutchman, or Frenchman all of one's life, knowing about the diluted drop of Jewish blood in one's veins, one must avow oneself as a Jew, wherever one can, and as loud as one can."<sup>104</sup> To the question of whether one's Jewish consciousness had become stronger since being ousted from Germany, other respondents answered in the negative or even stated that being Jewish had never mattered very much to them anyway, pointing to the great heterogeneity of the community of German Jewish refugees in America. The discussion of Jewish identity aroused the interest of many readers, as evident from the follow-up discussions in later *Aufbau* issues.<sup>105</sup> In 1940 and 1941, refugees'

occupation with their Jewish identity was connected to their need to distance themselves from their Germanness not only because of the war in Europe but also because the situation in Europe held personal meaning for them as Jews.<sup>106</sup>

## War

The beginning of the war in Europe affected refugees in the United States on both psychological and practical levels—particularly concerning their Americanization efforts and their relationship to Germany. Jewish refugees from Germany had been among the first to experience the power and brutality of the Nazis and considered themselves fortunate to have escaped Europe in time. Still, the refugees did not publically engage in debates over American “isolationism” or “interventionism” in regard to the war in Europe. Rather, they were careful to present themselves as loyal to the American government, whatever decisions it made. They focused their actions on helping Jewish refugees enter the country, just as American Jewish organizations did. When the war began in Europe, President Roosevelt had called for the neutrality of the American people toward the fighting parties in Europe, and *Aufbau* had declared early on that refugees must act in accordance with this neutrality legislation. However, the editors also prominently reprinted the following *New York Times* editorial. Despite the *Aufbau* editors’ neutrality promises to the American government, the editorial stated that

it must also be said, in justice to its facts and to the record, that no scruples of strict neutrality can conscript the underlying sympathies of the American people. We know where responsibility lies for this reckless act that has plunged Europe into war. . . . Hitler has said that this is victory or death for him. It is also victory or death for decent standards of international conduct and the democratic way of life.<sup>107</sup>

The refugees were in a difficult position, caught between loyalty to their new country and efforts to publicize that loyalty to the wider public and their knowledge of the real danger of the Nazis and the desire that something be done about it. The *New York Times* editorial captured this sentiment somewhat and was reassuring in that it showed there were Americans who felt similarly. What made the refugees’ situation more difficult, however, was the rumor that there could be Nazi spies among them. President Roosevelt fueled this suspicion in a press conference of June 1940:

Now, of course, the refugee has got to be checked because, unfortunately, among the refugees there are some spies, as has been found in other countries. And not all of them are voluntary spies—it is rather a horrible story but in some of the other countries that refugees out of Germany have gone to, especially Jewish refugees, they have found a number of definitely proven spies.<sup>108</sup>

Roosevelt explained that Nazis must have forced such refugees acting as spies to do so with the threat that “your father and mother will be taken out and shot.” He added that such cases were very rare but it was nevertheless “something we have got to watch.”<sup>109</sup>

Concerns over fifth columnists in the United States prompted the passing of the Alien Registration Act of June 1940. This legislation reminded refugees that even with all their efforts to Americanize they were still legally aliens in the United States. Title III of the Act required all aliens residing in the United States for thirty days or more to be registered and fingerprinted.<sup>110</sup> The instructions on the registration form stated that registration was compulsory and was done “so that the United States could determine exactly how many aliens there are, who they are, and where they are.”<sup>111</sup> However, the questions on the registration form implied that the Justice Department was really looking for subversive elements among the alien population.<sup>112</sup> While some refugees warned against an exaggerated fear of fifth columnists and rejected the idea that there could be any spies among the Jewish refugees, they generally had a positive response to the legislation.<sup>113</sup> *Aufbau* repeatedly appealed to refugees to register and included numerous articles explaining the necessity of the legislation, characterizing it as a democratic act and a protective measure for U.S. security.<sup>114</sup>

Refugees viewed the Alien Registration Act as a bureaucratic measure with which they were eager to comply, also because it gave them another opportunity to show their loyalty to the United States. Yet it did increase their concern over unwanted identification with Germany. As a consequence, the two largest refugee organizations in the United States erased the word “German” from their name. Many immigrants no longer wished to have anything to do with Germany, and they worried that the word German would arouse hostility among the American public if the United States joined the war.<sup>115</sup> While the members of the German Jewish Club in Los Angeles had already discussed the name change in spring 1940, the decision was finalized in late June after the Alien Registration Act was passed. In September 1940, members unanimously voted to change the name of the German Jewish Club to Jewish Club of 1933, Inc., stressing the Jewish character of the organization.<sup>116</sup> In October of the same year, the Jewish Club in Los Angeles also “Americanized” the title of its press organ by translating it to *New World* and began publishing a greater number of articles in English. Similarly, the German Jewish Club in New York changed its name to New World Club the same year. In a September issue of *Aufbau*, club members were called on to decide on the new name quickly: “Time is short. The term ‘German Jewish’ has become obsolete. The connection with the past has been broken. And this must be emphasized. One looks to the future, believes in the New World and the building of a new life in it.”<sup>117</sup>

While this statement about the broken connection to the past was far from the lived realities of the vast majority of German Jewish refugees—because it was

somewhat forced on them by the political situation—we have seen that their desire to create a new future was real. Intending to make the United States their permanent home, many refugees had applied for their first citizenship papers soon after their arrival. In November of 1938, the New York Jewish Club even made membership in the organization contingent on American citizenship or the filing of the first application for citizenship.<sup>118</sup> This, once again, shows that the focus of the organized refugee community was on Americanization.

The political situation and general fear of subversive aliens in the United States after the outbreak of war in Europe made it imperative for refugees to embark on the year-long citizenship application process. *Aufbau* urged those who had not done so to immediately pursue it, as possessing first papers might soon become legally necessary and would again demonstrate refugees' loyalty.<sup>119</sup> Beginning in fall 1940, possessing first papers also meant that refugees had to register for military service. The U.S. government passed a law requiring all male American citizens and first-paper holders of a certain age to register. Most refugees welcomed this opportunity to make themselves useful and also perhaps to contribute to a future fight against Hitler's forces.<sup>120</sup> Officers at one military camp articulated their surprise at the great number of refugees among the enlisted.<sup>121</sup> One refugee captured his enthusiasm, which he was convinced was the sentiment of many in his position, in a poem:

Equal in duty and equal in right  
The not-yet citizen is ready to fight,  
and I raise my heart and I raise my voice  
For the U.S.A. the land of my choice.<sup>122</sup>

The organized refugee community believed newcomers could also engage in other important efforts to help the United States prepare for a possible war. *Aufbau* articles encouraged readers to buy U.S. savings bonds and consider working in industries vital for the country's defense.<sup>123</sup> The refugee press clearly presented refugees' desire not only to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States but also to engage in activities that strengthened war preparations. After all, it was their hope that the United States could affect the outcome of the European conflict. While these examples show that the outbreak of war strengthened refugees' Americanization efforts in some respects, they also show that the war nevertheless complicated their relationship with the United States, especially considering the American response to the European crisis. The beginning of the war prompted refugees to direct their attention more frequently toward Germany and the European continent than they had earlier.

## The Situation of Jews in Europe

Many refugees still had relatives in Germany or Europe and were concerned about their fate. After the war began, it became more difficult to maintain contact with those who remained behind. Refugees were anxious to hear about the European situation, and *Aufbau* strove to complement American newspapers' reporting through its—as it stated—connections with Jews, including German Jewish refugees who were scattered around the world, to inform readers about what was happening in other parts of the globe.<sup>124</sup> During the war, *Aufbau* continuously reported on incidents concerning Jews in Europe, often through eyewitness accounts and analyses of local European newspapers.<sup>125</sup> The press organ of the Jewish Club of Los Angeles also published such articles under the title “Kurzberichte aus aller Welt” (Brief reports from around the world). These short accounts included letters from Shanghai,<sup>126</sup> reports about the expulsion of the Jews of Gdansk,<sup>127</sup> and descriptions of the harsh winter's effects on everyday life in Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia in 1940. These reports focused on the conditions of Jews in these areas but also included comments on the circumstances of Polish people and native Germans resettled in the eastern regions of the Reich, whose situation was not much better.<sup>128</sup>

Beyond worsening communication with friends and family, the prospect of bringing them to the United States grew less promising. Getting relatives or friends over had been an ongoing concern for many refugees. Most nationwide refugee agencies, especially the National Refugee Service, provided aid for such migration issues, and the German Jewish Club in Los Angeles, too, aimed to provide assistance in these matters. In his personal account about the early years of the club, Lothar Rosenthal reported that its members went to remote communities to tell them about the situation of Jews in Germany and to call attention to the importance of providing affidavits.<sup>129</sup> The club also established an office offering advice and assistance in the search for relatives in Europe as well as in efforts to get them out.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, American immigration policies, which grew progressively more restrictive, made such efforts more difficult and eventually impossible.<sup>131</sup>

In July 1941, the U.S. State Department passed visa regulations stipulating that visa applicants with relatives in Germany or any of the territories occupied by Germany were no longer eligible to receive visas. Further, the State Department became more involved in checking and verifying visa approvals, which meant that even people who had gone through the screening proceedings once, but whose visa application was still pending, were put under review again.<sup>132</sup> The new legislation reduced Jews' chances of leaving Europe almost to nil and caused great concern among refugees in the United States. Refugees had continuously acknowledged U.S. security interests and that the country had to keep potentially harmful people out. Even now, one community representative stated in

*Aufbau* that he understood the need for strict screenings. However, he could not comprehend the uniform exclusion of all people from Germany or German-occupied territories, as it ran counter to the emphasis on individual screenings the government had been following all along.<sup>133</sup> Refugees were not alone in their criticism: outrage over the regulation extended far beyond their circles.<sup>134</sup> An editorial from the *Nation*, for example, questioned the State Department's decision and demanded clarification of the facts behind it:

Until we hear of at least one, from the State Department or elsewhere, we shall continue to suspect that the ruling represents a ruthless determination to bar as many victims of Hitler's terror as can possibly be covered by the least plausible excuse. If only the department had thought of this earlier, it could have shut out Thomas Mann and Einstein.<sup>135</sup>

In their quest to become valuable U.S. citizens, refugees had refrained from voicing criticism of the government as a community, but they did now in response to this episode. They did so frequently by noting that the government's actions did not fit their expectations and image of the democratic country they had been glad to find a haven in. Leopold Jessner, president of the Los Angeles Jewish Club, reminded refugees, however, that their right to voice their conflict of opinion and disagreement with the government was part of the democratic experience and, thus, part of refugees' Americanization.<sup>136</sup> And while refugees never wavered in their public display of loyalty to the United States, many became less optimistic about life in the country as the situation in Europe worsened and U.S. policy failed to relieve Jews in Europe. At the same time, the refugees focused more attention on the continent they had left, which inevitably prompted discussions among them.

Since their arrival in the United States, many refugees had sent money and food parcels to family or friends in Europe to help alleviate their suffering.<sup>137</sup> Once the war began, this practice was widely criticized in the larger refugee community. One critic argued that sending food packages to Germany meant breaking the Allied blockade aimed at weakening the Germans. Those who sent packages were committing treason, he wrote, directing his anger at refugees who disregarded that they were in America now and ought to stand behind the new country's policies.<sup>138</sup> Critics of the food parcels generally believed they would not actually help the Jews but only benefit the Nazis. In March 1940, the Joint Boycott Council of the American Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Labor Committee, together with the Volunteer Committee to Boycott Germany, warned that goods sent to Germany would most likely be used to feed German soldiers.<sup>139</sup> *Aufbau* received several letters and contributions from readers concerned about this.<sup>140</sup> Such letters were often very emotional, with feelings running so high on both sides that participants accused each other of supporting the Nazis.

For example, people against sending packages were accused of accelerating Hitler's work of getting rid of the Jews by leaving them to starve to death. Those for sending parcels were accused of "playing directly into Hitler's hands" by allowing Nazis to use the resources for their purposes.<sup>141</sup> A further illustration of the debate over sending aid comes from another *Aufbau* article under the headline "Nazis will have to pay" and the responses to it.<sup>142</sup> The author, outraged by Nazi cruelties in Europe, particularly the latest violent deportations of Jews from several Baltic cities, announced that committees in Europe were planning the legal prosecution of the Nazis after the war. Joseph Loewenberg reacted to this report, writing that he and his friends believed that presenting such information prominently in a Jewish newspaper could have the "most terrible consequences" for Jews still in Germany or other Nazi-occupied territories in Europe. He sharply criticized the newspaper for being so "imprudent and irresponsible," as it had failed to consider that such threats could provoke Nazis to retaliate against Jews in Europe. *Aufbau* staff responded aggressively to this accusation:

We believe the attitude you and your friends have toward these things constitutes an unintentional encouragement of National Socialism, since the policies of the current German government aims at intimidating and muzzling its foreign enemies. They shall not and must not be successful in this with "Aufbau," however. The tragic fate of the Central and Eastern European Jews cannot be ameliorated by treating National Socialism lightly and by glossing over or covering up its crimes.<sup>143</sup>

The general disagreement over the way refugees ought to behave toward Germany, as visible in the refugee press, demonstrates the high level of angst and insecurity among them in light of the terrible news coming from Europe. While they were relatively secure in America—the country they had put so much faith in—the United States was actively impeding further immigration of Jews from Nazi-occupied Europe and had not entered the war. Consequently, refugees could do little to help those who remained, and the German Army's victories left many in somber moods. Reinhard A. Braun, a regular contributor to the magazine *New World* of the Los Angeles Jewish Club, attempted to counter the depression and hopelessness he observed among his fellow refugees.<sup>144</sup> In his articles, he used information from English military news sources and eyewitness accounts to show that the Germans were not doing as well as it appeared in the daily news. In his regular column, "Brief Reports from Around the World," Braun listed over 150 German cities that British bombs had rained on. Together with reports about anti-Nazi activities in German-occupied territories—Norwegians stealing German weapons and killing German soldiers, and Dutch church officials protesting anti-Semitic activities in the Netherlands, for example—Braun hoped to spur hope among fellow refugees.

Articles and letters to *Aufbau* also showed that depression, as well as anxiety and pathological distrust, were not uncommon among refugees and seemed to

have become more widespread in 1940 and 1941.<sup>145</sup> One letter published then by a twenty-one-year-old woman with the pen name Rose was representative of the story of many immigrants in this regard. She wrote that after Hitler had come to power when she was twelve, her life had been dominated by worries over emigration. Since her arrival in the United States, she had only known “hard work and worry about my parents, who are still in Germany.” Hinting at the new immigration restrictions, she continued: “The hope to see them again soon is now also gone.”<sup>146</sup> Rose did not want to be misunderstood, she wrote. She had learned to speak English well, had made American acquaintances, and had, “at least on the outside,” become Americanized. She stressed: “I like America, and I mean it.” Nevertheless, she explained, she was still depressed and was unable to find a goal that would make life worth living.<sup>147</sup>

These examples illustrate that Americanization was not, in fact, the panacea to all the problems of being a German Jewish refugee. As it turned out, Americanization and distancing oneself from Germany did not occur in a simple ratio in which more Americanization meant less German orientation. While German Jewish refugees had become ever more Americanized, they could not escape the trauma of their experience in Germany, of leaving a way of life and in many instances loved ones behind, nor could they ignore the ever-deteriorating situation of remaining European Jews; it shaped their experiences in America significantly. Even refugees who wished to leave their past behind and distance themselves from Germany found it impossible to do so because of political developments in Europe and the U.S. government’s reactions to these events. During this period, before the United States entered the war, some refugees felt helpless or forlorn, although they were closer to becoming American citizens. When the United States did enter the war, many refugees welcomed it, expecting it to help in the fight against Germany. At the same time, new U.S. legislation complicated their hopes of participating in this fight.

## Notes

1. The three most influential groups were the Protestant fundamentalist “Defenders of the Christian Faith,” the “Silver Shirt Legions” led by journalist William Dudley Pelley with a fundamentalist Methodist background, and the “National Union for Social Justice and the Christian Front.” Appelius, *Die schönste Stadt*, 31ff.
2. Ibid.; Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews*, 5ff.
3. Appelius, *Die schönste Stadt*, 33. Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 9. For a concise discussion of anti-Semitism during this time, see Diner, *Jews of the United States*, 207–15.
4. See Gottlieb, “The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement.”



5. *American Jewish Year Book* 41 (1939–40):195–96.
6. Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 9.
7. American Friends Service Committee, *Refugee Facts*, 12–13.
8. “Verbreitet die Wahrheit!,” *Aufbau* 5 (1 September 1939).
9. Hella Weiner, “My Story of My Beginning and That of the Jewish Club of 1933,” Collection of the Benefactors of the Jewish Club of 1933.
10. For a recent account on this topic, see Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism*.
11. Diner, *Jews of the United States*, 173.
12. Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism*, 11.
13. Saenger, *Today’s Refugees*, 157.
14. Radkau, *Die deutsche Emigration in den USA*, 127.
15. “America,” *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 1.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Alfred Wildberg, “Secretariat,” *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 8; and Ernest Berg, “Presse,” *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 11.
18. “America,” *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 1.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Interview with Heinz Pinner, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, CA, 1 January 1972, LBI New York, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1331811>.
22. Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 158. Of course, not all German Americans in Southern California believed in the “New Germany.” The Deutsch Amerikanischer Kultur Verband (DAKV, German American Cultural Association), which had a local branch in Los Angeles, sent its congratulations to the Jewish Club on its fifth anniversary. “Hans Schmitt (Deutscheramerikanischer Kulturverband),” *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 4.
23. See Grebler, *German-Jewish Immigrants*, 20.
24. See, e.g., *Neue Welt* (March 1940): 6; “Say it in English,” *Aufbau* 7 (5 January 1940).
25. Davie, *Refugees in America*, 175.
26. Report of WPA—Adult Education Program, Manhattan School of Automotive Trades, 20 December 1937. Quoted in Fields, *The Refugee in the United States*, 128–29.
27. See Davie, *Refugees in America*, 41.
28. Kent, *The Refugee Intellectual*, 75–76.
29. Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise*, 69ff.
30. Saenger, *Today’s Refugees*, 202–3.
31. Davie, *Refugees in America*, 109ff.
32. See *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 2, 10; and *New World* (October 1940): 4; as well as interview with William Stagen, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, CA, 1 January 1972, LBI New York, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1337416>. Also see Bunzel, “Berufschancen der Immigration in Los Angeles,” and “Die Westküste,” *Aufbau* 7 (5 September 1941).
33. See, e.g., *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 10, 11; and “Die Westküste,” *Aufbau* 7 (3 October 1941).
34. Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 101–2.
35. Davie, *Refugees in America*, 124–25.
36. Lothar Rosenthal, “Early Days of the German Jewish Club,” 1976, Collection of the Benefactors of the Jewish Club of 1933.
37. William R. Malsh, “You and Your Job,” *Neue Welt* (May 1940): 1.
38. Weiner, Kassof, and Decter, eds, *Lives Lost, Lives Found*, 17.
39. Interview with Susan Freudenthal, Abraham J. Peck, and Uri D. Herscher, in Peck and Herscher, *Queen City Refuge*, 195.

40. Reinhold Herz, "Deutsch auf der Strasse?" *Aufbau* 5 (15 April 1939). See another such letter to the editor in *Aufbau* 5 (22 December 1939).
41. See Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 113ff.
42. Kraut reported that a Roger survey, published in *Fortune* magazine in July 1940, showed that 71 percent of the respondents believed Germany had "already started to organize a 'Fifth Column' in this country." *Ibid.*, 117, 113.
43. Of course, this scenario is reminiscent of German Americans' experience during the First World War. See, e.g., Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*.
44. *Aufbau* 5 (17 May 1940). A similar letter to the editor was published in *Aufbau* 5 (22 December 1939).
45. W.C.H. (Wilfred C. Hulse), "An den Rand geschrieben: Nochmals, die deutsche Sprache," *Aufbau* 5 (7 June 1940).
46. *Ibid.*
47. Manfred Georg, "Eine ernste Frage," *Aufbau* 5 (January 1939). Georg (1893–1965) was born as Manfred Georg Cohn in Berlin. He first shortened his name to Manfred Georg and later Americanized it to Manfred George. In Berlin, he obtained a Ph.D. in Law and worked as a journalist for the *Berliner Morgenpost* and as editor in chief for the *Berliner Abendpost*. He was a politically active pacifist and Zionist and a founder of the leftist and short-lived Republikanische Partei. He left Germany in 1933 for Prague, where he continued his journalistic work, before escaping Europe via Hungary, Yugoslavia, Italy, Switzerland, and France in 1938. He served as editor in chief for *Aufbau* from April 1939 to his death in December 1965.
48. *Ibid.*
49. See, e.g., Thomas Mann, "Deutschland in seiner tiefsten Erniedrigung," *Aufbau* 5 (1 February 1939).
50. Manfred Georg, "Eine ernste Frage," *Aufbau* 5 (January 1939).
51. See, e.g., "Vortragsabende," *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 16.
52. Alfred Eichenberg, "Deutsche Bühnenkunst im Rahmen der W.P.A.," *Aufbau* 2 (May 1936).
53. "Sturm im Wasserglas: Das vaterländisch gesinnte Deutschtum New Yorks regt sich auf," *Aufbau* 2 (June 1936).
54. Manfred Georg, "Eine ernste Frage," *Aufbau* 5 (January 1939).
55. Karpf, *Jewish Community Organization in the United States*, 39.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*, 710.
58. Leopold Jessner, "The Zion-Soul," *New World* (October 1940): 1.
59. Ruth Ephraim Rosenthal, "El Pueblo," *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 7–8; "Vortragsabende," *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 16; Ralph Nunberg, "Hollywood heute: Schattenseiten einer Expansion," "Westküste," *Aufbau* 7 (15 August 1941); Hans Meyerhoff, "Wo liegt Hollywood?: Hollywood gibt es gar nicht," and "This Is Your City," *Aufbau* 7 (15 August 1941); Saenger, *Today's Refugees*, 107.
60. "Vortragsabende," *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 16.
61. L. Rosenthal, "Early Days of the German Jewish Club," 1976.
62. Baer, *Witness for a Generation*, 92.
63. Walter L., "Brief eines Neueinwanderers," *Aufbau* 1 (1 January 1935).
64. Alex Levy, "Deutsche Kultur ist tot," *Aufbau* 6 (9 February 1940).
65. Davie, *Refugees in America*, 49. This resulted partly from intellectual German discourses on the specificity of German culture as opposed to other Western nations that possessed only "civilization," as Thomas Mann had written in his influential essay "Gedanken im Kriege" at the beginning of World War I. On debates about American popular culture in Weimar Germany and German *Kultur*, see Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*; and Weitz, *Weimar Germany*.

66. W.C.H., "An den Rand geschrieben: Wir emigrierten Juden und die deutsche Kultur," *Aufbau* 6 (26 January 1940).
67. *Aufbau* and the Jewish Club in Los Angeles frequently criticized German Jewish refugees who did not join the organizations, arguing that it lessened the power and impact of their immigrant group.
68. Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific*.
69. Baer, *Witness for a Generation*, 92; Interview with William Stagen, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, CA, 1 January 1972, LBI New York, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1337416>, and Collection of the Benefactors of the Jewish Club of 1933; see also *Neue Welt* (March 1940): 3. Thomas Mann and Bruno Frank both became honorary members of the Jewish Club in 1942 after they appeared as spokesmen for the refugee community before the Tolson Committee, an episode discussed in chapter 3.
70. Bunzel, "The Jewish Club of 1933," 115.
71. *German Jewish Club of 1933, Los Angeles: Ein Vergessenes Kapitel der Emigration*, reconstructed by Marta Mierendorff, Radio-Essay, Süddeutscher Rundfunk, 9 January 1966, 15, Marta Mierendorff Collection, Max-Kade-Institute, University of Southern California. Since I accessed this document, the collection has been moved to the Feuchtwanger Memorial Library where it is held as Marta Mierendorff papers, Collection no. 0214, Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California. Attachment to letter from Elow to Professor Krakowsky, undated, Cornelius Schnauber Collection, Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin.
72. *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 9. The Tribune was managed by Braun and Alfred Pinkus and presented one of its first shows in April 1939 at the Hollytown Theatre. Program of "Panoptikum: The Show of 'The 39 Missteps,'" April 6th to 9th, 1939, Marta Mierendorff Collection, Box of German Jewish Club, Max-Kade-Institute, University of Southern California. For more, see Roden, "Der 'Jewish Club of 1933.'"
73. See, e.g., *Neue Welt* (March 1940). Ludwig Marcuse was a Berlin-born German Jewish writer and philosopher who lived in Los Angeles from 1940 to 1950. He was not related to the philosopher Herbert Marcuse.
74. Dr. Siegfried Bruno Bernstein, "Zusammenschluss," *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 5.
75. "Programm-Erklärung," *Neue Welt* (March 1940): 1.
76. See, e.g., Jacob Sonderling, "Rosch Haschonoh," *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 17; and Rabbi Magnin, "New Year's Greetings," *New World* (October 1940): 2.
77. "List of German-Jewish Refugee Congregations and Organizations," LBI New York, AR 6638, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1642195>.
78. See, e.g., Middell, *Exil in den USA*; Roden, "Der 'Jewish Club of 1933,'" 482–94; and the more general works on famous émigrés: Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise*; Taylor, *Strangers in Paradise*; Gumprecht, "*New Weimar*" unter *Palmen*; Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific*.
79. Lowenstein, "Women's Role in the German-Jewish Immigrant Community," 171.
80. Edward Newman, interview by Michael Tietz, transcript, New York, NY, June 1972, in Strauss, Friedlander, and Siegel, eds, *Jewish Immigrants*, vol. 5, *The Individual and Collective Experience*, 29.
81. Also, Siegfried Bernstein from the Jewish Club in Los Angeles points out that many refugees felt the Jewish organizations in Germany had let them down or had not been able to help them when the Nazis came to power, which they found disappointing. Thus, they had lost their trust in organizations and preferred to fare for themselves. Dr. Siegfried Bruno Bernstein, "Zusammenschluss," *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 5.
82. See also Weiner, Kassof, and Decker, eds, *Lives Lost, Lives Found*.
83. See *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 10; and *New World* (October 1940): 4.

84. Interview with William Stagen, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, CA, 1 January 1972, LBI New York, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1337416>.
85. See *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 2. Besides these service organizations, there were several religious communities that sent greetings on the club's anniversary, such as different Christian and Jewish congregations. The governor and representatives of the B'nai B'rith sent congratulations as well. All of these messages convey a sense that refugees were welcome in Los Angeles and recognized as new and important members of a larger community. Reports from Baltimore give a less rosy picture of the cooperation between refugee newcomers and native Jewish organizations. Weiner speaks of Eastern Jewish–Western Jewish animosity there (Weiner, Kassof, and Decter, eds, *Lives Lost, Lives Found*). Refugees I interviewed in Los Angeles told me there was no such animosity in L.A. Rather, Eastern European Jews were now happy to be in an established position and able to help, in a sort of role reversal from their respective European positions.
86. The words of Joseph Bonapart, superintendent of the Jewish Orphans' Home of Southern California, *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 2.
87. The General Secretary's name is S. C. Kohs; *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 2.
88. The director's name is cited as Ed. Bastheim; *ibid*.
89. One example from Los Angeles: "Early Days of the German Jewish Club—Jewish Club of 1933 as remembered by Lothar Rosenthal," *Mitteilungsblatt* 30, no. 6 (June 1976).
90. See, e.g., Dr. Siegfried Bruno Bernstein, "Zusammenschluss," *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 5; and Wilhelm Marcus, "Der neue Bund," *Aufbau* 5 (15 February 1939).
91. See numerous ads for Blue Card, or Blaue Beitragskarte, in *Aufbau*. An early ad can be found in *Aufbau* 6 (19 July 1940).
92. Strauss, *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period in the U.S.A.*, vol. 6, 325–26.
93. See, e.g., Al H. Katzenstein, "Was die Amerikanischen Juden tun," *New World* (October 1940): 4.
94. "Appeal to the Members of the German Jewish Club," *Neue Welt* (May 1940): 1.
95. See, e.g., Dr. F. Grubel, "Was leisten die Einwanderer für den United Jewish Appeal," *Aufbau* 7 (27 June 1941); and response by W.C.H. and Julius Petzon, "Letters to the Editor: Der United Jewish Appeal und die Immigration," *Aufbau* 7 (4 July 1941); see also interview with Hugo Zivi, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, 4 January 1972, LBI New York, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1337675>.
96. Diner, *Jews of the United States*, 172.
97. "Nazismus in USA: Brauner Antisemitismus in New York," *Aufbau* 1 (April 1935).
98. Hans Martin Meyer, "Die Völkerbundaktion des American Jewish Committee," *Aufbau* 2 (September 1936).
99. See more articles on this in *Aufbau* 2 (November 1936). Hans Martin Meyer, "Aufruf! Schafft eine Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Bekämpfung des Nazismus in U.S.A.!" *Aufbau* 3 (December 1936).
100. See, e.g., "German-American Congress for Democracy," *Aufbau* 7 (4 July 1941). They also paid attention to the efforts of "Anti-Nazi Germans" in the United States. See, e.g., "Deutschamerikaner in der Antinazi-Front," *Aufbau* 7 (7 March 1941); and "Deutsch-Amerikaner im Zeichen der Nazi-Abwehr," *Aufbau* 7 (1 August 1941).
101. Concerned that many German-speaking Americans had practically no other German news sources available, either written or broadcast on radio, than those tainted by Nazi propaganda, one refugee proposed in *Neue Welt* that refugees could take on the task of establishing an alternative program. Martin Hall, "Hitler-Propaganda in U.S.A.," *Neue Welt* (March 1940): 1, 4. Later, Thomas Mann and *Aufbau* actually provided German-language broadcasts for that reason.

102. "Was der 'Aufbau' entdeckte . . ." *Aufbau* 6 (21 June 1940).
103. "Statement of Policy," *Aufbau* 6 (27 September 1940).
104. "Eine Umfrage des 'Aufbau': 'Meine Stellung zur jüdischen Frage,'" *Aufbau* 6 (27 December 1940).
105. See *Aufbau* 7 (7 February 1941).
106. For an example of an article on the refugees and the war at this time, see "Ein wichtiges jüdisches Kriegsziel," *Aufbau* 7 (7 February 1941); and in relation to their efforts at strengthening their American Jewish identity, "Our American Brethren and We," *Aufbau* 7 (7 February 1941). See also "Der Freiheitskampf gegen Hitler," *Aufbau* 8 (21 February 1941).
107. "Our Neutrality," *New York Times* editorial reprinted in prominent position in *Aufbau* 5 (15 September 1939).
108. This is from Roosevelt's response when asked what should be done to avoid imposing suffering on the refugees already in the United States who were unjustifiably perceived as potential spies. Breitmann and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 212–13.
109. *Ibid.*
110. *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 76th Cong., 3rd Sess., 674.
111. AR-1, *The National Registration of Aliens: Instructions for Registration and Specimen Form*, 1.
112. Aliens had to provide personal information about their birthplace, birthdate, outward appearance, race, sex, and marital status on the registration form. Furthermore, there were questions about the date of entry, length of stay, and place of residence in the United States, occupation and employer facts, participation in military or naval services of any country, and the status of their citizenship application (AR-1, *The National Registration of Aliens: Instructions for Registration and Specimen Form*, 2ff.) Additionally, aliens had to report on their activities within the past five years relating to "memberships or activities in clubs, organizations, or societies." More specifically, they were required to state whether they had been affiliated with "organizations, devoted in whole or in part to influencing or furthering the political activities, public relations, or public policy of a foreign government," as well as whether they had ever been arrested. See *ibid.*, 4.
113. See, e.g., "Spies Among Refugees?," *Aufbau* 6 (6 September 1940).
114. See, e.g., "Achtung Nichtbürger: USA Registrierung!" *Aufbau* 6 (16 August 1940); "Akt der Demokratie: Thomas Mann über die Fremden-Registrierung," *Aufbau* 6 (20 September 1940); and "Eine notwendige Massnahme gegen die fünfte Kolonne," *Aufbau* 6 (31 May 1940). Francis Biddle, "No Discharging of Alien Employees," *Aufbau* 6 (18 October 1940).
115. "Namensaenderung (?)," *Neue Welt* (March 1940): 3.
116. Certificate of Amendment of Articles of Incorporation, 14 October 1941, Archive of Max Kade Institute, University of Southern California.
117. "G.J.C. Auf der Suche nach einem Namen," *Aufbau* 6 (27 September 1940).
118. "Der Clubvorstand gibt bekannt," *Aufbau* 4 (December 1938).
119. "Wer hat noch keine 'First Papers?'" *Aufbau* 6 (24 May 1940); see also W.C.H., "An den Rand geschrieben: Das erste Bürgerpapier," *Aufbau* 6 (8 March 1940).
120. "Wehrpflicht und First Papers," *Aufbau* 6 (20 September 1940).
121. "Refugees melden sich bei Uncle Sam," *Aufbau* 7 (2 May 1941).
122. Henry Serlin, "Declaration of Intention," *New World* (November 1940): 8.
123. "Auch Du musst helfen!," *Aufbau* 7 (9 May 1941).
124. "Unentbehrlich," *Aufbau* 5 (15 September 1939).
125. See, e.g., *Aufbau* 6 (5 January 1940), with articles such as "Deutsche Zeitung gibt Judenmassaker zu," which reports on an article in the Breslau *Schlesische Zeitung* (Silesian newspaper); or "Verstärkung der deutschen Judenhetze" reporting from Paris. Similar reports appeared in every issue of *Aufbau* during the war.
126. Al Katten, "Brief aus Shanghai," *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 13.

127. *Ibid.*, 14.
128. See *Neue Welt* (March 1940), n.p.
129. L. Rosenthal, "Early Days of the German Jewish Club."
130. "Jahresbericht: Beratungsstelle," *New World* (October 1940): 4.
131. Although the German immigration quota was 95 percent filled in the fiscal year ending in June 1940, only approximately 10 percent of the people whose names were on the visa waiting lists in Germany were actually able to receive visas when their quota number came up. One reason for this was that the U.S. State Department issued stricter regulations on affidavits in the fall of 1939. Stating that it had discovered fraudulent affidavits, the State Department issued visas only to holders of affidavits provided by family members. See Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews*, 169ff. In the summer of 1940, visa restrictions began to tighten. This time, it was fear of fifth columnists arriving as immigrants that prompted the State Department to reduce immigration to America. Officials were advised to examine visa applicants very carefully and to reject them if there was any hint of suspicion. Moreover, in April 1940, cases of visa fraud came to the attention of the State Department. Apparently, German officials had cleaned up criminal records of Jews who wanted to emigrate (Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 120.) Hence, in addition to fears of Communist or Nazi fifth columnists, a possible influx of criminals became a concern.
132. "Der Schlag gegen die Einwanderung," *Aufbau* 7 (18 July 1941).
133. "Demokratie und Fremdenpolitik," and "Schlag gegen Unschuldige," *Aufbau* 7 (11 July 1941).
134. "Wir warten," *Aufbau* 7 (8 August 1941).
135. From an editorial in the *Nation* from 4 July 1941 reprinted in *Aufbau*, "Schlag gegen Unschuldige: Noch eine Stimme der Kritik," *Aufbau* 7 (11 July 1941); also Werner Guttman, "The Truth about Refugee Agents" *Aufbau* 7 (27 June 1941).
136. Leopold Jessner, "Amerikanisierung und demokratisches Gefühl," *New World* (July 1941), reprinted in *Aufbau* 7 (25 July 1941).
137. *Aufbau* also called on refugees in the United States to donate money to the Reichsvereinigung (Reich Association) of Jews in Germany. For more on this, see, e.g., "The Haavaramark Miracle," *Neue Welt* (September 1939): 15; "Du musst helfen," *Aufbau* 5 (15 November 1939).
138. Dr. H. H., "Lebensmittelpakete nach Deutschland? Ich klage an!," *Aufbau* 5 (15 October 1939). See also responses to his letter.
139. "Warum keine Lebensmittel nach Deutschland?" *Aufbau* 6 (15 March 1940).
140. "An den Rand geschrieben: Verwirrung der Gefühle," *Aufbau* 6 (22 November 1940); "Vitamin in Briefen" *Aufbau* 6 (6 December 1940).
141. "An den Rand geschrieben . . . Verwirrung der Gefühle," *Aufbau* 6 (22 November 1940).
142. "Nazis werden zahlen müssen—Nach Stettin und Königsberg: Gerichtliche Verfolgung von Naziverbrechern geplant," *Aufbau* 6 (23 February 1940).
143. "Ein Briefwechsel" between Joseph Loewenberg and Wilfred C. Hülse, chair of the *Aufbau*-Committee, *Aufbau* 6 (15 March 1940).
144. Reinhard A. Braun, "Kurzberichte aus aller Welt," *New World* (November 1940): 2, 3, 5.
145. Dr. Max Guenthal, "Seelische Anpassung in der Emigration," *Aufbau* 7 (8 August 1941). See also Hans Habe, "Warnung vor dem Detail: Optimistischer Brief eines deprimierten Menschen," *Aufbau* 7 (27 June 1941); Siegfried Peine, "Vom Seelischen Aufbau: Zur psychologischen Ueberwindung der Emigration," *Aufbau* 7 (21 November 1941).
146. "An den Rand geschrieben: Frage und Antwort," *Aufbau* 7 (22 August 1941). Interestingly, the letter was composed in German; only the words "I like America, and I mean it" were written in English.
147. "An den Rand geschrieben: Frage und Antwort," *Aufbau* 7 (22 August 1941).

Chapter 3

## THE ENEMY ALIEN CLASSIFICATION, 1941–1944



Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, the German Jewish immigrant community promptly stated its total and unanimous support for the United States. Under the capital-lettered headline “United We Stand,” the first issue of *Aufbau* after Pearl Harbor delivered this unequivocal statement:

At this moment, the immigrants who in recent years have found asylum and a new homeland under the Star Spangled Banner, put forth but one desire and pledge: to stand side by side with the American people, to help them to the best of their abilities in the defense of our country and its ideals. These immigrants, composed of people from many countries and speaking many languages, are one in their faith in democracy, their hatred of any kind of dictatorship, and their love for the nation that gave them a home.<sup>1</sup>

The statement was translated into several different languages—among them Spanish, French, and Hebrew, representing the different places German Jews had fled to. This declaration of loyalty to the United States was consistent with refugees’ tone before Pearl Harbor and reflects once again their determination to establish themselves as Americans. As with many of their public statements at this time, German Jewish refugees emphasized that they belonged just like the multitude of other immigrants in the United States, rather than focusing on their particular German Jewish identity. Their desire to disassociate themselves from Germany with such statements was partly motivated by the particular political climate of deep suspicion toward immigrants from Axis countries in the United States at the time. Prior to Pearl Harbor, there was concern within the refugee community that America’s entry into the war might exacerbate this suspicion. Yet despite these concerns over its effect on their own status in the

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Notes from this chapter begin on page 75.

country, the entry into the war meant a great deal to the Jewish refugees from Germany, and clearly something different than for most other immigrants in the United States. Though *Aufbau's* declaration highlighted refugees' determination to defend America in solidarity with any other immigrant group, many refugees had impatiently longed for America to join the conflict in hopes it would change conditions in Europe. Kurt Klein, a refugee who had arrived in the United States in 1937, leaving behind his parents in Germany, recalled his feelings many years later:

I had hoped that, once the war started in Europe, America would get involved because I saw it as the only way to stop that tremendous evil. All of the political developments were absolutely predictable to someone who knew the conditions in Germany and the brutality of the Nazis. So I did expect war to break out, although I didn't know when that would be. It was a great frustration for me to stand by and see all of these developments that I knew were going to happen without being able to do anything or help my parents more. So it came as a great relief when America entered the war, for as tragic and dramatic [as] that was for its people, it had to be done. Instead of being a powerless bystander, I found out that now I could actually play a small role in the defeat of this monster.<sup>2</sup>

Klein was no exception. Many hoped that America might come to the rescue of family members and friends who had remained in Europe. Furthermore, U.S. participation in the war seemed to promise an escape from the helplessness many refugees had increasingly felt in the face of what was happening in their former homeland. Many hoped to join in the fight against Hitler.<sup>3</sup>

The desire to be identified as Americans and to fight as such for American ideals and against Hitler were stifled, however, when the U.S. government classified German Jewish refugees as enemy aliens after America declared war. This designation officially and inescapably reduced refugees, despite all their efforts at Americanization beforehand and demonstrations and declarations of loyalty to the U.S. after it, to their German national origin, and ignored their Jewish identity and specific history with Germany. Thus, U.S. policy toward them significantly influenced their relationship with Germany and their German Jewish identity at this time. While scholars have noted the classification of German Jewish refugees as enemy aliens, they have treated it largely as a technical issue without significant repercussions on that community.<sup>4</sup> This understanding results largely from a general focus in German Jewish immigrant history on studying the East Coast. The refugee experience, however, varied significantly depending on their place of residence. While the enemy alien classification remained indeed principally a technical issue in the rest of the country, additional regulations and restrictions for enemy aliens living in parts of the Western United States had immediate practical and psychological consequences for the great number of refugees in Southern California, the second largest center of refugee settlement.



There, the classification revived memories of refugees' recent oppressive past in Germany while complicating their pursuit of Americanization and their participation in the war effort. In their arguments against being classified as enemy aliens, refugees now emphasized their particular German *Jewish* identity, and especially their position as victims of the Nazis—in contrast to their previous endeavors to stress similarities with other immigrant groups in the United States.

### **Distress over Refugees' Wartime Status in the United States**

The majority of refugees arrived in the United States in 1938, and while they generally applied for U.S. citizenship soon after, by 1941 most refugees had not yet fulfilled the five-year residence requirement that would have made them eligible for naturalization.<sup>5</sup> In the weeks preceding Pearl Harbor, many refugees were concerned about how it might affect their status as nonnaturalized aliens should the United States enter the war. Various government agencies, particularly the Justice and War Departments, were increasingly suspicious and anxious about refugees, and the media speculated about potential threats refugees and other aliens posed to U.S. security. There were rumors of the government building internment camps, and the hostile atmosphere prompted refugees to worry about their future.<sup>6</sup> Reinforcing insecurities was their knowledge of how other countries had treated German Jewish refugees once war broke out, with the United Kingdom's mass internment of aliens beginning in May 1940, including German Jewish refugees, the best known and most foreboding example.<sup>7</sup> Several *Aufbau* articles addressed these insecurities, some subscribing to them, others not. While one author called for the government to publicize definite, unambiguous information "so that much unnecessary mental anguish might be spared to tens of thousands of the refugees and their families,"<sup>8</sup> *Aufbau* journalist Wilfried Hülse cautioned refugee readers not to let themselves be drawn into such anxiety. In his opinion, their fears emanated from rumors, exaggerations, and refugees' own past negative experiences, not objective circumstances. He was convinced that the United States was deeply dedicated to democratic principles, so it would not infringe on its recent immigrants' freedom and human rights. Hülse's conviction derived from the assurances of politicians and spokespeople who had long advocated for Central European refugees in the United States and had met under his chairmanship for a symposium on "Recent Immigrants and National Defense" at the Immigrants' Conference on 3 December 1941, in New York. There, four days before Pearl Harbor, Eleanor Roosevelt herself had assured the audience that "non-citizens need feel no anxiety" about detention or internment.<sup>9</sup>

But Hülse was overly optimistic, and initially many of the community's fears were realized. On 8 December 1941, President Roosevelt issued an executive order declaring all nonnaturalized Germans and Italians over age fourteen "enemy

aliens,” including stateless aliens who had once been citizens or subjects of Germany and Italy.<sup>10</sup> This meant that the regulations the president had passed just the day before, 7 December 1941, for Japanese Americans now also applied to them. They restricted free movement to and from certain areas, such as the Hawaiian Islands, the Philippine Islands, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Furthermore, no enemy aliens were permitted near military and naval facilities, airports, harbors, power plants, or any places connected to national defense.<sup>11</sup> There were also restrictions of movement, travel, and change of occupation. Air travel of any kind was allowed only with permission of the Attorney General, Secretary of War, or their respective representatives.<sup>12</sup> In addition, enemy aliens were not allowed to possess or use firearms, ammunition, bombs, explosives, or material that could be used to produce such things, nor short-wave radios, transmitting sets, signal devices, codes, cameras, or any kind of material such as books, pictures, documents, maps, etc., that could reveal anything about U.S. defense.<sup>13</sup> Any kind of affiliation or support of organizations deemed potentially threatening by the Attorney General was prohibited as well.<sup>14</sup> While not all of the regulations affected many refugees on a daily basis, the proclamation generated the most anxiety in its declaration that all enemy aliens could be subject to removal, apprehension, detention, and interment, because speculation about it had existed before the United States entered the war, and because of its breadth and vagueness.<sup>15</sup>

In the first weeks after German Jewish refugees were classified as enemy aliens, there was much confusion over its specifics and the practical consequences it would have for them. This was especially true because, after they had initially been issued in December 1941, the regulations were subject to change, redesignation, and respecification by the Attorney General and other authorized officials. Confusion was exacerbated by the contrary messages communicated to the community by the designation and enforcement of the act on the one hand, and mollifying pronouncements by public figures on the other. *Aufbau* served as the primary medium communicating information about the regulations to the refugee community while also offering refugees advice on how to act. In the first issue after the attack on Pearl Harbor, *Aufbau* reiterated prior warnings against speaking German in public. It warned refugees to avoid making themselves identifiable as Germans, as there had reportedly been incidents where German speakers had been treated in “displeasing” ways.<sup>16</sup> It further advised refugees to eschew obviously foreign or conspicuous behavior that could attract negative attention, carry their registration cards at all times, and keep their first citizenship papers where they could immediately be accessed. Beyond such suggestions for refugees’ security, *Aufbau* also urged them to engage in activities that would demonstrate their loyalty and support of the war effort, such as donating blood and purchasing war bonds.<sup>17</sup>

*Aufbau* also tried to make sense of and justify government actions to the community, thereby projecting compliance and loyalty to the state and the wider

public. *Aufbau* journalists presented a consistent message of trust in the U.S. government and its efforts to prevent hardships for Jewish refugees from Germany and other Axis countries. As it had in the months prior to the U.S. entrance into the war, *Aufbau* frequently referred to statements by politicians and officials assuring the public that loyal aliens would be safe. One such statement, by Attorney General Francis Biddle, declared that many people classified as aliens were “‘aliens’ in the technical sense of the word only” and that the government would make every effort “to protect them from discrimination or abuse.”<sup>18</sup> *Aufbau* editors’ stance in reporting on the enemy alien classification was inspired by their belief in the regular, sympathetic pronouncements from the government authorities; it appears the editors aimed to maintain refugees’ hope and calm while sending a message of compliance and goodwill to the authorities.<sup>19</sup>

Individual contributions from refugees to *Aufbau* show that in the weeks after Pearl Harbor, refugees largely went along with this message from the paper and the authorities: they took the classification as a necessary but temporary evil. Alfred Pinkus from Los Angeles, for example, wrote that it must be clear to refugees that the enemy alien legislation was really in their own interest and that they as a group would not want to be spared any discomfort if it meant risking that actual enemies could get away.<sup>20</sup> Elow, who was an active organizer of cultural events for the Jewish Club of 1933 in Los Angeles, expressed his attitude toward the classification in a small poem:

**We Aliens**

What do we have to do?  
We have to wait,  
until we are called.—  
But then we have to be there.

What do we have to do?  
We have to wait.  
But before we are called,  
we have to be ready.

What do we have to do?  
We have to wait.  
But when we are called,  
we have to give everything.  
Our life too.—  
THAT is what we have to do.<sup>21</sup>

Several *Aufbau* articles mirrored this attitude of service by showcasing the different ways refugees could present their readiness and loyalty in supporting the defense effort: by being active in the State Guard or, if one did not have much

time or money, raising funds for the war by buying war stamps.<sup>22</sup> These articles all suggested that these actions would surely soon lead to the classification being lifted.

Further bolstering refugees' hope that the classification would be lifted was German legislation expatriating all Jews residing outside of the German Reich, which passed in November 1941. *Aufbau* characterized this legal separation from the German state as an honor for the Jews and an act to be welcomed. One Ernest Golm put it like this: "In reality, we are not Germans any longer, and we are proud of the fact that all ties that in any way, whatsoever, could connect us with Nazi Germany have been cut for good and all."<sup>23</sup> Jews had practically been ousted from society in the Third Reich by discrimination, persecution, and alienation in Germany before they emigrated, and, as chapter 2 showed, most refugees viewed themselves as permanent immigrants—they were eager to make the United States their new home, and acquiring American citizenship was naturally part of this. Thus, the German expatriation decree was merely legal recognition of their lived reality rather than a further iniquity. Nevertheless, the announcement of the German decree was particularly welcome at the time, since the United States had not previously legally acknowledged refugees' actual detachment from Germany. Paradoxically then, and disconcertingly for the community, American legislation harmed refugees' aspirations while Nazi legislation advanced them. The German legislation did, subsequently, become extremely important in refugees' strategies to demonstrate their loyalty to the American state and in arguments against their classification as enemy aliens. With this legislation, as an *Aufbau* commentator wrote,

the German Government has made abundantly clear to all the world that it considers all Jews residing abroad as enemies. Unfortunately, however, many of them are still regarded by the authorities as German nationals in a formal legal sense. . . . Our fellow American citizens will undoubtedly realize that the term "enemy alien" is hardly applicable to the loyal immigrant from Nazi-occupied countries, and that it has no reality but a questionable, formal, legal meaning.<sup>24</sup>

Some refugees feared that the label enemy alien could become dangerous for them if Americans failed to appreciate that they were only "technically" classified as enemy aliens or were unable to differentiate between "real" and "un-real" enemy aliens. This perspective could be heard particularly on the West Coast, where the enemy alien situation was more unsettling than in the rest of the country. The optimistic tone of *Aufbau* journalists was intrinsically connected to their residing on the East Coast. In California, with its concentration of defense industries, military locations, and a large Japanese population, the enemy alien issue was pervasive and fraught. In the weeks following Pearl Harbor, many Californians came to perceive people of Japanese ancestry living among them as a threat. Newspapers published accounts of alleged sabotage and

other subversive activities by Japanese people. Consequently, demands to move the Japanese inland and away from strategic defense zones on the Pacific Coast became quite pronounced and sometimes hysterical.<sup>25</sup> While the term “alien enemy” as widely used in the press primarily referred to the Japanese and only mentioned German and Italian aliens in passing, many refugees feared for their own safety and worried that people might direct their suspicions toward them as well. Signs in restaurants saying “enemy aliens keep out” gave credence to these fears. Moreover, this sort of behavior was disturbingly reminiscent of refugees’ experiences in Germany when their countrymen had hung up signs saying “non-Aryans keep out.”<sup>26</sup>

In a statement a group of refugees from the San Francisco Bay Area sent to Attorney General Francis Biddle, they expressed that they believed that terms such as “‘friend and foe,’ ‘ally’ and ‘enemy’ mean so much to the nation in wartime” and that people would likely make judgments based on those names.<sup>27</sup> The writers were concerned that “emergency measures [might be] extended to all those who are called ‘enemy aliens,’” irrespective of their attitude toward the United States.<sup>28</sup> To show refugees’ “true” attitude, the writers emphasized refugees’ dedication to America and its ideals with reference to the German expatriation decree and their own “fight” against Hitler, which had caused them much hardship and suffering (the writers included formerly active political opponents of the Nazis). The writers thus petitioned Attorney General Biddle to have the refugees “be named and treated as ‘refugees from Nazi Oppression’ instead of ‘enemy aliens.’”<sup>29</sup> No such amendment of status was granted, however.

This letter was just one early example of refugees urging government authorities to revoke the enemy alien status. Arguments for the reclassification frequently relied on similar reasoning and all centered around the refugees’ “true identity.” Whereas they had previously referred to themselves simply as immigrants or refugees, *Aufbau* reporters now frequently used the terms “refugee-immigrants” and “anti-Hitler refugees” to leave no room for doubt about their more specific, anti-German identity, which was loyal to the United States.

On 9 February 1942, Attorney General Biddle announced that all those who had registered as Austrians, Austro-Hungarians, and Koreans under the Alien Registration Act of 1940, and who never thereafter became citizens of Germany, Italy, or Japan voluntarily, were exempted from the alien enemy regulations. The same exemption even applied to former German, Italian, or Japanese citizens who had become citizens of another country before the declaration of war. The refugees did not find these exemptions fully satisfying. As they were keen to point out, Hitler-friendly people were more likely to be found among Austrians, for example, or among some of the other immigrant groups, than among German Jewish refugees. They argued that it was much easier for them to demonstrate their complete lack of allegiance to their homeland because they had not only

been persecuted by Germans but also legally expatriated and expropriated from Germany. Concerning the exemption for individuals who acquired citizenship of another non-Axis country before arriving in America, refugees argued that this could hardly be a criterion for loyalty to the United States. Willy Jacobsohn of Los Angeles, for example, in a letter to the director of the Enemy Alien Control Unit, indicated that he and his wife could easily have obtained Dutch citizenship or a Liechtenstein passport when they had initially fled to those countries from Germany. But they had “refused to do this.” Jacobsohn explained: “The reason was the feeling that we should not apply for another citizenship than the citizenship of the country in which we intend to live permanently, i.e., the United States of America.”<sup>30</sup> Another statement contesting the idea that refugees who took citizenship in another country first “excel in loyalty to the United States” was titled “‘Enemy aliens’ is a term which is not a mere technical concept, but has become a vital problem for those concerned.” This shows that, by then, refugees explicitly rejected the technicality argument authorities had been propagating.<sup>31</sup> *Aufbau* reported that many refugees had become somewhat depressed because of this label.

The insecurity in the refugee community about the consequences of their status as enemy aliens reached a new height in mid-February of 1942. After government authorities had repeatedly assured loyal aliens for weeks that they should “not be afraid,” President Roosevelt signed an executive order on 19 February 1942, authorizing the military—that is, the secretary of war and his commanders—to establish military areas where they deemed necessary.<sup>32</sup> From such military areas, subsequently created in strategically sensitive spaces along the Pacific Coast, “any or all persons [could] be excluded” by the military commander. This legislation formed the legal basis for the removal and internment of Japanese Americans.<sup>33</sup> While it only immediately affected six German Jewish refugee families forced to leave their homes, West Coast refugees were increasingly unsettled about their insecure status.<sup>34</sup>

The actions Western Defense Commander Lieutenant General John L. De Witt took on 3 March demonstrated that West Coast refugees’ fears were well warranted. While civilian authorities had continually tried to allay refugees’ concerns (and *Aufbau* had emphasized these efforts), De Witt belied this stance by announcing that all enemy aliens would be gradually evacuated from Military Zone No. 1—the entire coastline of California, Washington, and Oregon, as well as the southern sections of California and Arizona along the Mexican border—with no exemptions for German and Italian enemy aliens.<sup>35</sup> Refugees living in these areas were duly shocked. The following excerpt of a telegram the Jewish Club of 1933 sent to the Council for Aliens of Enemy Nationality in New York illustrates the Los Angeles community’s distress, also in relation to the recent traumatic experiences of persecution and flight many therein had endured:

Thousands of antinazi refugees here are in panic and distress as no word about exemptions for victims of nazi oppression and persecution forthcoming . . . doubly distressed because trusting in francis biddles [*sic*] assurances about protecting loyal innocent refugees . . . spiritual strengths and power of endurance will be broken in most of them if they will have to suffer terribly after they learned to rely on the democratic refuge of the united states . . . much damage is done and being caused continuously by uncertainty . . . our members urge you to intervene in Washington without delay and to get clear unmistakable statement whether it is really contemplated to remove thousands of refugees from their home exactly like nazis . . . every day counts as every day brings new harm.<sup>36</sup>

Given the desperate anxiety De Witt's announcement engendered among West Coast German Jewish refugees, refugee organizations there intensified their efforts to have the enemy alien classification removed.

### The Tolan Committee

Once the United States entered the war and German refugees' status in the country became ever more precarious, West Coast organizations shifted their attention from helping newcomers get settled by providing social, educational, and cultural activities to representing this group politically and resolving the enemy alien problem.<sup>37</sup> Their first action was their participation in the hearings of the Tolan Committee, a select House of Representatives committee named after its chairman, John H. Tolan, and tasked with investigating migration, including the forced movement of large groups for national defense purposes.<sup>38</sup> When rumors regarding evacuation plans began circulating, the committee scheduled hearings in San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and Los Angeles. Representatives of the West Coast German Jewish refugee community hoped that presenting their case before this committee would help bring about exemption from evacuation and the enemy alien classification. In the context of these hearings, refugee organizations also began to coordinate their activities. Refugees first appeared before the committee in Seattle on 2 March. Subsequent to that hearing, Elsa Winners Schwerin, a representative from Seattle, sent a letter to the Los Angeles Jewish Club, reporting about the work the refugees had been doing in their city to fight the classification and commenting on the "wonderful public response" they had received. Schwerin pointed out, however, that the American Jewish community reaction had been quite different, writing, "In fact, a man was sent from the Joint Committee in New York to try keep us away from being publicly heard." He had "frighten[ed] refugee groups" in San Francisco and Portland, who thereafter refrained from appearing before the committee. It appears that the larger American Jewish community generally did not support German Jewish refugees in the enemy alien matter but responded to the classification

much like they subsequently did to the discriminatory treatment of the Nikkei, people of Japanese ancestry: extremely cautious, mostly silent, but expressing their trust that authorities were acting correctly.<sup>39</sup> A letter from the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League in Chicago (not one of the areas most affected) replying to a refugee's appeal exemplifies this attitude: "Please be assured that we are professionally concerned and stirred by the circumscriptions placed upon our brethren. We must be sufficiently objective, however, to be tolerant of some of the necessities imposed upon the government in order to guard against physical and psychological sabotage."<sup>40</sup> American Jewish organizations dedicated to directly working with refugees, like the National Refugee Service, showed more understanding for their situation and cooperated with them. Ellen Eisenberg explained the Western Jewish community's silence regarding the treatment of the Nikkei as a sort of paralysis arising from the tension between their dedication to fighting injustice and discrimination and their dedication to the war effort. The lack of vocal support for German Jewish refugees may be seen in the same light. Nonetheless, German Jewish refugees were not discouraged by that. Schwerin reported from Seattle that they did not let themselves be intimidated and that the Tolan Committee had been overwhelmingly sympathetic to their case.<sup>41</sup>

In Los Angeles, refugees also hoped for a favorable reception. At the hearings on March 7, they were represented by Felix Guggenheim from the Jewish Club, Hans F. Schwarzer (another refugee), and also three famous German exiles who had found a haven in Los Angeles: Thomas Mann, Bruno Frank, and Lion Feuchtwanger; Feuchtwanger submitted a written statement.<sup>42</sup> Thomas Mann was not classified as an enemy alien himself because he had taken on Czech citizenship and was thus exempt, but he contributed regularly to *Aufbau* on topics concerning the refugee community as a whole. Prior to the 3 March declaration, Mann had written President Roosevelt on a topic "close to [his] heart," advocating that German refugees fleeing the Nazis should be exempt from the enemy alien classification.<sup>43</sup> His prominence in the United States and his engagement in the matter prompted his invitation to speak before the committee.<sup>44</sup> Mann, Frank, Feuchtwanger, and Guggenheim all made similar contributions, focusing on portraying the refugees as victims who had first suffered wrongful treatment under the Nazis and were now suffering from the enemy alien classification. They openly compared the effects of Nazi and U.S. legislation, emphasizing the similar suffering both had entailed for the refugees.

Felix Guggenheim, born in Constance, Germany, in 1904, had arrived in the United States in late 1940 and become active in the Los Angeles Jewish Club, where he led a committee concerned with addressing the problems of the enemy alien classification on the West Coast.<sup>45</sup> In his statement before the Tolan Committee, he explained that refugees still bore the "scars" of Nazism "on their bodies or on their minds" and that it would be "the worst tragedy for them" to be treated as enemies by the country they felt was their new home.<sup>46</sup> Bruno Frank



reinforced this image of the distressed refugee by telling the story of a young refugee girl as an exemplar of many ordinary refugees. When the young woman emigrated, she had to leave her parents behind in Germany. Since her arrival in the United States, she had been writing them letters about her wonderful life in America and promised that she would bring them over, too. Then Frank asked the committee considering the enemy alien classification, “Well, Sir, what should she write now, if write she could. I am no longer among friends? I am considered an enemy now just as the beasts who are torturing you. Forget all about it. It was but a dream. Go to Poland, and die.”<sup>47</sup>

Felix Guggenheim even invoked the idea that U.S. actions could contribute to fulfilling Hitler’s goal and stressed that the classification and plans for evacuation contradicted and hurt America and democracy. The day refugees from Nazi oppression were to be interned, he stated, “would be counted by history as a first class victory of Hitlerism against democracy.”<sup>48</sup>

Although these speakers compared U.S. legislation with Nazism to express how severely the U.S. law impacted refugees, they emphasized that they did not believe the United States—“this great Nation which is fighting for freedom and human dignity”—would actually implement policies like those of the Nazis.<sup>49</sup> They proclaimed their trust that the nation, with agencies like the FBI, would manage to distinguish dangerous aliens from America-friendly refugees. They also suggested that examination boards could be set up to aid in this differentiation process. Such local boards had been established in England to investigate refugees, subsequently exempting loyal refugees from restrictions and identifying them in their registration certificates as “victims of Nazi oppression.” Guggenheim had spent time in England before coming to the United States and now shared his firsthand knowledge of procedures for establishing these boards with the Tolan Committee. In England, reclassified refugees were subsequently allowed to contribute to England’s war effort against the Nazis—which was, all speakers agreed, what the refugees longed for.<sup>50</sup> Emphasizing that reclassification was really in the best interest of America, its citizens, and its aim of defeating the Axis powers, Bruno Frank asserted the loyalty of the refugees: “No group, by its hatred of evil and its love of freedom, could be closer united in spirit to the American soldier than these very people.”<sup>51</sup>

In addition to these speakers from the refugee community, the Tolan Committee received personal and written testimonies on behalf of refugees from individuals in the political arena and community and religious organizations. California’s Governor Olson and Los Angeles’s Mayor Bowron followed an invitation to give their opinion on the enemy alien question, and both supported the establishment of hearing boards for Italian and German aliens, although they favored the evacuation of the entire Japanese population.<sup>52</sup> Carey McWilliams, a vocal civil liberties activist, journalist, lawyer, and, in 1942, director of the Division of Immigration and Housing, also advocated the reclassification of

German Jewish refugees. Similar to the refugee speakers, he argued that “if any group merits special consideration, it is this group.”<sup>53</sup> The support from these public individuals of diverse backgrounds and political affiliations indicates that, within general public opinion, German Jewish refugees were not seen as dangerous persons who should be subjected to the same treatment many deemed necessary for people of Japanese ancestry.

As in Seattle, the atmosphere at the Tolan Committee hearings in Los Angeles was very favorable and friendly toward the refugees. *Aufbau* reported extensively on the hearings, printing the statements of all the speakers from the refugee community, repeatedly emphasizing high expectations for a positive outcome, not least because so many prominent and influential speakers had participated.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, the plans to evacuate all German and Italian aliens were not carried out in the end. The testimonies by influential people highlighting German and Italian loyalty and support for their exemption in the general public, largely due to the absence of deep-seated racism that made the case against the Japanese, were reasons for this.<sup>55</sup> Further, evacuating Italian and German aliens did not seem feasible. The preliminary findings of the Tolan Committee, issued on 19 March 1942, suggested that there were too many German and Italians and that evacuating them would impede the war effort.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, while the committee recommendations spared these refugees evacuation, it did not exempt them from the enemy alien classification.

### **Practical Consequences of the Enemy Alien Classification**

While the classification itself, frequent amendments to the legislation, and uncertainty over possible future legislation precipitated great fear and distress among West Coast refugees, the regulations for German and Italian aliens residing in designated Military Zone No. 1 that De Witt issued on 24 March 1942 had very real material and practical everyday consequences. These included a curfew between 8:00PM and 6:00AM, during which enemy aliens were not permitted to leave their homes, and a travel restriction stipulating that they could not go more than five miles from their residence.<sup>57</sup> After *Aufbau*'s exceedingly optimistic picture of the Tolan Committee hearings had fueled refugees' hopes, these new restrictions provoked great disappointment and new fears among them. One San Francisco refugee who had become particularly active in fighting the enemy alien classification wrote a letter to Felix Guggenheim in Los Angeles expressing tremendous disapproval of *Aufbau*'s treatment of the West Coast situation. He wrote that hope-raising articles about the idea that the “central authorities” were particularly friendly toward the case of the refugees were not justifiable, since they were “certainly not based on any facts.”<sup>58</sup> Such reporting, he believed,

was rather harmful to the fight against the classification on the front line in the West. However, *Aufbau's* editor in chief, Manfred George, in a letter to Guggenheim, refuted such accusations from the West Coast that the newspaper had deliberately published false captions to create an optimistic atmosphere and increase its sales.<sup>59</sup> George averred that *Aufbau* reporters had treated the alien question very carefully and had cooperated quite closely with authorities. This small episode once again highlights the significant discrepancy between East and West Coast perceptions—borne of different political climates and everyday experiences—of the enemy alien classification during this time. *Aufbau* reporters in New York had more reason to trust the statements of the authorities because the East Coast situation did not feel nearly as threatening to refugees as it did to those on the West Coast, where, despite government officials' positive messages, the enemy alien classification had negatively impacted refugees from the beginning.<sup>60</sup> While the tension between East and West Coast organizations persisted, those on the East Coast eventually acknowledged the discrepancy. George, in a letter to Guggenheim from September 1942, admitted that evaluating the overall situation from the East Coast was sometimes difficult and may have precipitated misrepresentations.<sup>61</sup>

*Aufbau's* projection of trust in the authorities did, indeed, prove to have been optimistic, at least regarding the West. There, the favorable inclination of civilian authorities and public individuals toward German Jewish refugees did not hold sway; their promise that the classification would remain a mere technicality for these refugees proved false. Crucially, this resulted from authority over the enemy alien matter shifting from civilian to military authorities, and also from confusion about which department ultimately held the final authority. Originally, the Justice Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, under the direction of Attorney General Francis Biddle, had jurisdiction over enemy alien matters. Roosevelt's Executive Order of 19 February 1942 transferred this authority to the War Department, and thus, on the West Coast, to the Western Defense Command headed by General De Witt. So while civilian authorities remained sympathetic to the refugees, they repeatedly emphasized that "questions of curfew and evacuation on the West Coast" were no longer within their jurisdiction.<sup>62</sup> The War Department largely considered the classification a military necessity, though some officials also acknowledged that the refugees had fled Nazi persecution.<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, after various departments sparred over who had the authority to change refugees' classification, nothing was done about it.<sup>64</sup> Thus, while government officials recognized how unfair the classification was, they never felt the injustice warranted a change. Instead, the government pursued a strategy of stressing the need for the classification for internal security reasons not directly related to refugees, downplaying the effects—"the actual restraint of personal liberties of non-dangerous alien enemies is relatively mild"—and praising refugees for their "spirit of cooperation, which loyal members of the group,

almost without exception, have displayed in conscientiously carrying out their part of the Government's program."<sup>65</sup>

West Coast refugees did not react to their inclusion in the curfew restrictions with understanding, however, but rather with unanimous incomprehension. Some became dejected, as an *Aufbau* commentary aptly summarized: "Confidence in the future—so essential for people who have lost a great deal of their past—has shrunk overnight to the vanishing point."<sup>66</sup> This trope of loss of hope for a good future in the United States in the context of the refugees' recent past appears in many of their statements related to the enemy alien classification. Dubiously tactful proclamations by officials about the relatively mild inconvenience of the classification compared to what refugees had endured under the Nazis were neither convincing nor effective in calming fears. After all, the discrimination refugees had suffered under the Nazis had itself started in relatively small ways. Furthermore, since promises that the classification was a mere technicality had proved untrue, how could one trust the authorities now? Numerous refugees reacted to the curfew with outrage. In the weeks and months after the restrictions passed, many wrote to the authorities urging them to lift the classification, as the latest orders endangered "businesses and jobs, causing us greatest difficulties and imposing severe hardships upon us, making it impossible to earn a livelihood."<sup>67</sup>

Although refugees had at times declared their understanding that they were part of a nation at war, and that sacrifices must be made, they had also repeatedly argued that this "great nation" should not support procedures that, as they pointed out directly, were similar to those of the tyrannical dictatorship they had fled.

The curfew and five-mile travel restrictions did indeed impinge severely on their everyday life, especially in the sprawl of Los Angeles. An article in *Aufbau's* "Westküste" section described the particularly serious impact on occupational groups such as salesmen, storekeepers, truck drivers, various night workers, bakers, and dairy employees, who could not perform their jobs as required, leading many of them to resign.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, inevitably, while such discrimination was not legal, employers were disinclined to hire refugees because their enemy alien status affected their "usefulness."<sup>69</sup> Professional status did not grant any privilege, either: physicians and nurses were also subject to the restrictions because their status "was not recognized by the army order."<sup>70</sup> Consequently, they were not allowed to see their patients after 8 p.m., even in emergencies. The flip side of healthcare illustrates the severity of the restrictions: sick "enemy aliens" were not allowed to go to the hospital if it was more than five miles from their home—not even pregnant women in labor when this coincided with the curfew. People were prohibited from going to services at their church or temple by the regulations.<sup>71</sup> High school and university students were especially affected, as *Aufbau's* West Coast edition pointed out. One young refugee

named Frank Ullmann illustrated this in a letter to Felix Guggenheim of the Jewish Club. Ullmann recounted his persecution by the Nazis as a school boy in Germany and then Sweden, where his family had first fled. After coming to the United States, he experienced school “like a paradise” and had his happiest moments in years when his parents got their first papers. But the enemy alien issue undid this:

Now came the Enemy Aliens question, and because I was a former German citizen by birth, I was to be an enemy alien. I think this is very ridiculous. I, who hate the Nazis more than any American, am called an enemy alien, and the law is again pointing at me to suffer under more pressure.

I am ashamed to tell my fellows that I am not able to come to them to study or have fun in the evening. I only hope that I also will get the opportunity to do something; I think a job against the *Nazis*, I can work and will.

Guggenheim received several such letters highlighting how the restrictions caused refugees various hardships and inhibited their Americanization and participation in the war effort. Another letter was written by seventeen-year-old William Schwarzer, who had been elected to a leadership position within the Eagle Scouts and could not perform his duties because of the curfew. It exemplifies how the classification struck at the heart of all that was so significant and intrinsically entangled for them: their past experiences of oppression, their dedication to America, and their desire to contribute to the war effort:

Ever since we have been living here, we have tried to the best of our ability and quite successfully to live as good American citizens do: our language has been American, our rule of life has been the Bill of Rights, our law has been the Constitution, our inspiration has been the stars and stripes. It has been our sincere objective to obey and respect all the rules and regulations set up by the government. The curfew order, however, will make it impossible for us to live an American way of life and prepare ourselves for citizenship. This differentiation, segregation, and prejudice had been the cause of our emigration from Europe. We came here with the hope of enjoying liberty under the law, justice and equal rights. Our part in securing the final victory in this war is not one of brooding within our homes from eight to six, sinister, sad, and grim, under the constant observation and suspicion of officers and agents. We can do more, Sir, much more, if we would only be given a chance. Let those who are loyal, cooperative and harmless go free and hold the suspicious and guilty.<sup>72</sup>

Schwarzer’s words once again clearly express the misery refugees felt at having escaped discrimination in one place only to encounter it in another, particularly since they were transparently patriotic in their intentions and deeds. To some, the promise of the American dream appeared to have failed. Schwarzer’s equation of what he (and most refugees) saw as the arbitrary injustice of the oppression in Germany and the beginning of similar practices in the United States betrays the

depths of the disappointment and fear for the future caused by the singling out of German Jewish refugees as enemy aliens.

### **Fighting the Legislation: Alleviating Its Effects, Disputing Its Application**

West Coast refugee organizations became important sources of help for German Jewish refugees trying to deal with the consequences of the new restrictions. These organizations intensified their mutual cooperation, which had begun before the Tolson Committee hearings, when the Coordinating Committee of Refugee Immigrants was established in mid-March 1942. Members of this committee were representatives from major cities with German Jewish populations situated in Military Area No. 1. Delegations were somewhat proportionate to the size of their respective refugee communities; there were three representatives from San Francisco, three from Los Angeles, and one each from Portland and Seattle. Committee members believed that individual actions by refugees, such as sending letters to different officials, might actually hurt rather than help the group's cause, and that a few knowledgeable people from broadly representative institutions could achieve better results by establishing relationships with civilian and military authorities.<sup>73</sup> These West Coast refugee activists aimed to immediately alleviate the direct consequences of the enemy alien classification while simultaneously working to get it revoked for stateless Jewish refugees. Initially unable to attract the help of the broader American Jewish community in their protest against the classification itself, these refugees did work with Jewish organizations, mostly those that had supported them in refugee issues since their arrival, such as the National Council for Jewish Women, when dealing with the practical consequences of the legislation. They also worked with local state offices and increasingly with the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, the umbrella institution for German Jewish groups in the United States, with headquarters in New York City. To ease the hardships of the travel restrictions and the curfew, the Los Angeles Jewish Club helped individual refugees acquire exceptions from the Office of Civilian Defense and the city and country defense councils, and specifically designated officials authorized to issue permits.<sup>74</sup>

Sometimes local authorities had compassion and understanding for the refugees' situation and the complications of the permit processes, as Hedy Wolf's story shows. Her husband Ernest had a teaching position at a military academy in Glendale, while she was working at a doctor's office in downtown Los Angeles, about ten miles from their residence:

So at that time, we lived in different places. I took the bus to go see him. For several weeks, every Friday afternoon or Saturday morning, I had to go to the consul general

and ask for permission to travel to my husband. He was a very nice young man. At first he gave a permit to me each week. Later on, since he understood the situation real well, he laughed and gave me a permanent permit so I wouldn't have to come each week. I remember this very well because not so many nice things happened!<sup>75</sup>

Nevertheless, Hedy could not stay with her husband overnight, as every enemy alien was required to be in her own home at night. Such effects continually reinforced the community's overall unhappiness over the injustice of the enemy alien designation and its inappropriateness for refugees, who, far from truly being enemy aliens, urgently wished to become Americans. To quote Hedy Wolf again: "I wasn't German anymore. I wasn't American either. We were without a country. What bothered me was that I did not *belong*, that I had no passport."<sup>76</sup>

Since the state had structurally blocked the path to citizenship with the enemy alien classification, refugees channeled their motivation to become Americans into a fight to get the status revoked to symbolize their attempt to become full-fledged Americans. Paradoxically, in this fight to gain official permission to become American, their central strategy was to focus on their German Jewish identity to differentiate themselves from one of the state's enemies, Nazi Germany. In individual letters to authorities, refugees used their stories of victimization in Nazi Germany to point out the injustice of the enemy alien classification from the beginning. The organized refugee community intensified this narrative throughout the war. In their appeal to U.S. authorities, they continued to stress their victimhood and always positioned their fight against the enemy alien classification within the larger context of the war. Sensitized to the situation on the West Coast, the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe (AMFED) began taking the enemy alien classification more seriously and supported the efforts refugees in the West had started. In a memorandum to its member organizations, for instance, AMFED proposed to collect data about refugees that would identify them specifically as stateless Jewish victims of Germany. The federation sought evidence of "specific damage" individual refugees had endured in Germany, such as dismissal from their profession due to their Jewish origin, or arrest and imprisonment in concentration camps.<sup>77</sup> The data would then be used to issue affidavits guaranteeing a "non-enemy" identity for the refugees. Although it is unclear whether these suggestions were ever systematically implemented, the idea illustrates refugees' strategic focus on their German Jewish identity to facilitate their quest to become Americans.

Finally, in their appeals to various authorities to revoke the enemy alien classification, refugees also stressed that their German Jewish background, contrary to making them "enemies," could actually be of strategic advantage to the United States in the war effort. They characterized their community as having both intimate knowledge of the common German enemy and great motivation to do something to combat it. In Los Angeles, the Jewish Club proactively offered its

assistance in a letter to the local FBI office: “We would be only too glad to be at your service at any time and for any information and cooperation we are able to give.”<sup>78</sup> The FBI’s reply was fairly typical of many U.S. authorities the refugees appealed to; it was politely grateful for the refugees’ offer but extremely noncommittal, giving no indication of what refugees might do to make themselves useful. The implication that such help would define the refugee community as allies, if not actually Americans, and certainly make the enemy alien designation absurd, was entirely ignored.

## War Effort

The fact that the enemy alien classification hindered the refugees in participating to their full potential in the war effort was of utmost concern to them.<sup>79</sup> An obvious way young male refugees had been able to contribute prior to Pearl Harbor was to become a soldier in the U.S. Army. According to the Selective Training and Selective Service Act of 1940, refugees holding first papers were eligible to be drafted for military service. After Pearl Harbor, however, all enemy aliens were initially excluded from military service regardless of where they lived or whether they had first papers. Shortly thereafter, when enemy aliens were again considered for service, they had to pass a screening to prove their trustworthiness and dependability. All male enemy aliens between twenty-one and thirty-five years, along with all other Americans of that age, had been registered with their local draft boards since the Smith Act of 1940, and they now received special forms for documenting their personal history and political conviction.<sup>80</sup> If the alien was deemed “acceptable”—a decision within the authority of the commanding general of the army zone in which he lived, which could take several weeks—he would then be eligible for the draft.<sup>81</sup> Yet even after joining the army, refugees were subjected to certain restrictions on account of their enemy alien classification. Most refugees who joined the army in the first year of active U.S. involvement in the war were initially placed in noncombat units because the military refused to entrust them with weapons.<sup>82</sup> Certain positions were also initially closed to enemy aliens, like physicians in the Army’s Medical Corps, and they could not become officers until they were naturalized.<sup>83</sup> Not until spring 1943 were enlisted refugees exempted from the enemy alien classification. At that time, the government, under “congressional pressure and other requests by the general staff office,” lifted all previous restrictions, thereby acknowledging the refugees’ special qualifications simply due to their background, and finally accepting, at least within the military, the argument refugee organizations had made all along.<sup>84</sup> Until then, the enlistment restrictions affected all refugees equally, regardless of where they resided. There were only slight differences between regions due to the authority local draft boards had.



On the home front, however, refugees' opportunities to participate in the war effort differed significantly depending on their region of residence. While the organized refugee community strongly encouraged supporting the war, the curfew and travel restrictions on the West Coast made it initially difficult for refugees there to do so. First aid and training courses for vital wartime occupations like welders or technicians, for example, were frequently held during curfew hours.<sup>85</sup> Refugees reported that they could not donate blood if the Red Cross Donor Service was not within the five-mile zone. When the Los Angeles Jewish Community turned out for a mass meeting "to protest publicly against Nazi atrocities and massacres" in August 1942, German Jewish refugees could not participate because it happened after the eight o'clock curfew. Their note to the Jewish Community Council concisely articulates the absurdity of the classification: "But we as the first victims of the evil forces you are protesting against will join you in spirit and hope for an outstanding success of the mass demonstration against Nazi barbarism."<sup>86</sup>

One way all refugees could engage in the war effort was to raise money. In spring 1942, several private donors and refugee organizations on the East Coast formed the Loyalty Committee of Victims of Nazi-Fascist Oppression, which started a fundraising campaign to purchase a fighter airplane for the American Air Force.<sup>87</sup> A regional satellite of this committee on the West Coast was headquartered in Los Angeles under the chairmanship of Leopold Jessner; other members of the Jewish Club, as well as some prominent émigrés like Lion Feuchtwanger, Max Horkheimer, and Heinrich Mann, also actively participated.<sup>88</sup> The campaign was inspired as much by the refugees' desire to contribute to the war effort as by their desire to demonstrate their earnestness to the American public.<sup>89</sup> As one appeal to the refugee community for donations described it, the Loyalty Campaign was a "liberation" during a time when refugees were forbidden to act under the enemy alien classification and as an antidote to the "lethargy" many experienced as a result.<sup>90</sup> In addition to favorable reception in the refugee community, the Campaign garnered positive attention in the American press as well as from government officials.<sup>91</sup> In October 1942, the Loyalty Committee was able to present a check for \$48,500 to the War Department—funds which were, indeed, used to purchase an Air Force fighter plane. The refugees' struggle for recognition in their new country was symbolically validated in its name: "Loyalty."<sup>92</sup>

Refugees on the West Coast could really take up more proactive war efforts only after De Witt lifted the curfew and travel restrictions for German enemy aliens on 23 December 1942. He explained that they were no longer needed since "other security measures had been provided."<sup>93</sup> While the refugees were naturally relieved at this ruling, the Jewish Club in Los Angeles reiterated their ongoing dissatisfaction with the classification, which "put [them] in the same file as the Nazis."<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, the refugees welcomed the end of the curfew and travel restriction as an opportunity to dedicate themselves fully to the American war effort. The organized community was instrumental in furthering individual refugees' participation. In Los Angeles, the Jewish Club had been negotiating for German Jewish refugees to take part in the activities of the local Defense Council. In April 1943, the club enthusiastically informed its members that they were now eligible to join the U.S. Citizens Service Corps "on the same basis as citizens" and appealed to refugees to enlist, as "not a single refugee family will want to be missing when we present our list of volunteers to the Civilian Defense."<sup>95</sup>

The Jewish Club was designated to officially register all refugees on behalf of the Citizen Defense Volunteer Office, whether they were members of the club or not, and to assure that those registered were loyal and reliable. Refugees could volunteer in several different corps divisions, such as the Salvage Collection Service, the Price and Ration Board, the Health and Hospital Service, Childcare Service, Transportation, or Block Leader Service.<sup>96</sup> The Club received numerous applications for volunteer work, including one letter by Ernst Kleinmann and his wife asking whether they could be useful as volunteers, even though both were severely physically handicapped with arthritis and eye problems.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the enthusiasm to contribute to the war effort was even shared by some of the older refugees, whom the historiography has often depicted as less interested in active participation in American organizational life.

With the curfew and travel restrictions lifted, refugees could now also contribute to the war effort by organizing social events, previously very difficult to carry out. After entertainment had taken second place to the Jewish Club's political work, the club now organized numerous events relating to the war effort. It routinely organized Blood Donation Campaigns, and, like *Aufbau*, published the names of those who repeatedly and ardently gave their blood "for the victory of the United Nations."<sup>98</sup> Like other Jewish refugee clubs across the United States, it also held Victory Campaigns, including Victory Knitting and Sewing, and Victory Parties, all of which served to raise funds.<sup>99</sup> Even cultural events not explicitly related to these victory campaigns were put to the service of the war effort. The following words of introduction at the opening of a club event show how much the war dominated refugees' mindset and also how important it was for them to clarify their stance toward Germany:

We are looking forward to an evening of relaxation and amusement of laughter and entertainment . . . Such an hour of pleasantness will not make us forget the sorrows and sacrifices or our war-torn world, the expedient use of the German language will not make us forget our hate against Nazi Germany and our progress in America, and the jokes and the music will not let us forget our duties in this hour and every hour of this war for freedom and survival.<sup>100</sup>

While cultural events helped raise funds for the war, war bonds were the most common financial contribution, and in Los Angeles the refugee community was at the forefront of these activities with the initiator and chairman of the War Savings Committee being a German Jewish refugee.<sup>101</sup> In 1944, L.A.'s refugee club also took on leadership roles in other local anti-Nazi activities. For example, it was in charge of the Victory House in Pershing Square used for staging an Anti-Nazi War Bond Drive.<sup>102</sup> This was great progress, considering that refugees had not even been able to attend an anti-Nazi protest because of the curfew in 1942.

Once the revocation of the curfew and travel restrictions allowed the refugees on the West Coast to move on with living more normal lives and to finally tangibly oppose the Nazis, the urgency with which they had discussed the enemy alien classification ever since its passing diminished. By late 1943, the refugee press addressed this issue much less frequently. Nevertheless, the classification continued to impede refugees' efforts to become naturalized American citizens. As noted above, the passing of the enemy alien classification in 1941 put naturalization for all enemy aliens, regardless of place of residence, on hold. It also implemented a ninety-day investigation period, during which the Immigration and Naturalization Service reviewed the applicant's loyalty.<sup>103</sup> West Coast refugees had faced an additional obstacle during the curfew period because they were often unable to participate in naturalization-assistance programs, such as language and citizenship classes, which were generally offered in the evening.<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, the investigation process frequently took much longer than the proposed ninety days, and sometimes longer than six months.<sup>105</sup> Authorities attributed the delay to a lack of personnel and technical problems rather than difficulties in confirming applicants' loyalty.<sup>106</sup> However, refugees were concerned that the public might perceive this differently. The case of Harry Salinger, a refugee in Los Angeles, shows the distress and practical disadvantages caused by his delay in naturalization. Salinger had been a judge in Germany and was one of the few refugees who studied law all over again in the United States. Yet his admittance to the bar exam was dependent on U.S. citizenship, and the longer he waited for it, the more he worried about his professional future because the bar exam was only valid for one year. Also, he was concerned about how the American public, especially other lawyers, would perceive his delay in being admitted to the bar. In a petition to Earl G. Harrison, Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, to treat his case as one of "extreme hardship," he explained,

Every time I meet one of the them [other lawyers] I am asked whether I have been admitted in the meantime. If my answer has to be "no" for a long time to come, my reputation as to loyalty must gradually deteriorate as it will be very difficult to give an explanation for the delay which satisfies their doubts. As a good reputation of an

attorney is one of his main assets the damaging effect of an unforeseen delay in my naturalization procedure is obvious.<sup>107</sup>

Much scholarship on German Jewish refugees in the United States has identified problems they had integrating into American life as resulting from their specific background and from their individual characteristics (age, profession, etc.). But Salinger's case illustrates once again that discriminatory U.S. legislation also constituted a major impediment to their integration irrespective of their individual motivation to do so.

However, Salinger's petition also underscores refugees' efforts to fight the enemy alien classification and its ramifications in order to reach their goals. During the war, the Political Committee of the Jewish Club of 1933 negotiated with government organizations and authorities on behalf of numerous refugees over delays in their naturalization.<sup>108</sup> By the end of 1944, Felix Guggenheim proudly commented on his organization's success in overcoming roadblocks to refugees' naturalization and Americanization. In his report after a meeting in New York, he noted,

I realized for the first time how well things have developed in this respect on the West Coast. Only 2 years ago we were confronted with dangerous consequences of the enemy alien legislation; curfew, threat of evacuation and the treatment of refugees as . . . German . . . aliens seemed to stop our Americanization during the war and even to jeopardize our solidarity with American Jewry. To-day thanks to concerted action of American-Jewish organizations and refugee-organizations and thanks to the attitude of the government-agencies concerned, we have in LA the fastest-working naturalization procedure, compared with all other cities, and we see a much closer cooperation and integration of new Americans and old Americans than anywhere else in the USA.<sup>109</sup>

In this way, West Coast refugees once hardest hit by the enemy alien classification and its consequences were eventually able to Americanize faster than refugees in other parts of the country due to their organizing and activism. Despite the psychological and practical hardship the classification had caused them, they had not become disillusioned with the United States or more closely attached to Germany or nostalgic about their German past. Rather, they engaged in political activism, focusing strategically on their German Jewish identity to fight the association with Germany the government imposed on them, because it allowed them to construct themselves as enemies of Nazi Germany and acceptable future Americans. They embraced their legal separation from Germany and their anti-Nazi and pro-American stance. Ultimately, they drew strength from their ability to operate effectively within the democratic structures of the United States. To do this, like many immigrants before them, they transformed some of their communal organizations into political institutions of advocacy and, building new

institutions, strengthened their intracommunal networks. Taking part in the U.S. political process, they experienced significant flaws in democratic structures firsthand. Nevertheless, they were not afraid to appeal for better treatment when they perceived the United States to be violating its own democratic ideals. The refugees' classification as enemy aliens persisted throughout the war. However, as the above quote illustrates, the initially severe discriminatory effects of the legislation diminished, and the refugee community ultimately won its fight to be legally accepted as future Americans. From 1943 to the end of the war, some refugees were occupied even more directly with Germany when they returned to Europe as soldiers of the U.S. Armed Forces.

## Notes

1. *Aufbau* 7 (12 December 1941).
2. "Kurt Klein," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 273.
3. American Jews welcomed America's entry into the war with similar feelings: American patriotism and relief that something could finally be done to fight "the Jewish people's greatest enemy of modern times." Diner, *Jews of the United States*, 221.
4. Appellius, *Die schönste Stadt*, 113.
5. Davie, *Refugees in America*, 189.
6. See Herbert Weichmann, "Ausländer, Fremde sind's zumeist . . ." *Aufbau* 7 (24 October 1941); J.P.S., "Status of the Refugee," *Aufbau* 7 (7 November 1941): 4.
7. For more detail, see, e.g., Cesarani and Kushner, eds, *The Internment of Aliens*; and a novel based on the internment experience of a young German Jewish refugee woman, Ruth Borchard, *We are Strangers Here*. New Zealand also interned German Jewish refugees. See, e.g., Beaglehole, "Locked Up and Guarded."
8. See J.P.S., "Status of the Refugee."
9. *Aufbau* 7 (12 December 1941); "Keine Konzentrationslager für loyale Nichtbürger," *Aufbau* 7 (12 December 1941).
10. See Proclamation 2526 of December 8, 1941 ("Alien Enemies—German"), U. S. Code Congressional Service, 77th Cong., 1st Session.
11. Proclamation 2525 of December 7, 1941 ("Alien Enemies—Japanese"), U. S. Code Congressional Service, 77th Cong., 1st Session, 886ff.
12. *Ibid.*, 886.
13. *Ibid.*, 887.
14. *Ibid.*, 889.
15. *Ibid.*, 888.
16. "An Alle! Wichtige Mitteilungen für die Leser des Aufbau," *Aufbau* 7 (12 December 1941).
17. *Ibid.*
18. "Loyal Non-Citizens Safe: No Wholesale Distrust," *Aufbau* 7 (19 December 1941); and New York City Mayor La Guardia's statement, *Aufbau* 7 (26 December 1941).
19. See letter from Manfred George to Felix Guggenheim, 26 June 1942, Felix Guggenheim Papers (hereafter FGP), Box (hereafter B) 25, Correspondence 1940–1952, General A, Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
20. Alfred M. Pinkus, "Die Front," *Aufbau* 8 (9 January 1942).

21. Elow, "Wir Aliens," *Aufbau* 8 (9 January 1942).
22. See, e.g., different articles in *Aufbau* 8 (23 January 1942); and *Aufbau* 8 (30 January 1942).
23. "Du bist kein Deutscher mehr! Alle jüdischen Auswanderer ausgebürgert," *Aufbau* 8 (9 January 1942). See also letter by Dr. Ernest Golm, Feb. 10, 1942, FGP, Collection no. 0312.
24. "Du bist kein Deutscher mehr! Alle jüdischen Auswanderer ausgebürgert," *Aufbau* 8 (9 January 1942).
25. Eisenberg, "Civil Rights," 112. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, all ethnic Japanese were treated as if there were enemy aliens: 736 Japanese immigrant leaders were confined, and in the following months up to February, the FBI detained 2,912 people (Hane, "A Round Table," 570).
26. Thomas Mann pointed this out in a letter to Agnes Meyer, publisher of the *Washington Post*, of 6 February 1942. English translation by Frey from unpublished letter, Beinecke Library, Yale University" (Frey, "Thomas Mann," 203–4).
27. Letter from Richard B. Goldschmidt (professor at University of California), Oscar Meyer (former leader of Democratic Party in German Reichstag), and over thirty German refugees to Attorney General Francis Biddle, Jan. 31, 1942, FGP, B107, Correspondence, Enemy Alien Issues incl. Tolan House Committee 1 of 2.
28. Ibid. See also, *Aufbau* 8 (13 February 1942).
29. Letter from Richard B. Goldschmidt, Oscar Meyer, and over thirty German refugees to Attorney General Francis Biddle, Jan. 31, 1942, FGP, B107, Correspondence, Enemy Alien Issues incl. Tolan House Committee, 1 of 2.
30. Letter from Willy Jacobson to Edward K. Ennis, Director of Alien Enemy Control Unit, February 24, 1942, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1942–1943, Enemy Alien Issues incl. Tolan House Committee, 1 of 2.
31. Undated document, FGP, B108, 2, Correspondence 1942–43.
32. The local U.S. States Attorney was invited to speak to refugees at the Fairfax Temple in Los Angeles and told them to "not be afraid" since recent evacuation proposals had generally only referred to the Japanese. "Kein Grund zur Panik," *Aufbau* 8 (13 February 1942).
33. Eventually, 119,803 individuals of Japanese descent were incarcerated in internment camps, 65 percent of whom were American citizens. Hane, "A Round Table," 570.
34. "Die Sicherung der Westküste," *Aufbau* 8 (27 February 1942). Another article reported that a lot of people became slightly depressed about being called "enemy," even if this was only supposed to be a technicality. *Aufbau* 8 (27 February 1942).
35. "Proklamation No. 1," *Aufbau* 8 (6 March 1942).
36. FGP, B107, Correspondence, Enemy Alien Issues incl. Tolan House Committee, 1 of 2.
37. See *Aufbau* 8 (6 March 1942). See also, "Information Regarding Organizations of Recent Immigrants," questionnaire distributed by the *Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe*, 1945, 1.
38. Popularly called the Tolan Committee, after its chairman John H. Tolan, the committee began working in 1940 as the Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens, dealing with issues surrounding the Dust Bowl migration. With rising military concerns and people migrating to work in defense industries, the committee changed its focus and name to the House Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration in 1941.
39. Letter from Elsa Winners Schwerin to Leopold Jessner, 2 March 1942, FGP, B107, Correspondence, 1942–1943, Enemy Alien Issues incl. Tolan House Committee, 2 of 2; see the excellent study by Eisenberg, *The First to Cry Down Injustice?*
40. Letter from Richard E. Gutstadt to Mr. Berges, September 18, 1942, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, Enemy Alien Issues.
41. Letter from Elsa Winners Schwerin to Leopold Jessner, March 2, 1942, FGP, B107, Correspondence, 1942–1943, Enemy Alien Issues incl. Tolan House Committee, 2 of 2.
42. See Frey, "Thomas Mann."

43. From Thomas Mann's testimony before the Tolan Committee, *ibid.*, 207.
44. *Ibid.*, 204.
45. Guggenheim had worked in publishing in Germany and had held a leading position with the Deutsche Buch-Geinschaft. He fled Germany in 1938 and, following a circuitous route with a longer stay in England, arrived on the West Coast of the United States. In Los Angeles he first made a living by renting out apartments in a building he was able to buy. In 1942, he started a small publishing house, Pazifische Presse, which published German-language works by some famous writer refugees in Southern California. See Michaela Ullmann, "Felix Guggenheim" in *Immigrant Entrepreneurship*, ed. Wadhvani.
46. National Defense Migration, *Hearings before the Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration*, House of Representatives, Seventy-Seventh Congress, Second Session, Pursuant to H. Res. 113, Part 31, Problems of Evacuation of Enemy Aliens and Others from Prohibited Military Zones (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1942; reprint edition, New York: Arno Press, 1978), 11736.
47. Frey, "Thomas Mann," 212. When speaking about Poland, Frank references the publication of "horrid pictures in last week's LIFE magazine, showing heaps of naked, emaciated corpses, piled upon one another like so much rubbish, ready to be flung into the common pit." *Ibid.*, 205.
48. National Defense Migration, *Hearings before the Select Committee*, 11736.
49. These are Thomas Mann's words, quoted in Frey, "Thomas Mann," 208.
50. National Defense Migration, *Hearings before the Select Committee*, 11736–37.
51. Frey, "Thomas Mann," 214.
52. See National Defense Migration, *Hearings before the Select Committee*, 11629–52. *Aufbau* maintained that Fletcher Bowron's reason for not regarding Jewish refugees as suspicious was based on their "race." Ralph Nunberg, "Tolan Committee für Reklassifizierung in der Alien-Frage," *Aufbau* 8 (6 March 1942). Race was also the reason many officials and American citizens believed all people of Japanese ancestry should be interned. Some refugees also engaged in a wholesale condemnation of people of Japanese ancestry, saying, e.g., that checking the refugees' loyalty was naturally much more difficult, considering that they "as individuals intellectually and by way of their tradition come from an entirely different culture." "Zur Alienfrage," *Aufbau* 8 (20 February 1942). See also Eisenberg, *The First to Cry Down Injustice?*
53. Carey McWilliams, "Victims of Nazi Oppression," *Aufbau* 8 (20 March 1942).
54. See, e.g., "Loyalty Board an der Westküste," *Aufbau* 8 (13 March 1942); "Hoffnung für Staatenlose," *Aufbau* 8 (20 March 1942); and "Einheitsaktion an der Westküste," *ibid.*
55. See Frey, "Thomas Mann," 205–6.
56. Tolan Committee, Preliminary Report, note, 221–22, 24, cited in Fox, *The Unknown Internment*, 129.
57. Louricé, *Social Adjustments*, 148.
58. Letter from Richard G. Grau to Felix Guggenheim, March 25, 1942, FGP, B107, Correspondence, 1942–1943, Enemy Alien Issues incl. Tolan House Committee, 2 of 2. Grau refers to the articles on the Tolan Committee in *Aufbau* 8 (20 March 1942), and particularly the front-page statement "Hoffnung für Staatenlose."
59. Letter from Manfred George to Felix Guggenheim, June 26, 1942, FGP, B25, FGP, Correspondence 1940–1952, General A.
60. Eisenberg, *The First to Cry Down Injustice?*, also points to the discrepancy between East and West in reporting on enemy alien issues in other newspapers.
61. Letter from Manfred George to Felix Guggenheim, September 19, 1942, FGC, B108, FGP, Correspondence 1942, Enemy Alien Issues.
62. Undated document, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1942–1943, Enemy Alien Issues incl. Tolan House Committee, 1 of 2. See also letter from Edward J. Ennis, Director Enemy Alien Control

- Unit, to Mr. Rosenfeld, April 4, 1942, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1944–1945, Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe.
63. See also telegram by John J. McCloy, *ibid.*
  64. See letter from Edward J. Ennis to Max L. Berges, August 25, 1942, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, Enemy Alien Issues. See also Domm, “Enemy Alien Program,” who refers to the dissemination by Schmitz, “Enemies among Us,” 337–38.
  65. Letter from Edward J. Ennis to Max L. Berges, August 25, 1942, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, Enemy Alien Issues.
  66. “Sorrow Comes to the West Coast: The Curfew Regulations and Their Consequences,” *Aufbau* 8 (3 April 1942).
  67. Telegram from Benjamin, Friedman, Katz, Lederer, Meyerfeld, Rosenfeld, Wolfsohn to Francis Biddle, March 29, 1942, FGP, Correspondence, 1942–1943, Enemy Alien Issues incl. Tolan House Committee, 2 of 2.
  68. “Sorrow Comes to the West Coast: The Curfew Regulations and Their Consequences,” *Aufbau* 8 (3 April 1942).
  69. Letter from Richard Grau to Dean Edwin D. Dickinson, Department of Justice, July 12, 1942, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, Curfew Restrictions and Richard O. Grau.
  70. “Sorrow Comes to the West Coast: The Curfew Regulations and Their Consequences,” *Aufbau* 8 (3 April 1942). This also includes reprinted excerpts from the Los Angeles newspaper *Daily News*.
  71. Ralph M. Nunberg, “Wir klagen nicht an,” and “Die Westküste,” *Aufbau* 8 (3 April 1942).
  72. Letter from William W. Schwarzer to Felix Guggenheim, June 27, 1942, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, Enemy Alien Issues.
  73. See, e.g., letter from Richard O. Grau to Felix Guggenheim, August 16, 1942, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, Curfew Restrictions and Richard O. Grau.
  74. “The Committee for Refugee-Immigrants of Southern California reports,” undated document, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, Jewish Club of 1933.
  75. “Hedy Wolf,” in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 235–36.
  76. This was Hedy Wolf’s answer to the question of how she felt about being a German at the time. *Ibid.*, 236.
  77. “Suggestions for Participation of Refugee Organizations in the Reclassification Program,” undated, FGP, B108, House Committee Investigating National Defense Migration and FBI 1942.
  78. Letter from the Jewish Club to Richard Hood, FBI Los Angeles, May 18, 1942, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, House Committee Investigation National Defense Migration and FBI.
  79. In a letter to J. Edgar Hoover from 16 May 1942, Guggenheim wrote that it was the refugees’ “only wish . . . to contribute [their] share to the common war enemy.” FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, House Committee Investigation National Defense Migration and FBI.
  80. After Pearl Harbor, all males between eighteen and sixty-four were required to register with the draft board, and the duration of military service was extended.
  81. In reaction to the large number of refugees already in the army, the government passed the Second War Power Bill on 28 March 1942, which relaxed naturalization procedures. To be naturalized in the army, an alien was not required to have resided in the country for a certain length of time, which was the main reason most refugees had not become citizens yet. The only time constraint for naturalization was a minimum of three months honorable service in the army. However, many refugees appear to have been naturalized only before they left on their assignments to Europe or the Pacific. Joining the army was the fastest way for a refugee to become an American citizen. “Reklassifizierung im Heer,” *Aufbau* 8, no. 13 (27 March 1942): 1. The information about alien physicians not being admitted into the military as doctors is taken from *They Can Aid America: A Survey of Alien Specialized Personnel* (New York:



- National Refugee Service, New York, 1942), 6. In a survey on the year 1944 by the National Jewish Welfare Board, German Jewish refugee physicians in the Army's Medical Corps are cited. National Jewish Welfare Board, *Fighting for America*, chapter "Global Service."
82. Franklin, "Victim Soldiers: German-Jewish Refugees in the American Armed Forces during World War II," B.A. honors thesis, Clark University, Worcester, MA, 2006, 44–45. However, those who had joined before Pearl Harbor were apparently not transferred to noncombat units if they were still enemy aliens.
  83. "E.D.R. unterzeichnet das Naturalisierungs-Gesetz," *Aufbau* 8 (3 April 1942).
  84. Guy Stern, cited in Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 47.
  85. From a Memorandum on Curfew Restrictions, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, Curfew Restrictions and Richard O. Grau.
  86. Jewish Club of 1933 to Los Angeles Jewish Community Council, undated, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, Jewish Club of 1933.
  87. Other participating organizations were the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, the Immigrants' Conference, the New World Club, the American Association of Former European Jurists, the Italian Jewish Club, the Netherland Jewish Society, Selfhelp of Émigrés from Central Europe, Selfhelp of Émigrés (Chicago), the Jacob Ehrlich Society, and the Immigrant Jewish War Veterans. *Aufbau* 8 (10 April 1942).
  88. "Loyalty' an der Westküste," *Aufbau* 8 (10 April 1942).
  89. *Aufbau* 8 (17 April 1942).
  90. M.G., "Kampfflugzeug Loyalty," *Aufbau* 8 (10 April 1942).
  91. *Aufbau* 8 (17 April 1942).
  92. "Die Immigration überreicht ihre Spende," *Aufbau* 8 (6 November 1942), 9 (26 February 1943), and 10 (26 March 1943).
  93. "Curfew Law Ended on West Coast for German Aliens; Over 1,000 Forbidden Zones Also Abolished by De Witt," *Special Information Bulletin*, National Refugee Service, December 31, 1942, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942–44, National Defense Migration Hearing and German Alien Curfew. It is not clear what these other security measures were at this point. I assume, however, that the authorities had collected enough information about the enemy aliens in Military Zone No. 1 and thus had enough evidence that supported the argument (long held by different authorities) that the majority of those classified as German enemy aliens did not pose a threat.
  94. Undated document, most likely from the beginning of 1943, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942–1944, National Defense Migration Hearings and German Aliens.
  95. Announcement to members and anti-Nazi refugees from Jewish Club of 1933, Inc., Committee for Refugee-Immigrants of Southern California, April 16, 1943, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1943, Immigrant Organizations.
  96. C. C. Trillingham and Roy M. Tuttle, Los Angeles County War Council: Civilian War Services Functions of the Citizens Service Corps, 1943.
  97. Letter from Ernst Kleinmann to Jewish Club of 1933, Inc., from April 23, 1943, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1944–45, Committee for the Study of Recent Immigrants from Europe.
  98. See, e.g., "Victory Volunteer Reporter," and "Die Westküste," *Aufbau* 9 (22 January 1943).
  99. Ibid.; "Victory Volunteer News," and "Jewish Club of 1933, Inc.," *Aufbau* 9 (2 April 1943).
  100. Undated document, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1944–1945, Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe.
  101. See Davie, *Refugees in America*, 199. Interview with William Stagen, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, CA, Jan. 1, 1972, LBI New York, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1337416>. The organizers of one War Bond rally in Los Angeles in which members of the Jewish Club participated expected more than twenty-three

- thousand people to attend (“Refugees will stage pageant at Bond Rally,” undated excerpt of an article, Collection of the Benefactors of the Jewish Club of 1933).
102. Undated document, probably speech manuscript, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1944, German Jewish Refugee Issues.
  103. United States Department of Justice, “Questions and Answers on Regulations concerning Aliens of Enemy Nationalities” (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942), 33ff. Uncatalogued collection (as of 2004), Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
  104. Memorandum on Curfew Restrictions, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, Curfew Restrictions and Richard O. Grau.
  105. Letter from Klaus Schaefer to William Stagen, August 3, 1942, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942, Enemy Alien Issues, and other correspondence about this topic in B107 and B108. The problem with the delay in naturalization was a national issue and one that was also taken up in *Aufbau*.
  106. Letter from Ann Petluck, NRS to Felix Guggenheim, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1944, German Jewish Refugee Issues.
  107. Ibid.
  108. See different correspondences in FGP, B107 and B108.
  109. Speech at joint meeting of B’nai B’rith and Jewish Club of 1933, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1944–1945, Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe. Refugees took great pride in obtaining American citizenship. During 1943, the club started publishing the names of those members who acquired it. “Als Bürger eingeschworen,” and “Jewish Club of 1933, Inc.,” *Aufbau* 9 (15 October 1943).

Chapter 4

GERMAN JEWISH REFUGEES IN THE U.S. MILITARY



After the attack on Pearl Harbor, German Jewish refugees frequently expressed their eagerness to fight in the war for the United States but were often left frustrated when they tried. Though they were occasionally able to join the army in support roles, only after restrictions on enemy aliens in the U.S. Armed Forces were relaxed in 1943 were they able to enter all military branches and eligible to participate in combat. From then on, they joined in significant numbers. The National Jewish Welfare Service conducted surveys during the war that suggest the percentage of the Jewish refugee population fighting matched that of the general population, if not slightly higher.<sup>1</sup> War participation was a crucial topic within the German Jewish refugee community. *Aufbau* inevitably played a major role in this, promulgating the notion that it was natural and imperative for the refugees to fight because they owed it to both the United States and themselves, their German Jewish past, and Jewish friends and relatives who had remained in Europe. Meanwhile, German Jewish clubs across the country regularly and proudly published the latest numbers of members who had joined the Armed Forces and reserved special honors for soldiers' families.

Since the refugees had left their homes, Germany had been a rather distant political entity. It acted as a memory, an imaginary space and contested topic in their lives. For refugee soldiers, Germany now became a very immediate presence because they encountered German soldiers—on and off the battlefield, during and after battles—and later also German civilians.<sup>2</sup> The relationship between German Jews and non-Jewish Germans was dramatically altered in that the power dynamic was now frequently completely reversed.<sup>3</sup>

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Notes from this chapter begin on page 103.

## Donning an American Uniform: Motivations and Attitudes

When John Stern, a refugee from Marburg, recounted being drafted into the U.S. Army in November 1943, he recalled that he “was quite pleased,” explaining, “it offered me a chance to do something for the country that adopted me. Naturally, what I had experienced in Germany made a serious impact on me and gave me the extra incentive to be a good soldier.”<sup>4</sup> The two sides of his sentiments about joining the Army—reflecting his relationship with the United States and Germany—are representative of many refugees’ feelings, both at the time and in their recollections. While different individuals certainly had various personal motivations, in public, most refugees strongly emphasized their special relationship with the United States as a principle reason for their participation in the armed forces.

Military service held a special place for German Jews historically because it was closely tied to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates about emancipation. Young German Jews had volunteered to fight against Napoleonic France and also in the German wars of unification.<sup>5</sup> During World War I, Jews volunteered in disproportionately high numbers. Perceiving their service as an act of patriotism and loyalty to the state, Jewish men proudly pointed out their military service and saw it as legitimating their special tie to Germany.<sup>6</sup> In the United States, in the context of World War II, refugees regarded joining the Army as the best way to express their gratitude to the nation for accepting them and as ultimate proof of their loyalty to it. There was an understanding that refugees’ military service would clear the past debt, but also that it constituted an investment in the future, further establishing them as good (future) citizens of their new country. In fact, several *Aufbau* articles overtly stated that army service allowed refugees to further their Americanization, which, as we saw in previous chapters, they viewed as both essential for their success and acceptance in the United States and as their duty. In this spirit, one young refugee wrote *Aufbau* that “joining the Army [was] surely the best and quickest way to become Americanized.”<sup>7</sup> For refugees who had lived in strong refugee communities, like in New York City’s Washington Heights, the army was indeed one of the first places they closely encountered Americans and maintained steady contact with them.<sup>8</sup>

Refugees also wished to join the army because of the enemy in this particular war. Having escaped the Nazis, refugees knew firsthand how ambitious and ruthless they were. Explaining “what he was fighting for,” one young refugee wrote in 1943,

We don’t want to be afraid to open the door of our house when the bell rings because the Gestapo might be waiting outside. . . . This war is entirely different: it is not a war of conquering territories only, but our enemies want to rule the whole world physi-

cally as well as mentally. We are fighting to prevent the enemy from seizing our minds and our souls. We want to live our own lives.<sup>9</sup>

The refugees' German Jewish background affected their attitude toward participating in the war not only in relation to their new home but also with a view toward Europe. Besides wanting to defend their new country, most refugees were predominantly motivated by a strong desire to actively fight the German regime responsible for their and their families' suffering, and to stop the intensifying terror against Jews in Europe. For example, Siegmund Spiegel, originally from Thuringia, expressed his motivation as follows: "I became obsessed with joining the American army once war broke out in Europe in September [1939] because it was important for me to fight against Nazi Germany, the country of my birth."<sup>10</sup> Many refugees had felt helpless in the face of the worsening atrocities in Europe, and joining the army offered an escape from this, as Kurt Klein's words exemplify: "Being in the army came as a tremendous relief to me because I appreciated that America had given me the opportunity to serve as a soldier and possibly defeat evil. It was the first time that I felt good that I could help."<sup>11</sup> To make a difference, some refugees found it particularly important to fight in the European theater and not in the Pacific one. Edmund Schloss, a refugee from Hesse, remembered his "biggest fear was being sent to the Pacific." Schloss said, "I kept reminding the first sergeant of my training company that I had the special training in interrogation and could be more effective in the European Theater."<sup>12</sup>

The prospect of fighting Germans who had inflicted so much hardship on them appealed to many refugees. Bernard Fridberg, for example, explained, "I had first-hand experiences with the Germans, so I was anxious to get even with them a little bit."<sup>13</sup> Other refugees explained this appeal in stronger terms, like William Katzenstein, who wrote in his memoir, "I wanted my revenge, so I volunteered for the draft board."<sup>14</sup> While many refugees named revenge as a motivating factor for joining the U.S. Army in interviews and memoirs many years after the war, the stories they told about the war and their interactions with Germans rarely entailed personal acts of vengeance. Rather, these thoughts of revenge seemed to have fueled their urge to fight and defeat Germany as Allied soldiers and not through indiscriminate acts of retaliation.

Whereas for most refugees their experiences in Germany were motivating factors to go to war, some refugees were rather unenthusiastic precisely because of their recent experiences. Although they largely felt they had a reason to fight, after years of discrimination, persecution, flight, loss, and great efforts to forge new lives, they were hesitant to leave their often still unstable existence. Going to war would again interrupt their new "normal" lives. John Brunswick (formerly Braunschweig), a refugee from northwest Germany, for instance, received his draft notice with "very mixed feelings." On the one hand, he felt that he "should have volunteered to fight Hitler and his Stormtroopers who had caused such

unbelievable suffering to so many people and had ruined their lives.” But “on the other hand,” said Brunswick, “I hated to leave my wife. At the age of thirty-two, having already been in the United States for six years, I was making a little money and I was able to support my parents.”<sup>15</sup>

Some younger refugees, too, who did not yet have their own families when the United States entered the war, were very reluctant to leave their civilian lives. Walter Reed, who also believed that America could make a real difference in stopping the Nazi terror, wanted to avoid the draft until he had finished high school: “I was now eighteen years old and that was more important to me at that time than going to war.”<sup>16</sup> His draft was indeed deferred once or twice during 1942 so that he could finish high school.<sup>17</sup> Reed had come to the United States alone, leaving his entire immediate family behind in Germany. For Reed, establishing security in America was foremost in his mind—a pragmatic concern arising from his solitary status.

Also, while revenge and loyalty to the United States predominated in the discourse about refugees’ motivation to join the army, Tom Tugend, a refugee from Berlin, reminds us that pragmatic reasons were often as instrumental as ideological ones. His decision involved a “whole bunch of mixed emotions.” He did not deny that it was important for him to be part of this particular war, but said, “First of all, I wanted to get away from home as quickly as I could,” adding that perhaps “in other times I would have run away and joined the circus.”<sup>18</sup> This shows that while German Jewish refugees’ reasons for joining the army could be distinct from the mass of American soldiers and participation in this war was a very personal endeavor for them, at least some refugees were not that different from other young Americans.

### **The Refugee Soldiers’ Position within the U.S. Army**

As new soldiers, refugees particularly cherished the camaraderie they experienced with other soldiers and the opportunity to be part of the greater project. Still, particularly in the beginning of their time in the army, some refugees “sensed [their] ‘otherness’” as newcomers to the United States, as Jews, and also because of their immediate connection to the enemy country.<sup>19</sup>

Depending on how long refugees had been in the United States and on their place of residence, they had become more or less used to America and American ways. However, most were first exposed to numerous Americans from diverse ethnic, regional, and socioeconomic backgrounds in the army. While this was initially “daunting” for some, the refugees generally appreciated the diversity and felt that belonging to this group was part of becoming real Americans.<sup>20</sup> One refugee reported in *Aufbau* that “it [was] a pleasure to watch the boys of all nationalities, that is Puerto Ricans, Philipinos [*sic*], Chinese, Italians, Germans, Norwegians,

Danish and what not work together and try to profit from each other's experience and knowledge."<sup>21</sup> This characterization of the military experience—men from multiethnic backgrounds working together as a team—fits a major theme the Office of War Information propagated among the American public, which became an important image of the war experience as represented in American popular culture.<sup>22</sup> It is not clear whether the soldier quoted above had tuned into this central message or arrived at this position on his own. Nevertheless, the multicultural composition of the Armed Forces certainly made it much easier for refugees to “fit in,” not least because many native-born Americans were also surrounded by people from outside of their own, often homogenous, communities, for the first time.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, the diversity in the army also led to clashes between soldiers. Some refugees felt that it was not their non-American background but their Jewish identity that sometimes set them apart.<sup>24</sup> Tom Tugend recounted how some of the American soldiers in his unit, “mostly Southern boys, farm boys,” had strong stereotypes of Jews. When, during a conversation about religion, Tugend mentioned that he was Jewish, the reactions were “No you're not, no it's impossible, there are no horns growing out of your forehead and you haven't tried to gyp me and tried to get money from me, so you can't be a Jew.”<sup>25</sup> This episode could have happened to an American-born Jew as well and shows how, to some extent, the army was also an “Americanization” experience for Americans coming from parts of the country where they had rarely or never encountered people of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds.<sup>26</sup> For Tugend, this reaction, and various other experiences of anti-Semitism he was subjected to after arriving in the United States, led him to conclude that he “was better off identified as a German than as a Jew,” even in an army fighting Germans. Anti-Semitism was not unusual in the army; still, these episodes did not define refugees' experience there. They often blamed anti-Jewish sentiments on individual ignorance, and it was most important to them that there was no structural discrimination against Jews by the state and the military. Also, segregation of African Americans in the U.S. Army “taught Jews forcibly that despite whatever animosity they might meet, they were still white.”<sup>27</sup>

Occasionally, German Jewish refugees encountered skepticism among other soldiers because of their specific background. Siegmund Spiegel, for example, remembered a master sergeant who “distrusted me, not only because I was Jewish, but also because I was German and spoke with an accent.”<sup>28</sup> Also, in early 1942, one refugee soldier advised others in *Aufbau* to abstain from emphasizing their special background in the army and from “representing themselves as well fitted fighters against fascism.”<sup>29</sup> He wrote, “When you enter camp you should not show your emotions, you don't have to tell anybody how much you hate the Nazis and how much you have suffered in concentration camps. Soon you will find out that emotions don't get you anywhere.”<sup>30</sup> This kind of advice, which

suggested that most American soldiers did not have the same urge and reason to fight in this war as most Jewish refugees did, may have been intended to circumvent sentiments among some Americans who blamed “the Jews” for the war.

From the beginning of the war, and in connection with the enemy alien classification, the refugee community had stressed in publications that refugees’ special knowledge of the enemy and the enemy country could be tremendously useful to the American war effort. Yet only in 1943 did the U.S. government and military officially recognize this potential, when they began to regularly recruit German émigrés, and particularly Jewish refugees.<sup>31</sup> Also, after the restrictions associated with the enemy alien classification were lifted (see chapter 2), many refugees were assigned to special units to engage in intelligence work—primarily in the army, but a very small number went to the navy and also to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The OSS’s Research and Analysis Branch recruited prominent German émigrés such as Herbert Marcuse, Franz Neumann, and Otto Kirchheimer, and also employed lesser known or ordinary refugees, some of whom worked at OSS into the early postwar years.<sup>32</sup>

Still, most refugees recruited for intelligence work served in the army. After basic training, many German Jewish refugees and other foreigners with special knowledge deemed useful to the American war effort began special training at the United States Military Intelligence Training Center established at Camp Ritchie in Maryland. Starting in 1944, some also trained at Camp Sharp in Pennsylvania.<sup>33</sup> Not all refugees were recruited to these special training camps. Some regular army camps also had battalions in which refugee GIs were trained in interrogation techniques, while other refugees who later carried out intelligence work never received any special training at all.<sup>34</sup> Camp Ritchie was the largest specifically designated training facility, however, with nineteen thousand soldiers going through it, including three thousand German Jewish refugees.<sup>35</sup> Hans Habe, a refugee from Austria-Hungary, wrote in his autobiography about Camp Ritchie that “about 80 per cent. of the Intelligence recruits were not yet American citizens; about half of them were refugees from Hitler, and less than 5 per cent. had been born in America.”<sup>36</sup>

Soldiers at Camp Ritchie learned how to transform their civilian knowledge of the enemy and enemy country into militarily useful information and tactics, opening a different lens through which they could approach their former home. The German-speaking refugees were trained in all kinds of intelligence activities with a main focus on interrogation tactics for German prisoners of war (POWs) and German civilians. They also became experts in analyzing aerial photographs and on the size and structure of the German Wehrmacht and German military equipment. Beginning in 1944, training also began for them to engage in counterintelligence and spy work.<sup>37</sup> Some refugees received instruction in psychological warfare and subsequently worked for the Office of War Information composing leaflets to be dropped behind enemy lines and loudspeaker messages



addressed to German soldiers and civilians.<sup>38</sup> Many refugees were very fond of their experience at Camp Ritchie and felt good and proud, not only because they could finally do something in the fight against the Nazis but also because they had earned recognition in their new country. Kurt Klein, recalling a successful exercise at the camp prior to completing his training, stated, for example, “I had assumed a certain authority through my training and often thought it was the fulfillment of a dream to find myself in that position. Certainly it was a position in the army that I never expected to have, so I was very happy I could be in that place in that capacity.”<sup>39</sup> At the end of their time in Maryland, the Ritchie Boys, as they came to be called, were shipped to Europe, usually landing first in the United Kingdom. There, they gave lectures to other American GIs about Germany, the German army, and the German people the soldiers would be facing.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, their special knowledge as German Jews gave them distinct recognition and unique status within the Army.

Even so, the refugees did not see themselves as separate from the larger military. In fact, these specially trained refugees fought right alongside other soldiers in battle. While the intelligence units composed of Ritchie Boys (usually six men) played a special role within the American military and were thus distinct from other American soldiers, their units were attached to larger army divisions.<sup>41</sup> Many Ritchie Boys, and particularly graduates of Camp Sharp, took part in the invasion of Normandy on and after D-Day in June 1944, and many were involved in operations behind enemy lines.<sup>42</sup> Even while performing special intelligence tasks, these refugees understood their job to be part of the larger united effort of all American soldiers because, as Walter Reed pointed out, they and other Americans were “all in the same boat” in battle.<sup>43</sup> Reed emphasized how important it was to him to be part of the great American force; he recalled: “Having been in Europe and ‘knowing’ the Nazis soon faded into the background and was replaced by the danger we all equally felt and were determined to fight against.”<sup>44</sup> Many other refugees felt the same way. Interviews with former refugee soldiers reveal how immersed they became in the American military culture. Fritz Weinschenk remembered that he was not “immune to the general tenor of American propaganda of that period” and that he started calling the Germans “Krauts,” for example.<sup>45</sup> While it resulted from widely different experiences, there was a shared animosity toward the Germans by both German Jewish refugees and the American soldiers, contributing to a strong bond among the men.<sup>46</sup>

Most German Jewish refugees became American citizens before being shipped overseas, which reinforced their feeling of being part of a greater project.<sup>47</sup> As previous chapters illustrated, becoming American citizens was a principle goal for most refugees after their arrival. Refugee soldiers in the army reached this goal sooner than they would have as civilians. The ceremony itself was often quite important to them, since swearing the oath to the United States, and having it

acknowledged, finally validated and made official all their previous assertions of loyalty. Yet becoming naturalized citizens was also a practical matter because it would protect refugees if they became POWs of the German Army. While this situation would not have been unusually dangerous to immigrant soldiers with other backgrounds, many refugees worried that if they were captured and found to be of German origin, German authorities would charge them with treason and execute them.<sup>48</sup>

For this reason, and also to better fit in with mainstream American citizens, many refugees changed their names when they were naturalized. Sometimes military superiors or naturalization officials suggested the name change. Wolfgang Bloch remembered that when he was to be sworn in as an American citizen, an official came by and shouted: “Wolfgang?” When Bloch answered in the affirmative, the man replied, “Do you want to get shot as a spy? Change your name, you can do it here, I’m a judge, doesn’t cost you a dime.” Then, Bloch remembered, “The only ‘W’ I could think of was Walter, so that’s how I became Walter.”<sup>49</sup> Another refugee, Walter Reed, who was born as Werner Rindsberg, also wanted to change his name because he felt that it stereotyped him as a foreigner and a Jew. This was not easy for him, however, because his name also connected him with his parents, who had remained in Germany and about whose whereabouts and wellbeing he knew nothing at that point. He said, “I vividly recall that I had qualms about changing the name my parents had given me, so I intentionally kept the initials ‘W.R.’ and also selected my original first name of ‘Werner’ to be my new middle name.”<sup>50</sup>

From the time the refugees first entered the American military to their deployment in Europe, they became connected to the United States in new and intense ways. They returned to Europe as American citizens, and some even with new names, but they still had a close connection with their past.

## **Experiences in Battle and Encounters with German Soldiers**

Returning to Europe with the American military was an empowering experience for the refugees. They came as part of a strong military force they felt themselves to be an integral part of and were eager to prove themselves as good GIs. At the same time, unlike their fellow GIs, they had a special relationship with Germany. Individual refugees held different perspectives on their role in this war, and especially about their position vis-à-vis the Germans.<sup>51</sup> Edmund Schloss, for example, recounted, “While I felt a great deal of gratification that I was there with the American troops, I never felt that, ‘Here I am, back to fight you guys for what you did to me.’ [B]ecause I became one of the GIs I never gave revenge a second thought.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, fighting the Germans was foremost as a necessity to protect fellow soldiers. For Walter Reed this was the predominant motivation to fight:

“It was never about ‘getting back at Hitler,’ or worrying about killing my former countrymen. . . . It was mostly ‘these Krauts are going to kill my buddies,’ ‘let’s get them *first*’ or ‘they killed our buddies, let’s go get even.’”<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, in battle, other refugee soldiers were powerfully driven by their personal experiences with Germans before the war. Bernard Fridberg, for example, who flew bombing missions over German cities, explained:

I felt a great deal of hate toward the Germans at that time when I was twenty-one; what I did know was that my family had lived in Hanover for centuries, and then all of the sudden I wasn’t a German anymore. I wasn’t allowed to swim in public pools or go into parks or enjoy things that non-Jewish children did. Essentially, they took our country away from us. So, I felt good about what I was doing in the air force.<sup>54</sup>

Fridberg’s comment reflected on the relationship between his personal background and his actions as an American soldier, revealing not only that he felt his actions were justified but also that they gave him some satisfaction. In addition, his words illustrate how significant the loss of his and his family’s homeland had been even for a young refugee.<sup>55</sup>

This attachment most German Jews had felt to Germany could surface in certain situations, as the story of another refugee soldier, published in *Aufbau*, illustrates:

This refugee soldier, gunner on a Flying Fortress, had the thrilling experience of shelling his own hometown. Sad and unsettling emotions ravaged in him when he looked from the window of his airplane down on the streets he had known so well. One moment, he said, he was gripped by homesickness, but then he remembered his mother, his father, and his two sisters who had been slain by the Nazis, and his brother, who was a prisoner of the Gestapo. And he did his duty.<sup>56</sup>

As *Aufbau* presented it, the pain the Nazis had inflicted on this young man spurred him to engage in combat. *Aufbau*, always simultaneously serving as a source of information, a guide to proper behavior, and a representation of the refugee community toward the outside, clearly propagated the idea that refugees had a duty to fight in this war. Such statements addressed a principle concern the U.S. military had when enlisting aliens from Axis countries: that these men might be hesitant to fight their former countrymen. Even if they were, the public consensus was that they should overcome this hesitation. Many refugees contemplated the meaning of encountering their former home from the perspective of the enemy and, like the two men who flew bombing missions, being so directly involved in its physical destruction.

Similarly, refugee soldiers also reflected upon engaging Germans in battle. Even years later, they frequently remembered their first encounter and notable situations in the field involving enemy soldiers. William Katzenstein, for

example, stated in an interview that he often thought about a particular hand-to-hand knife fight he had with a German soldier he finally killed, and he described it in detail.<sup>57</sup> Eric Hamberg's description of his first deadly confrontation with Germans on a battlefield in Anzio, Italy, shows the conflicting emotions this engendered in him. After killing five German soldiers and having a fellow soldier compliment him for it, he felt "queasy," but then he recounted that he considered it his job to participate in the war, and that he wanted to get "back at the Germans" for what they had done to him, his family, and German Jewry more generally. He did not know whether his parents were still alive, and he remembered "the pleasure most Germans got out of synagogues and businesses, dragging Jews through the streets." He said, "Fighting the Germans went very deep for me; I wasn't going to give in an inch."<sup>58</sup>

Refugee soldiers could be aware of their special identity on the battlefield in other situations as well. Language and accent, inevitably, were particularly strong identifiers. During the German counteroffensive at the Battle of the Bulge, the German military had dressed some of its units in the uniforms of American soldiers. This was a dangerous situation for German Jewish refugees, Kurt Herrmann recalled, who, like him, often still had German accents and, thus, could be easily mistaken for the English-speaking German *Wehrmacht* soldiers in American uniforms.<sup>59</sup> Concern over German soldiers infiltrating their ranks lingered among American troops and refugee soldiers worried about a possible mix-up. This fear, as it turned out, was not unfounded. In one case, a German Jewish refugee was killed at night on his way to the latrine after having responded to the password call with a German accent.<sup>60</sup> However, refugee soldier Walter Eichelbaum used this potential for confusion to the advantage of the U.S. Army. When he discovered a unit of Germans in disguise, Eichelbaum pretended to be part of another one of these units and, pretending he thought they were Americans, asked them to surrender. Surrender they did, thinking they had nothing to fear from one of their own, only to subsequently "receive . . . the shock of their lives when their captors turned out to be Americans."<sup>61</sup> Here, Eichelbaum strategically used his "Germanness" to be an effective American soldier, demonstrating that refugees could be particularly adept at fighting the Germans in this war, just as many refugees had long argued they would be.<sup>62</sup>

### **Off the Battlefield: Full Reversal of Power**

For the refugees, facing German soldiers on the battlefield was different than facing them after they had surrendered or had been captured and when they did not pose an imminent threat to their lives or that of their fellow comrades. While some refugees articulated that fighting Germany was somewhat tied to notions of revenge, and that such emotions provided an incentive in battle, the testimonies

of refugee soldiers rarely reveal acts of personal vengeance against German soldiers off the battlefield. The relationships between German Jewish refugee GIs and German soldiers in such settings were shaped primarily by their respective status: the refugees were members of the victorious army and the Germans were on the losing side. One German Jewish refugee recalled the impression this complete reversal of power between the two groups had on him and a German officer he had captured:

Without undue delay I told him, 'Hände hoch' [hands up], pointed my rifle at the son of a bitch, and he turned ashen white. Then I told him, 'Ich bin ein deutscher Jude' (I'm a German Jew), and this man was in an absolute state of terror. He could not believe that one little yid should get him out of five million GIs. A rifle pointed at an arrogant officer becomes a powerful persuader. It was a good feeling.<sup>63</sup>

Although such displays of the power reversal may have constituted a sort of psychological revenge tactic for some German Jewish refugee soldiers, personal acts of revenge—that is, physical violence—against soldiers who had surrendered or been captured are largely absent from the refugees' stories.<sup>64</sup> On the contrary, many refugees highlighted the care they took to not behave in vindictive ways and to be especially sensitive in situations where Germans were killed when it did not constitute self-defense.<sup>65</sup> Even refugee soldiers like Eric Hamberg, who articulated that he "wanted to get back at the Germans," remembered his distress when American GIs killed two German soldiers who had surrendered.<sup>66</sup> Otto Stern recalled another instance when a German soldier was walking toward him with his hands up to surrender. Before Stern could question him, another soldier shot him. "I just hated that, and in fact, it is still on my mind. The last word the German said was, '*Mutter*' (mother)."<sup>67</sup>

Karl Goldschmith also remembered a similar incident, when a few young American soldiers killed fifteen POWs they had been ordered to guard. Goldsmith was deeply disturbed by this. He said, "In the pocket of one of the dead men, I found a letter to his wife about how happy he was that this mess was over and soon he would be home. My God, what horror that was. That was not war, it was murder."<sup>68</sup>

Some German Jewish refugees seemed to have been less inclined to kill German soldiers who did not pose a direct threat to them than their fellow American GIs. Their testimonies suggest that this derived from a certain sympathy for the German soldiers as well as the ideal they held of how one ought to act as a soldier. Because of their familiarity with Germans outside the context of war, refugees were able, perhaps more than other American soldiers, who had never met Germans without a *Wehrmacht* uniform, to more easily relate to the German soldiers as individual human beings rather than as ubiquitous and anonymous enemies. Being able to understand the enemy's language also

affected them, so that utterances like the word “mother” spoken in German by a dying soldier evoked some sympathy. Also, without forgetting the negative experiences they had suffered in Germany, many refugees recalled that not all Germans had been Nazis and that not all soldiers were ideologically driven and fervent fighters for Hitler’s Reich.<sup>69</sup> In addition, the refugees, being in the position of power the American military had granted them, were able to talk to the German soldiers once they had surrendered and been taken prisoners and, thus, to find out more about the soldiers’ involvement in the regime. This ability to distinguish between different Germans was an important incentive for the refugees to refrain from random acts of vengeance. Also, because of their past, the refugees were particularly sensitive to these kinds of killings. They had seen Nazis violently attack people merely for belonging to a certain group and did not want to act similarly.

In fact, having experienced a dictatorial system that had stripped people of basic human rights, many refugees were particularly eager to act with human decency and in accordance with the principles of the Geneva Convention to which they had sworn an oath.<sup>70</sup> Fritz Weinschenk described this feeling in a situation he faced. An American soldier friend, sympathetic to his German Jewish background, assumed that he would want revenge and to see any Germans dead. When a group of about thirty German soldiers surrendered with their hands up, his friend suggested that Weinschenk could now have his way with them, which he opposed. After yet another soldier then threatened to kill them, Weinschenk shouted at the Germans to run away and told the GI not to shoot them. He recalled, “I prevented a war crime. I didn’t want to see that happen.”<sup>71</sup> In their war stories, many refugees highlighted their decent and humane acts as soldiers. Many felt it was crucial for them to respect human dignity because it set them apart from the Nazis, a group they most directly identified with inhumanity, and bound them closer to the United States, a nation they believed embodied these principles.

All these aspects came to the fore in the refugees’ treatment of German POWs, with whom they had frequent and direct contact since they were in charge of overseeing POW camps and were mainly responsible for interrogating them. Even though the power reversal was paramount and most direct in this relationship, the interactions between refugee soldiers and German POWs were not characterized by acts of indiscriminate revenge.<sup>72</sup> Rather, most refugee soldiers experienced strong feelings of satisfaction, a sense that justice was being served, and gratitude in their position of power over the German POWs. Kurt Klein put it this way: “I enjoyed seeing Germans as prisoners because now the shoe was on the other foot. To see them bedraggled and kind of desperate to get out of the war felt very good. When I lived in Germany, they had the decision of life or death over us, and we could only stand with our hands tied. Now to see them in that state felt very good.”<sup>73</sup>

The relationships that developed from this power reversal depended on various factors, not least on the personalities and personal histories of both the refugees and the POWs. The prisoners came from different backgrounds, as Kurt Shuler remembered:

There were two kinds of German prisoners of war, in Italy, most of them were drafted Bavarian farmers who just wanted to get back to their farm, they were, you know, not necessarily convinced Nazis but they, you know, they were drafted. And then there were the German paratroopers, which were an entirely different class of people, you didn't even want to get close to them, they wanted to kill you.<sup>74</sup>

The individual stance prisoners had toward Hitler and the Nazi ideology frequently revealed itself during interrogations. The goal of the interrogations was to extract any information that could aid the Allied war effort, such as details about strategies and tactics, as well as the state of military might and morale in the Wehrmacht. In addition, interrogators also sought to gain insight into the morale of the civilian population in the Reich. Toward the end of the war, when knowledge about the Nazis' atrocities against European Jews and other "enemies" was being confirmed, interrogators also increasingly aimed to acquire information that could help identify war criminals and lead to their capture.<sup>75</sup> The treatment of the POWs during the interrogations differed, depending on their rank in the Wehrmacht, whether they belonged to the SS or other special units, and on how cooperative they were. Fred Fields recalled that when dealing with SS and higher-ranking officers, for example, they "had to be rough with them, psychologically (and sometimes physically) and threatened them with everything under the sun."<sup>76</sup> While one of the most effective threats was the prospect of transferring a POW to the Soviet Army, some refugees were conscious that their German Jewish identity, coupled with their position of power as American soldiers, could potentially terrify the POWs.<sup>77</sup> Thus, some refugees scared German soldiers by revealing that their interrogator, the "American captor," was a German Jewish refugee. Martin Selling reported in an interview that he played on his German Jewish identity when he told the POW he was interrogating why he spoke such good German: "I learned to speak such good German while I was in Germany, and I learned how to interrogate prisoners while I was an inmate at Dachau."<sup>78</sup> With satisfaction Selling reported that, upon hearing this, the POW not only lost control of his bowels but suddenly had answers to all of his questions.<sup>79</sup> Few refugees recounted intimidation and threats that turned physical. Fred Fields recalled one such incident during an interrogation when he "let [his] anger fly . . . [and] knocked a Sturmhauptführer's teeth out."<sup>80</sup>

In other situations, and with other POWs, the relationship could be different. When Kurt Shuler interrogated the Wehrmacht soldiers whom he described as Bavarian farmers not persuaded by Nazi ideology (see above), they were surprised

that Shuler also spoke with a Bavarian accent and wondered what he was doing “on the other side.” When he revealed he was a Jew from Nuremberg, their response, he said, was, “lucky you, you got away from here.”<sup>81</sup> Sometimes, refugees even recounted having friendly relations with German POWs. Fritz Weinschenk, for example, who was in charge of supervising POWs working for the American military, remembered the German POWs’ good work ethic with admiration. He also recalled having cordial interactions and interesting conversations with one particular German staff sergeant.<sup>82</sup>

Besides these stories about both friendly and hateful interactions, some refugee soldiers said in interviews that they were baffled by the submissiveness and ignorance of the larger situation they observed in many German POWs. Kurt Shuler remembered that Germans just “couldn’t believe that they lost the war, they were standing in their uniform with all their medals on, by their tanks and everything, and they looked at us as, their attitude was, how did this ragtag group of Americans manage to beat us, they couldn’t, they really couldn’t understand it.”<sup>83</sup> This incomprehension and submissiveness was even true for some who had formerly held powerful positions in the Reich, such as Julius Streicher, a virulent anti-Semite and publisher of the Nazi propaganda newspaper *Der Stürmer*. John Brunswick had interrogated Streicher, who, he reported, “sounded so ridiculous and pathetic that I could not even hate him.”<sup>84</sup> According to *Aufbau* reporter Wilfred Hülse, who was a captain in the U.S. Army and had a lot of contact with POWs through his position as a physician in a POW camp, this was a common character trait among German soldiers.<sup>85</sup> In his experience, they displayed absolutely no sense of courage, lacked political judgment, were neither “capable nor willing to personally take on responsibility” for the future of Germany, and were only motivated to please authority—regardless of its nature.<sup>86</sup> In 1945, Hülse wrote that the average soldier, although not a fanatic Nazi, did not object to the principles he had lived by over the past twelve years nor was he conscious of any crimes he had committed. Hülse expressed surprise at “how little these people have learned.” Hülse’s words do not communicate feelings of hatred for the German POWs or calls for punishment or revenge. Rather, they reflect this refugee soldier’s clear sense of moral superiority over them and a good dose of contempt.<sup>87</sup>

### **The German Jewish Refugees as Occupiers: Encountering German Civilians**

The refugees’ first contact with Germans frequently happened outside of the territory of the 1933 borders of the German Reich. Yet the experience of returning to German territory for the first time generated another range of feelings and reactions. In interviews recorded many years after the war’s end, many refugees



imbued this experience with great symbolic meaning. Otto Stern, for example, recalled, “I had a feeling of elation the first time I stepped on German soil when we crossed the Rhine to Mannheim and Ludwigshafen. I was not a victim but a captor and the feeling was unbelievable.”<sup>88</sup> The destruction Allied bombs had wrought on German cities caused a variety of reactions from the refugees. Edmund Schloss spoke of his response at the time: “It was a revelation to see what we had done to Germany; I was elated when I saw the German cities destroyed, because I thought that was justice and that they got what they deserved.”<sup>89</sup> Other refugees, especially those who found their former hometowns destroyed, said they had had more mixed feelings, often ruminating on the destruction and the brutality Hitler and his regime had brought upon so many different people. Still, the refugees put the destruction into the broader context of the war and German atrocities—something most Germans did not do.<sup>90</sup> This realization—that many Germans could not see beyond their own suffering and did not accept responsibility—especially shaped refugees’ relationship with German civilians. While refugee soldiers experienced satisfaction over their power as victorious American soldiers and employees of the military government in a position to identify and oust certain Nazis, they also saw that they could not force Germans to acknowledge their wrongdoing. This frustrated refugee soldiers tremendously, who overwhelmingly translated this frustration into contempt for Germans rather than indiscriminate acts of revenge on German civilians.

Shortly before the end of the war and in its immediate aftermath, the U.S. military often assigned German Jewish refugees to positions entailing a lot of interaction with German civilians. Such positions could involve taking over administrative or organizational tasks in a German town or community, for which the refugees were well equipped due to their knowledge of the language and familiarity with general structures in German society. Ludwig Mühlfelder, for example, a refugee soldier originally from Thuringia, was tasked with arranging accommodations for American troops.<sup>91</sup> In this position, he ordered Germans to leave their homes to make them available for American soldiers staying there temporarily before moving east. In his memoir, Mühlfelder emphasized the importance he placed in not behaving toward Germans in ways comparable to Nazi actions. Thus, he always told German civilians not to leave valuables behind so they would not get stolen. Mühlfelder’s fellow soldiers criticized him for treating the German people too humanely, he wrote, but he insisted that American soldiers ought to act honorably and decently. Like other refugee soldiers, Mühlfelder also described how his own experience with the Nazis made him want to act morally superior to them. Nevertheless, Mühlfelder did have a strong interest in finding out which Germans had been Nazis.<sup>92</sup>

Identifying Nazis in local governments was one of refugee soldiers’ major tasks in Germany. Henry Kissinger was assigned to a small county near Frankfurt, where he was to ensure security and “arrest all Nazis above a certain level.” He

recalled, “I had the right to arrest anybody I wanted for security reasons, which was a strange reversal of roles. Of course, no German ever claimed to have been a Nazi.”<sup>93</sup>

This was a problem most refugee soldiers encountered. Tom Tugend, for instance, recalled going from village to village as part of a counterintelligence unit searching for Nazis. Everywhere he went, people denied having been Nazis. Instead, everyone accused their neighbors. “Finally,” Tugend said,

I went into a small town in Bavaria and everybody said: “Well, there is one Nazi, he is an 80-year-old blind poet and he is a vergrämter [antagonized] Nazi.” So, I went to the guy, and he was blind, and said: “your neighbors maintain you . . .,” and he said: “yes I’m Nationalsozialist and I am proud of it and I believe in Hitler,” and so on. So I went back to my headquarters and said, “I think I deserve to get a medal, because I’ve discovered the only Nazi in all of Germany.”<sup>94</sup>

Although Tugend told this story with some bemusement many years later, it was an exceedingly frustrating experience when it happened. Klaus Mann captured this sentiment in an article for the army newspaper *Stars and Stripes* in 1945. He described how perplexed and irritated the Allies were by the Germans’ “complacency, self-pity and ignorance.” He wrote, “They don’t seem to regret anything, except their own unpleasant plight. They don’t see why they, of all people, should have to suffer so much. ‘What have we done to deserve this?’ they will ask you— all wide-eyed naiveté and bland innocence.”<sup>95</sup>

Despite such denials, refugee soldiers were able to circumvent them sometimes by using their own knowledge and experience. Some returned to their former hometowns “to look for the Nazis [they] remembered.”<sup>96</sup> Karl Goldsmith said in an interview, “As the war finished, I immediately put in a request to be involved with the Denazification of my hometown. I wanted to do that so badly. They kicked the shit out of me so much as a kid.”<sup>97</sup> Goldsmith’s request was granted, so he went to his hometown of Eschwege and was indeed able to arrest the main Nazi perpetrators there. This enabled Goldsmith to retaliate against specific Germans with whom he had experienced negative encounters, but he did so through official channels within the framework of the Allied occupation denazification program. During his time as military governor of the city, it appears that his relationship with the local population was fairly tense. While Goldsmith described himself as a pragmatist in this position, he also said that he lived very well while there. His neighbor called him the town’s “uncrowned king,” which suggests that Goldsmith may have used the authority invested in him extensively.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, Goldsmith’s mother told her son years later after returning from a trip to Eschwege, “Karl, you can never go back to Eschwege; they’ll kill you.” Goldsmith himself said of his behavior in Eschwege, “I doubt if my father would have approved, but I did not compromise or bring dishonor

to my adopted country or family.” It is clear that the locals’ denial of their responsibility for the situation they found themselves in was highly frustrating to Goldsmith. He recounted many people who had known him before the war asking him for special favors for their families. His answers to such requests, he claimed, were always, “I’m sorry, I cannot do anything about it.” He recalled that he was “flabbergasted that these people had the temerity to face me and say these things to me, when they knew what they themselves had done to me and my family. Forget about all the other people who burnt up in concentration camps.”<sup>99</sup>

Sometimes, refugee soldiers held such authority positions over former fellow townspeople by coincidence. Kurt Shuler, born in Nuremberg, returned to the city as an American soldier to look for his relatives. He was lucky to find his cousin alive: she had survived the war in a “privileged marriage” to a non-Jewish German man. Shuler remembered that when he arrived in Nuremberg on the day of the armistice, he was “essentially the only American representative” in the city. Although he had not intended to take on any authority, he recalled that because he had local knowledge and trustworthy connections, until the Allied Military Government arrived, “for several weeks I really ran the city. So, waiting for the real people to come and because of my cousin who knew everybody, who knew who was who, I was able to get rid of the main Nazis.”<sup>100</sup> Consequently, Shuler, who emphasized that he was not motivated by revenge, ended up in a position of power over the German population, using his local connections to help in the denazification process.

Like Kurt Shuler, many refugee soldiers asked for permission to return to their former hometowns to find relatives.<sup>101</sup> Walter Reed hoped to find out something about his family’s whereabouts in his hometown of Mainstockheim. There, however, “local residents knew only that the Jews had been ‘sent to a labor camp in the East’ several years before.”<sup>102</sup> While a few refugee soldiers were reunited with family members who had survived in hiding, most did not find any relatives alive.<sup>103</sup> Even refugees with no family members left in Germany frequently returned to their former hometowns, driven by a certain nostalgia and desire to see the place where they had grown up. Most refugees recalled this experience of going back as very emotional, depending on their particular histories with the place. For example, Guy Stern said, “When I arrived in the town, the town had been terribly destroyed. I was so nervous . . . . It was a very moving moment. I knew every street. I was very much emotionally connected with the city . . . . And the childhood memories, memories of my youth, I began to re-live it all. It made me sad that I was coming back home this way.”<sup>104</sup>

Confronted with the physical sites of his past life, Guy Stern found that the pain of having lost his home could not be erased by returning there as a victor. For another refugee soldier, returning home evoked negative feelings of a different kind: “I was to drive back to Weinheim, a place I left in disgust and

which I never expected to see again in all my life. Fate wanted it differently . . . I looked around and although everything looked familiar, it looked strange, cold and repulsive to me. The spirit, the sentiment, the atmosphere of former years removed.”<sup>105</sup> The confrontation with familiar places evoked memories and emotions associated with a range of positive and negative experiences. Which of these took precedence depended on a variety of factors, including refugees’ personal histories and postwar interactions with the people in their former hometowns.

How these interactions turned out depended on individuals’ past histories and the specific context of the postwar situation in which they met. Thus, while there could be agreement and friendly exchange over one issue, there might be a dispute over another.<sup>106</sup> Studies on early postwar Jewish and non-Jewish German encounters have emphasized that Germans avoided being drawn into conversations about Jewish persecution and annihilation and demonstrated ignorance and innocence, focusing on their own suffering.<sup>107</sup> This was particularly true when Jews returned to live in Germany, but the refugee soldiers faced such German reactions as well. Most interactions between refugee soldiers and locals seem to have been dominated by locals’ awareness that the refugees held a position of power—even if they were not officially in charge of the town. This realization could express itself in different ways. John Stern found it interesting that “quite a few people welcomed” him.<sup>108</sup> However, he also recounted that this welcoming could be quite ingratiating, likely because many Germans, while not openly acknowledging guilt, had a sense of the injustice committed and feared retribution. A prevalent fear Stern encountered was that he had returned to take away people’s property. Hinting at this sentiment, one woman told him, “You never looked like a Jew. You were always so nice,” also illustrating an astonishing lack of comprehension among many Germans at the time. Another refugee soldier stationed in Berlin in summer 1945 was repelled by the “bootlicking ways” German people employed in attempts to establish friendly contacts with Allied soldiers.<sup>109</sup> In a letter home, he wrote, “Girls are everywhere. They practically offer themselves to us.” He found this disconcerting, not only because he was surprised by their good looks, “impeccable” dress and makeup (he wrote, “Are we in liberated Paris or in conquered Berlin?”), but also because this all happened in the immediate context of the Holocaust: “and we try to look stern and to remember Buchenwald and Dachau.”<sup>110</sup>

Other refugee soldiers observed some Germans suddenly coming up with Jewish ancestors or telling returning refugees stories about helping different Jews in their hometown during the Third Reich.<sup>111</sup> In recalling his interactions with Germans, Kurt Shuler remarked, “What bothered me more than anything else was that everybody was lying. You know, when Hitler had these plebiscites, 99.4 percent voted ‘*ja*.’ After the war, 99.4 percent voted ‘*nein*.’ They were all lying through their teeth.”<sup>112</sup>

Yet, among these prevalent denials in the early postwar encounters between refugee soldiers and non-Jewish Germans, some refugees were able to make Germans engage with their own anti-Jewish actions. In this, they were empowered by their position as American soldiers, their familiarity with the people, and the knowledge that they did not have to live there. When Otto Stern returned to his former hometown, he found that the Jewish cemetery had partly been turned into a cornfield. Angered by the destruction, he confronted the mayor, whom he had known before the war, and demanded that he rectify this issue. The mayor insisted it was difficult to find people to do this, essentially trying to evade the situation, to which Stern replied, “If it’s not done by the time I come back, you’ll do it personally while I point a rifle at you.” Stern continued in his recollection: “Needless to say, by the time I did eventually return, the cemetery was in good shape.”<sup>113</sup> Such incidents might have given refugees momentary personal satisfaction, but most found that they did not belong there, not least because such rectifying actions needed to be forced on Germans. Learning about the full extent of the atrocities against European Jews reinforced this feeling.

## Holocaust

Throughout the Allied invasion, German Jewish refugee soldiers were very sensitive to the situation of Jews who had remained in Europe. Recounting their war experiences, refugee soldiers often specifically mentioned encounters with Jews in territories that had been under German occupation, most of whom had survived the war in hiding. The soldiers frequently tried to provide them with food or other useful items.<sup>114</sup> Nonetheless, during their time in the army, the refugees, along with the general American and world public, were not yet aware of the full extent of the crimes against European Jews. News of deportations and ghettos had appeared in American papers since late 1939–40, when Nazis had started to deport Jews from cities in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Austria. Massacres of Jews were also reported, and *Aufbau* in particular paid close attention to these events. Depending on when they joined the military, some refugees may have had an idea about atrocities and may have more or less believed the accounts of them. However, while in Europe, some refugee soldiers caught glimpses of the bigger picture during interrogations of German POWs. Harry Lorch recalled getting some soldiers to admit to him that “there were things happening to Jews in Russia that were unimaginable.”<sup>115</sup> Toward the end, and in the immediate aftermath of the war, refugee soldiers also found out about the atrocities from survivors. During a Shabbat service in Augsburg, for example, Jerry Bechhofer met a mother and daughter who told him they had escaped the gas chambers. Bechhofer recalled this incident as “the first eye-opener” for him.<sup>116</sup> Refugees also served in units that liberated concentration camps or entered them shortly

thereafter. While the encounter with the horrors were shocking and unfathomable for all, refugees had to fear to find family members or other people they knew among the dead.<sup>117</sup>

The realization just how extreme and extensive the atrocities against the European Jews were made some refugee soldiers question Germany's future. In late April 1945, Werner Angress, who had witnessed the liberation of some concentration camps, wrote in a letter to his friend Bo,

I am quite objective in my judgment; I am more than ever convinced that the German nation stinks, that they are a rotten bunch. Granted that not all of them are criminals, but their majority is below all standards . . . Bo, if they erase Germany's boundaries off the map, nobody would be sorry here. This state, this nation has forfeited their right to exist.<sup>118</sup>

Similarly, another refugee soldier remembered his response upon seeing Buchenwald concentration camp in April 1945: "I made a recommendation to the War Department. To dig a big hole from Elbe to the Rhine, plow it over, and forget about Germany. I know this sounds horrible, but that's the way I felt."<sup>119</sup> While not all refugee soldiers felt this strongly about Germany, most saw no future for themselves in their former home country when they recognized the reality of the atrocities against Europe's Jews and Germans' behavior in the face of it. As most refugees held sentiments of contempt for Germany, they appreciated the United States even more and felt confirmed in their sense of belonging there.<sup>120</sup> Their proclamations of loyalty and the gratitude they had felt and demonstrated since arriving in the United States took on another dimension of meaning when they learned about the fate of Europe's Jews.

Still, they were also grateful to the United States for allowing them to participate in the fight to end Nazism. The testimonies of these refugee soldiers convey their overwhelming pride about having been in the American military and having contributed to ending the Nazi terror.<sup>121</sup> To differing degrees, refugee soldiers also felt personal satisfaction at having retaliated against Germans (taken at large) for what they had done. William Katzenstein wrote in his memoir, "I was more than overjoyed, if not totally ecstatic, that I had been a conquering soldier. I felt that I got my revenge for my second cousin, Rosel Faist, many cousins more removed, and murdered friends."<sup>122</sup> Katzenstein's war memories, like those of most other refugee soldiers, did not include stories about him carrying out acts of personal vengeance against Germans. It becomes clear that, for him, revenge meant returning and defeating the Germans as an American soldier. Whether they called it "justice served" or, in one case, "my way of *Wiedergutmachung* (repayment)," many other refugees shared this satisfaction.<sup>123</sup>

For many refugees, any nostalgia they may have still held for the old country faded after they experienced the destruction that the Nazis and war had brought

upon it. The older generation may have mourned Germany's loss more intensely and had greater difficulties adjusting to a new life in the United States, but most of them did not see the destruction themselves. Walter Spiegel wrote as much in a letter to his parents: "You have to have been through the ruins of Europe to appreciate America, and I realize more than ever the value of belonging there, at least I have a lot to look forward to—a wholesome security and a nice way of life."<sup>124</sup> In contrast to Germany, the United States offered them a future. Many refugees took advantage of the GI Bill, which allowed them to begin or finish their studies if they were young enough. This gave them an opportunity for an education many would not otherwise have been able to afford.<sup>125</sup> Karl Goldsmith was among these GIs and was very grateful for it. Reminiscing about the end of the war and his return to America, he also reflected on his relationship to Germany: "I really think I tried very hard to do what I consider as fulfilling the debt. I think I paid back a little bit to the good old country, and what I was given was a new life and future. My reward for going to war was a free country."<sup>126</sup> For these refugee soldiers, having fought in the U.S. Army solidified their position in the United States.

While most refugees returned to the United States after completing their service, a few stayed in Germany to work for the American military government and put their experience in Germany to work for the United States.<sup>127</sup> Fritz Weinschenk, for example, stayed because he had "an intense (though not necessarily favorable) interest in the Germans and what was happening to them."<sup>128</sup> Refugees were mainly assigned to work on legal and denazification matters—their participation in the Nuremberg trials is their most well-known involvement. Yet others were also employed in the fields of civil administration, finance, economy, manpower, and plans and operations.<sup>129</sup> In addition, some refugees were entrusted with rebuilding German cultural institutions, such as the German press and German libraries.<sup>130</sup> In general, very few émigrés appeared to have been employed in high-ranking positions, likely because American authorities may have been concerned that they would either be too friendly or too hostile with the Germans.<sup>131</sup>

The relationships between refugees working for the American occupation government and Germans during the immediate aftermath of war were complex. Weinschenk recalled, "At first . . . we of the occupation looked down on them [the Germans] for what they had done."<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, some refugees also believed that certain Germans could be entrusted with rebuilding Germany and that they should have some freedom to do so.<sup>133</sup> Even so, many Germans continued to act ignorant of their own role in the war and its aftermath, and resented the occupiers and, as Hans Habe pointed out in his autobiography, seemed to have particularly disliked taking instructions from former countrymen in American uniforms.<sup>134</sup> In general, the refugees' time spent in Germany working for the military government and sometimes in closer cooperation with German

civilians did not propel them to want to stay and live in Germany again.<sup>135</sup> Also, the positions they held did not guarantee a future in Germany. In 1947, the vast majority of refugees were dismissed from service in the American occupation government, apparently because they were viewed as “insufficiently ‘impartial and objective’” in their actions toward German civilians.<sup>136</sup> Even though there are no reports of acts of Jewish vengeance, notions that such acts could happen persisted in American and German circles during the early aftermath of the war.

Not many years after they had fled Germany, some German Jewish refugees returned to the continent as American soldiers. As immigrants to the United States, they were subject to the draft and sometimes came in direct contact with Germany and Germans. Many refugees embraced the opportunity to fight against the Nazis and also saw it as a fitting way to show their loyalty to the new country. Coming back to Europe and Germany as American soldiers and victors gave most of them great satisfaction, which was particularly meaningful in direct interactions with Germans. Abstract notions of revenge that had spurred many refugees to fight did not translate into individual acts of vengeance, however. Encountering Germans and Germany, they faced the complex realities of their past, which for many included a good life before the Nazis, and persecution once the Nazis had come to power. In their interactions with Germans, they were guided by both these past experiences and their present status as American soldiers. They especially wished to distinguish themselves from the Nazis and act like decent, honorable soldiers, which they perceived as a core value of the democratic world they were fighting for. Many refugees believed this attitude accounts for the absence of vengeful acts against Germans. Furthermore, they often felt contempt rather than anger for the Germans they encountered. In this way, the soldiers’ military superiority was matched by feelings of moral superiority. The refugees’ interactions with Germans thus affected the way they wanted to see themselves. The experience of being a U.S. soldier solidified refugees’ status in America, not only because of the bond they experienced with other Americans, but also because their interactions with Germans and the destruction they witnessed did not offer very much for them to long for or identify with. This did not mean that they were uninterested in Germany’s fate after the war. On the contrary, because of what they saw and experienced firsthand, they remained interested, also for the sake of their own and other Jewish communities.



## Notes

1. Based on case studies of different cities published in 1943, 34 percent of refugees aged eighteen to forty-four served, which equals the percentage of Americans in general. Belt, *Fighting for America*, 4. Another study by the National Jewish Welfare board, also based on a case study of about 3,500 refugees, shows that 10 percent were in the service, compared to 8.9 percent of all Americans. National Jewish Welfare Board, *American Jews in World War II*, 23–24.  
 Various scholarship on German Jewish refugees serving in the U.S. Army during World War II puts their number between 9,500 (based on a calculation in Franklin, “Victim Soldiers”) and 30,000 (Remy, “Deutsch-Jüdische Flüchtlinge,” 201), which the majority claims. My own estimate, based on numbers of soldiers from the Los Angeles Jewish Club and the New World Club in New York, is closer to 15,000. Of about two thousand (mostly older) members of the Jewish Club in Los Angeles, 163 were soldiers in 1944.
2. For existing literature on the topic, see Franklin, “Victim Soldiers”; Remy, “Deutsch-Jüdische Flüchtlinge”; Stern, “In the Service of American Intelligence”; Stern, “The Jewish Exiles in the Service of US Intelligence”; Krauss, “Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?”; and Jochem, “Fallbeispiel III.”
3. In this, I concur with many scholars who have written on refugee soldiers and whose works are listed above. Female refugees who served in the U.S. Armed Forces are not included here; research on these women remains to be done.
4. “John Stern,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 125.
5. See Penslar, *Jews and the Military*.
6. Gerson, “In Between States,” 187–88. The Jewish enthusiasm for serving in World War I was damaged by the 1916 census of Jews in the army, the so-called Jew count, the army’s reaction to accusations that Jews were avoiding military service. The stab-in-the-back legend lived off allegations that treacherous Jews in the army were responsible for Germany’s defeat. Still, Jewish men who had served in World War I and their families kept certain rights and privileges after the Nazis were in power, in contrast to those who had not served.
7. Fred Forscher, “A Soldier on Americanization,” *Aufbau* 8 (30 January 1942): 8. Forscher was a refugee from Austria. However, his outlook was similar to that of refugees from Germany.
8. See, e.g., interviews with Henry Kissinger, Walter Reed, and Jerry Bechhofer in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*.
9. This is an excerpt from the winning essay of an essay contest of the National Jewish Welfare Board. “Jews in Uniform,” *Aufbau* 9 (27 August 1943).
10. “Siegmond Spiegel,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 19.
11. “Kurt Klein,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 274.
12. Edmund Schloss, from the small German town of Jesberg, came to the United States as a boy in 1938. Fear of being sent to the Pacific theater could also have been grounded in the brutal warfare in the Pacific rather than a determined desire to face the German enemy. The context of the interview suggests the latter, however. “Edmund Schloss,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 170.
13. “Bernard Fridberg,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 62; Fridberg was born in Hanover in 1922 and left Germany when he was thirteen.
14. “William Katzenstein,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 98.
15. “John Brunswick,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 248.
16. “Walter Reed,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 186.
17. *Ibid.*, 187. See also Mühlfelder, *Weil ich übriggeblieben bin*.
18. Interview Tom Tugend.
19. “Walter Reed,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 188.
20. *Ibid.*

21. From the regular section "Our Boy's Club," *Aufbau* 9 (22 January 1943).
22. Alpers, "This Is the Army," 143.
23. Even if other Americans came from diverse backgrounds, many shared cultural preferences distinct from those of the refugees. This was particularly true for sports. While baseball and football were important to most Americans, many refugees had not taken a great liking to them. They often preferred soccer or were not interested in sports at all. Thus, one refugee recalled heated arguments erupting between him and his fellow American soldiers over such ostensibly minor things as what to listen to on the radio because he preferred Brahms and his fellow soldiers football sportscasts and Sammy Kay. Fred Forscher, "A Soldier on Americanization," *Aufbau* 8 (30 January 1942): 8.
24. For a study of American Jews who fought as soldiers in World War II, see Moore, *GI Jews*.
25. Interview Tom Tugend.
26. *Ibid.* On anti-Semitism in the U.S. Army, see, e.g., Bendersky, *The "Jewish Threat."*
27. Moore, *GI Jews*, 71; see also 119, 151. In the interviews I used, segregation in the army was not discussed, nor, interestingly, was it mentioned in relation to discussions on anti-Semitism. Deborah Dash Moore pointed out that many Jewish GIs "ignored the fact that both the Army and civil society in the South were segregated, but some northern Jews did remark on Jim Crow."
28. This was in 1942. "Siegmond Spiegel," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 20.
29. Walter Schoenstedt, "Our Army, Too: Immigrant Etiquette for Military Life," *Aufbau* 8 (2 January 1942): 3.
30. *Ibid.*
31. It is not entirely clear why this happened so late, as Stern points out in "The Jewish Exiles in the Service of U.S. Intelligence," 51.
32. See Katz, "The Frankfurt School Goes to War," also for the interesting fact that the U.S. government employed Marxist thinkers. See also Müller, *Krieger und Gelehrte*.
33. Most of the official documents on Camp Ritchie were destroyed in a fire at the National Archive in St. Louis in 1973. Therefore, scholars have so far drawn mostly on individual testimonies to reconstruct the history of the camp. Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 53n34.
34. See, e.g., "Edmund Schloss," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 171.
35. Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 54.
36. See Habe, *All My Sins*, 324, 3.
37. Jochem, "Fallbeispiel III," 437. For a more detailed account on the experiences of the Ritchie Boys, see Franklin's thesis, "Victim Soldiers," or Stern's account, "In the Service of American Intelligence."
38. Stern, "In the Service of American Intelligence," 471.
39. "Kurt Klein," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 276.
40. Interview Kurt Herrmann.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 56. See also Habe, *All My Sins*, 341. In Europe, refugee soldiers were asked to translate documents or interrogate German POWs or civilians. Sometimes, when the demand arose, even refugees without special training performed these tasks.
43. "Walter Reed," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 186.
44. *Ibid.*
45. "Fritz Weinschenk," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 68. Karl Goldsmith also frequently said "Krauts" when referring to Germans.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Some refugees became citizens after they had been shipped overseas. See, e.g., "Eric Hamberg," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 54.
48. Davie also points out that this was a justified concern. Davie, *Refugees in America*, 191, and "Victim Soldiers," 47n20.

49. Interview Walter Bloch.
50. "Walter Reed," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 189.
51. They had different abilities and opportunities to express these positions both then and also retrospectively in interviews.
52. "Edmund Schloss," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 173.
53. "Walter Reed," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 188.
54. "Bernard Fridberg," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 63.
55. *Ibid.*, 12.
56. The refugee was a twenty-three-year-old man who had been in the United States five years before returning to Europe as a soldier. "Gestern Refugees—Heute Soldaten: Ruhmestaten von Immigranten in der amerikanischen Armee," *Aufbau* 10 (22 December 1944).
57. "William Katzenstein," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 99–100.
58. "Erich Hamberg," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 55.
59. Interview Kurt Herrmann.
60. See Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 71.
61. Stern, "In the Service of American Intelligence," 466–67.
62. In their testimonies about the war, many refugees recalled situations in which they used their special knowledge and skills for the American military. *Aufbau* also reported on refugee soldiers' "heroic deeds." See, e.g., "Gestern Refugees—Heute Soldaten: Ruhmestaten von Immigranten in der amerikanischen Armee," *Aufbau* 10 (22 December 1944).
63. "Harold Baum," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 163–64.
64. Naturally, more refugee soldiers may have engaged in such acts but did not talk about them in their interviews because they wanted to appear decent and humane, adhering also to the grand narrative of the "good American soldier" in "the good war."
65. "Eric Boehm," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 226.
66. "Eric Hamberg," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 56.
67. "Otto Stern," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 265.
68. "Karl Goldsmith," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 114. The accuracy of these stories of American GIs committing war crimes cannot be determined. Even if they are not true, the fact that soldiers told them in this way highlights how important they felt it was to create a narrative of having been good and humane soldiers.
69. "Fritz Weinschenk," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 66.
70. Remy, "Deutsch-Jüdische Flüchtlinge," 201. Reports that the Germans did not treat their POWs according to the rules of the Geneva Convention circulated in the U.S. Army. See "Die Nichteinhaltung der Genfer-Konvention durch die Deutschen ist heute eine notorische Tatsache," *Aufbau* 11 (18 May 1945).
71. *Ibid.*, 72.
72. There were various dimensions to this power reversal, as Fred Field's words show: "It felt damn good to interrogate Nazis, especially when we had a pistol (usually one of their Lugers) in a holster on us"; "Fred Fields," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 233. Thus, refugee soldiers interrogated German POWs and had weapons—sometimes even those the POWs themselves had formerly possessed.
73. "Kurt Klein," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 279, as well as other interviews collected in this volume.
74. Interview Kurt Shuler. Shuler, who did not change his name until after the war, served in the army as Kurt Schulherr.
75. See Stern, "In the Service of American Intelligence," 464.
76. "Fred Fields," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 233.
77. Stern, "In the Service of American Intelligence," 465.
78. *The Ritchie Boys*, cited in Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 58–59.

79. Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 59.
80. "Fred Fields," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 233.
81. Interview Kurt Shuler.
82. "Fritz Weinschenk," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 72.
83. Interview Kurt Shuler.
84. "John Brunswick," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 259. See also letter from Werner T. Angress to Curt Bondy, April 22, 1945, in Stiftung Jüdisches Museum Berlin et al., eds, *Heimat und Exil*, 207.
85. Interview Kurt Shuler.
86. Wilfred C. Hulse, "Erfahrungen mit deutschen Kriegsgefangenen," *Aufbau* 11 (13 April 1945).
87. Ibid. This article appeared on the third page in *Aufbau* and thus presumably reached a considerable audience.
88. "Otto Stern," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 128.
89. "Edmund Schloss," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 175.
90. See, e.g., "Walter Reed," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 191–92.
91. Mühlfelder, *Weil ich übriggeblieben bin*, 69.
92. Ibid.
93. "Henry Kissinger," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 120.
94. Interview Tom Tugend.
95. Quoted in Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?," 72. On Germans' exclusive focus on their own suffering in the early postwar, see, e.g., Moeller, *War Stories*; Heineman, "The Hour of the Woman."
96. See "Fred Fields," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 234.
97. "Karl Goldsmith," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 114.
98. Ibid., 115.
99. Ibid.
100. Interview Kurt Shuler.
101. Ibid.
102. "Walter Reed," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 192.
103. Two stories in *Aufbau* about soldiers reuniting with family members are "Die Mutter wiedergefunden," *Aufbau* 11 (19 January 1945); and "Die Eltern in Köln wiedergefunden," *Aufbau* 11 (16 March 1945).
104. *The Ritchie Boys*, dir. Christian Bauer (Tangram Productions, 2004). Cited in Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 74.
105. "Wiedersehen mit der Vaterstadt," report quoting Ernst Braun, *Aufbau* 11 (11 May 1945).
106. For an analysis of relationships between Jews and non-Jews in Germany after the war, see, e.g., Demant, "Living in an Abnormal Normality." See also Koch, "Returning Home?"
107. Lissner, *Den Fluchtweg zurückgehen*; Moskowitz, "The Germans and the Jews," quoted in Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 7. Lühe et al., *Auch in Deutschland waren wir nicht wirklich zu Hause*.
108. "John Stern," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 129. See also the report of refugee soldier Walter Hellendall. "Als amerikanischer Soldat in der deutschen Vaterstadt . . . Erlebnis in München-Gladbach," *Aufbau* 11 (6 April 1945).
109. M/Sgt. Charles Gregor, "Fahrt durch Berlin," (based on letter from 14 July 1945), *Aufbau* 11 (17 August 1945).
110. Ibid.
111. See letter from Werner T. Angress to Curt Bondy in Stiftung Jüdisches Museum Berlin et al., eds, *Heimat und Exil*, 207; and *ibid*.
112. Interview Kurt Shuler.

113. Ibid. The state of the Jewish cemeteries in their hometowns or towns where they had family were a major concern for almost all the refugees.
114. See multiple interviews in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, which contain references to meeting Jews in different places in Europe. Some refugees recalled celebrating holidays and shabbat with Jewish residents.
115. "Harry Lorch," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 290.
116. "Jerry Bechhofer," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 42.
117. See Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 77.
118. Letter from Werner T. Angress to Curt Bondy in Stiftung Jüdisches Museum Berlin et al., eds, *Heimat und Exil*, 207.
119. Hans Spear in *The Ritchie Boys*, cited in Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 77.
120. See also Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?"; and Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," who come to the same conclusion.
121. In the case of interviews recorded in the 1990s, the refugees' narratives of pride fit those of their non-Jewish comrades-in-arms. See Terkel, *The Good War*; and importantly, Bodnar, *The Good War in American Memory*.
122. "William Katzenstein," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 100.
123. See, e.g., "Eric Hamberg," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 59–60.
124. Letter from Walter Spiegel to Julian and Kathe Spiegel, December 17, 1945, Personal Files of Joshua Franklin, New York, quoted in Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 77–78.
125. Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 165. This is not to say that returning from war and adjusting to civilian life was easy. Hans M. Salzmann, "Vom Soldaten zum Zivilisten," *Aufbau* 11 (6 July 1945); and Salzmann, "Die Sorge um den Arbeitsplatz," *Aufbau* 11 (13 July 1945) both discuss the difficulties this entailed for many returning soldiers.
126. "Karl Goldsmith," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 116.
127. "Fachleute bei der Okkupation: Die Verwendung von deutschsprachigen US Bürgern," *Aufbau* 11 (22 June 1945).
128. "Fritz Weinschenk," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 74.
129. This example is based on research on the military government in Bavaria. Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?," 75. For participation in the Nuremberg trials, see, e.g., Stiefel and Mecklenburg, *Deutsche Juristen im amerikanischen Exil*.
130. See Stern, "The Jewish Exiles in the Service of U.S. Intelligence," for specific examples of Jewish refugees working in U.S. intelligence after the war.
131. Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?," 74; see also Habe, *All My Sins*, 365.
132. "Fritz Weinschenk," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 74.
133. See Hans Habe, e.g., who was angry about the "Morgenthau spirit" he felt existed in Washington. Habe also criticized the double standard of the American victors in dealing with the Germans, who, e.g., "condemn[ed] soldiers and re-employ[ed] Gestapo agents." Habe, *All My Sins*, 354, 366.
134. Hans Habe, *Im Jahre Null*, 138, quoted in Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?," 73.
135. See Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?," 80–81.
136. Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, 91n21. See also Stern, "The Jewish Exiles in the Service of U.S. Intelligence," 61, for more information on General Lucius Clay's instructions on not to renew contracts nor hire "anyone who has been naturalized since 1933," which essentially targeted German Jewish refugees.

*Chapter 5*

**GERMAN JEWISH REFUGEES AND THE WARTIME  
DISCOURSE ON GERMANY'S FUTURE, 1942–1945**



While German Jews who fought as soldiers in the American Armed Forces frequently came into personal contact with Germans, most refugees who remained in the United States (most women, as well as those too old or young to take part in active military duty) also engaged with Germany during World War II. Though naturally less direct, this engagement occurred, as for soldiers, while the refugees were becoming more Americanized. From late 1942 to the end of the war, many refugees, particularly those young enough to join the workforce, became naturalized and increasingly integrated into American life through their war effort activities and participation in American Jewish organizational life. Simultaneously, the ongoing war drew refugees' attention continually toward the European continent and Germany. The war's events and outcome had immediate significance for them. Most still had family members and friends in Europe and worried about their situation. During the last three years of the war, refugees' relationship with Germany was shaped by news of Holocaust atrocities reaching the United States, their own prewar experiences in Germany, and larger discussions taking place in the United States and abroad about Germany's future after an anticipated Allied victory. German Jewish refugees, and particularly leaders within the organized community, participated in these discussions, formulating their own demands for punishment and restitution.

**On the American Home Front**

The organized refugee community put tremendous emphasis on rallying refugees to participate in war efforts—from civilian defense to purchasing war bonds.

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Notes from this chapter begin on page 127.

Like refugee soldiers, civilian refugees found these activities important as contributions to defeating Germany and projecting their loyalty to America. Local refugee groups organized activities to support the wellbeing of refugee soldiers, such as letter-writing campaigns, and sent them issues of *Aufbau* and care packages with cigarettes, sweets, and “home made cookies.”<sup>1</sup> Along with such local efforts, *Aufbau*, the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, and the Immigrants’ Conference joined forces to centrally organize and coordinate the German Jewish community’s war efforts. Under the motto “We know the Enemy—America’s War is Our War,” they formed the Immigrants’ Victory Council, which worked to intensify cooperation between the immigrants and relevant American agencies, particularly in the U.S. Citizens Service Corps, in which many refugees served home-front needs.

Also like refugee soldiers, refugees on the home front put their special knowledge to use in the Allied war effort. In late 1942, the editorial staff of *Aufbau* initiated a “Map Drive,” calling on its readers to send maps, photographs, and any other information potentially useful to the Allied military in its operations against Germany.<sup>2</sup> Thus, even older refugees could contribute. Ludwig Schulherr, for example, in his sixties during the war, had specific knowledge concerning the location and construction of hydraulic dams in Germany because he had worked in this area before emigration. He presented his intelligence to the Navy and the Office of Naval Research. For Schulherr, who had had trouble adjusting to life in the United States, having left a prestigious position in Nuremberg to be a “nobody” in Atlanta without a social circle, let alone friends, this work was positive and gave him a sense of purpose and belonging.<sup>3</sup>

While many individual refugees became more involved in American organizational life through war efforts, refugee organizations also became increasingly represented in American Jewish institutions. At the national level, the largest organization of German Jewish refugees, the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe (AMFED), joined the newly founded American Jewish Conference in 1943. The latter organization included delegates from the major Jewish defense and advocacy groups, making it one of the most representative institutions of American Jewry. It was founded primarily to discuss the future of European Jewry and of Palestine. To be recognized and become part of this was significant for AMFED officials.<sup>4</sup>

In Los Angeles, meanwhile, the city’s Jewish Community Council elected a representative of the Jewish Club of 1933, the German Jewish refugee organization, onto its board of directors for the first time in 1944. Although the Jewish Club of 1933 had worked with different Los Angeles Jewish organizations since its establishment in 1934, such cooperation had been ad hoc regarding issues concerning refugees specifically. Now, however, refugees were officially represented in the Los Angeles Jewish community and participated in decision-making processes regarding L.A. Jewish life in general.<sup>5</sup> While the great number of

refugees in Los Angeles made the inclusion of representative voices in larger organizations more pressing and likely, similar developments occurred in communities all across the United States. Connecting to the larger institutional network gave refugees greater access and influence, establishing them more firmly in the United States.

### Concern about Europe's Jews

Even as refugees became more integrated into American life, their attention was constantly drawn to the European war and the situation of European Jews. Refugees in the United States were able to follow the events of the war closely through the American press, especially *Aufbau*, which dedicated significant coverage to the European theater and the situation of Jews in German-occupied territories.

From the beginning of the war, *Aufbau's* reporting was extensive. Its journalists wrote about deportations, ghettos, concentration camps, and mass killings of Jews. The general American press also reported these things but not as regularly. Nor did the general press usually put such stories on the front page, as *Aufbau* increasingly did. *Aufbau's* journalists also tended to give more credence to reports of atrocities than most non-Jewish papers. This was the case, for example, with the news about the implementation of the so-called final solution, which reached the United States during the fall and winter of 1942. In November 1942, *Aufbau* published an article concerning the public statement Reform Rabbi Steven S. Wise, then president of the World Jewish Congress, had made about Nazis carrying out an "extermination campaign" to "entirely liquidate" the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe.<sup>6</sup> Wise emphasized that the State Department had confirmed this information,<sup>7</sup> yet most major American newspapers nevertheless "treated this as a story released by a Jewish source and an interested party."<sup>8</sup> Their reporting—including the language and placement of the articles—conveyed doubt about the accuracy of Wise's statement. General skepticism in the United States about stories concerning Nazi atrocities derived in no small part from World War I reporting about German atrocities that had later been discredited as "grossly exaggerated by Allied propaganda."<sup>9</sup> For *Aufbau* journalists though, Wise's statement reinforced their own reports. They declared that it "finally officially confirms in its entire tragic extent all the information which 'Aufbau,' based on its various sources, has been reporting."<sup>10</sup>

*Aufbau* editors deemed such news significant to its refugee readership, but not all refugees liked to be presented with ongoing news about the atrocities. One rabbi explained in a letter to the editor: "Again and again I hear fellow refugees rail and curse, not at Hitler, but at *Aufbau*, as if your paper and not this bandit produced the horrors, as if it is your reporting and not the Nazi barbarity which



steals our sleep.”<sup>11</sup> Evidently some refugees, like other Americans—common people, journalists, and government officials—were somewhat skeptical about the accuracy of these reports, considering them possibly exaggerated.

While the American Jewish organizational landscape was rife with division over many issues, the organized refugee community, along with the big American Jewish organizations, repeatedly publicized their deep concern about the desperate situation of European Jewry. Several large organizations joined forces to raise awareness of this issue.<sup>12</sup> The American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Labor Committee, and B'nai B'rith organized a mass rally in New York City in July 1942, which drew more than twenty thousand people.<sup>13</sup> Then in December, after the news of mass extermination had reached the United States, delegates from different American Jewish organizations presented a memorandum to President Roosevelt, asking him to bring attention to the killings of Jews in Europe and to do everything he could to stop them.<sup>14</sup> As is well known, their pleas went unanswered.<sup>15</sup>

Refugees expressed outrage in their communities at this lack of engagement on the part of the United States and the United Nations concerning the rescue of European Jews, but they were largely limited to symbolic awareness-raising actions and fundraisers, which they hoped would help.<sup>16</sup> In this regard then, the activities of American Jewish organizations, both national and local, were particularly important for refugees in providing a (relatively) united voice to the world at large as well as avenues of symbolic and economic action. When, for example, the Synagogue Council of America initiated a six-week “Mourning and Intercession” period for the “victims of Axis brutality” in the spring of 1943, *Aufbau* editors supported these activities with a campaign asking United Nations leaders “to send a message of compassion and encouragement to the Jewish people in the world.”<sup>17</sup> The campaign was successful, and replies from various leaders were printed in subsequent issues.

A common symbolic action on the local level was to observe a minute of silence at meetings “in honor of the Jewish victims in Europe murdered by Hitler,”<sup>18</sup> as the board of directors of the Jewish Club of 1933 in Los Angeles did in the summer of 1943. The Los Angeles community also regularly organized various social events centering around the issue, which incorporated symbolic and political actions, and often also fundraising. One, for example, was a lecture titled “Our Duty towards European Jewry,” put on in July 1943 by the Society for Jewish Culture–Fairfax Temple, with which the city’s refugee community was closely affiliated. That event was intended partly to draw more attention to the show “We Will Never Die,” which had been staged in Madison Square Garden in New York earlier that year and was to play at the Hollywood Bowl. This dramatic “Memorial Pageant” created by Ben Hecht and Kurt Weill with the help of other European Jewish refugees aimed to raise awareness for the plight of Europe’s Jews and to call for more Jewish activism.<sup>19</sup> The L.A. organizers

appealed to refugees to attend both events and heralded the show as one that could make “American Jews and Gentiles understand more and more all the aspects of the refugee-problems and . . . bring them to a closer contact with what is happening to European Jewry.”<sup>20</sup> The show was a success in Los Angeles, raising money to benefit European Jewry.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond such individual events, there were longer-term efforts, such as one Felix Guggenheim, member of the Jewish Club of 1933 board of the directors, proposed: to start a separate fund to help “our unhappy brothers and sisters in Europe” after the war.<sup>22</sup> He believed that the efforts of the newly founded United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the United Welfare Fund would not be sufficient to help all the Jews he hoped would survive in Europe. Thus, he proposed that Jewish immigrants gather their forces not only within the United States but also by cooperating with refugees in Central and South America and Great Britain. Guggenheim suggested everybody should donate “at least one week’s salary” per year. While the proposal received much positive resonance, it failed to attract significant contributions, likely because people lacked the funds or gave to larger fundraising organizations.<sup>23</sup> Consequently the idea was abandoned, and the United Jewish Appeal remained the major campaign to collect money for the cause of Europe’s Jews.<sup>24</sup> While the German Jewish refugee community leadership stressed the community’s special responsibility toward Jews in Europe in public announcements, it did not launch any ongoing activities to distinguish refugees from the larger American Jewish community. Rather, most of its efforts happened in the context of activities organized by larger American Jewish organizations.

## **Punishment and Restitution**

### *Punishment*

As the refugees were occupied with the fate and future of European Jews, they also sought to ensure that those responsible for the crimes against Jews would not escape punishment. The community’s discussion of this topic happened in the context of similar debates around Germany and the war in both U.S. governmental and public circles in the country at large.<sup>25</sup> In November 1942, *Aufbau*’s front page featured the headline “Plans for the Punishment of the Nazi Perpetrators.”<sup>26</sup> The accompanying article explained that it was not too early to think about how to deal with the Nazi perpetrators after war’s end. It stated that both President Roosevelt and a high government official of Great Britain had publicly raised the issue of prosecuting German war criminals and that the two men believed such punishment would affect relatively few people compared to the overall German population. The *Aufbau* journalist pointed out

both men had distinguished between Nazis and the German people—suggesting that Germans had been “misled” by the Nazis—but did not comment on the legitimacy of this claim. While the newspaper featured this kind of “neutral reporting,” it also included opinion pieces by *Aufbau* journalists and outside contributors, remaining true to its mission to present a broad picture of events and opinions.<sup>27</sup> It treated the topic of German responsibility extensively in subsequent months. Following the November announcement of plans for punishing German war criminals, a December 1942 article approved of a UN declaration that it would launch a special commission to investigate the crimes against Jews in Europe. However, *Aufbau* criticized the lack of action when there were no new developments by February 1943 with the article “What Will Happen with the War Criminals? The Negotiations Are Not Yielding Results.”<sup>28</sup> In the following months, discussion on this topic was subsumed into a more general debate about the responsibility of the German people at large and the repercussions they should collectively face.

The German Jewish refugee community was not alone in America in engaging in this debate. Politicians and various other Americans with influence on public opinion—filmmakers, novelists, journalists, business leaders, etc.—also did so, representing different opinions and images on the nature of Germany’s dictatorship. In general, American public opinion changed over the course of the war from one that differentiated between Germans and Nazis to one that placed responsibility for Nazism on the German nation.<sup>29</sup> While refugees may have followed this general discourse to differing degrees through various media channels, *Aufbau* was once again the major community forum. It not only picked up strands of the general American discussion but also presented the opinions of a variety of representatives of the general German emigration, both Jewish and non-Jewish. *Aufbau*’s pages had carried debates about Germans’ responsibility led by prominent representatives of German exiles since they arrived in the United States, with Thomas Mann being a leading voice among them.<sup>30</sup>

The refugee perspective was not so different from that of the broader public. However, it displayed and was informed by a deeply personal understanding and connection to events. This, inevitably, caused refugees to be far less likely to overlook their treatment under the Nazis or absolve the general German populace, and more likely to take issue with those who did. However, it frequently also brought an immediacy to their arguments and urgency to their conclusions unmatched by most voices outside the community.

One particularly heated exchange of letters began when Charles Weisz, a German Jewish refugee from Washington, asked *Aufbau* to publish his response to an article by Gerhart H. Seger, a Social Democrat who had been incarcerated in Germany before fleeing in 1934. After emigrating to the United States, Seger became the editor of the New York–based *Neue Volkszeitung*, a newspaper close to the labor movement and associated with German Social Democrats in exile.<sup>31</sup>

In his article, Seger had differentiated between Nazis and the German people.<sup>32</sup> Weisz, after expressing that he had once been proud to be German and had loved Germany “above all else in the world,” questioned whether this differentiation could legitimately be made. In discussions among refugees, he noticed that they frequently considered only Germans who wore a SA or SS uniform to be Nazis. Weisz challenged this assumption on the basis of his own experience in Germany, where, as he wrote, it was “these non-Nazis who on October 10, 1938, took my two brothers, two nephews, an uncle and me out of our apartment; it was such ‘non-Nazis’ who slapped me all the way down four stories, just because I am Jewish.”<sup>33</sup> Further, a man who had been his friend for twenty-one years and whose life he had once saved called him a “stinking, dirty Sow-Jew” just two days after Hitler had come to power. Addressing Seger, Weisz wrote, “What do you understand to be the German people, I have to always ask you? Maybe 200 or 2,000 people who did not take part in the brutalities, do you call these 200 or 2,000 people the ‘German *Volk*’ among the 80 million others?”<sup>34</sup>

Seger’s reply was condescending in both tone and content, downplaying Weisz’s painful experiences by saying that he and other political emigrants had sometimes suffered far worse at the hand of the Nazis long before Jews ever concerned themselves with Hitler very much.<sup>35</sup> For Seger, the German *Volk* were the German workers and all those who had behaved decently toward Jews and fought the Nazis before they themselves were incarcerated in concentration camps.<sup>36</sup> Judging from the number of people interned in camps, this group was considerably larger than two thousand, he argued.

This exchange over the nature and responsibility of the German people clearly struck a nerve in the refugee community, as the discussion in subsequent issues of *Aufbau* shows. It continued with a contribution by outspoken non-Jewish anti-Nazi intellectual Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster, a rebuttal by Social Democratic philosopher Siegfried Marck backing Seger, and another reply by *Aufbau* editor in chief Manfred George. Both Foerster and George disagreed with Seger’s characterization of the German people and presented evidence that the general German population had been involved in Nazi ideology and crimes on a large scale. They referred to reports by American war correspondents about crimes committed by members of the German army and to interviews with German POWs, 85 percent of whom were identified as having been and continuing to be Nazis. Moreover, they pointed to the absence of large-scale resistance or acts of sabotage within the German Reich.<sup>37</sup> These facts, Foerster argued, demanded that the majority of the German people should be punished alongside acknowledged Nazis because they, too, had made themselves guilty by participating in the Nazi regime. He suggested that their punishment should consist of their right to political participation being revoked for the foreseeable future. Siegfried Marck, responding to Foerster, acceded that this kind of punishment might be justified if one looked at it from a purely ethical standpoint,

but he wondered whether enduring the consequences of the lost war were not already punishment enough.<sup>38</sup>

Marck and Foerster represented two camps that formed during the war years with opposing views on whether the end of the war should bring a “hard” or “soft” peace to the Germans.<sup>39</sup> In this lengthy debate, the German people’s complicity became an important criterion in discussing what should be done with Germany after the Allied victory, which I will return to below. Yet the debate, whose stakes were clearly important to the community, may nevertheless have had little direct effect on decision makers. While the opinions of Foerster, Marck, and their backers shaped views within the refugee community and even in the general American public, several historians have noted that German émigré intellectuals did not hold any official position of recognition or influence in the U.S. government circles that actually made these decisions on Germany after the war.<sup>40</sup> Officials in the State Department followed the debates among these groups, albeit in the interest of gaining information that would help their war aims in Germany rather than in developing government policy for the postwar period.

Specifically, the U.S. government sought information that could help U.S. forces on the ground identify individual Nazis. In May 1943, an *Aufbau* article called on refugees to document their experiences with particular Nazi officials—mayors, police officials, judges, etc.—and send this information to Robert M. W. Kempner.<sup>41</sup> Kempner had been a former official in the Prussian Ministry of the Interior and had been serving as special consultant to the U.S. Justice Department, the War Department, and the OSS since 1941.<sup>42</sup> Once again, refugees’ inside knowledge of the German enemy enabled them to make a special contribution to the war effort. As I noted for other contexts, such contributions gave them great satisfaction in a general sense because they supported their adopted country and efforts to defeat Germany, but in this particular context, they derived an additional, personal satisfaction, intertwined as it was with individual retribution, when they identified particular Nazis. Retribution was an important issue to the refugees and required their particular attention because, at the time, the larger discussion among Allies concerning the punishment of Nazis focused on wartime and on occupied territories. They did not take Nazi crimes against Jews in Germany and Austria before the official declaration of war into consideration, a shortcoming that refugees criticized. In early 1944, Felix Guggenheim, then president of the Jewish Club of 1933 in Los Angeles, articulated his thoughts on this at a membership meeting and suggested the club set up “a committee . . . to study these questions, to contact other groups and to prepare what ever can be done in this respect in order to safeguard our interests.”<sup>43</sup>

Guggenheim was always cautious not to represent his group of refugees as only interested in purely German Jewish affairs—the community wanted to be seen as civic-minded and good future Americans, and to represent this both within the community and beyond it. Consequently, he went on to say, “I don’t

want to be misunderstood. This is not a question of refugees thinking of their claims at a time when the world is on fire and when the American boys—and our friends among [them]—have to fight for a better world.” However, he explained that the club’s board members and the Political Committee regarded this issue as a more significant moral matter, namely, as a matter of justice:

This is a question of justice in more than one respect, because it is not only intolerable, that the chief of the concentration camp in Dachau may have the chance to get away with it, when the chiefs of the concentration camps in occupied countries will face the firing squad. It is equally intolerable—not from a materialistic point of view—that the Nazi who stole a house, a factory, an object d’art in Prag[ue] or Paris will be chased out if he is lucky and will be buried there if he has tough luck—when his colleague [*sic*] in Berlin or Frankfurt will stay in the stolen house and run the stolen factory [*sic*], because it has been fixed up legally and because it is done in a time of semi-war and within the boundaries of Germany.<sup>44</sup>

In this context of reflecting on specific losses, refugees mapped onto their image of Germany—as their former home, ordinary lives, and joys and suffering—a topography of expropriation, injustice, and crime. Their views on this differed from those of most other Germans and Allies. To make sure that, as Guggenheim put it, the “criminal acts committed against European refugees, against their life, their freedom, their property between 1933 and the beginning of the 2nd World War” would not be ignored after an Allied victory, Jewish Club members decided to seek cooperation with other organizations of its kind in the United States and Great Britain.<sup>45</sup> Guggenheim formulated very group-specific interests for doing so while simultaneously successfully pursuing the group’s Americanization and integration into American Jewish organizational life. For the first time since its establishment in the United States, the community reached out to similar groups internationally to pursue refugees’ own proactive interests related to experiences in their former homeland.

The concern that crimes against German Jews before the declaration of war would not be acknowledged was subsequently allayed when the Allies revised their concepts for postwar justice to include them. Then, as the war in Europe came to an end, refugees in the United States gained an opportunity to immediately contribute to bringing Nazi perpetrators to justice.<sup>46</sup> Four days before V-E Day, *Aufbau* editors published a call asking refugees to “Help with the Punishment of War Criminals.” The call asked readers to record information about Nazi crimes—such as murders, abuse in concentration camps, the torching of synagogues, and theft—as well as the names of the perpetrators based on “their OWN knowledge—something they experienced themselves or saw with their own eyes.” The stipulation that they should report only what they would be able and willing to “testify to under oath” was very important.<sup>47</sup> Once more, Robert M. W. Kempner served as the liaison to receive such testimony. Refugee

responses reached him from all over the world, and he was able to use this information in postwar legal proceedings against Nazi criminals.<sup>48</sup> Whether refugees' information eventually incriminated Nazis or not, they assumed a position of power over their former oppressors merely by being able to recount their experiences to an institution that actively wanted to hear them and intended to use their testimony. As with refugee soldiers who helped in the arrest of German Nazi criminals by interrogating POWs, the refugees on the home front in the United States thus at least felt that they were somewhat able to settle personal scores with Germans and Nazis. Once again, it was their specific German Jewish background that gave their claims about these Germans credibility, while their position in the United States provided them with structures and opportunities that empowered them in relation to Germany. Thus, refugees' interest in Germany's future was motivated by past experience even as it, paradoxically, facilitated their embrace of being American.

### *Restitution*

Discussions about the punishment of Nazi criminals frequently accompanied debates on matters of material indemnification and restitution. In the same speech to the Jewish Club cited above, Felix Guggenheim pointed out that it was a matter of justice to hold Germans responsible for stealing Jewish property, and he also declared that certainly "in all these instances justice can be done in respect to the transgressor without necessarily thinking of the former owners."<sup>49</sup> However, he went on to say that "during the foreign property registration we were shocked [*sic*] to see how many among us who are bitterly poor here, have been tricked and burgled [*sic*] in Germany too much to just let go of it."

Some German Jews raised the issue of material compensation for stolen Jewish property as early as 1939.<sup>50</sup> Then, Shalom Adler-Rudel, a former leader in the Jewish community in Berlin, wrote a memorandum presenting suggestions on how to record information about these thefts that could serve as a basis for subsequent specific claims on Germany. At that time, his memorandum generated little interest among Jewish leaders in the United States and Great Britain, but this changed by the end of the war.<sup>51</sup> While individual Jewish emigrants and different American organizations gradually engaged with the topic, the German Jewish refugee community in general did not pay much attention to it until 1943 and then increasingly in 1944.<sup>52</sup>

The community's hesitation to engage in the topic derived from many German Jewish refugees' having initially decided that they never wanted anything to do with Germany ever again. Felix Guggenheim remembered many refugees saying at first that they "don't even want to register anything. We don't want to have anything to do with it."<sup>53</sup> However, some leaders within the Los Angeles community, whom Guggenheim identified as "our practical group," believed that

“it would be foolish to reward the Germans by benign neglect, and leaving the spoils in their hands.” These members of the board of the Jewish Club of 1933 decided in February 1943 that “the time has come to initiate the establishment of a unified front of all refugees from Central Europe in the United States.”<sup>54</sup> As they were aware of activities of American Jewish organizations and U.S. government considerations on this issue, they wanted to make sure that “the voices of these early victims of Hitler would be most assertively heard at future hearings where decisions about expiation [Sühne] and restitution [Wiedergutmachung] for committed injustices will be made.”<sup>55</sup>

In discussions about restitution, the Jewish Club’s political committee emphasized legal and practical questions to secure German Jewish refugees’ rights both as a collective and as individuals. Committee members communicated and cooperated with various individuals and organizations from the refugee community in the United States, such as the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, the American Association of Former European Jurists, the Axis Victims League, and former German judge Hugo Marx, who was writing on German Jewish restitution issues at this time.<sup>56</sup> A preliminary activity in preparation for making actual demands was the formation of a special committee within the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe that would collect data about destroyed or stolen property and assets formerly held by Jewish communities in Germany.<sup>57</sup>

Cooperation among German Jewish refugees in restitution matters also went beyond national borders. In 1944, members of the Los Angeles Club began exchanging concrete ideas for postwar “rehabilitation and reconstruction” of European Jews with the Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain.<sup>58</sup> This strengthened German Jewish refugee networks nationally and abroad, yet refugees in the United States also deemed it crucial to represent their particular interests in restitution through the large American organizations. In addition to their membership in the American Jewish Conference, German Jewish refugees formed a German Jewish Representative Committee within the World Jewish Congress (WJC).<sup>59</sup> Committee members were representatives from AMFED and other active people from the community, such as Max Grunwald, Hugo Marx, Manfred George, and—the only woman—jurist Margarete Berent.<sup>60</sup>

Participating in these organizations was critical for refugees because they believed their situation differed from that of the great mass of European Jews in the countries occupied by the German Army in several ways.<sup>61</sup> Firstly, they wanted to ensure through the committee that crimes committed against German Jews during peace time and under legal pretexts were considered valid for indemnification claims. Participation in these larger American Jewish organizations was crucial for the refugees also to advance their standing in the United States. They viewed their German Jewish position in them not as a sign of their outsider status but rather a placement of their voice as one among many within greater American



Jewry. In engaging in this sort of collective action, then, joining various organizations together to project a concerted voice towards Germany on behalf of their community, the refugees strengthened their German Jewish community identity in the United States in light of a renewed, if troubling, connection to Germany through restitution.

### **Tensions Between the Connection to Germany and Americanization**

German Jewish refugees' renewed connection to their former country also brought tensions into their connection to the new one. Despite their increased integration in American (Jewish) life, refugees were still concerned with their status in the United States. Community leaders continued to emphasize the group's belonging to the United States, particularly in their pursuit of restitution and interest in the future of Germany. During these early years of discussions about restitution, refugee leaders frequently expressed their demands on Germany along with assurances that their loyalty and future was in America and that they had no intention of returning to their former home. As the organized refugee leadership in Los Angeles noted in connection with a demand for restitution from Germany,

The board of the Jewish Club of 1933, Inc. finds it misleading and dangerous . . . when an impression is created in the American public that the refugees want to play a part in the political shaping and organization of the future Germany. The board holds the position that the crimes of the past ten years have cut the bonds between us and Germany and that our present and future belongs to the country which, in the hour of plight offered us refuge, and wants to make us citizens.<sup>62</sup>

Clearly, German Jewish refugees still worried about looking like outsiders or temporary visitors in the United States, despite living lives to the contrary.

In an article from November 1944, Manfred George addressed the problem of refugees' image as temporary residents. He explained that the term refugee had "assumed a somewhat unfavorable meaning during the last few years. First, it was shrouded by clouds of pity and sympathy, then gradually the emotional fog lifted" and "the word slowly assumed a bitter taste. It came to be synonymous with 'alien,' 'foreigner.'"<sup>63</sup> He continued: "One of the commonest accusations brought against those who came to the United States during the last eleven years is the implication that they can't wait to go back." This image had even more negative implications than that of the foreigner. First, it cast refugees as taking unfair advantage of benefits. The notions that surfaced in this context were reminiscent of those made by anti-immigration agitators in the 1930s about refugees taking up jobs and receiving financial support when the United States

was struggling economically. The sort of refugee who might want to return to Germany all along while enjoying material benefits in the United States would be regarded as an exploiter. Second, this image connected the refugees directly to the enemy. A desire to go back to Germany, the country countless Americans were risking their lives to defeat, suggested betrayal. Furthermore, refugee stereotypes—such as the arrogant German who knows everything better, is nostalgic for the homeland, and critical of how things were done in America—persisted and made it seem more plausible that refugees wished to return.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, the question of returning became particularly pertinent again on practical grounds in connection with rising demands for restitution from Germany. Demands for indemnification of lost property potentially suggested refugees had an economic interest in returning to Germany after the war—for example, to take back and run one's former factory, or live in the old family home. Some refugees did harbor such sentiments. An article in the Los Angeles *B'nai B'rith Messenger/Jewish Community Press* recounted the story of one anonymous refugee who, concerning his reparation demands, had stated, "Yes, the Nazis must be made to pay back. Where the property could be found in its original form there must be restitution. Where the property has been liquidated there must be compensation."<sup>65</sup> He went on: "I hope to get back to [my] house and live in it again." The author further stated, "Of course, those who preferred not to return to Germany could not expect restoration of their property; but exiles who resumed their lives in Germany should be paid in full for that of which they were robbed."

The organized refugee community did not respond favorably to such individual refugees who wished to return to Germany and linked restitution with that return. The Los Angeles Club, for example, which had always promoted refugees' Americanization, advocated indemnification irrespective of claimants' postwar residence. Community representatives also sought to characterize the desire to return as individual and unusual. A board member of the Jewish Club used a meeting at the B'nai B'rith Lodge to make a public announcement on this issue on behalf of the club:

99 percent of the refugees organized in the Jewish Club of 1933 have no other aim and intention than to be or become American citizens, fulfilling the duties and exercising the right this privilege involves. It would be a great mistake to assume—or to conclude from an exceptional single case—that the Jewish refugees from Germany would ever think of returning there . . . the fact itself cannot be stated clearly enough.<sup>66</sup>

The negative implications the question of return had for refugees' public image, and for their understanding of themselves as Americans, made them very sensitive to the issue. The refugee community increased efforts to refute this perception of them, which not only anti-Jewish circles but even some parts of the larger American Jewish community had. Manfred George's article "Do

Refugees Want to Return?” in *Congress Weekly*, the organ of the American Jewish Congress, for example, was another strong attempt to clarify the situation to American Jews. George blamed the perception that a majority of refugees wished to return to Germany on the vivid discussion about Germany’s future that politically active refugees led in 1943 and 1944. He wrote, “It is *their* arguments and activities, their postwar plans and letters-to-the editor which create the impression that all German-Jewish refugees want to go back—because the 99 percent who don’t meddle in German affairs or American foreign policy keep quiet.”<sup>67</sup>

The German Jewish Representative Committee of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) also characterized the refugee community’s position vis-à-vis postwar Germany clearly as one of noncontinuation and noninvolvement. They passed a statement declaring that German Jews—as opposed to surviving Jews from other European countries who might want to return or continue to live in those countries after the war—had “severed all connections with their former homeland and will not return to it” because of the atrocities the German state and Germans had committed against their own Jewish citizens.<sup>68</sup> In terms of restitution and restoration of rights to Jews in Europe, the Representative Committee made clear that German Jews did not desire to have their citizenship automatically restored in Germany, as the WJC had proposed for Jews who had not become or were in the process of becoming citizens of another country.<sup>69</sup> They explained that they did not “contemplate rebuilding a Jewish community in Germany” and demanded that Jews in Germany be able to renounce German citizenship because it constituted a “burden” for them. Nevertheless, they noted that some individuals who had left might have reasons to go back and that those people might “specifically and formally request” citizenship for themselves.<sup>70</sup>

Supporting this idea, Manfred George reiterated in a subsequent commentary in *Aufbau* that German Jewish refugees had “moral reasons that they do not want to be ‘Germans’ anymore.” Imagining a difficult postwar reality for Germany, George further added that “from a merely practical perspective, possession of a German passport is probably not something that either today or in the next few years will make its bearer particularly happy.”<sup>71</sup> While not completely excluding the idea that some Jews might live in Germany after the war, George’s message was that a future in Germany was neither desirable nor desired.

Overall, the public discourse about restitution and retribution in the last two to three years of the war within the organized German Jewish refugee community focused on emphasizing this group’s special situation and their desire to have nothing to do with Germany beyond reparations. In April 1945, the three major refugee organizations in the United States (AMFED), Great Britain (the Association of Jewish Refugees), and Palestine (Irgun Oley Merkaz Europa) formed the Council for the Protection of Rights and Interests of Jews from Germany, primarily to deal with postwar restitution for all Jews from Germany.<sup>72</sup> This act stressed their German Jewish identity in opposition to Germany and as

citizens(-to-be) of new homelands, positioning them on the winning side. This enabled them to formulate demands for retribution not as supplicant, but from a position of influence and potential power. While discussions over these demands touched on the question of Germany's future, broader debates in the United States at the time concerned more general plans for that future. The organized community participated in that conversation too.

### **What Should Be Done with Germany after the War?**

In 1943–44, public discussions about what should be done with Germany after the war were widely held in America. The government had already begun to debate this question shortly after Pearl Harbor, when President Roosevelt set up an Advisory Committee on Post-War Foreign Policy under Secretary of State Cordell Hull.<sup>73</sup> American intellectuals, too, ruminated on this issue and how Germany's postwar treatment would influence the future of Europe and the entire world.<sup>74</sup> The refugee community also engaged in these discussions, and regular articles about the postwar treatment of Germany appeared in *Aufbau*, pertaining particularly to questions of punishment and retribution for German crimes against Jews and others. When the American discussion began to delve into more concrete plans for Germany—whether it should be divided into different zones, occupied, demilitarized, etc.—Manfred George, as editor of *Aufbau*, published a statement delineating how he believed German Jews should participate in this.<sup>75</sup> He deemed it important “that formerly German-speaking Jews look at this issue as Jews and not as Germans.”<sup>76</sup> As Jewish refugees, they were becoming Americans and therefore ought to look at Germany only with an American eye, although some German Jews fancied themselves experts on the German people, he wrote. In George's eyes, these Jews were misguided, and their opinions on the subject suspect, as they themselves had not been able to foresee the German peoples' actions against their fellow Jewish citizens.

Despite George's skepticism, *Aufbau* took part in the larger discussion and published all kinds of opinions on the future of Germany by both American and German-born contributors, as well as Jews and non-Jews. The editors justified this by arguing that while neither the paper itself nor its editors had a stake in Germany's postwar future, it had to serve its journalistic function as one among many American newspapers engaging in the discussion, and cater to its audience of émigrés and immigrants. As a main news source for the German Jewish community, it understood itself as a “kind of ‘Clearing House of Opinions.’”<sup>77</sup> The discussion about Germany's future became the “most intense and longest” single debate to appear in *Aufbau* to that point, although refugee debates in the late 1930s about Americanization and Germanness prefigured it to some extent.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout this debate, George repeatedly argued that German Jewish refugees were immigrants who had severed their ties with their former home and did not want to return. Consequently, they must carefully consider how much interest they should even maintain in this discussion, let alone take part in it. As new Americans, their interest in Germany should be limited to that of Americans concerned about postwar peace in Europe, with no personal political ambitions for Germany.<sup>79</sup> In this, George made a strong distinction between political refugees and Jewish refugee-immigrants to the United States: whereas political refugees' keen interest in Germany and public suggestions on the nation's future could be tied to their ability and possible desire to return there, Jewish refugees generally did not feel that way. Like most Jewish organizations at the time, George argued that being Jewish automatically explained the decision not to return.

George felt that emotional responses to Germany among German Jewish immigrants to America were only acceptable if they related to private memories as well as to German language and culture. Political considerations about the future of Germany, on the other hand, should not make any emotional impression on them. Thus, he wrote "we do not faint, when somewhere someone suggests that parts of Eastern Prussia be ceded" from Germany.<sup>80</sup> George most frequently used "we" to insinuate that he was the spokesman for all refugees and represented their natural opinions and perspectives to the world. However, the didactic tone of his statements also suggests that some did not share these perspectives. In fact, George called Jews too interested in Germany's future, who contemplated returning, "confused minds."<sup>81</sup> Even though most German Jewish refugees shared George's opinions on returning to Germany, the division between rational detachment and emotional attachment to their former home, and the degree to which one ought to be interested in its future, were by no means as clear-cut as George suggested, as debate around the Council for a Democratic Germany showed.

The Council for a Democratic Germany was one of various groups, or Free Movements, in which German political émigrés and other interested anti-Nazis came together to discuss the future of postwar Germany. Under the chairmanship of theologian Paul Tillich, the council comprised a committee of nineteen members supported by sixty "signers"—all anti-Hitler emigrants from Germany representing a wide political spectrum ranging from Communists and Socialists, former members of the conservative German National People's Party, and the German Catholic Center Party, to Protestant clergy.<sup>82</sup> In addition, it was supported by more than fifty prominent Americans, including many liberal spokespeople such as Dorothy Thompson and Reinhold Niebuhr.<sup>83</sup>

Shortly after the council first published its program in May 1944, heated debates broke out about the organization itself, the specific content of its program, and its objective to "say a word about the future of Germany [at] a time, when the German people cannot speak for themselves."<sup>84</sup> Critics' main point of

contention was that the council's program depicted the German people as victims of Nazism who, therefore, could themselves be entrusted to dismantle the structures of Nazism—which the council identified as primarily the landowners, industrialists and the military.<sup>85</sup> This belief in the innocence of most Germans, given no evidence of any great resistance, was not well received in the emigrant community, nor by many Americans.<sup>86</sup>

Thomas Mann was the most famous early vocal critic of the council. As it was being formed, some founding members had asked Mann to participate as the organization's chairman. Mann declined because he did not believe that German exiles could or should give advice on how to deal with their former country after its people had committed horrible crimes.<sup>87</sup> For Manfred George, meanwhile, the council's establishment prompted him to declare that there was a clear split between German political exiles and immigrants, between those who saw Germany as their main interest and others whose future lay in America.<sup>88</sup> This split did not fall along Jewish/non-Jewish lines. However, the council's program said nothing explicit about the atrocities against the Jews and other victims of the Nazis, let alone punishment for those crimes. Also, while the council's program did mention restitution, it immediately made clear, hinting at the Treaty of Versailles, that too much restitution would generate a backlash and present a great burden to "the masses of German Nazi opponents."<sup>89</sup> These points provoked outrage within the Jewish community and the World Jewish Congress and German Jewish organizations, and spurred individual Jewish refugees to speak out against the council.<sup>90</sup> In addition, refugees were critical that some Jews supported the council despite its failure to acknowledge crimes against Jews.<sup>91</sup> For example, German Jewish writer Emil Ludwig—an active participant in the discussion about Germany's future—expressed his lack of understanding for Jews who saw themselves as more German than Jewish and who thus supported the council.<sup>92</sup>

Among Jews who supported the council was the former president and then honorary president of the Jewish Club of 1933, Leopold Jessner. Jessner's embrace of the council caused great uproar in the Los Angeles Club. The board not only discussed this matter within the club but also sought advice on how to deal with it from the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe in New York. In a letter to the federation's executive secretary, Herman Muller, club president Felix Guggenheim wrote, "we feel very much disturbed about some members of this Council as we feel that Jewish refugees, especially if they are consciously Jewish and are naturalized American citizens, should be reluctant to join the Council."<sup>93</sup> Not having had a chance to confront Jessner with this issue in person, as he was in the hospital recovering from an accident, Guggenheim asked to be informed about the federation's position and decisions in regard to the council.

The members of AMFED—representatives from different refugee organizations throughout the United States—concluded in mid-June 1944 that members

of their groups should abstain from joining the Council for a Democratic Germany.<sup>94</sup> Delegates had different reasons for this decision, however. While one's Jewish immigrant identity was the main criterion for some, others said that "for political reasons in general the Council should not be supported by anyone, whether he is Jewish or not." The diversity of reasons was not a matter of public discussion, nor was the decision that "those of our members who signed the Aufruf [call] of the Council for a Democratic Germany should not be called to account as everyone has the right of making decisions in his own discretion." But to the general public, the federation's clear message was disapproval of the council. Nevertheless, the federation emphasized that opposition to the council did not constitute disinterest in Germany's future: "On the contrary: on behalf of our brethren who may have to live in Germany after the war we have such an interest, and a very great one, which, however, we have to safeguard through recognized Jewish organizations and through the institutions of the United nations [*sic*] and not through the 'Council' or similar groups."<sup>95</sup> What mattered in the end was that the two most important organs of the refugee community—AMFED and *Aufbau*—set the tone of opposition to a program they felt neglected Jewish interests.

However, Jewish interest could also be used to make a case for the council, as evident in an explanation for Leopold Jessner's participation in the organization. Jessner's friend and former secretary gave a speech in front of the Jewish Club in Los Angeles clearly in response to accusations that only a person with a "confused" Jewish identity and lack of dedication to America would be driven to participate in the council:

Leopold Jessner's participation in the Council for a Democratic Germany is—needless to say—not dictated by a German heart, which none of us has anymore; it is dictated by his Jewish and American heart, it comes out of a feeling of solidarity with our Jewish brothers in Europe, who will have survived the decade of murder and for whom—seen from a real political perspective—neither the gates to America nor those to Palestine are open and will be open. It is not a German but a Jewish insight that longs for a democratic environment for the sake of these poor worn down people as a precondition for their emotional and mental [*seelisch*] convalescence. And it is not a German but a deeply Jewish understanding that is not only concerned about compensation for robbed money and possessions but above all about the foundation for political restitution of our Jewish brethren in Europe.<sup>96</sup>

Contrary to claims that the council was antithetical to Jewish interests, Jessner's spokesman argued in this context that Jessner joined precisely because the council's work was beneficial to and in the interest of Jews. Even though others, such as members of the AMFED as well as Manfred George, acknowledged the virtues of an interest in a democratic Germany for the sake of Jewish survivors and prospective peace, Jessner's lack of engagement with and ignorance

of German atrocities against Europe's Jews did not find understanding within the larger community. His position isolated him.

Together with Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator, Leopold Jessner had been one of the great directors of Weimar theater. Unlike the other two, however, Jessner was unable to continue his success in the United States. Even though he preached Americanization to his fellow refugees when he became active in the Jewish Club of 1933, he was not very successful in this endeavor himself. Jessner died in December of 1945 at the age of sixty-seven, but had, according to his close friend Alfred Perry, seriously considered eventually returning to Germany from 1944 on.<sup>97</sup> These variables, together with the fact that Jessner was both a socialist and a religious Jew, and a firm believer in a German-Jewish synthesis, make his decision to join the council seem much more understandable.<sup>98</sup> While it is not clear how Jessner could ignore the crimes against the European Jews, himself included, this short sketch reveals the complexities of human existence and emotional belonging that characterized the lives and experiences of some of the German Jewish refugees. As refugees' life stories and identities were complicated and inconsistent, so, too, could be the decisions they made.

If Jessner was at one end of the spectrum of attitudes German Jewish refugees held toward Germany during this time, Manfred George's stance can be regarded as the other. As a major public figure of the German Jewish refugee community and editor in chief of *Aufbau*, the mouthpiece of that group, he was in a very different position of responsibility than Jessner. George was always concerned with the image, standing, and future of this community in the United States. Thus, George's articulations and calls on refugees to abstain from having a political interest in postwar Germany and from joining organizations such as the council have to be seen in this context. When the public debate on Germany's postwar future was underway in summer 1943, the U.S. State Department made known that it did not seek to cooperate with anti-Nazi Germans.<sup>99</sup> Apparently, the U.S. government distrusted German emigrants' motives and aims in their postwar planning schemes.<sup>100</sup> Hence, George's strict position of noninterest and nonengagement in discussions of postwar Germany represented the safest way to situate his community in America.

Except for Jessner's, no one expressed opinions contrary to George's in *Aufbau* during that time. It is unclear whether there were none, none that wanted to speak publicly, or none that met George's editorial approval. Refugees' stances toward and interest in Germany at the end of the war were certainly tied to their age, personal experiences in the old country, the fate of family members and friends there, and their own family situation and integration into American life. The official principal stance of the larger organized community was to have no interest in Germany beyond issues of restitution, retribution, and the protection and survival of Jews in Europe.



In the last years of the war, German Jewish refugees, not without difficulty, carved out a special position for themselves within America, within the larger American Jewish community, and toward postwar Germany. In doing so, they took part, both within their community and more widely, in debates concerning German punishment and restitution. Their discourse on these topics, although superficially similar, was of a different quality than that outside the community. It betrayed an impatience, angst, and intimacy with the events that reflected a deeply personal connection to the debate, borne of their traumatic experiences and close ties between parts of their identity and its central questions. Overall, their engagement in this discourse strengthened their German Jewish refugee identity. Even though this identity was projected against Germany and deeply entrenched in a genuine attachment to America, suspicion from outside the community fostered insecurity among refugees about their position in the United States. This fear prompted the leading American refugee organizations not only to emphasize their belonging to the United States, but also to encourage refugees to abstain from showing too much interest in Germany. While Leopold Jessner's position, one that attempted to look beyond the atrocities to pursue a new Germany, did not meet with much understanding within the larger refugee community, George's rationalist stance, advocating complete disinterest in political developments in Germany, offered an alternative that ultimately also asked too much. Even though George insisted that the primary makeup of the refugees' identity, patriotically speaking, must be American and Jewish, their connections and special interests in Germany could not be denied; too many great questions regarding Germany demanded their interest. This is not to suggest that there was any significant positivity toward Germany or optimism for its future. On the contrary, in the initial postwar years, most refugees were suspicious and critical of the new state, regularly cautioning Americans not to be so trusting.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, the detachment from German affairs that George advocated waned, and the organized refugee community at large changed its relationship to Germany into one of critical engagement, an approach that was legitimated and then even promoted by George himself.

## Notes

1. See, e.g., *Aufbau* 9 (20 August 1943).
2. See collection of articles in "Aktion Landkarte," in Schaber, ed., *Aufbau Reconstruction*, 57ff.
3. Interview Kurt Shuler.
4. Herman Muller, in German, report from May 24, 1965, in Feld, "American Federation of Jews from Central Europe," 134.
5. "Dawn of Liberation," *Aufbau* 10 (12 May 1944).

6. “Himmler’s Ausrottungsplan: State Department bestätigt alle Nachrichten,” *Aufbau* 8 (27 November 1942). The article appears only on the fifth page, perhaps because some readers were fed up with reading such awful news. See, e.g., Manfred George in *Aufbau* 8 (23 October 1942). The next issue from 4 December 1943, gave the topic more prominence, however.
7. For more detail on this and how the State Department tried to distance itself from Wise, see Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 180ff.
8. *Ibid.*, 181. See chapter 8 on this larger issue.
9. Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914*, 410. While journalists did occasionally embellish stories about German atrocities during World War I (*ibid.*, 206), the German Army did in fact commit great atrocities. However, postwar pacifists in France, Britain, and the United States began to cast these wholesale as exaggerated propaganda (paralleling German revisionist accounts). This view became a dominant narrative and resulted in initial skepticism on the part of Allied governments toward reports of German atrocities and reluctance on the side of the press to publicize them. See *ibid.*
10. “Himmler’s Ausrottungsplan: State Department bestätigt alle Nachrichten,” *Aufbau* 8 (27 November 1942).
11. Rabbiner Dr. Manfred Swarsensky, “Sollen wir schweigen?” *Aufbau* 9 (4 December 1942). Translation mine, “fellow refugees” is “Schicksalsgenossen” in the original text. See also Karl Kluge of the Friends of German Democracy, “Wir dürfen nicht schweigen,” *Aufbau* 10 (11 December 1942): 10. People had different reasons for being unwilling to believe or engage with the news. See, e.g., Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 140–41; and Moore, *Know Your Enemy*, 193–94.
12. Some historians have argued that the disunity and strife within the American Jewish community led to insufficient and inefficient actions to save Europe’s Jews. Others have suggested that, although more could have perhaps been done by American Jews, forces dominating the American government and public opinion—who largely shared an anti-Jewish or disinterested attitude—were so strong it is unlikely that even a united American Jewry would have changed much. See, e.g., Feingold, *Bearing Witness*; Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 220–21.
13. Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 218.
14. Penkower, “American Jewry and the Holocaust,” 99.
15. Feingold, *Bearing Witness*; Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue*. For a counterargument, see also Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*; and Arad, *America, Its Jews, and the Rise of Nazism*.
16. See, e.g., “Der grosse Appell,” *Aufbau* 9 (5 March 1943): 1; and the *Aufbau* campaign “Messages to the Jewish People,” *Aufbau* 9 (7 May 1943); and subsequent issues.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Minutes of the fourteenth meeting of the board of directors of the Jewish Club of 1933, Inc., on Thursday, June 3, 1943, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1942–1943, Correspondence Jewish Club of 1933.
19. March 1943 editions of *Aufbau* contain critiques of the show. Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 219.
20. Announcement from the Jewish Club of 1933 to its members, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1943, Refugees and Civilian Defense.
21. See “We Shall Never Die,” *Aufbau* 9 (6 August 1943).
22. Letter Dec. 15, 1943, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1943, Refugees and Civilian Defense.
23. *Ibid.* and undated document, probably early 1944, referring to the former. FGP, B107, Correspondence 1943, Refugees and Civilian Defense.
24. See, e.g., another appeal to the Los Angeles refugee community, *Aufbau* 9 (16 April 1945): 16.
25. Moore, *Know Your Enemy*, 3.
26. “Pläne für die Bestrafung der Nazi Verbrecher,” *Aufbau* 8 (6 November 1942).
27. See, e.g., “Einheit oder Aufteilung” *Aufbau* 9 (23 April 1943).

28. *Aufbau* 8 (25 December 1942); and “Was wird mit den Kriegsverbrechern? Die Verhandlungen kommen nicht weiter,” *Aufbau* 9 (19 February 1943).
29. See Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture*, 2–3, 208.
30. For more detail, see Middell, *Exil in den USA*, 169–94.
31. Gerhart H. Seger was a member of the Reichstag for the SPD from 1930 to 1933 and was incarcerated in the concentration camp in Oranienburg.
32. “Wer ist eigentlich das ‘deutsche Volk?’,” *Aufbau* 9 (5 November 1943).
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.* See also Lamberti, “German Antifascist Refugees in America,” 292.
36. Toni Sender made a similar argument about the German workers, in “Gibt es ein ‘anderes Deutschland’? Der Widerstand der Gewerkschaften wurde nie gebrochen” in *Aufbau* 9 (30 July 1943).
37. See “Zum Streit über das Deutsche Volk” *Aufbau* 9 (12 November 1943); and Manfred George, “Die Frage deutscher Exilpolitik in U.S.A.,” *Aufbau* 10 (14 January 1944).
38. “Um das deutsche Volk,” *Aufbau* 9 (24 December 1943).
39. See Moore, *Know Your Enemy*, for a recent account on this debate in the United States.
40. See Lamberti, “German Antifascist Refugees,” 279, and note 1 for scholarly works that come to that conclusion, e.g., Petersen, “Das Umfeld: Die Vereinigten Staaten und die deutschen Emigranten,” 70–71. The German born writer Emil Ludwig (formerly Cohn) seemed to have been one notable exception to this trend. See the section on Emil Ludwig in Moore, *Know Your Enemy*, 256–58.
41. “Die Alliierten brauchen Ihre Kenntnisse über die Nazis,” *Aufbau* 9 (14 May 1943).
42. On the involvement of refugees in the OSS, see Franz Neumann et al., *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany*.
43. Speech manuscript, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1944, German Jewish Refugee Issues.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*
46. See Manfred George, “None Shall Escape,” *Aufbau* 10 (16 June 1944).
47. “Helft mit bei der Bestrafung der Kriegsverbrecher,” *Aufbau* 11 (4 May 1945).
48. Kempner was assistant U.S. chief counsel at the Nuremberg trials. For more on how information provided by refugees through *Aufbau* aided Kempner in his prosecution of Nazi criminals, see Schaber, *Aufbau Reconstruction*, 72–73.
49. Speech manuscript, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1944, German Jewish Refugee Issues.
50. Sagi, *German Reparations*, 14.
51. *Aufbau*, which published two articles on the general topic of restitution in 1939, did not report about Adler-Rudel’s memo. See Bauer-Hack, *Die Jüdische Wochenzeitung Aufbau*, 43 and notes 14 and 15.
52. American Jewish organizations—the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Conference, and the American Joint Distribution Committee—began launching coordinated activities in 1940 and 1941. In 1940, the American Jewish Committee set up a special Committee for Peace Studies concerned with questions of postwar compensation and reinstatement of rights for European Jews. In November 1941, the World Jewish Congress organized a conference in Baltimore dedicated to the subject. Then, Nahum Goldmann, who would become a central figure in restitution, stated to the participants of the conference, “Who can doubt that we Jews have a right to international help for European Jewry after the war? If reparations are to be paid, we are the first who have a claim to them.” The event did not receive *Aufbau* coverage. Bauer-Hack, *Die Jüdische Wochenzeitung Aufbau*, 44. In 1943, the American Jewish Conference was established. In Palestine, first organized activities to engage with restitution matters were launched in 1943, headed by Nir Company which had handled Ha’avara transfers prior to

- the war. Sagi, *German Reparations*, 16. For more details on the beginning of restitution and different approaches to the idea, see also Goschler, *Wiedergutmachung*.
53. Interview with Felix Guggenheim, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, 6 January 1972, LBI, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaec/results/?qtype=pid&term=1328082>.
  54. "Vorstandsbeschluss," *Aufbau* 9 (5 March 1943).
  55. *Ibid.*
  56. Different documents in FGP, B108, Correspondence 1944, German Jewish Refugee Issues.
  57. See "Wiedergutmachungsansprüche der Juden aus Deutschland," *Aufbau* 10 (27 October 1944).
  58. Demands included the following: "After cessation of hostilities Jews on the Continent shall be given the option for either returning to their countries of origin in possession of all their former rights as subjects of those countries, or of final establishment in their countries of residence, unless they choose to emigrate to Palestine or elsewhere. 3) Economic restitution has to be carried out regarding all properties in whatever shape or form towards Jews from Germany taken from them under legal forms or pretexts or by open robbery after the 30th January 1933. The same applies to rights of pension, special taxes levied on Jews, including flight tax, losses sustained through forced sales of property or businesses and the like. 4) Pensions have to be paid to widows or orphans of Jews murdered by the Nazis. 5) Communal property has to be restored respectively the indemnities paid to be used for the resettlement of Jews abroad. 6) Indemnity has to be paid on property belonging to persons who have died in Nazi Germany or after deportation to the rightful heir or, if none, to a resettlement fund." Memorandum of the Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain, London, FGC, B108, FGP, Correspondence 1944, German Jewish Refugee Issues.
  59. See, e.g., "Wiedergutmachungsansprüche der Juden aus Deutschland," *Aufbau* 10 (27 October 1944).
  60. Minutes, German Jewish Representative Committee, October 4, 1944, Ms. Col. No. 361, H134, American Jewish Archives.
  61. See, e.g., "Future of the Jews from Germany," *Aufbau* 10 (8 December 1944).
  62. "Vorstandsbeschluss," *Aufbau* 9 (5 March 1943).
  63. Manfred George, "Do Refugees Want to Return?" *Congress Weekly*, 10 November 1944, (as of 2006) uncatalogued materials related to the Jewish Club of 1933, Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
  64. See, e.g., "Another Open Letter to the Refugees Who Are Our Guests," in the *Santa Barbara News-Press*, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1942–1943, Enemy Alien Issues incl. Tolan House Committee, 1 of 2. Discussions about the behavior of individual refugees as prompting this negative image of the group also appear in *Aufbau*. See also Kassof et al., *Lives Lost, Lives Found*, 20ff. See also Hannah Arendt's 1943 essay "We Refugees," which was then published in the *Menorah Journal* (January 1943): 69–77, and Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 264–74.
  65. Al Segal, "A Man's House," *B'nai Brith Messenger*, combined with the Jewish Community Press, 27 August 1943.
  66. FGP, B107, Correspondence 1944–1945, Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe.
  67. George, "Do Refugees Want to Return?," emphasis added.
  68. "Juden und deutsche Bürgerrechte," *Aufbau* 10 (17 November 1944).
  69. *Ibid.*
  70. "Future of the Jews from Germany," *Aufbau* 10 (8 December 1944). Interestingly, Manfred George, who expressed his strong disapproval for Jews living in Germany or wanting to have anything to do with Germany elsewhere, endorsed the option of German citizenship upon request; see Manfred George, "Staatsangehörigkeit 'Deutsch?'" *Aufbau* 10 (24 November 1944).

71. Ibid.
72. Over the next year, other refugee organizations from South America, France, Belgium, and Australia joined the council. *A.J.R. Information* 1 (January 1946).
73. Moore, *Know Your Enemy*, 281–82.
74. Ibid., 178.
75. See also the discussion about the proposal by the American political journalist Kingsbury Smith about the partition of Germany in *Aufbau* 9 (9 April 1943), and in subsequent issues.
76. Manfred George, “Diskussionen über Deutschland,” *Aufbau* 9 (8 January 1943).
77. “Einheit oder Aufteilung,” *Aufbau* 9 (23 April 1943). See April 1943 issues in which *Aufbau* editors asked prominent émigrés to answer different questions on the political future of Germany.
78. See Schaber, *Aufbau Reconstruction*, 212ff.
79. See, e.g., Manfred George, “To Repeat It Again and Again,” *Aufbau* 9 (28 May 1943); and “Deutschlandpolitik in U.S.A.,” *Aufbau* 10 (28 January 1944).
80. “Das unberührte Herz,” *Aufbau* 9 (3 September 1943).
81. Manfred George, “Diskussionen über Deutschland,” *Aufbau* 9 (8 January 1943); and “Verwirrte Gemüter,” *Aufbau* 10 (2 June 1944).
82. Langkau-Alex, “Vorwort,” in *Was soll aus Deutschland werden?*, ed. Langkau-Alex and Ruprecht, 10. For the history of the council, also see Liebner, *Paul Tillich*; and Lamberti, “German Antifascist Refugees.”
83. Lamberti, “German Antifascist Refugees,” 295.
84. “Deklaration des Council for a Democratic Germany,” in *Was soll aus Deutschland werden?*, ed. Langkau-Alex and Ruprecht, 156.
85. Ibid.
86. See, e.g., the reactions from the Society for the Prevention of World War III.
87. His brother was among the signers. See previously cited publications on the council and Chapter 9 in Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific*.
88. Manfred George, “Am Scheideweg,” *Aufbau* 10 (12 May 1944).
89. “Deklaration des Council for a Democratic Germany,” in *Was soll aus Deutschland werden?*, ed. Langkau-Alex and Ruprecht, 156. See Walter Mehring, “Kleine Feststellung,” *Aufbau* 10 (12 May 1944). See also *Aufbau* 10 (19 May 1944), for different statements from refugees about the council, including a long letter under the title “Es gibt kein ‘anderes’ Deutschland” by radio commentator Hans Jacob, who wrote, “There is no word on restitution. The crimes are forgotten.”
90. See, e.g., the letter exchange between Erika Mann and Carl Zuckmayer, *Aufbau* 10 (12 May 1944).
91. See the discussion about the alleged endorsement of Rabbi Jonah B. Wise, “Rabbi Jonah B. Wise dementiert seine Unterschrift,” *Aufbau* 10 (19 May 1944); and Lamberti, “German Antifascist Refugees,” 297, on the World Jewish Congress.
92. Emil Ludwig, “Richtigstellung,” *Aufbau* 10 (16 June 1944).
93. Letter from Felix Guggenheim to Herman Muller, June 15, 1944, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942–1945, American Federation of Jews from Central Europe.
94. Letter from Herman Muller to Felix Guggenheim, Jewish Club, dated July 10, 1944, FGP, B108, Correspondence 1942–1945, American Federation of Jews from Central Europe.
95. Ibid.
96. Mitgliederversammlung, FGP, B107, Correspondence 1944–1945, Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe.
97. From a letter by Alfred Perry to Marta Mierendorff, July 17, 1974, Marta Mierendorff Papers, Collection no. 0214, Marta Mierendorff Collection on Leopold and Fritz Jessner, 1910–1986,

- B1, Marta Mierendorff, Correspondence, 1965–1972, 1, 1, Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
98. Feinberg, “Leopold Jessner,” 120.
99. See Claus-Dieter Krohn, “Der Council for a Democratic Germany,” in *Was soll aus Deutschland werden?*, ed. Langkau-Alex and Ruprecht, 17–48, 27 and note 32.
100. Petersen, “Das Umfeld,” 71.
101. See, e.g., “A Fateful Mistake,” *Aufbau* 11 (18 May 1945). Similarly, “Die Nazis haben es gut: Die Zustände in der englischen Besatzungszone,” *Aufbau* 12 (22 March 1946); and interviews in Peck, *Queen City Refuge*, and Wolmann, *Crossing Over*.

Chapter 6

GERMAN JEWISH REFUGEES AND THE WEST GERMAN  
FOREIGN OFFICE IN THE 1950S AND 1960S



In November 1965, the German Jewish refugee community in Los Angeles invited the local West German consul general to attend a commemoration of the November Pogrom of 1938.<sup>1</sup> Afterward, the diplomat reported to the Foreign Office in Bonn that he had told the audience his participation in the event was “an outward sign of the beginning of a new chapter in the relationship between the German and the Israeli people [*israelische Volk*].”<sup>2</sup> The consul’s attendance at such an event, his address, his “new chapter” metaphor, and his clumsy use of “Israeli people” to denote the entire Jewish diaspora neatly encapsulate the thrust of the relationship between German Jewish refugees in the United States and West Germany in the 1950s and ’60s. This relationship had come some way since the end of World War II, and it was important to both sides. At the same time, the consul’s language reveals that it was a relationship fraught with misunderstandings, missteps, and, mostly for the refugees, suspicion. The relationship required continual learning and change. This was possible, because both West German state officials (particularly employees of the Foreign Office) and representatives of the German Jewish refugee community in the United States viewed positive relations as advantageous. In fact, at certain times, the relationship was of a mutually constitutive character, each group shaping the other’s construction of itself.

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Notes from this chapter begin on page 156.

## **West German Foreign Policy Considerations and German Jewish Refugees in the United States**

After the end of World War II, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer clearly grasped that the legacy of the Third Reich was a huge liability for Germany's international standing. For Adenauer, an important aspect in his conceptualization of foreign policy was to address that legacy in a way that would allow West Germany to secure a solid position in the West. He saw reconciliation with the United States and Western European nations as critical to that project, but the ways in which postwar Germany dealt with Jews also became a key indicator for the Allies of whether the country was successfully making the transition into a "new" democratic, peaceful Germany.<sup>3</sup> The high commissioner of the American occupation zone saw this as early as 1949, observing of Germany's small Jewish community that "what [it] will be, how it forms itself, how it becomes a part and how it merges with the new Germany, will . . . be watched very closely and very carefully by the entire world. It will, in my judgment, be one of the real touchstones and the test of Germany's progress toward the light."<sup>4</sup>

American Jews and German Jewish refugees scrutinized these efforts intensely, with particular attention paid to any signs of resurgent Nazism.<sup>5</sup> Adenauer was very much aware of this, and, in his view, gaining the goodwill of American Jews was essential to Germany's obtaining "acceptance as a morally equal partner of the West."<sup>6</sup> He believed that Jews had outsize influence on American public opinion—an atypical instance of him invoking a popular anti-Semitic stereotype.

Various scholars and contemporaries have debated the extent to which Adenauer's interest in Jewish issues was motivated by moral concerns or pragmatism. Some have pointed to Adenauer's ties to a Zionist committee in 1927 and to his good relationship with the Jewish community during his time as Cologne's mayor during the Weimar Republic as evidence of the sincerity of his convictions. Adenauer does indeed seem to have been genuinely interested in German-Jewish reconciliation and in the wellbeing and secure future of Jews who had suffered at the hand of the Nazis. At the same time, he was also conscious that certain actions in this regard would further his policy goals.<sup>7</sup> Philo-Semitism became a strategic political instrument that served as the "moral legitimator of the democratic character" of the young Federal Republic.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, in order to project a positive image of West Germany in the United States, the West German government considered it an important task to create good relationships with the American Jewish community in general and with German Jewish refugees in particular. Because German diplomats necessarily had to be enlisted in such an effort, the Foreign Office had to send individuals to the United States who represented the values of the "new Germany" and who were likely to be accepted by the communities they wanted to reach. This introduced complications, particularly given how much of the Foreign Office personnel had



worked there since before the war's end.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the early postwar Foreign Office had many employees who were distinctly unsympathetic to the Jewish cause, even demonstrably so, thus leaving a very limited pool of candidates who might carry out Adenauer's policy in the United States. More difficult still, the legacy of Nazism in the Foreign Office could not simply be glossed over.

American Jews and especially German Jewish refugees in the United States closely monitored the presence of Nazis within German government institutions. In the late forties and early fifties, the German press covered debates about the issue, which even led to a parliamentary investigation.<sup>10</sup> In the United States, *Aufbau* showed German Jewish refugee journalists to be critical, skeptical observers of German society and the new West German state.<sup>11</sup> Discussions about anti-Semitism, denazification, individual responsibility, and the presence of Nazis in the new German government were common.<sup>12</sup>

Since the German Jewish press in the United States was already discussing details of proposed diplomats' biographies in relation to their history during the Third Reich, Foreign Office posts there could not be filled by just anyone. Officials decided that former Nazis should be discouraged as possible hires, and should absolutely not be assigned conspicuous postings overseas.<sup>13</sup> Areas with large Jewish populations demanded particular sensitivity, which is why the first West German consular staff in New York included several prominent anti-Nazis.<sup>14</sup> Among them was the consul general, Heinz Krekeler, who had never been a member of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) and "presented himself as a strong supporter of German-Jewish reconciliation."<sup>15</sup> Krekeler was well liked by the refugee community in New York, which had gotten to know him as an "impeccable anti-Nazi."<sup>16</sup> Krekeler subsequently became the first West German ambassador in Washington, D.C. Heinrich Knappstein, consul general in Chicago, also had no Nazi past.<sup>17</sup>

It was not always an easy matter to implement the new staffing policies. Among the reasons for this was a longstanding bias in the Foreign Office against rehiring individuals who had lost their jobs due to National Socialist exclusion. While this prejudice undoubtedly reflected persistent anti-Semitism and vestigial Nazi loyalties, it also arose from the department's strong sense of collegiality and a belief that those diplomats who had been ousted had somehow behaved "indecently" to their former colleagues.<sup>18</sup> This was the situation that faced Richard Hertz. In 1951, Hertz was recruited to lead a new German consulate in Los Angeles, which at the time had the country's second-largest population of Jewish refugees and émigrés. A former German diplomat who was "retired" in 1937 due to his Jewish ancestry, he had spent much of the intervening time in Mexico and the United States, including as a lecturer at a college in the Los Angeles area.<sup>19</sup> Remarkably, the Foreign Office's choice for Hertz as consul in Los Angeles resulted from their inquiring with the local German Jewish refugee community not only as to how they would regard a West German diplomatic mission in their city but also

whether they could think of a suitable candidate for consul.<sup>20</sup> Hertz's name was put forward by Harry Salinger, former president of the Jewish Club of 1933. Some in the Foreign Office objected to Hertz's appointment, believing he could not adequately represent West Germany in the same country where he had lived as an exile. Nonetheless, his experience in the United States, his Jewishness, and his reputation among his fellow German Jews eventually carried the day, having become newly desirable in the context of political reconstruction.<sup>21</sup>

Though the Foreign Office's personnel decisions appeared unorthodox to some, they were driven by a strategy of posting people who could embody "good West Germans" likely to be accepted by local refugee communities.<sup>22</sup> Through such appointments, the West German Foreign Office began to change its composition, identity, and practices in these places. Even while the headquarters in Bonn at the time remained largely staffed with former Nazis, incremental change was taking place at the periphery. And the Office's decisions were frequently vindicated by outcomes on the ground. When the consulate opened in Los Angeles, for example, refugees disagreed on whether they should have anything to do with it. The former refugee Heinz Pinner remembered that when he accepted an invitation of the consulate on the occasion of the anniversary of the German *Bundestag* (parliament), "a storm broke loose in the [local German Jewish refugee] Club. How could you accept the invitation to the Nazis?"<sup>23</sup> For Pinner though, and subsequently for most other refugees in Los Angeles, the identity of the consul mattered. He stated that, in choosing such a man, "Mr. Adenauer had a very lucky hand. They sent us the right man. The first one was one fourth Jewish."<sup>24</sup>

Invitations to representatives of the refugee community for events held at German consulates were not rare. From the beginning, "German diplomats were anxious to present themselves and their government's policies" to different groups within the American Jewish community.<sup>25</sup> They frequently reached out to popular and influential individuals among the refugee community, such as rabbis or journalists, because if these people reacted positively, others might also look more favorably at German diplomats and consequently Germany. In this way, the diplomats also sought the support of some individual "pro-German" refugees, such as the New York-based lawyer Fritz Oppenheimer, who had good contacts with the U.S. State Department and West German officials, which he used to promote friendly relations between the two.<sup>26</sup> In addition, German diplomats engaged in "gesture[s] of goodwill" in an effort to reduce animosity among refugees, such as the former chief rabbi of Cologne, to whom New York Consul General Heinz Krekeler made a visit carrying personal greetings from Chancellor Adenauer. Adenauer had been mayor in Cologne prior to the war, and this presumably positive prewar connection was now used to make contact.<sup>27</sup> These efforts were not always successful though. When Krekeler sent Passover greetings to the American Federation of Jews from Central Germany in 1951,

for example, the president of the organization refused to accept them.<sup>28</sup> In the early 1950s, German Foreign Office outreach efforts to German Jewish refugees received mixed reactions as the community remained mostly skeptical and far from united in its attitude toward Germany.

The currency of the issue of German Jewish relations in the refugee community is exemplified by a debate that the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe (AMFED) organized in the summer of 1950 on the question “Are we as Jews interested in the German Problem and if so, what is our position?”<sup>29</sup> Without differentiating between the two German states, the debate centered on the refugees’ attitude to Germany at large. Rudolf Callmann, chairman of the Federation’s board of directors, rejected the notion of German collective guilt but stressed that every Jew ought to be aware of his responsibility toward the larger Jewish community. Jews who had not experienced great personal hardship at the hands of the Germans still had to act in ways that would not downplay the atrocities that the German nation had inflicted on Jewry at large. Callmann believed that, in principle, German Jewish refugees should not engage in German problems. He added, however, that life made certain exceptions necessary, which included keeping relations with German friends who had not been implicated in the regime and being in touch with Germans over restitution issues.<sup>30</sup> The decision about the degree to which such exceptions were permissible fell within the responsibility of each individual, who, as Callmann stressed, should be aware of the principle of nonengagement. Overall, his organization was determined to engage with German problems only in cases that would be in the interest of its members. Rabbi Max Gruenewald, the second speaker of the evening, opposed any attempts to interact with Germans that could potentially minimize what had happened, stating that the “graves were still too fresh.”

The third speaker, *Aufbau* editor in chief Manfred George, however, took a different stance on Jewish engagement with Germany. Without ignoring the “Blutschuld” (blood guilt) of the Germans, he argued that Germany had become a central European problem. Therefore, “particularly if one is an American of Jewish descent from Germany, [one] had the duty to concern oneself with Germany.” This, he said, “was not a question of sentimental ties to personal memories, but the utilization of factual experience for the benefit of the U.S.A. and thus the world.”<sup>31</sup> Following this objective, one year later George met with Theodor Heuss, president of the Bundesrepublik. The interview George conducted with him was subsequently published in *Aufbau* and was followed by an article in which George pointed to what he believed was the specific duty of the German Jewish refugees: to recognize that there were “a number of significant personalities and circles in Germany with whom communication [and understanding] had never been broken off.”<sup>32</sup> He emphasized that connections with such German individuals might hold benefits not only for American politics but also for “the Jews in and outside of Germany, and even some day for Israel.”<sup>33</sup>

Thus, all three speakers, even though generally distrustful of Germany, did not advocate an absolute prohibition or avoidance of relations. Rather, they believed that there were certain ways in which relations with certain Germans or the German state could benefit their community and Jews more generally. This approach, as put forward by George, would become the reasoning of many refugees, particularly representatives of refugee organizations who decided to engage with Germans and Germany.

Among the German officials who did gain the trust of the official representatives of the organized German Jewish community in the 1950s and 60s were West German President Theodor Heuss, the Social Democratic opposition leader Kurt Schumacher, and Chancellor Adenauer.<sup>34</sup> Significant in this thawing of relations was Adenauer's speech to the German parliament in September 1951, in which he acknowledged the crimes that had been committed "in the German name" and declared Germany's obligation for moral and material reparations. Adenauer's speech came after much pressure from Jewish organizations within and without Germany, who had criticized the lack of commitment to restitution on the part of the German government.<sup>35</sup> In 1951–52, the state of Israel, American Jewish organizations, and mainly the newly founded international Jewish Conference on Material Claims against Germany helped secure reparation settlements resulting in payments to Israel and to the Claims Conference, which were first set out in the Luxembourg Agreement of 1952. Adenauer hoped that the reparation payments would have a particularly positive influence on West Germany's image in the world, certainly among the American public, and would benefit Germany's efforts at political and economic integration into the West.<sup>36</sup>

The announcement of the restitution settlements was indeed generally received positively around the world. The signing of the Luxembourg treaty and its ratification in 1953 "softened the hostility" of most American Jewish pro-Zionist groups and "also affected the attitude of committed Jewish legislators on Capitol Hill." Nonetheless, the success of these measures was mixed. The majority of Holocaust survivors, Orthodox groups, and left- or communist-leaning Jews remained hostile toward Germany.<sup>37</sup> Among the German Jewish refugees, there were many who rejected restitution, mainly because they considered it "blood money." Representatives of the refugee community in the United States largely embraced the prospect of restitution, however. *Aufbau's* editors had already greeted Adenauer's speech as "the first step onto a rightly chosen path," and the board of the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe sent a telegram to Adenauer expressing their hope that the proclamation would soon be followed by actions.

German diplomats in the United States closely observed Jewish reactions to the Luxembourg restitution agreement and actively undertook efforts to publicize information about it to communities that might not have heard about it on their own, believing in the positive impact of the message.<sup>38</sup> For the German

diplomats, German Jewish refugees were of particular importance to their efforts at creating and advancing the image of a changed Germany in the United States. Partly this was a practical view: the refugees appeared to be generally less critical than American Jewry at large, and they were also easier to reach for the German diplomats, since restitution matters frequently made it necessary for the refugees to be in contact with people at the German consulates, which offered a pretext for dialogue. But the diplomats also believed that the refugees were especially good advocates for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) because of their particular identity. Having been persecuted by Nazi Germany, they might have been expected to dislike the country and to be the least likely to speak favorably about it.<sup>39</sup> Hence, a favorable inclination toward West Germany on their part was a far better advertisement than, for example, that of non-Jewish German-Americans. In the eyes of many diplomats, the majority of non-Jewish German-Americans represented a Germany of the past.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, there were some German-American groups that still held extremely nationalist and anti-Semitic views from which the German missions made efforts to distance themselves.<sup>41</sup> But even if they had not been so politically out of line with contemporary German aims, many German-Americans seemed to some observers in the Foreign Office to have gotten stuck in “*Heimweh-Wunschprojektionen*” (projections of homesickness) of the nineteenth century, a way of thinking that had little to do with the image of a modern and cultured West Germany of the twentieth century that the diplomats wanted to project.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, the majority of the German Jewish refugees with whom the diplomats came into contact were much closer to the imagined new West German citizen and therefore more suited as promoters of the new Germany. According to a report by the consulate general in New York, German Jewish refugees also possessed more cultural potential and importance than the vast majority of non-Jewish German-Americans.<sup>43</sup> This was a critical point because the diplomats deemed it especially important to sway Germany-skeptical circles of intellectuals, such as columnists and commentators working mainly for important opinion-shaping newspapers on the East Coast.<sup>44</sup>

### Restitution and Other Troubles

The overall improvement of the refugees’ perspective on West Germany in light of developments like restitution could not be taken for granted, however. For whenever events occurred that disturbed the image of “a new West Germany,” refugees were forthright in voicing their concerns. When problems arose in the actual execution of restitution in the mid-1950s, the refugees’ initial softening of sentiments toward Germany was almost reversed.<sup>45</sup>

Community leaders were well aware of the strategic role that restitution played for West Germany as an instrument of positive publicity for the FRG.

Understanding the role they played in this, namely that their good opinion of West Germany was an important part of legitimizing the new state, they used this position of judgment to exert pressure on the German government. In the case of restitution, they did so by publishing articles in *Aufbau* that heavily criticized both its theory and practice.<sup>46</sup> The editors did so not only to record these opinions as news items—and in doing so publicize their discontent with Germany—but also to send messages, knowing that this public discontent would reach the German authorities. While among German officials *Aufbau* was initially only read by diplomats in the United States, it soon also became important reading for politicians in Germany, particularly those who were working in the field of restitution.<sup>47</sup> By publishing critical articles, the refugees could thus make it clear to German politicians that as long as Germany was not living up to its promises, it could not count on their endorsement. When Nahum Goldmann, president of the Claims Conference, met with West German Foreign Minister Heinrich von Brentano in 1955 to address the slow pace of implementing indemnification laws, *Aufbau* reporters commented, addressing Brentano more or less directly:

The foreign minister will be interested to hear that through the manner of execution of the restitution legislation, and the fact that the Dritte Masse Gesetz [name of specific restitution legislation] has not been passed by the Bundestag, much of the credit that West Germany initially gained, will be lost. We hope and wish that West Germany's foreign minister does not only listen to the Jewish representatives with his ear but also with his heart, and that when he returns to Bonn, he will exert his not inconsiderable influence, so that the necessary reforms in this area will finally be executed.<sup>48</sup>

Besides allowing them to exert public pressure on the German government in this fashion, the refugees' position of influence also allowed them a role in the procedures surrounding restitution. Through representatives such as Kurt Grossmann, affiliated with the Claims Conference and the Jewish Agency as well as main *Aufbau* representative and correspondent for restitution cases, and Hermann Muller from the AMFED, the German Jewish refugee community was directly involved in discussing restitution issues with German politicians.<sup>49</sup> In addition, refugee lawyers in the United States often worked directly on individual restitution cases—frequently through their membership in the American Association of Former European Jurists or with the United Restitution Organization—and they also communicated to German authorities their ideas about how restitution should be carried out.<sup>50</sup>

These connections to German officials and their role in shaping the restitution process gave many of those involved considerable satisfaction.<sup>51</sup> This satisfaction also percolated throughout the wider community, as the refugee press frequently publicized such connections, broadcasting the influence the refugees had gained. Underlying the many articles that appeared in *Aufbau* on this topic is a sense of pride on the refugees' part for having transformed their status from

that of victims—people who had been persecuted by the German state—to that of people who could make demands on it and were thus, in fact, actively taking part in reshaping it. In an interview in 1972, Felix Guggenheim, a refugee in Los Angeles, explained how he experienced restitution:

Restitution was something you fought for, and you mostly did not get what you should get, and it was a hard fight, and you didn't have to say thank you for it. . . . On the contrary, the tougher you were, especially in the beginning there were a few attorneys who did not use the law, they used the toughness, and say what do you want. The house the family lived in, 900 people are dead, one is alive. Should he also be dead, so that you could keep the house? . . . In other words, the mentality in the restitution, especially in the first ten years, or five years, was a fighting mentality. It was not, we have to behave and to be nice, so that Germans give us something. This is ours.<sup>52</sup>

Not every refugee was ready to fight for restitution, which was in the overwhelming majority of cases a lengthy, frustrating, and frequently painful experience.<sup>53</sup> Even so, the organized refugee community did not want negative feelings to be the dominant emotional reaction to restitution. Frustration and disappointment were expressed not into the void to dissipate among a community of fellow victims but to a German audience that, for its own good, needed to listen and react in a productive way.

German consulates in the United States played an important role for refugees looking to solve procedural problems with claims and to articulate their frustration. In 1954, the West German Embassy in Washington, D.C., reported to the Foreign Office in Bonn that refugees had submitted great numbers of complaints to several diplomatic missions in the United States about the way the restitution offices in Germany had been handling their cases. In most cases, extraordinarily long delays (some had been waiting for years for a response) were an applicant's primary complaint. Delays were caused by the complex restitution bureaucracy, while various other problems arose because of restitution office staffing.<sup>54</sup> The reports that different German consuls sent to Bonn concerning these complaints further illustrate the strategic role the refugees and restitution held in the West German effort to represent itself as a changed nation. In their letters, the consuls emphasized that disillusionment was growing among the refugee population and warned that this significantly endangered "Germany-friendly public opinion" in the United States.<sup>55</sup> They stressed that the refugees, who had been influential in promoting a good image of Germany, were now beginning to express harsh criticism and accusations against the country. The consul general in Chicago, for example, wrote to Bonn that the refugees in his administrative district felt that "perhaps the government and the parliament had the best intention and will to carry out a just restitution, but that these efforts were sabotaged by the civil servants in charge, using bureaucratic excuses."<sup>56</sup> Sporadically, refugees even put forward the thought "that the Federal Republic, by making all their statements

about their intention to make restitution, had only wanted to win over public opinion in the world and in the United States. In reality, however, they intended to let restitution peter out in bureaucratic quicksand.”<sup>57</sup>

Communicating these sentiments and complaints to Bonn, the consuls emphasized to the Foreign Office that it should stress the political dimension of restitution to the responsible offices and people in Germany. Consul General Hertz in Los Angeles wrote that, from abroad, it seemed like the civil servants in Germany who had been entrusted with restitution evaluated the whole matter entirely by applying fiscal and legal measures but neglected the effects their work had on foreign policy. The damage and the loss of prestige that would result from treating restitution matters in such a way, he argued, would be completely disproportionate to the money that Germany might save in the end.<sup>58</sup> Other similar statements by German diplomats demonstrate that as a group they saw it as an urgent matter to solve the complications that had arisen in regard to restitution in order to prevent damage to Germany’s image in the United States. Protecting Germany’s reputation was, after all, their job.

Beyond the pragmatic argument regarding diplomacy, however, the diplomats’ letters also reveal a second level of support for more efficient restitution. In addition to arguing that it was important to clear up problems because they jeopardized Germany’s reputation in the United States, they also argued that it was important to do so because the delays were ethically and morally wrong. They emphasized that many of the refugees were old and not well, and that if their restitution cases were to be delayed even longer, they would possibly never be able to make use of the money. In their letters, the diplomats not only confirmed the refugees’ complaints but emphatically described different cases at length in order to demonstrate the existential need that people were in, as many were unable to achieve financial security after having come to the United States as refugees from Nazi persecution.<sup>59</sup>

The empathy with which these letters were composed and the fact that they portrayed the refugees’ suffering as a consequence of Nazi persecution—at a time when direct references to German responsibility were almost always absent in the responses that reached the consulates from restitution officials in Germany—demonstrates that the diplomats had a stake in the moral obligation that lay behind restitution.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, the letters that diplomatic missions received back from the Foreign Office and other offices dealing with restitution, such as the Ministry of Finance, rarely contain any acknowledgment of the moral implications of these restitution problems but rather exemplify the diligent bureaucrat, referring to paragraphs and financial restrictions.

In their acknowledgement of the ethical and moral dimensions of restitution, the German diplomats in the United States managed to project an image of West Germany that many of the nation’s politicians fervently wished to cultivate. It is, in fact, remarkable how much the narrative of the “good Federal Republic of



Germany” was generated by its representatives overseas at a time when the sentiments of much of the German population was at odds with it.<sup>61</sup>

Restitution proceedings, and particularly problems arising out of the process, led to increased interaction between German Jewish refugees and the Foreign Office, and by extension other German officials. The refugees observed these efforts on their behalf and generally appreciated the ways in which the German diplomats handled their restitution problems, often looking at West Germany in a more favorable way as a result, acknowledging that there appeared to be at least some well-meaning and decent German officials. When asked whether he thought that there existed an understanding of postwar Germany that was fostered by the local consulate, one refugee in Los Angeles answered in the affirmative and added that he believed that this was true also for New York. He stated that there were certainly people who never entered into relationships with the German consulate as a matter of principle, even if they actually needed certain documents. Many others changed their opinions after they experienced positive interactions in restitution matters, however.<sup>62</sup> Another refugee pointed to the helpfulness of the consulate staff, “who showed a lot of sympathy for [them].”<sup>63</sup>

To smooth the stuttering progress of restitution claims and thus move opinion among refugees further toward the positive view of West Germany, the West German government thought it useful to send German officials involved in restitution work to the United States. The idea was first proposed by a representative of the American Association of the Former European Jurists, who thought that if those officials could see with their own eyes what the situation of the restitution applicants was, this would then lead to a more efficient processing of the cases in the restitution offices back in Germany.<sup>64</sup> After West German officials concluded that the cost of sending people on this trip would be justified by the result, and after securing additional funds from the American State Department, a small group of officials working on restitution traveled to the United States in the early summer of 1957.<sup>65</sup> Besides meeting with people responsible for restitution at the diplomatic missions, the German officials appeared at events set up by the local refugee organizations in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, which all recorded large numbers of attendees.<sup>66</sup> One forum held in Los Angeles by the Jewish Club of 1933 featured Georg Blessin of the Ministry of Finance and Kurt Brockhaus of the Berlin Senate assuring the refugees in attendance of German goodwill and trustworthiness.<sup>67</sup> They explained that there was no reason to doubt West Germany’s ability and intention to meet the financial obligations of restitution, and that delays and problems were simply due to administrative and technical difficulties, which were expected to be solved in due course. They clearly sought a sympathetic understanding of these issues among the refugee population, and thus a stay of the public pillorying of Germany for not living up to its obligations. The officials’ trip was successful in uplifting the sentiments and hopes of many refugees in these places, at

least momentarily.<sup>68</sup> In response to the Los Angeles event, the editors of the L.A. Club's publication printed the following: "In conclusion, one dare say that the Federal Government and the City of Berlin chose their best messengers of good will, that no one could have possibly closed oneself off to their genuine good will as representatives of their governments, and that the gentlemen left with a sense of having fulfilled the aim and purpose of their mission."<sup>69</sup>

Even though troubles and problems in restitution did not disappear in the following years, the refugee community at large appreciated the attention West German authorities paid to their opinions on the matter and recognized that their protest reached certain individuals with authority. The dedication of individual German diplomats in combination with goodwill missions made the experience with restitution in the United States in some ways a more positive one than it was for people who dealt with civil servants at the restitution offices in Germany itself, underscoring the importance that West German government officials attributed to the refugee community abroad.

### **Praise and Criticism**

German diplomats may have managed to handle restitution issues in a way that improved refugees' perception of West Germany, but this hardly put an end to criticism of the country. The refugees knew that sympathetic officials were not representative of the German population.<sup>70</sup> In fact, this context of restitution made possible a new modus of engagement with Germany, in which the refugees were no longer just confined to a weaker position. By the late 1950s, the organized refugee community was deploying both criticism and praise in dealing with West Germany, applauding Germans when they accepted responsibility for the past and demonstrated a democratic commitment to the future, but responding negatively and sharply in response to any perceived backsliding. When at the turn of the year 1960 a series of anti-Semitic incidents—more than 470 cases of swastika smearings and desecrations of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries—occurred in West Germany, German Jewish refugees, as well as all major American Jewish organizations and the Western press reacted with great concern.<sup>71</sup> These incidents did not shatter the relationship between German Jewish refugees and German officials, however, but rather strengthened its characteristics, both of praise and criticism. In January of 1960, *Aufbau's* pages were filled with analyses and reports on the anti-Semitic occurrences and the state of German society. In these, various regular journalists, as well as special contributors such as well-known community leader Rabbi Joachim Prinz, presented themselves as experts on the topic and voices of authority, offering criticism and advice.<sup>72</sup> They issued warnings that the German authorities should not take the incidents lightly and also that they ought to clean up Nazis in their own ranks. At the same time, they complimented

those—for example, officials in Berlin—who in their eyes reacted appropriately to the “Nazi activities.”<sup>73</sup>

At the same time as the refugees engaged in this commentary of praise and criticism, German officials, and particularly diplomats in the United States, reached out to the refugee community in efforts to assure them that such incidents were neither tolerated by the West German government nor representative of the majority opinion of the West German people and would be prosecuted in the German legal system.<sup>74</sup> While such assurances certainly did not relieve the concern of all refugees, they made sure that a dialogue between the refugees and the West German government remained possible. Arguably, it was these events that motivated a more intense dialogue, inspiring interest and commentary on the part of the refugees, while necessitating an intensification of official West German efforts to keep that critical community on Germany’s side.<sup>75</sup> Other events, such as the meeting between Adenauer and Ben Gurion in March 1960 in New York, provided news that aided the development of more positive perspectives on Germany. Besides matters relating to restitution or the Nazi past more generally, the other crucial variable that influenced the refugees’ views on Germany was West Germany’s stance toward Israel.<sup>76</sup>

### **Rabbi Max Nussbaum as a Voice on Germany**

Besides observing the German situation through media outlets, an important way in which refugees formed their image of West Germany was through the opinions of individual refugee leaders who had direct interactions with individual Germans. Their experiences often served as trustworthy evaluations of the West German situation, or were represented as such in *Aufbau* and even non-Jewish media outlets. The view that West German officials had of Jewish refugees was similarly constructed, through the refugee press and from meeting certain individuals. Rabbi Max Nussbaum, rabbi of Hollywood’s Temple Israel from 1942 until his death in 1974, was one such individual whose opinion on Germany mattered both to refugees and to West German officials. Because Nussbaum was known for a critical stance on Germany and believed to hold influence over public opinion, German officials made a variety of efforts to engage with him.

Born in Bukovina and educated in Breslau and Würzburg, Nussbaum came to Berlin in 1934 and fled from the Nazis to the United States in the summer of 1940.<sup>77</sup> After spending time in Oklahoma as a rabbi and lecturer, he arrived in Los Angeles in September 1942 to take up his position at Temple Israel, whose congregation included many German Jewish refugees, including some he had known earlier in Berlin.<sup>78</sup> Besides his work in the congregation, Nussbaum became active in American Jewish life and over the years held senior leadership positions in large American Jewish organizations, including the vice-presidency

of the American Jewish Congress, the presidency of the Zionist Organization of America, and the chair of the American Section of the World Jewish Congress.<sup>79</sup> Throughout, he maintained an interest in Germany and frequently addressed topics concerning it in public.<sup>80</sup> His background gave him a position of authority in this regard, particularly among American Jews. In 1953, for example, he was one of the delegates of the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) who traveled to Berlin, Paris, and Israel to report back to the UJA about the situation of Jews in these localities. In 1958, upon his return from another such trip, he delivered a sermon in which he also commented on the state of Germany, which he said was “not easy to define.” Nussbaum elaborated: “There are people in the American Government who are completely convinced of the Western allegiance of the Federal Republic. I wouldn’t sacrifice my life on this premise. I am not so convinced of it.” Ruminating on the question of how far West Germany had “rejuvenate[d] itself or went through any experience of cleansing its soul,” Nussbaum referred to a couple of very antithetical speeches he heard in Berlin. At an event to commemorate those who had taken part in the assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 July 1944 and were subsequently executed by the Nazis, Berlin’s minister of the interior, Joachim Lipschitz, appeared as the first speaker. According to Nussbaum, his address was one “which, coming back to Germany after so many years, you expect to hear . . . which made you feel there is a new voice and it may be a new turning point.”<sup>81</sup> Lipschitz, half Jewish and a member of the Social Democratic Party, reminded the audience that it was imperative that they face their responsibility for creating a German past that saw “brutality,” “slavery,” and the murder of millions in death camps.<sup>82</sup>

The second speaker was Gerhard Schröder, federal minister of the interior and member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). His message was quite different. Nussbaum reported that Schröder had explained that the Third Reich had lasted only for a very short time and that it would be wise to forget about it, the sooner the better. Schröder’s main concern was that the “Fatherland is bleeding because the nation is not unified yet.”<sup>83</sup> Nussbaum’s conclusion from hearing these two speeches was that there were some West Germans, particularly Chancellor Adenauer, President Heuss, and the Social Democrats, who could be trusted. If the future was with them, one could be optimistic. However, should West Germany be dominated by conservatives of the likes of Schröder, who had been a Nazi party member, Nussbaum saw no good outcome.

Thus, in his sermon, Nussbaum offered a warning “to the Western nations not to fall so easily into a trap again” and to beware of trusting Germany, “which may be the cause for another war, and another one, and another one unless the big nations on the outside understand this danger and neutralize it to a point by which she never becomes a great power again.”<sup>84</sup> A version of Nussbaum’s critique appeared a few weeks later in *Aufbau*, which reached not only refugees but West German readers as well.<sup>85</sup> It was one of many instances in which

Nussbaum was able to reach a broad international audience. The following year, on the eve of Yom Kippur, the news agency Voice of America broadcast a speech by Nussbaum titled “Is Forgiveness Possible?”<sup>86</sup> Directed to the German people via RIAS, the radio station in the American sector of Berlin, the speech featured a characteristic mingling of praise and reproach, warning against “reactionary forces . . . still dreaming of the splendors of a national socialist Germany,” but ultimately conveyed the “hope that the good, decent, and progressive voices in the Bundesrepublik will prevail in this desperate struggle for the German soul. Only then will real atonement occur.”<sup>87</sup>

The crimes of the Third Reich received renewed attention in the early sixties thanks to the Eichmann Trial and the Auschwitz Trials, along with the newly created Central Office of the State Justice Administration for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes in Ludwigsburg. At the same time, several German actions communicated the opposite impression—that a German desire for atonement and reconciliation with the Jewish people was rather distant.<sup>88</sup> Thus in 1964–65, the German parliament debated a bill that would extend the statute of limitations in order to allow for the continued persecution of Nazi war criminals. In the late fall of 1964, amid parliamentary debate, the West German government announced that it would not extend the statute of limitations for Nazi war crimes, leading to widespread public censure. Nussbaum again spoke up, condemning the West German policy in a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, where he devoted particular attention to what this meant for the nation’s relationship with Jews: “If the Germany of today desires to be a member of Western society, not only on a political but on the purely human level, and it expects, as it says it does, a future dialogue with the Jewish people—then it has to solve its human problems first by a complete repudiation of its horrendous past.”<sup>89</sup>

Nussbaum once more took a prominent critical stance following the German government’s decision to allow the nation’s scientists and engineers to work for the Egyptian armament industry. Nussbaum argued that the Germans were not only not taking responsibility for destroying Jewish lives in the past but were again threatening Jewish wellbeing in the present and future. In early 1965, the crisis around these issues peaked when the West German government stopped its regular armament shipments to Israel because Egypt’s President Nasser threatened to recognize the sovereignty of the East German state.<sup>90</sup> Egypt’s recognition of East German sovereignty would have forced West Germany to either abandon one of its key policies—the Hallstein Doctrine, which stipulated that the FRG would not maintain diplomatic relations with a state that recognized the German Democratic Republic (GDR)—or cease diplomatic relations with Egypt. The West German government’s halting of weapons shipments to Israel met with great domestic and international criticism, and created, according to one German diplomat, “possibly the Federal Republic’s worst foreign policy crisis since its foundation.”<sup>91</sup>

The response of the refugee community in the United States was fervent as well. At the initiative of members of the Jewish Club of 1933, the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles formulated a direct appeal to the FRG to change its policy.<sup>92</sup> In late February, this appeal was followed by a community-wide protest meeting held at Temple Israel of Hollywood and featuring Rabbi Nussbaum as the main speaker. Nussbaum's speech was a fierce criticism of the actions of the West German government and culminated in this powerful pledge:

The Jewish Community of the United States—and for this matter the Jewish Community all over the free world—has no intention of taking this dangerous development lying down. We voice our sense of shock . . . We will not rest and will not pause until Germany undertakes in repentance the following acts of atonement: the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel; the recalling of the German scientists from Cairo; the extension of the Statute of Limitations; and the resumption of aid to Israel. We will mobilize all forces, Jewish and non-Jewish in this country, and all men of good will wherever they are, to bring about the victory of morality over expediency, of commitment against surrender and of moral responsibility against political blackmail.<sup>93</sup>

Germany's actions, particularly its changed behavior toward Israel, were not only significant for Nussbaum but, judging from an eyewitness to the event, also for the audience: "Many who had believed in a new Germany, sat there numb and struck in horror. Everybody realized the deadly seriousness [*tödlichen Ernst*] of the report."<sup>94</sup> Shock, as Nussbaum emphasized, was not to be the continuing response to West Germany's behavior, however. Rather, he called for concerted protest, being aware of West Germany's particular deference to Jewish opinions.<sup>95</sup> Amid a wide variety of domestic and international critics, diplomats paid particular attention to German Jewish refugee voices because these local developments were neither isolated cases nor unpublicized.<sup>96</sup> A report on the Los Angeles event appeared in Berlin in a publication of the Bund der Verfolgten des Naziregimes (Union of persecutees of the Nazi regime), the purpose of which was to monitor the democratic development of West Germany.<sup>97</sup> Its author, a German Jewish refugee, wrote, "If one bears in mind that similar meetings took place in almost all American states, any predictions about the consequences for the Federal Republic are obvious."<sup>98</sup> The title of the article disclosed the author's feelings on the public outcry directly: "The New Image of Germany Is Destroyed!"<sup>99</sup>

Notwithstanding such dire predictions, the West German government did take action to resolve at least part of the crisis and to safeguard its image, which nevertheless did not emerge unscathed. When in late May 1965 Chancellor Ludwig Erhard decided to establish full diplomatic relations between West Germany and Israel, Max Nussbaum, like many other public figures inside and

outside of Germany, publicly endorsed this development.<sup>100</sup> His statements on the event were published in several newspapers, such as in a *Los Angeles Times* article, which quoted him as saying that “the German-Israeli link could ‘usher in a new era of happy relations between Germans and Jews.’”<sup>101</sup> Readers of these newspapers could get a sense that West Germany was now moving in the right direction again.

Rabbi Nussbaum further promoted this sense of optimism in regard to West Germany when, in 1965, shortly after making these remarks, he traveled to Germany at the invitation of the German government. As part of its program of public diplomacy, the German government had been inviting “politically and culturally significant” personalities from foreign countries to visit the Federal Republic and West Berlin.<sup>102</sup> These individuals were often journalists, representatives of political parties and civil society organizations, clergy, and academics—in short, opinion and decision makers in different domains of society.<sup>103</sup> In Germany, they were given carefully planned itineraries that included meetings with leading German figures from their field of expertise or area of interest. The idea behind these “guest” or “visitor programs” or “information trips,” as they were variously called, was that these individuals would gain positive impressions of Germany and report them to their communities upon their return. As such, this was a general outreach and publicity program not aimed specifically at Jews. Nevertheless, Rabbi Nussbaum’s visit was significant in that he was a Jew and that he accepted the invitation.

Indeed, the West German Foreign Office supported Nussbaum’s invitation precisely because he was Jewish. The idea to invite him originally came from Heinz Galinski, then chairman of the Jewish community in West Berlin, who referred to the precedent of the Foreign Office having extended invitations to several rabbis in the recent past. Galinski suggested Nussbaum’s invitation in 1961 because he wanted him to speak to the Jewish community in Berlin and to be able to “form his own impressions about the actual situation” in Germany.<sup>104</sup> He added that he believed that a visit by Nussbaum would be in the interest not only of the Jewish communities in West Berlin and West Germany but also of the federal government. The Foreign Office approved Nussbaum’s invitation after an examination of his case through the consul general in Los Angeles, who reported that Nussbaum was a man of “recognition and respect far beyond his local sphere of influence.”<sup>105</sup>

While Max Nussbaum was initially invited to go to Germany in 1962, he did not actually go until July of 1965, and his acceptance of the invitation was not a matter of course, as he relayed to a refugee audience after his return:<sup>106</sup>

I, personally, had received many such invitations before, and I did not accept them because it is . . . much more difficult for me to detach myself psychologically, subconsciously, emotionally from what has happened. But quite aside from the personal

angle of sentiment, I felt that the time had not come yet till now to go as an official guest of the government. I have been back, of course, many times as the guest of the Jewish Community—but as guest of the government, that was another story. I felt that one had to wait, at least in my concept of it, and to see this ‘new’ Germany along several lines.<sup>107</sup>

Thus, Nussbaum’s decision to visit, and to offer the partial endorsement of the FRG that he felt the visit would imply, depended upon the politics of the German government and the behavior of the German people. The rabbi explained that he wanted to see how seriously the West German government would take the trials against leading Nazis and whether it would extend the statute of limitations. He also wanted to see what would happen with restitution and indemnification legislation to the Jewish people and Israel. “Most of all,” he said, “I wanted to wait for the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel. All of these four steps and many others have, in the meantime, been taken by the German government—not to our full satisfaction, but taken nevertheless.” Considering these “steps in the right direction,” Nussbaum felt it was the “proper time to go and study this ‘New’ Germany of today.”<sup>108</sup>

Good publicity for West Germany being the aim of the program, the invitation itself was supposed to be an honor for the guest, which was only the beginning of what was to be a good experience in Germany. For Rabbi Nussbaum, however, while presumably feeling somewhat honored, it was nevertheless a different experience, as his relationship with Germany was much more fraught than that of the average visitor. Also, Rabbi Nussbaum was a representative of a large German Jewish community and as such he needed to justify such a significant move as implicitly endorsing the FRG by a visit as the government’s guest. He stressed to his Los Angeles audience that he was not a pawn in a strategic game but that he took part in setting the rules himself—beginning with his delayed acceptance of the invitation and ending with his critical report to the community. Moreover, Nussbaum made clear that he had not accepted the invitation to please the Germans but to probe them, and his task for the trip was to investigate the “the moral and historical problems between . . . Israel and Germany, on the one hand, and for this matter Germany and the Jewish people, on the other.”<sup>109</sup> He went to examine the conditions on which any relationship between Germans and Jews must depend, and the Jewish community in the United States awaited his expert “judgment and appraisal.”<sup>110</sup>

Nussbaum initially shared his observations and opinions in a sermon he gave at Temple Israel shortly after his return, but parts of his report on Germany also reached audiences beyond Los Angeles, as they were published in several American Jewish press outlets.<sup>111</sup> German newspapers had reported on his actual visit.<sup>112</sup> Nussbaum’s report was complex and nuanced in both its approval and disapproval. For example, while criticizing Germany’s lack of sensitivity when



it came to picking its first ambassador to Israel, he explained that he was nevertheless certain that the man who was chosen—Rolf Friedemann Pauls, who had been a *Wehrmacht* officer—would do an excellent job. Further, Nussbaum said that while deep-rooted anti-Semitism was still present in Germany, there were many Germans who opposed it. He reported on meetings with high officials and young Germans, and, while he was particularly optimistic about the young generation, he suggested that Germany should do more in the realm of “Education toward Democracy.”<sup>113</sup> And near the end, he reflected on future prospects for the German-Jewish relationship:

I do not believe that the time has come either for forgiving or for forgetting. No fair-minded German even expects it of us, and I don't believe the Jewish people will, for a long time, be ready for either of these two steps. The time has, however, come for the commencement of a dialogue, especially with the young German generation. . . . The dialogue that we ought to begin now will not necessarily always be friendly, and it may have to carry a sharp vocabulary; but the time for discussion has come nevertheless. This is after all not the Nazi Germany of yesterday. There are liberal forces struggling bravely for reshaping the soul of the German nation. These forces are still small, and they have to be encouraged by somebody. And who is in a better position to fulfill this historical function than we the Jewish people? By doing so, we may in time open a new chapter of the German-Jewish relationship; help foster better understanding between Bonn and Jerusalem; and make a contribution to the peace of our generation.<sup>114</sup>

Here again, a former refugee perceived the relationship as one in which Jews would hold the senior position or, at least, a position of guidance with respect to the new Germany.

There is evidence to suggest that Nussbaum's speech met with widespread approval. A report from an employee of the German consulate who had attended the event stated that a small minority in the audience had expressed that they felt Nussbaum was too harsh and “unforgiving” toward Germany in his speech.<sup>115</sup> Given that German observer's likely bias, the majority of the assembled must have appreciated Nussbaum's report for its presentation of the complexities of the German situation. As an important moral leader and trusted person, Nussbaum legitimated dialogue with decent Germans. For at least some Jews, Nussbaum's trip and his report suggested an approach to navigating one's personal relationship to Germany and its people. His own critical stance and the position of moral authority he attributed to Jews offered a relatively comfortable basis for engaging Germany, allowing them to explore their relationship with that country as more than simply one of antagonism.

For German government officials, meanwhile, Nussbaum's visit to Germany was also a success, as a report from the Los Angeles consulate to Bonn concluded. While a representative from the German consulate in Los Angeles who had

attended the rabbi's lecture was somewhat irritated that he presented so many negative impressions, the report to Bonn noted that "positive statements from the mouth of a man—who had hitherto only been disapproving toward us—weigh doubly, [thus] one can view the result of Dr. Nussbaum's Germany trip as satisfactory."<sup>116</sup> He added that Nussbaum ultimately offered his congregation "a favorable impression of the direction of the politics of the Federal Republic."<sup>117</sup>

That Rabbi Nussbaum's visit did in fact change his own attitude toward Germany can also be seen in his acceptance, while still in Germany, of another official invitation—this time extended by the mayor of Berlin. He took this trip in January of 1966. Yet another invitation from the Foreign Office came in 1967, initiated by the West German ambassador to Israel, Rolf Friedemann Pauls, acknowledging Nussbaum's growing positive inclination toward Germany after the first two visits. While developing this optimistic outlook, Rabbi Nussbaum never lost his critical edge, however, and continued to make suggestions on how West Germany could do better.<sup>118</sup>

For the diplomats, Nussbaum's knowledge and interest in Germany and his standing within the American Jewish community made him a useful liaison between that community and the FRG, a role he did not reject. An example of this is Nussbaum's correspondence with Heinrich Knappstein, West German ambassador to the United States in 1966, on the occasion of the appointment of Kurt Georg Kiesinger as West German chancellor. Because Kiesinger had been a Nazi Party member and head of the Foreign Office's International Radio Propaganda Office during the Third Reich, his appointment received much opposition within West Germany as well as criticism in the international press. In this situation, Ambassador Knappstein reached out to Nussbaum, sending him the minutes of Kiesinger's denazification court trial, which had placed him in the "exonerated group." Based on these findings, Knappstein believed that Kiesinger "did more to oppose the National Socialism [*sic*] regime in Germany and thereby risked his life to a greater extent that [*sic*] many a 'good citizen' who did not join the party and simply bent his head to allow the storm of National Socialism to pass over him."<sup>119</sup> Knappstein was interested to hear Nussbaum's opinion on the verdict, which mattered to him particularly because Nussbaum was chairman of the American Section of the World Jewish Congress at the time and, as such, potentially able to influence the stance of a greater Jewish community on the Kiesinger issue. After all, he had shown himself to be a critical observer and judge of the German scene and must have appeared trustworthy in the eyes of many in the highly critical wider American Jewish community.

Moreover, Nussbaum was one of the few people in the organization who could in fact read the trial minutes in the German language. Max Nussbaum's response to Knappstein was again careful in balancing praise and criticism of German actions. He thanked Knappstein for his "thoughtfulness," expressing that he found the minutes "impressive" and that it put "the whole story in a

somewhat different light.”<sup>120</sup> While he agreed with respect to Kiesinger’s individual merits, Nussbaum stressed that the real problem was the ongoing insensitivity of West German officials, who did not see that a man with former Nazi party membership would be a problematic choice to lead this “new” Germany, irrespective of the extent of his engagement with Nazi activities. He closed the letter by appealing to Knappstein’s own anti-Nazi background and the hope that the new grand coalition government in West Germany would learn from the mistakes of the past and “steer Germany in the direction of a true democracy—a goal so genuinely desired by you and me alike.”<sup>121</sup>

This episode shows that by the mid- to late 1960s, a working relationship had developed between certain German Jewish refugee leaders and German government officials in matters that dealt with the legacy of the Nazi past. During the 1960s, German responsibility for the Nazi past was gradually beginning to become part of West German self-understanding, and consideration for Jewish opinion was an essential part of this self-understanding.<sup>122</sup> Yet this episode also resembles the example at the outset of this chapter, where a German diplomat called American Jews “Israeli people.” Both examples show that there existed a significant gap between the German understanding of Jews and the Jewish perception of Germany and Germans. In response to the myopia of the German government regarding Kiesinger’s Nazi past, Nussbaum pointed out that it was “only 21 years” after the war and that the “world hasn’t forgotten yet” and that “it is the symbol of Nazi membership, even if it is was a nominal one only, that stirs the emotions.” While some Germans were beginning to actively engage with their Nazi past, they still had much to learn about how it was viewed from other perspectives, especially that of German Jews, and not least that they could not unilaterally determine how to evaluate that past and when to declare it “absolved.” The interaction between Knappstein and Nussbaum, resembling that of student and teacher, is representative of the larger relationship between Germans and Jewish refugees at the time.<sup>123</sup>

## Social Interactions

As a consequence of increased interactions between German officials and the refugee community in the realms of politics and public diplomacy, mostly on restitution matters, social interactions increased as well. These interactions took place in various ways. Former German Jewish refugee lawyers and doctors frequently were associated with West German consulates as so-called *Vertrauensanwälte* and *Vertrauensärzte* (independent legal counselors and physicians to whom the consulates referred clients), and these professional contacts sometimes developed into friendly personal relationships, as they did in the case of John Baer, who lived in Los Angeles. Baer had initially “had strong emotional reservations against the

resumption of any kind of relationship with Germans.”<sup>124</sup> His opinion changed, however, when he found out that most of the consulate’s employees belonged to a younger generation of Germans who had grown up after the war and who shared his view that “they carried a heavy responsibility for the future.” He found his conversations with them “a most interesting and encouraging experience, which in many instances led to lasting personal friendships.”<sup>125</sup>

Additionally, refugees and consulate members participated in each other’s social events. In Los Angeles, for example, while the German consulate had initiated invitations to people from the refugee community, these were subsequently reciprocated, and in the 1960s representatives from the local consulate became regular attendees at events of the Jewish Club of 1933. William Stagen, one-time president of the Club, said, “I don’t recall any important affair, official affair, where we don’t invite the German consulate. And most of the time there are either representatives, in most cases probably the Consul General himself and his wife who appear.”<sup>126</sup>

These occasions were beneficial to both parties. For the German diplomats, they offered insight into the attitude of the émigrés, and at the same time a chance to demonstrate their good will, their support of the refugee community, and Germany’s interest in refugee matters. On occasion, the consular staff were able to give speeches at these events, addressing concerns that the refugees had about occurrences in Germany, while also guiding their attention to topics the Foreign Office deemed important. For the refugees, having German diplomats at their functions created a forum in which they could address the West German state publicly on matters of importance to the community. They used the diplomats as mediators to further their interests, as they could be certain that a report from the event and their praise or criticism of German actions would reach the Foreign Office in Bonn. In addition, by frequently inviting both the West German and the Israeli consuls to their events, the refugees in the United States furthered the German-Israeli relationship, which, as we have seen, was particularly important to them.

Two other incentives for inviting the German diplomats to their functions as well as participating in events at the West German consulate demonstrated the community’s engagement with matters beyond the Nazi persecution of Jewish Germans. First, many refugees greatly appreciated German culture, and such events allowed for conversations with educated Germans. Second, the refugees enjoyed the prestige conferred by the presence of senior diplomats and state representatives. The presence of these officials at their functions was always particularly noted in their publications. To give another example from Los Angeles: upon the arrival of a new consul general in 1967, the Jewish Club made it a point not only to send him a welcome message but also to publish it in their newsletter.<sup>127</sup> These last two factors should not be interpreted in any respect as a wish to once again become German or to repatriate; however, they demonstrate

a re-engagement by the refugees with their identity as middle-class Germans. For the German diplomats, on the other hand, the German Jewish refugees were important ambassadors for German culture in the United States and for German-American understanding. In one report from Chicago, a German diplomat described the “emigrants of the Hitler-period” (not specifying a Jewish identity) in this way: “They represent a valuable bridge between the German and American mind and help to give German visitors insight into American life and to create a platform to bring German ideas to the Americans.”<sup>128</sup>

Over the years, friendly personal relations sometimes developed between individual members of the refugee community and the consuls, often over shared interests in German culture or German political or business matters. These interactions would go beyond the formal events of the Consulate and the organized refugee community.<sup>129</sup> For example, the former president of the Los Angeles Jewish Club, Felix Guggenheim, and his wife had a close friendship with Consul General Constantin von Dziembowski and his wife. Even after von Dziembowski left his post in Los Angeles, the couples kept in touch, visited each other in Germany and in California, and maintained a regular correspondence.<sup>130</sup> Relationships like these were possible in the first place only when the German representatives appeared to be genuinely concerned about their country’s past and interested in reconciliation. Then, if they were socially compatible, friendships could be formed. Thus, Annelise Bunzel explained that her friendship with one consul and his wife commenced over the couples’ mutual love of dachshunds and the fact that neither of them had children.<sup>131</sup> These friendships between German Jewish refugees and German officials marked significant turning points in the history of postwar German Jewish relations.

To be sure, the growing relationship between the refugee community and the German state remained fraught with tension. Many refugees steadfastly refused to have anything to do with Germany and Germans, and there were ongoing tensions over restitution and German politics. Nevertheless, considering that at the end of World War II there was almost no direct interaction between the refugee community and Germany, the 1950s and 1960s marked a dramatic change. While initially the contacts were predominantly based on strategic considerations, the dynamic that evolved in the interaction between German officials and refugees played a significant role in the transformation of the German state. In their efforts to shape public opinion on West Germany, some German officials practiced and projected how one might be a member of a democratic Germany. Overall, personal interactions between Germans and refugees in the United States frequently resulted in an increased acceptance of dialogue and even an improved image of West Germany on the part of the refugees.<sup>132</sup> The refugees did not allow themselves to be instrumentalized. Instead, knowing the German need for Jewish legitimization, they used public demonstration of their interests

to exert pressure on the West German government and the representatives in the United States, whom they frequently came to trust, to follow the path they had pledged to take.

Finally, the satisfaction many refugees gained from their new position of empowerment ought not to be underestimated. It allowed them to engage once again in a relationship with the country many of them felt pained to have lost. For many, however, this was not a relationship that was dominated by nostalgia for the past before emigration. Rather, it was a relationship that allowed them to remain content in their new country but at the same time retain an interest in their former home. Moreover, the special relationship with Germany enabled some of them to embrace their identity as refugees, which for a long time had carried a negative connotation in the United States.

## Notes

Several brief passages and some of the overall analysis in this chapter first appeared in Anne Clara Schenderlein, "Making German History in Postwar Los Angeles: German Jewish Refugees, Rabbi Max Nussbaum, and West German Diplomats," *Jewish Culture and History*, 17, no. 1–2 (2016): 133–51.

1. The Austrian and Israeli consul generals were invited as well.
2. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (PA AA), Box (B) 32, Folder (F) 211, letter from Consulate General (CG) LA to Foreign Office (AA) Bonn, Nov. 11, 1965.
3. While historians have written about Germany's special postwar relationship with the broader American Jewish community and Israel, they have largely overlooked the role that German Jewish refugees played for postwar Germany. See, e.g., Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations*; Hindenburg, *Demonstrating Reconciliation*; Wolffsohn and Bokovoy, *Eternal Guilt?*; Hansen, *Aus dem Schatten der Katastrophe*.
4. John J. McCloy, high commissioner of the American occupation zone, at a 1949 conference in Heidelberg debating the question of the future of Jews in Germany. Brenner, *After the Holocaust*, 76. McCloy's declaration was registered by the German Jewish community in the United States: "Hochkommissar McCloy über jüdische Tagesprobleme: Prüfstein für Deutschland," *Aufbau* 16 (4 August 1950).
5. See Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations*, 179.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Geller, "Das Bild Adenauers vom Judentum," 151 and note 44. See also Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations*, 166–67. For discussions on Adenauer's motivations, see, e.g., Wolffsohn, "Wiedergutmachung oder Realpolitik—Eine Bilanz der Israelpolitik Adenauers in den fünfziger Jahren," in *Adenauer, Israel und das Judentum*, ed. Küsters, 212–13; and other chapters in this same volume. See also works by Norbert Frei.
8. Stern, *The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge*, xi.
9. The continuity in the Foreign Office between the Third Reich and the Bundesrepublik has been explored most recently in Conze et al., *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit*.
10. *Ibid.*, 475–88.
11. See, e.g., "Hier will jetzt jeder Jude sein," *Aufbau* 11 (28 December 1945).

12. Regarding concerns about former Nazis, see, e.g., “Adenauers Vertrauensmann: Der Mann, der Hitlers Rassengesetze kommentierte,” *Aufbau* 15 (16 December 1949); and “Adenauers erste Ausland-Diplomaten,” *Aufbau* 16 (12 May 1950).
13. Maulucci, *Adenauer’s Foreign Office*, 99, 147.
14. Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations*, 183.
15. Lambach, *Our Men in Washington*.
16. “Kein Zweifel über Pauls,” *Aufbau* 31 (6 August 1965).
17. See Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations*. For more detailed information on these diplomats’ biographies, see Lambach, *Our Men in Washington*.
18. Conze et al., *Das Amt*, 536–37, and 542–44.
19. Biography of Richard Hertz, provided in email conversation by archivists from PA AA.
20. Chronicle of the Jewish Club of 1933, compiled and composed by Alvin Barbanell, Private Collection.
21. Conze et al., *Das Amt*, 542–44. Shafir calls Los Angeles a “sensitive spot because of the growing Jewish community.” Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations*, 183.
22. Because of the large number of former Nazi Party members who worked in the Foreign Office, it was not always possible to prevent their being posted to German missions in the United States. It seems, however, that the Foreign Office selected its appointments carefully and considered factors beyond party membership. Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations*, 180, 418n3, n11, and 191.
23. Interview with Heinz Pinner, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, CA, Jan. 1, 1972, LBI New York, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaecck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1331811>.
24. *Ibid.*
25. For more detail, see Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations*, 191.
26. *Ibid.*, 185.
27. *Ibid.*, 184.
28. Shafir, *American Jews and Germany*, endnote 25.
29. “Deutschlandfrage in der ‘Federation’” about the question: “Sind wir als Juden am deutschen Problem interessiert, und wenn ja, welches ist unsere Einstellung dazu?” *Aufbau* 16 (21 July 1950).
30. “Deutschlandfrage in der ‘Federation,’” *Aufbau* 16 (21 July 1950).
31. *Ibid.*
32. Manfred George, “Juden und Deutsche. Vorbemerkungen zu einer Artikel-Serie und Nachbemerkungen zu einem Interview,” *Aufbau* 17 (27 July 1951).
33. *Ibid.*
34. Rather close relationships developed between some of the German politicians and the representatives of the refugee community. Manfred George and Theodor Heuss, e.g., became very friendly and communicated regularly about political and private matters until Heuss’s death. See Bauer-Hack, *Die Jüdische Wochenzeitung Aufbau*, 143.
35. See Goschler, *Wiedergutmachung*, 200–1; and Bauer-Hack, 142–43.
36. Constantin Goschler has shown that “public opinion in the United States proved to be the strongest weapon in the struggle for compensation.” See his “German Compensation to Jewish Nazi Victims,” 400.
37. Shafir, *American Jews and Germany*, 362.
38. Bauer-Hack, *Die Jüdische Wochenzeitung Aufbau*, 194–95.
39. PA AA, B81, F334: Consulate General (CG) San Francisco to Foreign Office Bonn (AA), Oct. 7, 1954.
40. *Ibid.*
41. The consul in New York cites, e.g., Federation of American Citizens of German Descent. PA AA, B32, F239: CG New York to AA Bonn, Feb. 4, 1966.

42. PA AA, B11, F965: Notes of the Cultural Attaché, Diplomatic Mission Washington, D.C. to AA Bonn, June 14, 1954.
43. PA AA, B32, F239: CG New York to AA Bonn, Feb. 4, 1966.
44. Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations*, 179.
45. The refugees were far from alone in their concerns. There existed widespread skepticism within American public opinion about West Germany's commitment to restitution and the stability of the new democracy. In the American press, concerns about a renewed rise of National Socialism and anti-Semitism were rife. See Frei, "Die deutsche Wiedergutmachungspolitik," 218.
46. See, e.g., Kurt Grossmann, "Sabotage der Wiedergutmachung. Zwei empörende Fälle der Praxis deutscher Behörden"; and "Wie lange kann eine Einundneunzigjährige noch auf ihre Rente warten?," both *Aufbau* 21 (30 September 1955). Also, Bauer-Hack, *Die Jüdische Wochenzeitung Aufbau*.
47. See Bauer-Hack, *Die Jüdische Wochenzeitung Aufbau*, 193.
48. Translation. "Konferenz Brentano—Goldmann," *Aufbau* 21 (30 September 1955).
49. See Bauer-Hack, *Die Jüdische Wochenzeitung Aufbau*, part B.III for details.
50. See, e.g., Hockerts, "Anwälte der Verfolgten."
51. *Twenty Years American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, Inc. 1940–1960* (New York: AFJCE, 1961).
52. Interview with Felix Guggenheim, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, 6 January 1972, LBI, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1328082>.
53. An extensive and excellent body of scholarship attests to that. Correspondences between former German Jews and restitution offices certainly included many in which the voice of the German Jew did not convey the confidence and entitlement to restitution that Guggenheim expressed. While German Jews most often expressed frustration and complaint, in some letters they formulated their requests with extreme politeness and humility. There were even letters in which the refugee writers sounded as if the Germans were doing them a favor and as though they were sorry for the work their application created for the German officials. For more on restitution and its reception among those who applied for it, see, e.g., Fischer-Hübner, eds, *Die Kehrseite der "Wiedergutmachung"*; Frei et al., eds, *Die Praxis der Wiedergutmachung*; Hockerts, "Anwälte der Verfolgten"; and works by Cordula Lissner and Tobias Winstel.
54. PA AA, B81, F334: Diplomatische Vertretung Washington, D.C., to AA, Bonn, July 26, 1954. Spagnol and Langrock, "Amtliche Wirklichkeit." On the execution of restitution laws, see Fischer-Hübner, eds, *Die Kehrseite der "Wiedergutmachung"*; and Kenkmann et al., eds, *Wiedergutmachung als Auftrag*.
55. These are the words used in the "regards" line of several of the letters from the consuls. Different documents in PA AA B81, F334.
56. PA AA, B81, F334: Bericht, Dr. Knappstein CG Chicago to AA, Bonn, Aug. 4, 1954.
57. *Ibid.*
58. PA AA, B81, F334: Letter, Richard Hertz, CG Los Angeles to AA Bonn, Feb. 28, 1955.
59. PA AA, B81, F334: Letter, Liebrecht, CG San Francisco to AA Bonn, Oct. 7, 1954; similar reports from Seattle, Boston, and from diplomatic missions in Canada and France, in PA AA, B81, F334.
60. See, e.g., PA AA, B81, F334: Letter, Richard Hertz, CG Los Angeles to AA Bonn, Feb. 28, 1955; Letter, Office Bundesminister der Finanzen to AA Bonn, Aug. 23, 1953; Letter, Blessin, Bundesminister der Finanzen to AA Bonn, Sept. 22, 1954.
61. See, e.g., Bergmann and Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany*; and Stern, *Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge*.
62. Interview with Heinz Pinner conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, CA, Jan. 1, 1972, LBI New York, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1331811>.



- While Atina Grossmann writes that “interactions with representatives of German consulates” were “almost always distinctly unpleasant” (Grossmann, “Family Files”), the experience in Los Angeles seemed to have been overwhelmingly positive. *Mitteilungsblatt* 20, no. 2 (February 1966). See also Winstel, “Über die Bedeutung der Wiedergutmachung,” especially 208–9.
63. Interview with William Stagen, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, CA, Jan. 1, 1972, LBI New York, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1337416>.
  64. See, Bauer-Hack, *Die Jüdische Wochenzeitung Aufbau*, 200.
  65. See *ibid.*, 200–1.
  66. *Ibid.*, 201.
  67. Henry D. Sass, “Forum über die Wiedergutmachung,” *Mitteilungsblatt* 11, no. 7 (July 1957).
  68. Bauer-Hack, *Die Jüdische Wochenzeitung Aufbau*, 202–3.
  69. *Ibid.*
  70. At the annual meeting of the AMFED in May 1956, Benjamin Ferencz (not a German Jewish refugee but someone who had spent considerable time in Germany in the postwar period) presented his observations on the German scene. About restitution and trustworthy officials, he said, “As far as the attitude of the officials is concerned, it depends upon the official. If you are talking to the Federal Chancellor—his attitude is marvelous. Without the attitude and the spirit of Chancellor [*sic*] Adenauer, I am quite sure, this program would have taken a substantially different turn. That spirit passes down through the ranks in various degrees.” About the people who worked in the restitution office who might have questioned restitution, he wrote, “Such approaches are largely deficiencies of small people, without vision, understanding or sympathy. They are not policies of the Federal government” (22). About the general population, he reported that there was a “complete lack of any sense of guilt and remorse about what happened” (29). “Generally, however, throughout the country, there is no sense of shame, there is no sense of guilt, there is no remorse, there is a feeling that something unpleasant happened that should be quietly forgotten” (30). Benjamin B. Ferencz, “Observations after Ten Years in Germany,” in American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, Inc., *Annual Meeting, Reports and Addresses* (New York City: AMFED, 1956).
  71. On the reaction of different sections of the American Jewish community, see Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations*, chapter 11.
  72. See “Protest des Council of Jews from Germany” *Aufbau* 26 (22 January 1960). Further, the community organized events, such as the lecture “Vortrag über Deutschland” by Bruno Weil at the New York New World Club (*Aufbau* 26 [15 January 1960]). *Aufbau* journalists did not exclusively blame Germany for the attacks but pointed to an international fascist conspiracy. See *Aufbau* 26 (8 January 1960) and subsequent issues.
  73. Kurt Kersten, “Hintergründe der Nazi-Aktionen: Der Abwehrkampf West-Berlins,” *Aufbau* 26 (15 January 1960).
  74. “Ein Statement des deutschen Generalkonsuls,” *Aufbau* 26 (22 January 1960).
  75. Before and during the Eichmann Trial (1961/1962), officials in the Foreign Office were also very sensitive to fostering a good image of Germany. For that reason, one diplomat suggested that Germany circulate books on German resistance during the Nazi period through the German missions. PA, AA, B32, F11.
  76. The GDR, interestingly, really did not play much of a role here. A more thorough investigation of how perhaps the refugees looked at West Germany more positively because it engaged with Israel, unlike the GDR, would be important.
  77. See Barth and Nussbaum, eds, *Max Nussbaum*, for more details on his life.
  78. Historian Michael A. Meyer’s family was among those who joined the Temple because they had known Nussbaum in Germany. Personal conversation with Michael A. Meyer, Cincinnati, OH, 5 September 2012. See also Barth and Nussbaum, eds, *Max Nussbaum*, 16.
  79. See Barth and Nussbaum, eds, *Max Nussbaum*, 18–20, for exact dates and details.

80. Manuscript Collection No. 705 (Ms. Coll.), Max Nussbaum (1928–1974), Series C. Sermons (1932–1974), B4, F5 (4/5), Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA).
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. See Max Nussbaum, “Journey with History,” *Aufbau* 24 (3 September 1958), part 1; and *Aufbau* 24 (26 September 1958), part 2.
86. Max Nussbaum, “Ist Versöhnung möglich?” *Aufbau* 25 (10 September 1959).
87. Script, “Is Forgiveness Possible?” Ms. Coll. 705, 5/6, 1959, AJA.
88. For a short overview, see Siegfried, “Zwischen Aufarbeitung und Schlußstrich.”
89. Max Nussbaum, “Rabbi Criticizes West German Policy on Nazi War Criminals,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 November 1964, morning edition, Ms. Coll. 705, Scrapbooks X-470, AJA.
90. See Hindenburg, *Demonstrating Reconciliation*, 127.
91. Heinrich Knapstein, West German ambassador to the United States at the time. Hindenburg, *Demonstrating Reconciliation*, 129.
92. Ibid.
93. “Excerpts from Speech by Dr. Max Nussbaum, Community Wide Meeting—Temple Israel of Hollywood, Feb. 22, 1965,” Ms. Coll. 705, 7/1 1965, AJA.
94. *Die Mahnung*, 15 March 1965, newspaper clipping in Ms. Coll. 705, 7/1 1965, AJA.
95. See also Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations*, 195; and Hindenburg, *Demonstrating Reconciliation*, 190–91.
96. See also Miquel, “Explanation, Dissociation, Apologia,” 58.
97. Walter Wicclair, “Das neue Deutschlandbild ist zerstört! Augenzeugenbericht von einer Protestversammlung,” *Die Mahnung*, 15 March 1965.
98. The author of the piece, Walter Wicclair, was a refugee himself. As an actor and director who had been ousted by the Nazis, he became active in the postwar period in calling attention to theater in the Third Reich and Nazi actions against artists. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid.
101. “Nasser Defeat Seen in Israel, German Ties,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 1965; and “Urge Still Closer Bonn-Israel Ties,” *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 24 May 1965.
102. Letter from NYC to AA Bonn, June 22, 1965, PA AA, B32, F232.
103. Bettzuege, “Auswärtiger Dienst.”
104. Letter from AA Berlin to AA Bonn, March 1, 1961, PA AA, B32, F179. Galinski’s choice of the phrase “actual situation” likely results from the fact that Jewish observers from outside were sometimes more skeptical about the existence of Jews in Germany. The head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Van Dam, at times criticized foreign Jewish organizations for meddling in matters that concerned the Jewish community in Germany (PA AA, B32, F107). During the height of anti-Semitic incidents in 1959–60, Van Dam believed the situation was not as bad as presented in the press and that “Antigermanism” was one reason foreign countries paid so much attention to the anti-Semitic incidents.
105. Report from CG LA to AA Bonn, April 21, 1961, PA AA, B32, F179.
106. PA AA, B32, F179 and F232.
107. Max Nussbaum, “How New Is the ‘New’ Germany?” July 23, 1965, Ms. Coll. 705, 7/1 1965, AJA. The speech was the sermon of the Friday night service at his temple but was also advertised as a lecture in the newsletter of the Jewish Club of 1933 under the title “Das neue Deutschland—ist es neu?” *Mitteilungsblatt* 19, no. 7 (July 1965).
108. Ibid.

109. Ibid.
110. "The Nussbaum Visit," *B'nai B'rith Messenger* 69, no. 29 (16 July 1965). The paper called him an "exceptionally well qualified observer of the current German scene."
111. Ralph Kagan, "Rabbi on Modern Germany," *L.A. Herald Examiner*, 15 August 1965. See also, e.g., "Germany Tries for Image—Nussbaum," *B'nai B'rith Messenger* 69, no. 31 (30 July 1965); the *Dallas Jewish Post*, the *Detroit Jewish News*. The *British Jewish Chronicle* also published an article.
112. *Tagesspiegel, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Münchner Merkur*.
113. Max Nussbaum, "My Impressions of the 'New' Germany," July 27, 1965, Ms. Coll. 7057/1 1965, AJA. The text is dated July 27 but it appears to be an almost identical version of the original sermon, of which no complete version is archived.
114. Ibid.
115. "Aufzeichnung" on speech by Nussbaum at Temple Israel "How New Is the New Germany," CG Los Angeles, August 20, 1965, PA AA, B32, F232.
116. Ibid.
117. Deutschlandreise des Rabbiners Dr. Max Nussbaum, Präsident der Zionisten in den USA, CG LA to AA Bonn, August 20, 1965.
118. See, e.g., CG LA (Kiderlen) to AA Bonn, zu Hd. des Herrn Leiters Referats L 3 o.V.i.A. Vertraulich! PA AA B 32 F. 246, LA, Feb. 28, 1967.
119. Letter from H. Knapstein to M. Nussbaum, Washington, D.C., November 22, 1966, "Chancellor Kiesinger: An Exchange of Letters," published in *World Jewry: The Review of the World Jewish Congress* 10, no. 1 (January/February 1967), Ms. Coll. 705, F7/3, AJA. This was not the first correspondence between Knapstein and Nussbaum. Nussbaum had written to Knapstein in December 1965 to protest a delay in indemnification payments to Nazi victims. The correspondence was also published, put together by Hershel Glick in the *B'nai B'rith Messenger* (25 March 1966), Ms. Coll. 705, Scrapbooks 1965–1970 X-471, AJA.
120. Letter from M. Nussbaum to H. Knapstein, Hollywood, CA, November 30, 1966, "Chancellor Kiesinger: An Exchange of Letters."
121. Ibid.
122. Constantin Goshler and Anthony Kauders explain the developments in the relationship between Jews in Germany and non-Jewish Germans and the ways in which some German Jewish "dignitaries" saw themselves also as important mediators of democracy, and mediators between the Federal Republic and Israel and Jews more generally. In Brenner, ed., *Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 355ff.; Gassert and Steinweis, *Coping with the Nazi Past*. For a short overview, see Jarausch, "Critical Memory and Civil Society"; Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany*.
123. Historians of restitution have described the processes and practices of restitution as learning processes. I agree with that characterization and would extend it to the larger field of dealing with the Nazi past and communication and understanding between Jewish refugees and non-Jewish Germans. See Brunner et al., "Komplizierte Lernprozesse." The publication of the correspondence in the *Review of the World Jewish Congress* communicated the balance of power in this relationship to a considerable audience.
124. Baer, *Witness for a Generation*, 104.
125. Ibid.
126. Original words of William Stagen. Interview with William Stagen, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, CA, Jan. 1, 1972, LBI New York, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1337416>. See also "Manfred George Tribute," *Mitteilungsblatt* 21, no. 4 (April 1967); and "Max Reinhardt Abend," *Mitteilungsblatt* 22, no. 2 (February 1968).
127. *Mitteilungsblatt* 21, no. 9 (September 1967).

128. PA AA, B32, F211: "Bericht ueber das Deutschtum in Chicago," from CG Chicago to AA Bonn, March 1962. This raises the question of which kinds of outreach were directed specifically at Jewish refugees or refugees/emigrants more generally. In Los Angeles, the communities partly overlapped, and invitations to cultural events at the consulate seemed to have gone out to all.
129. See Interview with William Stagen, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, CA, January, 1972, LBI New York, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1337416>.
130. Felix Guggenheim Papers, B7, F4.1: "Correspondence, Deutsches Generalkonsulat Ehemalige Konsulatsbeamte," Collection no. 0312, Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
131. See chapter 1. Interview Annelise Bunzel.
132. One revealing example is the reaction of some refugees to a speech Rabbi Joachim Prinz, a former rabbi in Berlin and then president of the American Jewish Congress, gave in Los Angeles in late 1962. His rather critical account of Germany caused some people to accuse him of wanting to "incite new hatred." In the aftermath of the speech, the local consulate received calls from various German Jews, including one rabbi, who wanted to express their disapproval of Prinz's remarks—a gesture akin to reassuring a hurt friend of one's loyalty in the face of criticism. This reveals that some refugees felt somewhat closer to West Germany than to the larger American Jewish community. PA AA, B32, F154: Letter, General Consul Kiderlen, Los Angeles, to AA Bonn, Dec. 7, 1962.

Chapter 7

## GERMAN JEWISH REFUGEE TRAVEL TO GERMANY AND WEST GERMAN MUNICIPAL VISITOR PROGRAMS



How about a nice long drive through the countryside? We deliver the country. And the car. And a good amount of free kilometers. With Pan Am's three-week "Freewheeler Holiday Tour" to Germany—for only \$338. And that's not all you get for this low price. You'll get the round-trip jet flight from New York to Frankfurt, 20 overnight stays in a lovely guesthouse in Paderborn, and a car with 1000 kilometers free of charge.

Think about how wonderful it will be to once again experience the beauty of Germany.<sup>1</sup>

This Pan Am advertisement, printed in German and accompanied by a photo depicting a Volkswagen Beetle in front of a castle on a hillside, is taken from a May 1969 edition of *Aufbau*. There, it appeared in the company of German-language ads from Lufthansa offering "low-priced non-stop flights to Germany," and from Swiss Air promising "Our Service to Germany is twice as good. To and fro. Our non-stop flights from New York to Frankfurt are as comfortable as you can only wish for."<sup>2</sup> While perhaps they were not originally written solely for the still German-speaking audience of the mostly Jewish *Aufbau* readers, the regular presence of such advertisements in the main newspaper of the community suggests that these companies saw a potential customer base of travelers to Germany to be found among former German Jewish refugees in the late 1960s, and that *Aufbau* editors largely agreed, or at least considered the idea to be acceptable to their readership. Was this so? Why would German Jewish refugees want to travel there, given their not-too-distant past? Was visiting Germany just a matter of finding the best travel bargain? If so, how could Germany be considered just another European destination?

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Notes from this chapter begin on page 204.

This chapter answers these questions by examining German Jewish travel to West Germany, the reasons behind it, and its consequences, focusing particularly on the development of West German municipal visitor programs for former Jewish citizens from the 1960s to 1988.<sup>3</sup> I argue that these programs emerged in a climate of ongoing individual travel that German Jewish refugees undertook to Germany prior to their inception. The trips to Germany were important for the refugees and German organizers of the programs alike, though for different reasons. The German Jewish community in the United States supported them because they reconnected many refugees with their German Jewish identity at a time when this was fading. For West Germany, these programs, framed as efforts of reconciliation and *Wiedergutmachung* (restitution, literally: “making good again”), were an important part of its democratization process. In this way, the programs were both motor and symptom of German attempts at confronting the Nazi past, happening in these instances on the local level.

### **Individual Travel to Germany in the 1950s and early 1960s: Attitudes**

German Jewish refugees began to travel to West Germany in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> Among them were leaders from the United States refugee community who frequently traveled to manage issues connected with their official standing: to attend meetings with German officials about restitution matters, for example, or to meet representatives of Jewish communities in West Germany. At the same time, some “ordinary” refugees also traveled to Germany, mostly also in order to take care of some sort of business, such as attending to restitution or family property issues, to look after family graves, occasionally in the context of their profession, and sometimes to visit relatives or friends. Most of these visits were not undertaken for the primary purpose of vacationing, and they were usually embarked upon with some degree of suspicion toward West Germany and the people one would likely encounter, especially people in the refugees’ former hometowns. In contrast to those refugee leaders who were invited to go to West Germany, whose schedules were busy and who often spent most of their time meeting selected officials, those who went individually encountered ordinary Germans in ordinary life situations. Without the structure of an invitation program, it was easier to feel overwhelmed by difficult emotions connected to one’s own past in Germany. Ruth Nussbaum, Rabbi Max Nussbaum’s wife, remembered her first encounter with Germany after the war in 1957 as very traumatic. Returning from a visit to Israel, she stopped over in West Berlin, where her husband had already arrived a few days earlier as a guest of the Jewish community. In an interview she gave many years later, Ruth Nussbaum recalled her arrival in Berlin’s airport:

I became so nauseated that I said to my husband: “I have to, well I have to leave, I cannot do it.”—I got sick. And I am not a hysterical person per se. This was my first return to Berlin . . . yes, to Germany. And—well they somehow managed to tow me to the hotel and of, of the five days in Germany, I was about three days in the hotel. I just could not go outside. And then I walked around a bit and showed my son where we had lived and my school and so on.<sup>5</sup>

Stories of ordinary and individually traveling refugees’ direct encounters with West Germany, and of their encounters with their individual pasts, were not part of the larger refugee discourse on Germany as it was taking place in the 1950s and the early 1960s, however. Rather, in the community’s major newspaper, discussions on Germany were dominated by reports of journalists and leading community figures. Moreover, these trips seem not to have been topics of widespread private discussion among the refugees.<sup>6</sup> However, personal testimonies reveal how some refugees experienced their visits.

One such example is that of Ernest Wolf, a professor at San Diego State University. He returned to Germany in the 1950s in the context of one of the European study tours he organized for the university. He recalled,

The first time I brought students to Dortmund was in 1955. It felt terrible. I couldn’t believe that people could be so self-satisfied and carry on the old ways as if nothing had happened. For me, it was like visiting a huge cemetery. That’s what I told one of my friends. He asked why I didn’t move back to Germany. “I can’t live in a cemetery.” This was a non-Jewish person, but he could understand.<sup>7</sup>

The symbol of Germany as a cemetery was not infrequently used by Jews when talking about Germany at this time. Ernie Sommer went to visit his former hometown Soest in 1954; speaking of his visit, he said,

It was like digging in graves. It was very, very depressing. There were a few people left who we had known before. One neighbor showed us a book with something written in it. She said, “Your father gave this to me.” We went across the street to another neighbor. There was a crystal bowl on the table and she said to look at that bowl. “That was yours. Your father gave it to me when he was driven out of his house. The Jews were all put together in a ‘ghetto house,’ and then sent to extermination camp.” And so, I heard a report about the end of the Jewish people in my town. They had been on the last transport.<sup>8</sup>

Yet both Ernie Sommer and Ernest Wolf, while recounting these somber stories and emotions of their first trip to Germany during interviews in the 1990s, also revealed that there remained Germans with whom they had agreeable relations. Ernie, for example, trusted that the people who had his father’s things spoke the truth about how they acquired them, stating that they had been well acquainted with his family since his childhood. Other people in the town he

distrusted, however, knowing firsthand that they had been Nazis or because they—as many Germans did—denied having had anything to do with the Nazis.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, Ernest Wolf found that it was easier for him to engage with Germans who were honest about their past actions and regretted them: “We later met people that had been in the SS, but they turned around and were sorry. Others were not. With those that were not, I didn’t make contact for long. But the others I took as persons.”<sup>10</sup>

The first uncomfortable trip that Ernie Sommer and Ernest Wolf took did not remain their last one. Both returned again, their attitude being that not all Germans were the same and that particularly the younger generation was different. Ernie Sommer explained that he could continue his relationship with Germans and travel back again because “things had changed.” He said, “I had made up my mind, more or less, not to forget but to forgive the German people.”<sup>11</sup> The behavior of individual West Germans—the willingness of some to face the past and perhaps attempt to make up for it, in combination with the perception of a generational change in West German society—were important factors that influenced refugees’ decisions to travel to Germany, at least to do so more than once.

More significant in this regard were, however, the individual perspectives and attitudes German Jewish refugees adopted. John Best from Los Angeles explained how different these attitudes could be, even among people who were close to each other. He and his business partner and brother-in-law, Max Ponder, had completely different relationships to Germany, something they themselves found somewhat puzzling. Ponder and Best’s company, dealing in photographic equipment, did business with West German manufacturers. On his first trip to Germany, John Best “hate[d] every second of it,” a feeling that did not substantially change after going a second time. When he went to Germany, he could not “get out fast enough and away from it.”<sup>12</sup> Ponder on the other hand, as represented by John Best, “loved to go back to Germany. He enjoyed doing business with the Germans.” Best’s explanation for their difference in attitude was his partner’s older age and the enjoyment he got out of returning “as a big business man,” a situation in which “he was a customer, and they [the Germans] had to bow and to cater to him and to make overtures to him.” Best said, “I think that gave him the biggest thrill.” Also, Best recalled that his partner turned these trips into “fun” experiences, going to theaters and night clubs, something Best could not relate to. Although he was engaged in business with German companies, he told his interviewer, “I personally have no love for the whole German enterprise.”<sup>13</sup>

A refugee’s personal attitude toward Germany and toward visiting it certainly depended on various factors, but, as Best suggests, age was one particularly significant variable. People who had been older when they left Germany retained much stronger ties to the country than did younger refugees. Their family’s graves



were there; they had good memories of life before the Nazis, and of friends and communities. In an interview that Hedy Wolf, born in 1910, gave in the 1990s, she recalled, “It is terrible that that had to happen to us. Germany is a beautiful country. I loved it. I *loved* it. I had those wonderful friends which I had to give up. I loved it there.”<sup>14</sup> Older refugees simply retained more points of connection to their old country, and though they often hated Germany in the initial years after emigration, these sentiments frequently abated with time. Moreover, traveling to West Germany did not necessarily imply approval of the country, but rather, as with much travel in general, was an exploration. Wolf said, “A lot about Germany still bothers me. But I still went there.”<sup>15</sup> In her case, it was the friends she mentioned who made a difference in her decision to visit: “Somebody in that little town of Laupheim got my address here, and they all started writing to me. Very good friends. I visited them three times when we were in Europe.”<sup>16</sup> Traveling to Europe in general for vacation purposes was something that the older generation of refugees in the United States did increasingly in the 1960s, and it was on these trips that not a few decided to also visit Germany.

### Germany as a Tourist Destination? Individual Trips in the 1960s

Both *Aufbau* and the *Mitteilungsblatt*, the publication of the Jewish Club of 1933 in Los Angeles, were paying a great deal of attention to the topic of travel by the end of the 1960s. *Aufbau* included a regular column on the topic, “Travel and Traffic,” and published special vacation guide supplements for the summer months.<sup>17</sup> Spring of 1969 editions of the newspaper featured a large number of advertisements by airlines, travel agencies, and guest houses. Besides upstate New York, Israel, northern Italy, and Switzerland—unexceptionable destinations for a refugee from Nazi persecution—trips to Germany and Austria were also regularly advertised.<sup>18</sup> The interest in travel took place in the context of a general growing popularity of mass tourism in the West, which accelerated rapidly in the postwar period for a number of reasons, most especially the full flowering of the U.S. economy and the increasing wealth of its middle class, the associated extension of interest in travel from the wealthy to the middle classes, and the rapid development of transport technologies, particularly mass air travel.

By the late 1960s, the older generation among the refugees had reached an age at which some could afford to no longer work, which allowed more time for travel. The attention paid to travel in two main refugee press organs suggests that a considerable number must have been able to afford to travel and—considering particularly the costs for intercontinental trips—bespeaks economic success in the United States and a comfortable standard of living.<sup>19</sup> In addition, restitution payments that some of the older people received monthly, as compensation for the salaries they would have gotten in Germany, also made a considerable

difference to their financial wellbeing.<sup>20</sup> This was particularly the case for people who had been—or would have been, if the Nazis had not interrupted their career paths—higher officials and state employees.<sup>21</sup>

Many of those refugees who could afford it thus traveled during their later years. Frank White from Los Angeles, for example, a board member of the Jewish Club, was a particularly avid traveler who went to South America, Southeast Asia, the Mediterranean, Iceland, Israel, Germany, and Austria.<sup>22</sup> Upon returning from these trips, he regularly shared his experiences abroad with other refugees in the group's newsletter or at presentations organized by the Club, as other refugees did about their travel as well. White's travel activities were certainly an exception as far as the number of trips and breadth of locations are concerned, but he was not the only one from Los Angeles who vacationed in Europe. When he visited his "*alte Heimat*" (old home) Austria in 1966, he "ran across many friends and Club members from L.A." in Bad Gastein.<sup>23</sup> Judging from the article, meeting fellow Los Angeles refugees there did not seem to have come as a surprise to him. At the time, spa vacations were very popular among a certain age group, and in some cases, refugees received subsidies for treatments and stays at health spas from the West Germany restitution offices. Thus, many older refugees spent their vacations in European spa towns like Bad Gastein for health treatments.<sup>24</sup> One of them was William Niederland, who explained in an interview in the 1980s that he enjoyed going for spa treatments in Bad Kissingen—near Würzburg, where he had grown up—because his parents used to do that once a year. For him, going there was a "sentimental" and "emotional" matter.<sup>25</sup> This form of vacation and destination resonated with many refugees' European heritage, and for those who never had completely become comfortable in the United States, going to a German-speaking destination, and perhaps a familiar one, may have even been a more comforting experience than traveling in the United States. In addition, charter and group flights to Europe, offered by various airlines and regularly advertised in *Aufbau* and the L.A. Club newsletter, made such trips affordable to many in the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> White's article and the advertisements for travel to Germany and Austria convey a sense that it was normal for refugees to travel there. This was a new phenomenon, as in prior years trips of refugees to Germany were primarily reported on in conjunction with an evaluation of German conditions, always with a view to the past, while, at the same time, individual trips purely for vacation purposes were virtually nonexistent in public discourse.

This sense of normalcy was also communicated in other reports about travel. In 1968, a group of refugees from Los Angeles took advantage of a charter flight to visit West Berlin. The article about this trip that one Club member wrote for the Los Angeles newsletter is free of any reference to Germany's National Socialist past and did not contain any hint at a difficulty of encountering the country and city that some of the travelers must have left under dire circumstances. There is no reference to emotional discomfort or to problems encountering Germans. In

the report's estimation, the only thing that seemed to have clouded the Berlin visit was the cold weather: "not one of the 169 charter passengers came back with less than two nice warm woollies that they probably won't look at again until their next trip."<sup>27</sup> One wonders whether warm sweaters were the only thing they took back from Germany. That a "next trip" is mentioned is yet another indicator that travel to Germany does not seem to have been so unusual then, nor was it perceived to be so, at least among certain refugees. A survey of 513 refugees in Manhattan's Washington Heights community showed that more than half of them had visited Germany by the 1980s.<sup>28</sup>

The recognition of German Jewish refugees as potential tourists to Germany, as signified by the efforts German companies like Lufthansa took to attract their business, perhaps reached its apotheosis in the advertisements that Berlin hotels and businesses posted in *Aufbau* on the occasion of the Jewish New Year in the late 1960s under headlines such as "Hier gratuliert Berlin" (Congratulations from Berlin). Some, like the Hotel Kurfürstendamm, even printed their new year's greetings in Hebrew. This expenditure of advertising budgets on advertisements tailored toward such a particular consumer group makes it clear that Berlin businesses saw (German) Jews as valued clientele.<sup>29</sup>

The notable absence of criticism and apparent normalization of travel to West Germany in the main German Jewish press organs does not mean, however, that the overall relationship between German Jewish refugees and Germany had become "normalized" and that all refugees went and had a wonderful time. Many would not go to Germany—if we take the data from Washington Heights as representative, perhaps as many as half. One of those who would not go was Hilde Kracko:

I go to Italy every year and I have been in Europe a few times, but I can't go to Germany. My husband wouldn't go near it and that sits in me too. I can't get myself to go back. Because if I would see the people and would to shake hands with the ones who could be the same age as the ones who killed my parents, or my . . . I just can't do it. They say you should forgive but not forget. You can't forget what they did to us. I lost more than twenty people in my family. We had a very big, close family and all of a sudden you are only three. You miss a lot of love. And I suffered because my husband suffered.<sup>30</sup>

It seems only natural that such experiences and memories of the Holocaust would inhibit the desire to return to Germany. Those refugees that suffered more than others had usually much less incentive to return and every reason not to. However, the way people dealt with their past and how it affected their relationships to Germany inevitably varied from person to person. Ernst-Günther Lilienstein, whose parents and younger brother were killed in Auschwitz, went back nine times before then taking part in the official visit organized by his hometown of Usingen in 1985. He expressed his close relationship to the town

with the following words: “I was, I am and I will be a Usinger, wherever I live.”<sup>31</sup> While he held a particular bond with his hometown, for others going there was particularly difficult. Annelise Bunzel recalled that she enjoyed going to Germany but not to her hometown of Hamburg:

Annelise Bunzel (AB): And there it comes. There is a division within myself. Hamburg I remember. I grew up in it. There was my family, and if I am in Hamburg, I feel very uncomfortable. It all comes back.

Interviewer (I): In the rest of Germany you are a tourist.

AB: I am a tourist, and I just happen to be able to speak the language. This is, I mean, so people say, why don't you go to Hamburg. I mean, I did, with my husband I did it. I did it, as matter of fact, once after he died. I went to the cemetery. You know, I had to, I wanted his name engraved on the . . . what is it? . . . in the cemetery where his . . .

I: The gravestone.

AB: Yes. The gravestone. And I couldn't get fast enough away from Hamburg. I couldn't . . . I just called the airline. I said, any plane that is leaving just put me on it. I didn't want to stay there. The appointments, the dates that I had, I just canceled them all. I just wanted to get away. But the rest of Germany, I am a tourist. Exactly. I enjoy it.<sup>32</sup>

Other testimonies of refugees who went to West Germany in the 1960s and '70s reveal that individual experiences varied widely in a spectrum from wonderful to horrible, frequently with both positive and negative occurrences, memories, and emotions happening during the same trip. Even so, refugees increasingly did travel to Germany, and though not all people enjoyed it, the idea of it became less unusual, as the treatment in publications demonstrates. A significant contribution to this image of normalcy in regard to travel was a general change of discourse on Germany in the two refugee publications that reached the largest number of refugees: *Aufbau* and the Los Angeles *Mitteilungsblatt* began to feature a new engagement with Germany outside of the topic of its National Socialist past. One such article appeared, for example, in *Aufbau*'s women's section, “Welt der Frau” (World of the Woman), in May 1969. Under the title “Berlin Was Worth a Trip,” it reported about an international fashion fair held in Berlin, noting the exhibitors at the fair and that it was good for the city to have that event there. Such reporting without any reference to the past was rare; its existence at all was a novelty.<sup>33</sup> Most of the coverage on Germany in *Aufbau* still followed the familiar discourse of criticism and praise. However, a steady rate of articles appeared in the late 1960s that featured the journalists' praise of developments in Germany: as they announced the reopening of a synagogue, for example, or gave credit to Germans, frequently Social Democrats holding posts in municipal governments, who engaged in projects

that addressed the Nazi persecution of Jews and other groups—for example, through commemoration publications.<sup>34</sup>

This new discourse largely occurred because influential leaders in the community supported the development of good relationships with the Federal Republic. Hans Steinitz, the successor of Manfred George as editor of *Aufbau*, was a key figure in developing this narrative.<sup>35</sup> In 1947, with Hitler gone, it seemed logical to him that German Jews would continue relationships with Germany:

Naively, I thought that. I was completely overwhelmed and flabbergasted to find I was totally isolated, totally alone with that kind of attitude. In fact, I was almost lynched by people who were outraged [about the idea of return to Germany]. For all of these people, the idea of going back to Germany, for a visit, to recuperate lost property, buying German goods, was completely out of the question. They were deadly enemies forever. It took me years—and I take some credit for that—to change that attitude.<sup>36</sup>

As editor of *Aufbau*, Steinitz was a driving force behind the newspaper's postwar editorial stance of "comradely openness" (*kameradschaftlicher Offenheit*) toward the democratic forces in postwar Germany.<sup>37</sup> His interest in a democratic reconstruction of Germany partly followed from his political engagement with the Socialist Youth before the Nazis had come to power.<sup>38</sup> Now he was invested in bringing the refugee community and West Germany closer together and saw himself as an active "bridge-builder." He recalled that when Lufthansa advertisements first appeared in *Aufbau*, people objected to them but that this criticism "disappeared completely over the years."<sup>39</sup> With him as editor in chief, *Aufbau*, while it remained an institution that observed developments in Germany critically, nevertheless adopted a much more German-friendly bent. The number of advertisements that it published, not only for issues related to travel to Germany, but also German products such as brandy or beer, increased, even though there were many refugees—not to mention many American Jews—who boycotted German goods.<sup>40</sup>

The German newspaper *Die Welt* also posted a one-page announcement stating the corporation's sociopolitical principles:

We want Germany to be reunited in peace and liberty. We reject any type of totalitarianism from the right or the left. We advocate for reconciliation between the German and the Jewish people. We approve of a socially oriented free market economy and free world trade. We support the parliamentary democracy grounded in the basic law of the Federal Republic. We support international cooperation according to the Charter of the United Nations.<sup>41</sup>

This particular outreach from a large German institution proclaiming desire for German Jewish reconciliation was another way in which a positive image of Germany received promotion in *Aufbau*. The placing of the ad was no

coincidence, as Hans Steinitz served as the foreign correspondent for the Axel Springer publishing group to which the newspaper *Die Welt* belonged.<sup>42</sup> Here, German business interest and the economic benefit that advertisements brought for *Aufbau* coincided with the less critical views on Germany of the newspaper's editor in chief.<sup>43</sup> As a result, these ideological and economic factors created a strong narrative in the major refugee newspaper that it was common and acceptable for German Jewish refugees to travel to Germany and to want German products.

The city of West Berlin figured particularly prominently in *Aufbau* in the late 1960s and after, not only in the advertisements devoted to it, but also the more general attention it received, even to the extent of publishing the season program of Berlin's Opera and theater stages.<sup>44</sup> This sort of coverage afforded the paper, according to Steinitz himself, the character of a Berlin newspaper in the United States.<sup>45</sup> This notion, that a newspaper with the character of a fundamentally German city paper could cater to a community of refugees from Nazi oppression, contributed dramatically to the growing discourse of a normalization of relations between German Jewish refugees and the new Germany. Berlin's prominence in the paper, and the success of this coverage, was the result of Steinitz's fondness of and connections with the city, combined with the fact that a great number of refugees, including other *Aufbau* staff, were also from Berlin, which before the war had been home to the largest Jewish community in Germany.<sup>46</sup>

It is in this context of increasing individual travel and the reestablishment of personal ties to Germany, as well as a public discourse normalizing such travel and relationships, that the organized visitor programs for former Jewish citizens of German cities were introduced and must be understood.

## **The Emergence and Development of German Municipal Visitor Programs**

There was no official call from any German government office that initiated municipal visitor programs, nor one for German cities to be in touch with their former Jewish citizens. Yet support for the programs did tend to fall along party lines: Social Democrats tended to support them because of their own persecution by the Nazis, while the other major parties were initially rather more reluctant. In many cases, the programs came about through the refugees' travels to Germany and the Jewish presence this reintroduced, and sometimes their involvement and advocacy in combination with certain German groups, individuals, and grass-roots initiatives who sympathized with the refugees and were interested in reconciliation. Moreover, the manner in which the programs developed in different cities varies, even though, over time, many were inspired by successful projects of other towns.

The first city to invite German Jewish refugees to visit their former hometown was Munich, which received three individually traveling visitors in 1961.<sup>47</sup> The invitation happened in the wake of an outreach initiative from the city in December 1960, published in various refugee media outlets, which called on its former citizens to send a “*Lebenszeichen*” (sign of life) because Munich was interested in renewing contact with them. Some of these former citizens responded and expressed an interest in visiting the town. While it is not clear whose idea the outreach campaign was initially, it was begun as part of a larger municipal project intended to address issues of anti-Semitism as well as to create positive relations with Israel.<sup>48</sup> Initially, however, uptake among refugees was somewhat hesitant, and, by 1965, the open invitation still resulted in only thirty-five program visitors. Their trips were not purely touristic adventures but, much like the visits many refugees had been undertaking on their own, were a *Mittel zum Zweck*, or means to an end: business, with some culture mixed in. The city paid for their accommodation, gave them theater tickets, and also provided assistance with restitution issues. As such, the invitations were an official recognition that refugees had significant relations with their hometown—an interest that was primarily pragmatic (restitution) but also cultural. In the early 1960s, several other southern German towns also extended invitations to their former Jewish citizens. In these cases, invitations were not actively initiated by city officials, but were solicited, being responses to requests by individual refugees who had previously dwelled there.<sup>49</sup>

## Hamburg

Of the larger cities, the emergence of the Hamburg and Berlin programs, which were initiated in 1965 and 1969 respectively, are more easily traceable. In Hamburg, the initial idea to establish connections between the city and former citizens came from the Social Democratic senator of finance, Gerhard Brandes. While his motives do not seem to have been made public, one can speculate that they might have been connected to his own history of persecution by the Nazis.<sup>50</sup> The city’s Social Democratic Mayor, Herbert Weichmann, himself a Jew who had returned to Hamburg after spending the war years in the United States, did not immediately agree that outreach to Hamburg’s former citizens would be a good idea.<sup>51</sup> Whether this hesitancy resulted from a belief that outreach would not be welcomed by the refugees or that it would be too out of line with the contemporary German memory culture, which focused more on perpetrators (based on some of the major trials held at that time) and “moderate” remembrance, is not clear.<sup>52</sup> However, the precedent set by Munich, connections with individual refugees (including one who had requested an invitation), and the recognition that refugees were traveling to Germany—which was interpreted as an expression

of their bond to Germany—all influenced Weichmann’s eventual decision to support the outreach.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, the Senate Chancellery sent out a call to all former Jewish citizens of Hamburg on the occasion of the publication of a memorial book for the Jewish victims of the “National Socialist terror,” based on the research of the head of Hamburg’s Jewish community. The call was published in several newspapers in and outside of West Germany over the course of 1965 and 1966. Its message was that Hamburg was not only remembering the dead but also wanted to express that “we”—though the we in this case was mainly a select few, as the interest of the general populace of Hamburg was rather low—“had never lost the bond” to the living members of the Hamburg Jewish community.<sup>54</sup> The call asked for the refugees to contact the city so the Senate could inform them about political, cultural, and economic developments that had taken place in Hamburg.<sup>55</sup> While some supporters of the project argued, altruistically, that it would be a nice idea for the refugees to see that they had not been forgotten, the major result the Senate hoped for was that they would think positively about their old home and project that positivity to their communities.<sup>56</sup> In taking this approach, the Hamburg Senate was pursuing a similar image campaign for its city in refugee communities throughout the world to the one that the German Foreign Office was engaged in on a larger scale for the entire country. The response from refugees to the call by Hamburg was significant: in 1967 more than six hundred letters reached the city.<sup>57</sup> To those who had responded, the Senate Chancellery then sent out the book of commemoration, to which it received an overall positive response. Some refugees were bewildered and distressed when they received it, however. In an interview conducted with Irene Brouwer from Argentina in 1991, she recalled that the arrival of the book, documenting Hamburg’s murdered Jews, caught her off guard: “And then I was in such desperation that I wrote that letter that they should kindly leave me alone, I don’t want to see and hear anything else. I thank you for the orderliness with which you noted the extermination.”<sup>58</sup> While Hamburg’s outreach may have initially caused interest, and perhaps fostered positive associations to the Hamburg before the Nazis, the book brought direct confrontation with the murderous past. Thus, German outreach and commemoration efforts, even if well-intended, evoked misery for some people and actually prevented rapprochement. In voicing her sentiments to Germans who reached out, Brouwer is an exception, and how many refugees felt similarly but abstained from communicating it remains unknown.

Other refugees were encouraged enough by the initiative that they expressed a desire to be invited by the city to visit, wishes that the Hamburg Senate did not fulfill at this time, apparently due primarily to financial considerations.<sup>59</sup> Hamburg’s first invitations, in fact, were finally issued only in the 1970s, and this had much to do with the establishment and success of the municipal visitor program that was launched by West Berlin in 1969 and that paid for the visits of



its former citizens. Refugees would invoke Berlin's example in asking Hamburg for invitations, and members of Hamburg's city government—in particular the acting Social Democratic senator for social issues and head of the restitution office, Ernst Weiß—also pleaded for invitations to be extended after the Berlin model.<sup>60</sup> In the end, strategic considerations concerning the prospective positive effects of invitations on the city's image abroad were decisive, as they had been in Munich and West Berlin. Even so, the Hamburg program developed only very slowly, initially extending only individual invitations, and even these not without complications.<sup>61</sup> An open invitation program came into being only in the early 1980s, by which time an increased public interest in the Nazi past had created an atmosphere in which various actors, introduced later in this chapter, pushed for a full-fledged program.<sup>62</sup>

## Berlin

The Berlin program, meanwhile, though it had its beginnings later than either Munich or Hamburg, was by far the most extensive of the German municipal visitor programs. Berlin's prewar Jewish population had been the largest in Germany with about 160,500 Jews in 1933, about half of whom were able to leave between 1933 and 1939, while fifty thousand Berliners were deported and murdered.<sup>63</sup> The origins of the Berlin visitor program sprang from the connection that existed in the 1960s between individual German Jewish refugees and German officials, most particularly that between *Aufbau* editor Hans Steinitz and Hanns-Peter Herz, speaker of the Berlin Senate.<sup>64</sup> Steinitz and Herz shared a Social Democratic as well as a Jewish background, and both retained a particular fondness for their home city of Berlin.<sup>65</sup> Both men also shared the sense that a special relationship to Berlin also remained among refugees in various communities in the United States and Israel.<sup>66</sup> Out of this insight, along with their mutual and strong interest in German-Jewish understanding, the idea emerged in the late 1960s to invite for a visit—through a formal city program—Berliners who had been forced to leave the city because of Nazi persecution.<sup>67</sup>

Herz also found support for the idea from the leader of the West Berlin Jewish community, Heinz Galinski, with whom he seems to have been friends.<sup>68</sup> In his capacity as speaker of the Senate, Herz then brought the idea before his superior, Social Democrat Heinrich Albertz, who was West Berlin's mayor from 1966 to 1967. Albertz, a theologian by training, who as a follower of the Confessing Church had himself been arrested several times during the Third Reich, was sympathetic to the idea.<sup>69</sup> As in Hamburg, however, money was the difficulty. Herz recalled that while he convinced Albertz that such a program would be a good idea, Albertz said, "But it cannot cost anything."<sup>70</sup> This did not meet Steinitz and

Herz's conception of the program, however, which had included sponsorship for the former Berliners' trips, particularly those who did not have the means to come on their own. This matter of finances was a most delicate one for visitor programs and was an issue for many cities, often significantly delaying the process from the genesis of the idea to its realization.

The West Berlin program eventually began in 1969, by which time Klaus Schütz had become the Social Democratic *Regierender Bürgermeister* (governing mayor) of Berlin. Schütz was a protégé of Willy Brandt's, had worked in the Foreign Office before becoming mayor, and was sensitive to issues of German Jewish relations. Speaking in 2011, he recalled that the financial question was solved with the support of the federal government, on which West Berlin was financially dependent. In his recollection, the invitation project laid "in a realm for which we did not have difficulties to receive means, because it is partly foreign policy, it has effects also in America and Israel, as such it can even support German foreign policy."<sup>71</sup> According to Hanns-Peter Herz, there were initially some unenthusiastic voices raised in the Berlin Senate, coming mainly from the right wing of the Christian Democratic Party, about the idea of the program inviting former Jewish Berliners in particular. The eventual outcome of the vote on 10 June 1969, however, was unanimous.<sup>72</sup> In the end, strategic considerations of how the invitations could "improve the status and prominence of Berlin," as Klaus Schütz put it, were a significant factor for their realization.<sup>73</sup> In the public announcement launching the program, the invitations were framed as a form of *Wiedergutmachung*.

Considering Schütz's references to the role of positive publicity for Berlin, it is an interesting side note that the Foreign Office, while reaching out to individuals of the German Jewish refugee community in the United States for exactly these reasons of public relations, initially took a rather hesitant stance when they first heard that the city of Frankfurt published a call to its former citizens in Israel. From the newly established West German Embassy in Tel Aviv—the opening of which had been met with some protest—a representative warned in October 1965 that such a call might be taken as "an unwanted effort of ingratiating" (*unerwünschter Anbiederungsversuch*) and "inappropriate importunity of Israeli citizens" (*untunliche Bebellion israelischer Staatsangehöriger*).<sup>74</sup> After a difficult year of German-Israeli relations, Bonn's concern over public criticism of Germany in Israel was great, and even after reports from Tel Aviv that the call had been received positively, officials in Bonn hoped that no other cities would follow Frankfurt's example.<sup>75</sup> The German embassy in Washington, D.C., had a different perspective on the matter. When Hanover issued a call for invitations in 1967, the diplomats welcomed it, believing that it might work effectively in "overcoming the distrust against Germany." They even suggested engaging the *Deutsche Städtetag* (association of German cities) to propose similar programs to other German cities as well.<sup>76</sup> As for Mayor Schütz's comment regarding

financial support, by the time the Berlin program was implemented, the supportive stance of the Foreign Office was clear.

The news about the Berlin invitation program was publicized to former Berliners through German consulates worldwide and through refugee publications, and increasingly made its rounds by word of mouth. The first announcement in *Aufbau* appeared in a small article in the 20 June 1969 edition. The author noted that a speaker of the West Berlin Senate had declared that the decision for the invitations was based on the fact that by the end of 1969, a majority of restitution cases would be completed, but that the city of Berlin, “however, would like to carry on the fundamental idea of the West German restitution legislation in a ‘meaningful way,’ and offer former citizens the opportunity to render their own judgment about the present conditions in the city.”<sup>77</sup> It was added that invitations were particularly addressed to former Jewish Berliners and those who were financially not well off. The announcement came to the refugees at a time and in a context when, as we have seen, physical ties to Germany and public discourse on travel to Germany were at a heretofore unknown height, and refugees already had a general interest in travel to the country.

The response to Berlin’s invitation was overwhelming. On 11 July 1969, *Aufbau* reported on the great number of visit application letters that had reached the Berlin Senate Chancellery from all over the world, which Berlin’s Mayor Klaus Schütz interpreted as “impressive evidence for a bond to the old *Heimat*.”<sup>78</sup> *Aufbau* also promoted the program by publishing articles, some written by Steinitz and Hanns-Peter Hertz (the former did not mention his personal involvement) that presented the city and the program itself in a very positive light.<sup>79</sup> By 1 February 1970, 11,146 applications for visits had reached Berlin.<sup>80</sup> Many of the applicants wrote that they had long held the wish to see “their Berlin” once more but that they did not have the finances to make the trip.<sup>81</sup> Not all included a reference to their suffering under the Nazis, but some made specific mention of Berlin wanting to make a contribution to the *Wiedergutmachung* of past wrongs with the invitations. A typical phrasing was, for example, “You can understand that I have the greatest interest to follow this invitation to my home country. It is precisely the invitation and the return to my home country that will help to heal the wounds that a Hitler afflicted in unfound and unjust ways”—wording that appears verbatim in a number of letters from Los Angeles.<sup>82</sup>

The organizers of the program had not expected such an overwhelming response, and it became clear that it would require a permanent administrative structure as well as an ongoing, higher budget for the invitations to continue over many years. Because of the vast number of applications, the organizers decided to streamline the program and hierarchize the applicants. They decided to grant early invitations based on several criteria: first would be the oldest applicants and those who had been interned in a concentration camp or survived in hiding, and

initially only people who had not been back to Berlin after the war on their own would be invited.<sup>83</sup>

The news about Berlin's invitation program spread quickly within the refugee community, and refugees from other cities (as in the example of Hamburg, above) began to use Berlin's example to ask their own towns for invitations. The motivation for many to contemplate returning was born of emotional memories of place and home, of family and childhood, as Liselotte Levy-Weil's letter from Louisiana exemplifies: "My dear sir: I have a very good life here in this 'blessed America' but my thoughts often return to the house in Engerser Street 12 in Neuwied on the Rhine. This is where my parents ran the butchery Levy. Perhaps, I can come to visit one day."<sup>84</sup>

### **Refugees' Influence on Visitation and Commemoration**

The examples of Berlin and Hamburg demonstrate how German Jewish refugees both figured in and influenced city policy decisions through their interest, their individual visits to Germany, their involvement in drawing attention to a lack of care on the part of municipalities, their pleading for invitations, and their using the Berlin program as negotiating leverage. Numerous examples from other cities all over West Germany confirm the significant role refugees themselves played in the development of municipal visitor programs. In some places, rabbis who returned were important idea givers. Rabbi Dr. Kurt Metzger, for example, who, beginning in 1964, made annual trips to his former hometown of Landau in Rhineland-Palatinate, became an advocate for German Jewish reconciliation and also made a proposal to the city council to invite all former Jewish inhabitants for a visit.<sup>85</sup> Refugee rabbis held a special position of influence on opinion regarding Germany in their communities, and their positive inclination likely encouraged others to allow an interest in Germany or even accept invitations.

The example of Ilse M. Wolfson from North Hollywood, who undertook a private trip to her former home of Krefeld, North Rhine-Westphalia in 1971, demonstrates that refugees who did not hold such special positions also contributed to the development of relationships between German towns and their former Jewish citizens. Wolfson reported on her experience of returning to Krefeld for the first time after thirty-two years in a letter to *Aufbau*. Her letter is a particularly strong example of how Jewish travel affected this process, as it illustrates her relative lack of awareness of, or interest in, a Jewish past and its annihilation in many smaller German cities at that time. Further, it shows how, through their travels, individual refugees explicitly and implicitly called attention to that past, their own presence as former Jewish citizens, and their interest in their former hometowns.

I seethed with indignation when I quickly became aware of the total oblivion to which the Jewish community of the pre-Hitler era was relegated. The site of the burned-out synagogue had been completely swallowed by the renovation of the central city, and nowhere was there any sign that Jewish citizens had ever played an important part in the city's growth. Apathy and defensiveness reigned supreme, even among some of the survivors of the holocaust. I felt compelled to voice my personal feelings and several suggestions at a press conference called for that purpose. The article which ensued seemed to give impetus and courage to those in the community who themselves had suffered from Nazi persecution, and they began to put pressure on the City to implement some of the suggestions. The erection of the "Mahnmal" [memorial] near the site of the synagogue is a direct result of our continuing effort to prod a very reluctant municipal government into action. Several other suggestions, such as an invitation to a group of former Krefelder Jews and the publication of a history of the Jewish population of that city, also materialized.

I take some pride in having had a hand in this outcome and having spoken up when conscience dictated it. I urge "Aufbau" readers to follow a similar course in every German city with which they have contact. I realize full well that the only purpose monuments serve is as a historical landmark, a constant reminder of events which tend to get blotted out with time . . . lest they forget.<sup>86</sup>

Wolfson points out that her visit and initiative eventually led to the invitation of other former Jewish citizens of the town. Her pride in having caused this, and in rectifying the absence of a memory of a Jewish past in that town and filling that memory with new life, pushing for a perpetual reminder that Jewish life there was wiped out, signifies the attitude of someone who believed in the importance of educating Germans. While her motivations on the one hand derived from a moral duty to her ancestors and her community, her words reveal that she also believed it to be significant to incite the Germans in her hometown to engage in morally correct actions.<sup>87</sup>

### **German Supporters of Visitor Programs**

As in the case of Hamburg and Berlin, Wolfson, while speaking of a "total oblivion" in regard to the Jewish past, nevertheless found people in Krefeld who were receptive of her desire to change that. Her allies, similar to those who supported the outreach actions in Hamburg and Berlin, were people who had their own history of persecution by the Nazis. In cities with Jewish communities, those communities often became major supporters of invitations to former refugees, sometimes initiating contacts with former residents and making inquiries about whether they would be interested in visits.<sup>88</sup> The initial "apathy" and "defensiveness" of local Holocaust survivors that Wolfson mentions in the case of Krefeld can perhaps be explained by a general attitude of "laying low" that existed among

some Jews in Germany, sensing that their history was likely to meet disinterest, if not rejection. Additionally, Jews residing in West Germany, as well as the Central Council of Jews in Germany, frequently disliked the intervention of Jews from abroad in what they considered their issues. For others, their political affiliation was more important than their Jewish background. Hanns-Peter Herz in Berlin or Herbert Weichmann in Hamburg, for instance, each de-emphasized their Jewish background while stressing their Social Democratic identity, which in the 1960s and early 1970s offered a more direct engagement with Germany's Nazi past and its victims as part of its platform. In fact, Social Democrats were, in general, among the most constant supporters of outreach activities to Jews during this time.<sup>89</sup>

The refugees were distinctly conscious of who the people in Germany were that supported their interests. The clearest example of this appears somewhat later in a special 1994 edition of *Aufbau*, which documented 120 different visitor programs. Reporters paid special attention to emphasizing which groups and individuals within the city governments were for and against the programs. Again and again it is pointed out that members of the conservative Christian Democratic Union, and occasionally the liberal Free Democratic Party, were reluctant to adopt visitation plans, while representative of the SPD and the Green Party were usually in favor of such programs.<sup>90</sup>

It is notable, particularly because in hindsight and from a removed perspective the invitation programs are identified with the city and its image, that in many cities the supporters of the idea of the visitor program were individuals and small groups outside of the political establishment of the municipal governments. These groups or individuals—in no way representing a majority of the city's inhabitants—were instrumental in exerting influence on the city's governments. One group that was frequently involved in the development of visitor programs was the Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit (Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation, GCJZ).<sup>91</sup> The first German chapters of this organization, which already existed in the United States, Switzerland, Great Britain, and France, were founded in 1948–49 with the assistance of the U.S. Occupation Administration, which thought it useful for Germany's democratization. Regional chapters all over the FRG followed, financed subsequently with federal and state money, and lay persons and clerics—both Catholics and Protestants—began in the 1950s to organize regular activities and an annual *Woche der Brüderlichkeit* (Week of Brotherliness) to foster understanding and good relations between German Christians and Jews.<sup>92</sup> Acknowledging “the historic guilt” of Germans and the responsibility for the annihilation of Jewish life in Europe, the society had two major concerns: to bring Nazi perpetrators to trial and to find “adequate *Wiedergutmachung*” for the survivors of the Holocaust.<sup>93</sup> The GCJZ's involvement with the visitor programs were part of this effort, and in some cases they initiated their establishment, since the societies had frequently

taken up contacts with emigrated Jews already in the early postwar period. Sometimes, as in the case of Marburg, the local GCJZ chapter even organized and administered the entire program, while the city only covered the finances.<sup>94</sup> The group's support of the program must be seen as connected to a West German desire for "normalization" of German-Jewish relations and the betterment of Germany's image. However, the involvement of people who were genuinely interested in dialogue makes this more than ritualized philo-Semitism.<sup>95</sup>

Most important for the development and success of many local visitor programs were the initiatives of teachers, city archivists, local historians, university students, and doctoral candidates, who in the 1960s began to be interested in topics related to the Third Reich. The Auschwitz trials from 1963 to 1965 and public debates about the statute of limitations for German war criminals in the mid 1960s and again in the 1970s contributed to a perspective that brought an increased focus on the Holocaust as a central element of the Nazi past.<sup>96</sup> The Third Reich also became a more important topic in various media representations such as dramas, literature, and—very importantly, because of their reach to larger segments of the population—television programs during this time. While these representations often focused on different actor groups of Nazi perpetrators, the new level of exposure of the topic of the Nazi past in several realms of public life left its mark on wider audiences, particularly younger generations of Germans who had not lived through the Third Reich themselves.<sup>97</sup> In this respect, the American television miniseries *Holocaust*, airing in Germany in January of 1979 and watched by about one-third of the West-German population (and circa half of West German adults), was of great significance in steering attention toward the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime.<sup>98</sup> It was the visual representation of the persecution and extermination of a German Jewish family in particular that made a great impression on people: surveys showed that two-thirds of those polled were "deeply moved" by what they had seen and more than one third "were 'appalled' that 'we Germans committed and tolerated such crimes.'"<sup>99</sup> For some people, these emotions translated into greater interest in Jewish history and also an interest in reconciliation.

In addition, the time between 1933 and 1945 was instituted as a mandatory part of a regular school curriculum in 1962. This included the Holocaust, and though inevitably not all teachers covered the topic with the same intensity, the annual number of school group visits to the Dachau concentration camp site increased from 471 in 1968 to well over five thousand yearly at the end of the 1970s.<sup>100</sup> In this atmosphere of increased awareness, many history workshops emerged, often centered around *Volkshochschulen* (adult education institutions) and high schools, which sought to investigate everyday life under the National Socialist regime. These workshops frequently researched topics and molded projects around the Jewish past of their towns and cities.<sup>101</sup> City archivists also often became involved in such research projects, which regularly yielded small

publications. Visiting refugees often had engaging interactions with these archivists, such as in Soest, where Ernie Sommer was “received with open arms.”<sup>102</sup> There, the archivist had published a study on *The Persecution of Our Jewish Co-Citizens in Soest*, and Sommer was able to offer a lot of information on the fate of the Jewish community that the archivist had not been able to obtain.

In other cases, archivists, amateur historians, and students—in order to obtain information for their research projects—searched for and reached out to surviving members of their town’s Jewish community even before they traveled to Germany. Sometimes these contacts by German researchers actually renewed interest on the part of the emigrants and refugees to visit their hometowns.<sup>103</sup> For many refugees, such outreach activities were a sign of the existence of people on the German side who were genuinely interested in their very personal histories. While German politicians had publicly communicated a general message acknowledging responsibility and desiring reconciliation since the 1950s and increasingly in the following decades, these researchers were interested primarily in the refugees as individuals, and in the very personal, detailed, uncomfortable, and tragic histories of the refugees themselves and their family members and friends. While much of the official communication from politicians to the community was about sending the message that the Germans wanted reconciliation, this was a different, deeper level of engagement, which did not require refugees to absolve the Germans, and as such touched many in a very different way.

In this regard, the emigrants were often most impressed by the attention and curiosity concerning their individual experiences that German high school students showed. It compelled some to reconsider their perspective on Germany, as another example from Krefeld from the early 1980s demonstrates. Here, on the occasion of the fifty-year anniversary of the Nazis coming to power, a high school religion teacher encouraged her students to write to the fifty-four Jewish refugees whose addresses they had been able to obtain. Conceptualized as a form of memorialization of forced emigration, the student’s letters read, for example, “We can imagine that the memories of that time must be difficult for you. . . . However, we would like to make a contribution so your fate will not be forgotten in this year of remembrance. . . . What were your experiences in Krefeld before and after 1933? . . . What were the conditions under which you left the city?”<sup>104</sup>

The letters were well received by the addressees, and the ensuing relationship inspired the students to support the idea of municipal invitations to these people in order to “not forget Krefeld’s Jews.” For many refugees, meanwhile, it was the contact with the high school students that convinced them to accept the invitation. Rolf Gompertz, living in North Hollywood, explained that whenever he had in the past heard of Germany or only thought of it, he had automatically started to shudder. This had not changed in the forty-seven years that had passed since he had left Krefeld as an eleven-year-old boy. It was the efforts of the young



students that “moved him,” affected how he felt about Germany, and eventually made him accept the invitation to visit the town of his birth.<sup>105</sup>

Student projects like the one in Krefeld became more frequent in the 1980s, a time which is widely understood to represent “the climax of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*” (working through the Nazi past) in the FRG.<sup>106</sup> Thirteen years of Social Democratic governments had left their mark on the country’s intellectual and educational infrastructure: now people who believed that the Holocaust was to be a significant part of the country’s “cultural memory” held positions of influence.<sup>107</sup> When the Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl became chancellor in 1982, this became an issue of political contention played out over various different issues throughout the 1980s, such as the Bitburg affair and the *Historikerstreit*, to name but two.<sup>108</sup> These debates, while they were primarily led by politicians and intellectuals, received attention across all major media outlets and created an atmosphere in which the Holocaust became a topic of public interest. Under the Kohl government, the Third Reich as a whole became subject to federally directed memory politics. While local historical and educational initiatives, as well as grassroots movements, engaged in research, and artists created memorials in different communities throughout the 1980s, the FRG government planned a more centralized memory policy.<sup>109</sup> Prior to this move, conservatives had typically been inclined to steer attention away from the Nazi past, but under the Kohl government it became “not just a factor to be reckoned with but an opportunity to create a new, positive German historical consciousness.”<sup>110</sup> Initiatives such as the building of museums and the support for the planning of a central Holocaust memorial involved ideas of public remembrance and official contrition, and were targeted to create an atmosphere combining “reconciliation and normalization.”<sup>111</sup>

In this climate of a federally prescribed Holocaust awareness with a purpose, many more cities instituted visitor programs for their former Jewish citizens. Frequently, as we have seen in the case of Hamburg, the establishment of such a program had been considered for quite some time, brought up and supported by people outside of the municipal governments. While cost and organizational efforts were certainly factors that influenced the decision for or against a visitor program, the question of the *value* of the program was paramount in many cases. This idea of value was in the first place evaluated from the perspective of city officials. If they were of the persuasion that the city’s residents “do not want anything to do with the whole shebang [referring to the Nazi past] anymore,” as the CDU mayor of the city of Oldenburg believed in 1985, then they saw no obvious value to be found in establishing one of these programs.<sup>112</sup>

Even in such cases, however, pressure from the political left and from citizens and interest groups led some city governments to eventually establish programs in spite of popular opposition or apathy. In addition, an increasing motivation that aided in the realization of invitation programs in many cities during the

1980s was the concern not to be seen as a “Nazi town.” The strategic value that conducting an invitation program carried for a town’s image became ever more important, not only from a foreign political perspective, as it had been for those supporting the early programs in Munich and Berlin, but also in terms of inner German pressure. From an outside international perspective, municipalities that established visitor programs increasingly conformed to the larger discourse of “reconciliation and normalization” that was being adopted nationwide. In some cities, however, public statements and speeches given by mayors and other city officials revealed a lack of understanding of the Jewish experience, as examples below illustrate. Yet, because of a heightened awareness in general and the influence of a new generation of Germans who were sensitive to this issue in a different way than their forebears had been, there were also more people who supported these initiatives for moral reasons.<sup>113</sup> Ultimately, the experiences of Jewish visitors on their invited trips depended heavily on the motivations and characters of the individuals involved in the programs on the side of the German cities. The next section will give an insight into these experiences.

### **Invitations and Pre-visit Perspectives**

In order to evaluate the effects of invitation programs on the broad population of German Jewish refugees, it is necessary to take a brief look at the response rate. While the response to the Berlin call for invitations was overwhelming in the eyes of its organizers, no numbers are available to determine how many people chose to not respond because they did not want to go. In Hans Steinitz’s opinion, it was “only a very small circle” of people who held deep-seated resentments that prevented them from wanting to go.<sup>114</sup> A refugee living in Massachusetts who had accepted the invitation to Berlin in 1972 had his own thoughts concerning the attitudes that German Jewish refugees in the United States held toward Germany. In a letter to the Senate Chancellery, he wrote that he believed that the German Jews in the United States could be divided into three different groups when it came to their perspective on Germany. In contrast to Steinitz, he thought that there existed actually a “rather large” group of people who would not accept an official invitation to their German hometown because they still hated Germany. A second, “rather small group,” among which he counted himself, comprised people who would accept the invitation because they believed that the majority of the German population of the 1970s had “absolutely nothing to do with the Nazi ideology anymore.” The third and largest group he characterized as being made up of people who do not really know “where they stand.” For them, the invitation of the Senate could really make a difference, the man wrote encouragingly in his thank-you letter to Berlin: “I believe that with the invitation to Berlin and the subsequent opportunity to come into contact with Germans again, you

will be able to influence a fraction of these people in a positive way and lead them back to a normal thinking toward Germany.”<sup>115</sup> Interestingly, this refugee thinks that a “normal” relationship with Germany was possible and favorable, something that, as we have seen, *Aufbau* had to some degree begun to promote as well.

Numbers from smaller cities, which often sent out invitations directly to former citizens, suggest that there were, in fact, many people who did not accept them. The city of Stuttgart, for example, reported that 30 to 40 percent of those who received invitations declined them.<sup>116</sup> In Ulm, Baden-Württemberg, 78 of 127 people accepted. In Fürth, near Nuremberg, 120 out of 350 people accepted. In Laupheim, 19 out of 60 went when the city sent out invitations on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the destruction of the synagogue.<sup>117</sup> In most cases, we do not know why people decided not to come. Outraged rejection letters referring to German crimes were either rare or just not archived by the cities. In the northwestern city of Aurich, however, city officials preserved such a letter. Rosel Sievs, living in Ireland, responded to the mayor with the following words:

I have to tell you that I do not have the wish to ever return to Aurich or to ever set foot on German soil again—because my memories are very, very sad and bitter. My whole family was annihilated in Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Theresienstadt, only my sister survived after terrible suffering in the extermination camps. She had become a total physical wreck. . . . My family, my youth, and my education were taken from me, and by God, why should I return to Aurich? . . . Have things really changed? I have abandoned this idea [*Ich bin davon abgekommen*], Mr. Mayor. 63 members of my family died by the hands of the Nazis, and you invite me to return? No, sir, I will never return.<sup>118</sup>

While the majority of the rejection letters I have been able to view stated that the refugees would not come because they were too old or in poor health, we know, mostly from interviews, that many refugees felt like Rosel Sievs and never wanted to return to the “country of the murderers.” They either found it too painful to visit their former hometown in particular (see the example of Anneliese Bunzel above) or felt that going on this trip would send the wrong message to the Germans. Larry Greenbaum, who settled in San Diego, pointed out that he did not want to accept the free trip and then have to be grateful to and shake hands with people who had kicked him and his family out. In an interview, Greenbaum said that he did not need the Germans to pay for him to go to his town and see what they wanted him to see.<sup>119</sup> He did, however, visit the city on his own terms with his wife and another refugee couple when he was on a European tour.

Often, people who were younger when they left Germany were more critical of the idea and less enthusiastic about going than were older people, who, as mentioned above, had many more reasons to go. Older refugees often felt more connection to Germany because living under Nazi rule had only made up a

small part of their life there. For some, this made a difference, even though in other cases this short time period and its gravity crowded all other good memories of Germany out. Moreover, with age, people frequently develop a nostalgia for their youth and past places.<sup>120</sup> In addition, it is more likely that refugees who had arrived in the United States at an advanced age and did not adjust as successfully as younger ones—those who had never become quite comfortable in the United States—were more enticed by the idea and prospect of traveling to Germany.

Those refugees who were interested in accepting the invitations often felt that they were entitled to receive this more or less financially covered visit to their former hometown. Correspondence between refugees in the United States and the Berlin office responsible for that city's invitation program makes clear this sentiment of strong interest, echoing the initiatives of those refugees who participated in constructing the programs in the first place. Because of the many applications to visit Berlin and the long waiting list, some refugees who were most keen on going sent several letters asking to finally be considered, often stating that if they would not get an invitation soon, they might never see Berlin again because before long they would either be too old or even dead.<sup>121</sup> Many refugees were particularly sensitive to how Berlin handled their cases, protesting when they felt they had unjustly been waiting for too long. In some instances, they pointed out people they knew who had already received invitations, even though they were younger than themselves. The program's manner of prioritizing the invitations was confusing to the applicants at times, as the Berlin office could frequently not make predictions as to when applicants could expect to receive a date for their trip. When receiving a generic letter to a very specific question about the timing of his trip, one man answered disapprovingly, "I assume that you were not very interested in my letter and I do not really feel like coming to Berlin only with the help of bureaucracy, I thought this would be a bit more personal. So many thanks for your answer but I think I will postpone my trip for a while."<sup>122</sup>

Responses like this illustrate the sensitive nature of the invitations and the process surrounding them. They also show that some refugees took Berlin's outwardly projected goal of *Wiedergutmachung* (making good again) very seriously. "Making good" could not happen if there were not people in Berlin who also took this matter very seriously and who were morally invested in it. Certainly, communications that made the refugees feel unwanted, burdensome, or otherwise uncomfortable were not conducive to creating an atmosphere that would make people want to go back to a place that they had been forced to leave. Yet, through their expressions of criticism and suspicion as to the virtuousness of German motivations, some refugees also made it clear that they would hold the people of West Berlin accountable, and would not accept a functionalist bureaucratic approach to their visits.

The administrators in the Berlin office, which employed between one and three permanent staff at various times, were indeed sensitive to the emotional context that the invitation process meant for many former Jewish Berliners. While the great volume of requests and limited manpower made it difficult for the staff to avoid using form letters, they generally seem to have made an effort to be personable and not too bureaucratic. This was particularly the case with certain employees with whom refugees developed friendly relationships, which were sometimes even continued after the visits.<sup>123</sup>

In order to foster the positive relationships between West Berlin and the visitors and also to keep those who were still waiting for their invitation informed and positively inclined—the Berlin organizers, after all, wanted to present a positive image to the wider world—the Berlin Press and Information Office (under Hanns-Peter Herz) published the magazine *Aktuell* beginning in 1970. The magazine, which appeared one to four times a year, reported organizational information on the visitor program and publicized its success by regularly printing thank-you letters from participants. Beyond that, it always included a greeting by a politician or official, reports about Jewish life in Berlin, and articles on cultural, economic, political, and historical topics connected to Berlin. The magazine was well received by many emigrants and prompted some to communicate their views on it to Berlin. After its first appearance, one man living in New York wrote to Berlin, “May I congratulate you to this paper and its idea and thank you for it! For all of us—inveterate Berliners—these articles, information, and images . . . are a source of greatest delight, because we are and will remain Berliners, no matter how many decades separate us from this city.”<sup>124</sup>

This statement of endorsement was published in *Aktuell* as well, declaring to the wider readership that the city of Berlin, with its intention to keep the refugees connected to the city, was doing a great job. Endorsements by refugees were certainly the best advertisements for Berlin, and this was, as mayor Klaus Schütz had stated, one result the city had hoped for: to receive good publicity abroad. While surely not all those who received the magazine were so unprejudiced toward Berlin, voices critical of the manner in which Berlin reached out to the emigrants through this magazine and its visitor program were almost completely absent from the publication.

## Berlin Program Structures

Traveling to Berlin as part of a large group was the most common visitor experience for refugees, even though in some years individually traveling guests made up about one-third of the visitors.<sup>125</sup> In the 1970s, the Berlin Senate organized multiple charter and group flights from destinations in Israel, North and South

America, South Africa, and Australia. From the United States, group flights departed from New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

To convey goodwill, remembrance and acknowledgment of the Jewish sufferings, and make an attempt at reconciliation, program organizers tried to make the visits as pleasant and comfortable as possible. Invitations from Berlin included the costs of travel, accommodation in first-rate hotels, pocket money, and a program of informative and cultural events. During their one-week stay, the visitors—generally the emigrants and their spouses—would have an official reception with the mayor, meet other Berlin politicians, go on sightseeing tours, often with specific stops at the (former) synagogue or memorials dedicated to victims of Nazi oppression (in later years, specifically dedicated to Jewish victims), have a boat tour on the Spree or Havel river, and meet representatives of the local Jewish community. In the program's early years, the farewell reception would even be held at the Jewish community center. In addition, there would be tickets to the opera or the theater, a cabaret, or a concert. People were also given the opportunity to visit the Weissensee cemetery in East Berlin. Visitors who came as individuals, rather than as part of a group, whether or not they paid for their own travel (paying for one's own travel was sometimes a way to gain an invitation outside of the group visits but was still subject to the priority list of age, etc.), would also receive free accommodation and tickets for cultural events. Because documents about the development and administrative side of the Berlin program no longer exist, it is difficult to trace the decision-making process regarding what the officials thought the visitors should see. Overall, the Berlin program was very similar to that of most other cities. They all aimed to familiarize the visitors with the city again. Thus, they took them to famous sites and places the refugees would have known before they left. They also aimed to showcase memorials in order to indicate that people in the city had not forgotten about the Jewish population.

### Reactions to the Visits

The visits to Berlin—whether the refugees took part in one of the larger group visits or came as individual guests—were hailed as a success in press outlets reporting about the trips—*Aufbau*, *Aktuell*, Berlin newspapers, and occasionally a local American paper—and this perspective is frequently supported by personal testimonies from emigrants who participated.<sup>126</sup> While many of the written testimonies began with a few sentences about the mixed feelings that accompanied the decision to go to Berlin, the next few lines would explain that these fears and uncomfortable feelings quickly subsided upon arrival and were eclipsed by more positive experiences. The letter one of the first visitors in 1970 sent to Berlin is representative for many that followed:

To be honest, I returned with reservations and inhibitions to my home town after 31 years. Because of the kindness, graciousness and especially the good will from all participants to make this stay pleasant and informative in every way, many memories of sad times in the past were alleviated. While one says that it is difficult to forget and forgive, one should not hold a new generation and decent people responsible for past sins.<sup>127</sup>

*Aufbau*, in particular, with its editorial stance of reconciliation and bridge building, welcomed such positive impressions of the visitor program and changed perspectives on Germany.

Voices that were more critical of such change of heart, meanwhile, seem to have been rare, or not openly publicized, but they did exist, as one example from Los Angeles demonstrates. There, Walter Bucky, a very active member of the Jewish Club of 1933, complained that the people who had returned from their 1971 trip were “brainwashed.” An excerpt from an interview with Bucky reveals this sentiment:

Interviewer (I): What is your attitude towards Germany? Do you have any connections with the Germans here?

Walter Bucky (WB): I tell you, I had bad, bad experiences with the last trip of the 175 people invited from Berlin.

I: Were you there?

WB: No, for heaven’s sake not [in an agitated, angry voice]. It was all [not comprehensible] and they came back 100 *Prozent* brainwashed. They came to me, on Saturday we have our Kaffeeklatsch in the, we have a daycare center in the Jewish Community Center . . . and there we have every two weeks a Kaffeeklatsch, or Chanukka Feier.

. . .

I: Yeah, well is there anything, do they think a lot about Germany?

WB: People came back brainwashed. One woman came back, you know, with an *Aktenmappe* [folder] full of papers and pictures, and we should love them and they gave us the red carpet treatment and we shouldn’t say no, and I told them she wanted to have my mic, and I said you can’t get my mic. You can’t get my, we have no right to hate them, but you have no obligation to love them.

I: What do you mean get your mic?

WB: She wanted to talk with the people! Propaganda! They were, they were brainwashed!

I: What is your feeling about the Germans?

WB: That's what I tell you. I have no right to hate them but I don't need to love them.

I: Yes.

WB: You know, but I can forgive them but I don't have to forget. That is my standpoint.<sup>128</sup>

For those people who Bucky characterized as brainwashed, the trip to Berlin had done exactly what the organizers had wished for: the visitors enjoyed overwhelmingly positive experiences that changed their attitude toward Germany, or at least Berlin more particularly, and they were eager to spread this message upon their return home. Frequently, emigrants were eager to share this enthusiasm with the organizers of the program in Berlin, and letters like the following example from a couple in Florida were not unusual. After writing that their trip had left “a very good and unforgettable impression” on them, they went on to assure the Berlin organizers: “We told our children and grandchildren, all friends and acquaintances about the exceedingly nice visit in Berlin. About the enormous efforts of the Senate so that everything went so well and beautifully. We are your ambassador for the new Berlin.”<sup>129</sup> With letters such as this, their writers expressed not only their approval of the Berlin of the present, but also made clear that they felt included in the project of making Germany a better place—part of which, as they made clear, was to give it what they thought was its due reputation. At least one refugee remarked that it “pained” her to only ever hear about Germany in negative terms in the United States.<sup>130</sup>

The organizers in Berlin, for their part, appreciated such messages. In an *Aktuell* article in 1976, Johannes Völcker, for a long time the main administrator responsible for the program in the Senate, explained that these messages, which suggested there existed a generally increasing readiness of the visitors to renew or create personal relationships with Berlin, filled him with “thankful gratification.”<sup>131</sup> Thus, both visitors and organizers showed a mutual interest in the relationship—in being connected and in gaining something valuable out of this connection.

## Positive Experiences

Thank-you letters some refugees sent to the organizers of the Berlin program reveal that while they appreciated the care that had been put into the organization of these events and activities, what left the biggest impression on them were the ways that the German organizers welcomed and interacted with them. The letters overflow with references to the warmth and cordiality with which the



emigrants were welcomed by the organizers and the volunteers, who accompanied the groups to most of the events and throughout their stay. This warm care of the organizers not only made the biggest impact on visitors to Berlin but also in programs all over the country. In Freiburg, some visitors observed, “Never in our lives have we been sheltered and protected in such a way, and not because the ladies felt obligated—no, one could feel their warm affection.”<sup>132</sup> This feeling that German organizers treated them with utmost sincerity, “coming from the heart,” was important in the visiting refugees’ evaluation of the programs as an authentic act of morality, something that was of highest significance to them.<sup>133</sup> In this regard, a Berlin visitor wrote, “What touched me personally most was the atmosphere. All speeches to us reflected dignity, non-concealment of what happened in the past—and a serious, warm willingness and empathy for a new present and future.”<sup>134</sup>

In addition to the recognition of the past through words, the refugees also commended—and were often quite surprised by—the existence of memorials to the atrocities of the National Socialist past, especially in light of the importance of the remembrance in Jewish tradition. In Berlin, sightseeing tours for the visiting emigrants included the memorial in Plötzensee (the prison and execution center for opponents of the Nazis) and, increasingly, other memorials that emerged in the city and were dedicated to commemorating the Nazi past and particularly its Jewish victims.<sup>135</sup> In smaller cities, the emigrants visited the synagogue, or its former site, which generally had a plaque commemorating the events of the November Pogrom of 1938 or the town’s Jewish community. Whereas Jews on personal visits had often found the synagogue or the Jewish cemetery in poor condition in the 1950s and ’60s and early 1970s, through the initiatives of such visiting refugees or civic interest groups—and a decree of 1956–57 stipulating that federal and state institutions would take over half of the costs necessary for upkeep of Jewish cemeteries—by the end of the 1970s, this situation had improved in most places. In any case, many cities made sure that there was some recognition of Jewish sites before an official visit of former Jewish citizens. In several cities, the visitor programs were even planned around the renovation of a synagogue, and some municipalities staged exhibits in which they presented the history of the Jews of that particular town.<sup>136</sup> Sometimes cities also decided to name streets and squares after Jewish places or individuals, frequently before or on the occasion of the official invitations.<sup>137</sup> As such, the restoration of such places was to serve as an indicator that the cities valued and remembered their former Jewish citizens, something that was, when well done, very well received by the visitors.<sup>138</sup>

## Negative Experiences

Actions, events, and memorials which seemed to signify an authenticity of feeling figured most significantly in positive experiences of the refugees' visits. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that it was the absence of authentic cordiality and appropriate acknowledgment of responsibility for the wrongs of the past that produced the most ill feeling. While it is difficult to find reference to such occurrences in the letters collected at the Berlin Senate Chancellery, the special edition of *Aufbau* documenting 120 different visitor programs featured a number of critical voices.<sup>139</sup> In some cities, refugees realized from public statements and speeches given by mayors and other (sometimes church) officials that despite the existence of the visitor program, there were individuals in influential positions in Germany whose attitude toward the National Socialist past was not especially condemnatory. This became particularly apparent when speakers neglected to address the fact that it was the government and citizens of their towns that had actively participated in the discrimination against and persecution of Jews during the Third Reich. The mayor of Crailsheim, for example, in his speech at the Jewish cemetery in 1987, explained, "Not buried here are 50 Crailsheimers who during the years 1939–1945 were somewhere in the world, disdained by a misguided ideology and killed, driven by a terrible world war."<sup>140</sup> In Aurich, the mayor's speech similarly revealed his complete lack of understanding of history when he explained that Jews had been persecuted because they were "*andersartig*" (of a different kind) and "different minded" than other Germans.<sup>141</sup> In response to this, one refugee stood up and, to the applause of the attendees, corrected the mayor's statement. Still, such comments, distancing the crimes of the war from the people, showed the visitors that despite official narratives of German responsibility, more sinister popular narratives and stereotypes concerning Jews were persistent. Such situations demonstrated to the refugees that some Germans did not in every sense take on a more personal and local responsibility. The existence of visitor programs alone, then, did not necessarily lead people to engage in a critical look at history, or to make a serious effort at understanding what had happened to these Jewish visitors. Especially in the 1980s and later in the '90s, they had become the politically correct thing to do, a standard practice of many municipalities. Inevitably, some participants engaged in them without serious consideration for their meaning, while others, who participated for one civic or bureaucratic necessity or another, even held personal beliefs that were antithetical to the ostensible aims of the programs. Nevertheless, in spite of these dubious examples and the ill will they engendered, existence of the programs contributed to the general restructuring of German society. In this way Germans were still learning to be citizens of a country that took responsibility for its past.

A criticism perhaps related to that of German rote participation in visitor program events was the absence of spontaneous contact with regular Germans

during visits. Some refugees criticized their cities' programs because they were often so tightly packed with activities that the visitors felt there was no time to meet "normal" inhabitants, which put them in doubt about the extent to which the warmhearted engagement and interest of those directly involved in the programs was representative of the broader population.<sup>142</sup> In smaller towns, however, meeting "ordinary" citizens—often people the refugees had known before the war—was frequently unavoidable, and it created a different, more difficult atmosphere than in large cities such as Berlin. While, generally, refugees appreciated it when Germans paid attention to their history of persecution, some visitors were put off by too much sudden focus on it. Ann Ikenberg recalled in an interview such an incident during her visit to her hometown of Wuppertal: "We went to a meeting in the city hall and met with a council man who wanted to know the story of my family, about what my parents did for the city. It got to be too much." At another point in the interview, she said she found in the outreach activities of the city too much "greasy sweetness." While, on the one hand, people's insensitivity to the Jewish persecution history, or the sense that they were merely fulfilling a duty in acknowledging it, caused revulsion in some refugees, on the other, philo-Semitism, or a sense of it, did not sit well either.<sup>143</sup>

Finally, a related point of criticism was raised by refugees when they felt that the West German efforts were so focused on making their stay a pleasant experience that they neglected the deeper emotional context these trips held for the visitors. Even if the German participants were doing and saying all "the right things," facing the old hometown, and the memories connected with it, in itself required courage and was difficult and painful to varying degrees.<sup>144</sup> One visitor said of her trip to Laupheim, for example, that the reporting about the program made it seem like "everybody simply had fun." She explained that in her case, she had had to leave the town for Switzerland after two and a half days because she could no longer bear looking at her childhood home, which lay directly across from her hotel window.<sup>145</sup> Some refugees criticized that the "*Vergangenheitsbewältigungsjargon*," the jargon that Germans had developed for the discourse on "mastering the past" and which became filled with words like "bridge building" and "reconciliation," plastered over the horrific nature of the very events that made these visits necessary. In some cases, refugees felt that the German satisfaction over the good deed of inviting the refugees to their city was greater and more real than their realization of the broader context of forced emigration and genocide.<sup>146</sup>

### **Impacts—The Meaning and Value of the Visits**

In their original conception of the visitor programs, those who created and ran them intended them to be an important event for the refugees, and a contribution

to German Jewish understanding and reconciliation. What then did the visitors draw from these experiences? What were the actual, as well as long-term, effects of these visits on the (Jewish) participants, on their identity, and on the German Jewish relationship? It seems clear that, in general, positive experiences on the visitor programs improved the relationship to Germany of those that experienced them, while negative ones tended to confirm suspicion and dislike of the country. This was not always the case, however, and an overview of different reflections and emotional reactions to the visits shows the complexity of the impact they made on people.

As with reactions to the invitations, experiences and reactions frequently differed among different age groups. For older people, who had spent a great portion of their lives in Germany, and who, as we have seen, often responded enthusiastically to the invitation programs, returning to Germany was one of the most important events of their later lives, as they frequently asserted. Forced emigration had been a painful experience, and for many older people, especially if they did not have a fulfilling life in the United States, their life in Germany remained an important reality and reference point for them. While they suffered from the rejection and persecution they had experienced in Germany, they nevertheless often sorely missed the familiar places and circumstances of their former home. This ambivalence or contradiction of feelings was not an easy one to bear, especially when the predominant discourse concerning Germany in the greater American Jewish community of which they were a part was one of utter rejection or, at best, intense criticism that tended to not leave any place for nostalgia.<sup>147</sup> Visiting and seeing that their former hometown was a place in which one could feel safe and good again legitimated their longing for the place in their own eyes, as well as to some degree in the eyes of the larger community. In the thank-you letters to Berlin, many of the older refugees testified to their feelings of being at home in Berlin during their visit and the continuity of the beauty of the city.<sup>148</sup>

For many visitors, then, their trip to Germany reconciled their painful experiences with their love for their former city or country. One couple described how going to Berlin—which they “used to love so much”—and seeing it in a positive light, cared for by well-meaning Germans, “put balsam on [their] still burning wounds.” This description of the healing effect of the visitor program, while it simultaneously suggests that the trauma of Nazi persecution can never really be cured or forgotten, is representative of many responses the refugees shared with the German organizers. Having been treated well by Germans was not only an important experience during the visit, however. As the couple’s letter implies, their visit produced a more general feeling that they could take back to their home: “It did us so much good to be able to believe that there still existed human love in Germany.”<sup>149</sup> For many, to be able to relate to their former home as a place that they had most recently experienced as “good” was soothing.

The personal interactions with morally decent and warmhearted Germans that made the biggest impact on the refugees also had their therapeutic effects in a different way. Ruth Wertheimer-Shurman's words exemplify the transformation that numerous other participants of the visitor programs experienced: "The open conversations have released us from the hate that we had carried within us for so long."<sup>150</sup> While one intention of the German visitor programs had been just that—to deconstruct negative feelings for Germany in the visitors and contribute to German-Jewish reconciliation—the revelation for the refugees that there existed moral goodness in Germans created also a reconciliation with their own history in Germany. Wertheimer-Shurman's words show that the hatred of Germany had sat hard with her and it was a relief to be able to release this emotion and let it fade. The visits thus allowed for some refugees to look at Germany, and also their own German Jewish past prior to the Nazis, with more positive eyes.

Even good visits, however, did not always lead to good feeling. For most older refugees, the renewal of a positive connection to Germany did not mean that they wanted to return to Germany permanently, as they felt that their place and future, and that of their families, was now in the United States. For some, however, especially those who had not adjusted well to life in the United States, returning to the old places, seeing them in beautiful shape and being cared for by nice people to whom one could relate effortlessly, both linguistically and culturally, increased the pain over having lost that place. One woman wrote to the Berlin Senate that while she had enjoyed the visit, it left her husband, who had originally asked for the invitation, "very sad."<sup>151</sup> Two years after his return to the United States, this man again wrote to Berlin, asking to be invited a second time. Referring to Germany as his beloved fatherland, he stated, "Life here is very hard. I beg you to give me the opportunity to let me see my fatherland again . . . . I did not file restitution many years back."<sup>152</sup> The collection held at Berlin's Senate Chancellery includes other similar letters from people whose good experiences on their official visit incited or increased homesickness for Germany but who could not afford to return again either temporarily or permanently. For them, the Senate had no solution to offer, just apologetic words. Even though, in their speeches and press outreach, the politicians and administrators in Berlin communicated the message that they considered the refugees still part of the city, as belonging to Berlin—by calling them co-citizens or fellow Berliners, for example—they nevertheless remained only virtual or imagined Berliners. The exclusion of the past remained the reality of the present, and the Senate was not in the position to change that in practice; only those who could afford to come back by themselves could potentially make that change.<sup>153</sup>

Similarly, the losses that the refugees endured could not be repaired, even if the visits were "good." The story of a couple from Orange County, south of Los Angeles, also exemplifies this. When they received an invitation to Nuremberg,

the woman, even though she had worked in a travel agency for many years that specialized in trips to Germany—and was also frequented by many German Jewish refugees for that reason—hesitated to accept the invitation. The couple eventually did go, and Lisa, the German born (non-Jewish) owner of the travel agency, recalled a visit by her employee's husband after the couple had returned. He brought with him a book of photographs of Nuremberg before the war that the couple had been given during their trip. But he had found that looking at these photographs was too painful for him and did not want the book in his house. Knowing that Lisa was from southern Germany as well, he brought it for her as he thought she would cherish it.<sup>154</sup> The assumption on the side of the organizers that such a book would bring joy to the refugees as they looked at these pictures was mistaken in this case.<sup>155</sup> These examples clearly show the limitations of these programs: that though they may sometimes have ameliorated pain or hatred in refugees, they could not make good again (*wiedergutmachen*), could not give back what had been taken and destroyed, and could not restore those who had been killed. In this way, reconciliation with Germans of the present was one thing, but such outreach did not always lessen the pain and loss that refugees carried with them. For some people, in fact, the program offered no lasting solace, but rather renewed or extended their pain. In fact, the programs owe their overwhelming success in the first place to the strength of the refugees in confronting their losses, and this should be kept in mind when considering the more positive impacts the programs made on people, as they are described in the following sections.

For refugees who had been younger when they left Germany, positive experiences in Berlin often meant a connection to their parents' and families' past that had frequently not received much attention during their life after emigration. In their efforts to Americanize, many younger people did not want to have much to do with Germany, and a generally critical attitude dominated their perspective on the country. Even in cases where the parents were more positively inclined toward Germany, children frequently either had no interest in this heritage or held a strongly critical attitude of rejection toward the country. West Germany's democratization process—restitution in particular, and more personal acknowledgements of guilt and a public desire to atone—permitted a reasonable interest in Germany, but for many, a visit at the invitation of their former hometown was not the result of the same sort of heartfelt desire as it was for older people.

However, with age, and aging or dying parents, family connections became more important to some, and their interest in their past increased. For Albrecht Strauss, for example, going to Marburg and staying in touch with people in the city was significant for him and made him “happy and proud,” as it meant keeping up a “direct connection with my father's and grandfather's Marburg.”<sup>156</sup> For many refugees, while it was a melancholic trip to visit the city where they had spent wonderful time with their parents, they nevertheless cherished the

memories of family that their trip brought back to them.<sup>157</sup> Such memories had sometimes faded over time and were overshadowed by the dominating public memory, especially in the 1980s in the United States, of Nazi persecution and the Holocaust. The testimonies of many refugees reveal that personal experiences in these towns and the retrieved positive memories that resulted could, in turn, ameliorate the larger, more impersonal discourse. This, also in turn, (re)created a personal connection to the city, which frequently extended to an overall more positive evaluation of the present Germany.

Furthermore, encountering the places of the past not only invoked memories of the past, but also that of past selves.<sup>158</sup> While this, as we have seen in the examples above, could for some translate into very painful experiences of loss—of the person one had been before the Holocaust (with a family, etc.)—for other refugees this could mean the retrieval of something they had missed. Discussing this, one visitor, a professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley, said, “The honesty with which [the] citizens [of Nidderau] sought to approach the past made it possible for me to rediscover my German-Jewish roots.”<sup>159</sup> Thus, for some refugees the trip brought a renewed identification with their German-Jewishness. For one woman, this manifested itself in a new embracing of the German language, and her remark in a letter to Berlin, that she would make an effort to not forget it again, reveals the value this held for her.<sup>160</sup>

For people who had left Germany as very small children and who retained very few memories of the place, the effects of their travels to Germany on their own identity could be even more surprising. Hannah Goldrich, who had left Germany in 1937 as a two-year-old child, had for the longest time refused to travel to Germany. Her parents, on the other hand, had been back several times, something she could never really understand, as her relationship to Germany was predominantly shaped by the very German-critical New York Jewish environment she surrounded herself with. However, when she returned from having finally taken part in an organized visit to Heilbronn, she wrote,

It was good for me that I went in 1985 because I now do not have the feeling anymore that all Germans are bad and this is a lot for me. I had an extremely strong feeling of peace after the trip. . . . First of all, I found out that I am German . . . It still seems weird when I say that, but I felt at ease there. . . . Until about five years ago I did not know that I had scars, which is interesting. I grew up with lots of Jewish cultural connections, but I did not give my children Jewish schooling. Now I think the reason was my feeling that being Jewish would mean to be killed. I know that war influences children in many respects and I know that these years of my life really had influence on me. The results of this stupid war reach for generations into the future. To have made this trip does not take away from this but it helps. It helps to heal.<sup>161</sup>

Interesting in this case is that Goldrich had, prior to her trip, a comfortable relationship with neither her German nor Jewish background. For her, both

Germanness and Jewishness existed primarily in the context of the Holocaust. However, her positive experiences in Germany not only allowed her to better understand her parents—something that many young refugees felt was really important to them—but also allowed her to engage with her own heritage of being German *and* Jewish, which in turn created a new understanding of self.<sup>162</sup>

How intimately this discovery was linked to being in Germany and how powerful and transforming it could be is further exemplified by the experiences of a man who returned to Berlin with his mother. He recounted his thoughts upon seeing his grandparents' former house and their synagogue:

Something became clear to me that I had not understood my entire life: The stories about Berlin were not fairytales, because this is the place where I am from. We were no refugees or vagrants as people had seen us but we were part of a family with an old rich Jewish culture. What I am today I owe to those who did not survive the hell; but their spiritual and cultural heritage resisted the brutal annihilation. My deep gratitude to the Senate of Berlin for the opportunity of this special, touching experience. We had to and could again step on German soil so that I could see with my own eyes where my roots are.<sup>163</sup>

As this example shows, for young German Jewish refugees and children of refugees, the places of the past were often very abstract, and their own identity as German Jews beset with negative connotations. In this light, going to the actual places that one's family had left behind and seeing that current German citizens were interested in the German Jewish past could be life-changing for some.<sup>164</sup> This acknowledgement of a positive German-Jewish heritage in people who had theretofore neglected it was particularly resonant in a self-proclaimed nation of immigrants like the United States, where one's background and heritage was and is accorded much public interest. Because of this, for many refugees, especially those who did not marry other German Jews, it was important then to not only connect with their past, but also to include their partners and children in this personal history. While most West German visitor program invitations included the refugee's spouse or partner, many refugees also requested that they be able to bring their children or, later, grandchildren too. Visitor programs were often unable to accommodate this wish, but in Berlin, people who paid for their own airfare and came outside of a group often brought their children. Even when children did not go on the trip themselves, parents often related their positive experiences in Germany to their families. That some felt this connection to Germany should live on in the future is apparent in Lore Rasmussen's letter to Germany, assuring the friends she had met and made in her native Lampertsheim during her visit in 1988 of their impact: "These ten days will remain among the deepest memories of my life and will continue to live on in our children and grandchildren."<sup>165</sup> In this way, the effects of the invitation programs extended



their influence into the future and fostered a relationship between Germany and a generation of people who had often had few connections to the country or their parents' or grandparents' heritage.

### **Bearing Witness to German Youth**

The future-oriented connection that sometimes resulted from these visits not only applied to the offspring of German Jewish refugees, but also extended to German children. Similar to the refugees who had engaged in the memorial initiatives not only for themselves but also to teach Germans, some refugees who came through visitor programs also wanted to engage in such education efforts. Before visiting Berlin through the visitor program in 1983, Gerald Jeremias sent a letter to his former school indicating that he was interested in seeing it again during his upcoming trip. The school headmaster's response was to invite Jeremias to speak to the students about his experiences.<sup>166</sup>

For some people, such as the Grünbergs, who visited a high school in Leer (East Frisia), it was speaking to students that made coming to Germany possible and worthwhile. During their official visit to their hometown, Mr. Grünberg told the students about his imprisonment in Auschwitz. Upon the students' question of how the couple was able to return to Germany after that experience, Mrs. Grünberg answered that it had been a difficult decision but that they had accepted the invitation "because they owed it to their children to do everything in order to prevent their own history being repeated."<sup>167</sup> Going back to talk to young Germans was one way many refugees felt that goal could be accomplished. In this way, some German Jewish refugees viewed and portrayed Germany's integrity and future as intrinsically connected to their own and their families' future. This stake in West Germany made their presence in the country crucial and also justifiable—to themselves and to potential critics. For some, it was a way to combine their interest in, or fondness for, their hometown, or Germany more generally, and their feeling of somehow belonging to that place, with a critical and empowered position of authority on the German past and future.

The case of one woman, Gerda Lowenstein, who had lived in the United States for thirty-five years before returning to Germany for the first time in 1971, exemplifies this investment particularly well, even though she is exceptional given the extent of her dedication.<sup>168</sup> In the school years 1975/76 and 1979/80 she worked as a governess, upon invitation of the headmaster, at the Max-Rill girls' boarding school near Bad Tölz. At this school, Lowenstein found her "mission" of "educating and speaking about the time of horror, which back then was still gladly left out of history education."<sup>169</sup> It was her conviction that "we Jews who emigrated can offer today's youth so incredibly much. Not only in the realm of culture but also as personal witnesses of a time which has now

become history.”<sup>170</sup> For the sixteen- and seventeen-year-old girls at the school, Lowenstein was the first Jewish person they ever saw, and her becoming something of a “substitute mother” was an important revelation for them. Deep connections developed between her and the girls, and Lowenstein was proud to have “built a small bridge” and to have “opened many young people’s eyes to an unfathomable chapter of German history.”<sup>171</sup>

Increasingly in the 1980s and 1990s, both refugees and Jews who had survived concentration and extermination camps acted as similar witnesses of the past, and many visitor programs arranged or included the opportunity to speak to German youths.<sup>172</sup> After a trip to Germany in the late 1980s, Hans Sahl, writer, critic, and regular contributor to *Aufbau*, praised the zeal with which young Germans were interested in the “authentic” experience of the Nazi past, and hinted that there was a duty to make it available to them: “[The youth] are on a quest for authenticity and this authenticity is a human being. They are looking for an answer; one cannot forsake them again, one has to bear witness.”<sup>173</sup> While bearing witness was certainly not an easy task, many refugees were proud of this role they acquired in educating young Germans.

By the 1980s, there existed a sense of a mutually felt responsibility among some German citizens—especially a younger generation of teachers—and German Jewish refugees to remember and teach the National Socialist past, often with the belief that this would prevent a repetition of such atrocities in the future. In this vein, Berlin’s mayor Eberhard Diepgen wrote an *Aktuell* article on the occasion of Berlin’s 750-year anniversary in 1987, titled “Berlin—History for the Future,” which told of the great democratic and peace-loving city that Berlin had become and the memorials and projects that stood for it. Addressing former Jewish citizens of Berlin, he offered his hope to greet many more of them during the anniversary year so they could not only witness the city’s transformation but, at the same time, strengthen it through their presence.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, the budget for Berlin’s visitor program in 1987 was the highest ever, signaling a particular effort to include those who had been victims during Berlin’s darkest years in the celebration. That year brought eighteen hundred visitors, the highest number ever for a single year, and the twenty-thousandth guest to the city.<sup>175</sup> The year 1988, meanwhile, the fiftieth anniversary of the Kristallnacht, the pogrom of 9 November 1938, saw a significant rise in the number of visitor programs in Germany country-wide, with forty cities inviting their former Jewish citizens for the first time.

## Final Considerations

Fifty years after the pogrom that forced many German Jews into the decision to emigrate, a significant number of them either had been or were back in their

hometowns, which had invited them in commemoration of the events. Most German Jewish refugees, while embarking on the trips with mixed emotions, returned to their countries of residence or new homelands with a stronger connection to Germany and to their own German Jewish heritage and identity. For the organized refugee community in the United States, this reorientation toward a German Jewish identity was significant. The majority of German Jewish refugees had become well integrated into American life, seeing themselves as Americans first. Many of the older refugees had by the 1980s passed away, and the younger generation had less of a connection to their heritage. The interest from Germany in German Jewish refugees, I contend, which was mainly expressed through the visitor programs, contributed to a boost in individual and communal German Jewish identities in the United States in the 1970s and particularly the 1980s. For the organized community, people working for *Aufbau*, for example, who had an interest in keeping this community together and strong, the visitor programs were significant as modes of promoting and preserving German Jewish identity and an interest in this heritage.<sup>176</sup> *Aufbau* articles reporting on the trips appeared regularly, portraying German ambitions to commemorate the past and honor its Jewish victims. The discourse in *Aufbau* was not one of victimhood in a lachrymose sense, however, but rather focused on the German Jewish refugees as witnesses, as experts on the past, who had an important message to spread and heritage to preserve.<sup>177</sup> The time of great outreach from German cities coincided also with a general rise in public interest in the Holocaust in the United States and a reformulation of an American Jewish identity, in which the Holocaust was a defining (and uniting) element.<sup>178</sup> While their particular history had been a topic of interest to the German Jewish refugee community ever since their arrival, it was in the context of these larger developments of a Holocaust discourse that an interest in their specific history of persecution and efforts at the preservation of the German Jewish heritage increased.<sup>179</sup> As the Holocaust story in the United States focused primarily on Jews who had survived concentration and extermination camps, the refugees' story was one on the sidelines. Partly as a consequence of this, they valued a reestablished connection to Germany. This was so particularly in light of some German citizens increasingly valuing their particular knowledge of the Nazi past and their roles as witnesses to it, something that emerges most distinctly in the visitor programs on occasions when refugees were invited to speak to students. As such, being a German Jewish refugee held positive connotations of being a person who held the ability to educate, to make a positive change in the world, particularly in relation to Germany.<sup>180</sup>

While the connection to Germany was important for individuals and the community to varying degrees then, for Germans, the visitor programs and their connections to German Jewish refugees was also exceedingly—perhaps even more—important. In an individual and communal search for disassociation from the Nazis and their atrocities—for moral or political reasons, or

both—acknowledgment of this past and its events, demonstration of contrition, and desire for reconciliation and “normalization” were primary expressions.<sup>181</sup> In the 1980s, the Holocaust was evolving as the focal point of West German memory culture in relation to the National Socialist past. National and international events such as the Auschwitz and the Eichmann trials of the early and mid-1960s, the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, Willy Brandt’s genuflection honoring the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1970, and the airing of the American miniseries “Holocaust” in 1979 had brought public attention not only to perpetrators but also to Jewish suffering.<sup>182</sup> As a consequence of this confrontation with Jewish pain and the horror of the German crimes, certain people—I have pointed out several groups—and especially the younger generation, longed for reconciliation with Jews. Notwithstanding what was frequently a genuine personal desire for reconciliation, with the intensification of Holocaust discourse, it also became a pressing concern to avoid being identified with the Nazis. Doing good things for Jews and having good connections with Jews, particularly those who had been wronged in the past, was a good way to know and show that one was neither a Nazi nor an anti-Semite. Hence the increased efforts in the 1980s to make it possible for the German Jews to visit their native hometowns, to “send a signal of remembrance and acknowledgment of their [Jewish] suffering in an attempt for reconciliation.”<sup>183</sup> Part of these efforts was to show the visitors that towns had changed.<sup>184</sup> Whether they were motivated primarily morally or politically, many German municipalities attempted to represent a “transformed town” engaged in active memory creation. They did this by removing physical traces of the violent Nazi past and rebuilding demolished synagogues and cemeteries, thus referring back to a time when Jewish life had existed in those towns. In synagogues and cemeteries, Jewish visitors could either remember or develop (depending upon their age) a sense of a good life in Germany before the rise of Nazism and also potentially, if there were Jews in these places, in the present. Where there was an absence of Jewish buildings and Jewish communities, as in many locations, additional efforts were required to present a positive image of the cities to the Jewish visitors and other Germans during the 1980s. Through memorial ceremonies and exhibits, often put on by history working groups or by the city archives, the Nazi past was publicly condemned and distance was established between the Germans who had carried out and supported the persecution of the Jews and the current populations of towns—even though among the current population were still many who had lived under the Third Reich, albeit as children. Thus were bad and painful memories associated with Germany or a specific town marginalized, to be replaced by new memories which were actively created by German preservation and restoration of Jewish structures and construction of places of remembrance on the one hand, and refugee presence and witnessing (and its local support) on the other. The naming of streets after native Jews was another attempt to combine an honoring of these individuals with the offering of this

honoring to Jewish visitors. In these ways, the identity and memory of the towns and the people who lived in them were redefined in the eyes of their own citizens and presented to the refugees and the world at large as good places in which lived good Germans.<sup>185</sup> While these actions of memorialization cannot be detached from certain political interests and particular ulterior motives of image and representation for German cities and their inhabitants, and while the presence of such material sites cannot be understood to translate directly into moral understanding, these memorials and their associated meanings were lasting.<sup>186</sup> In this way, the German Jewish past of these towns was visible and no longer hidden. Compared to children growing up in the 1970s, German children in the 1980s were much more likely to become aware at some point in their school life—likely at an event to commemorate the pogrom of 9 November 1938—whether a Jewish community had existed in their towns and where the synagogue had been, if the town had had one. In these transformed local geographies of towns all over West Germany, which were partly a result of the visitor programs, and the changed meanings and understandings they reflect, lies another example of how German Jewish refugees affected German identity construction.

In the efforts some German citizens undertook in making these changes and raising more awareness for the German Jewish past, it was frequently very important for them that these were seen and acknowledged by Jewish visitors. After all, the idea was that the Jewish presence and acknowledgment would validate the German efforts, absolve the people of the crimes of the past (or their parents' past), purging from them the guilt of the perpetrators, and approve their democratic and tolerant identity. German Jewish refugees who were very open to dialogue were usually welcomed and sometimes received certain honors. Those who were more critical on the other hand, were not welcomed with open arms.<sup>187</sup> Observing the language with which German officials addressed Jewish visitors in *Aktuell* in the late 1980s, and increasingly in the 1990s, reveals a transformation in the discourse concerning the visitors, one which shows that Jewish connections had become ever more important. In previous years, the West German message had been one of wanting to make up for the past and offering something good to the Jewish refugees: to invite them back, make it possible for them to see their former hometown, in an attempt at reconciliation. Increasingly, official addresses to Jewish visitors, for example in *Aktuell* or in letters or speeches from mayors, expressed a sense of intense German need for the visitors, a plea to come, and gratitude when they did.

This intensification of German Jewish interactions on the local level, and the rising pressure for them across this time, must also be understood in the context of an intensification of national memory politics, which was partly influenced by American developments. In the 1980s, West German diplomats in the United States worried that the popular attention the Holocaust was receiving would influence American public opinion negatively toward Germany.<sup>188</sup> That this had

been an ongoing concern for the German diplomats I have shown previously. It now, however, reached a new height, and West Germans responded to it in a familiar way: by trying to foster good connections with Jews. What on the federal level was an extended visitor program involving relationships between the government and American Jewish organizations was, on the local level, carried out between refugees and their former towns and citizens.<sup>189</sup> Thus, with increasing Holocaust consciousness, nationally and internationally, the relationship with German Jewish refugees played an increasingly important role for West Germany's international image, as well as its image of itself, while for German Jews it, in many cases, offered a new understanding of both Germany and of themselves.<sup>190</sup>

## Notes

1. Excerpt from Pan Am advertisement, *Aufbau* 35 (23 May 1969).
2. *Ibid.*
3. In cities with a large Jewish population, German Jewish visitor programs were carried out on a yearly basis. Berlin is the prime example of this. There, the last large group of visitors came in 2010. Individual visitors are still received by the city government, however, and frequently accompanied by volunteers. Interview Margit Mücke. Interview Barbara Boehm-Tettelbach.
4. The Israeli government did not permit Israeli citizens, and thus German Jews who had emigrated to Israel, to travel to Germany until after 1956. Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 7.
5. See interview with Ruth Nussbaum conducted in German by Alexander von der Borch-Nitzling, in Borch-Nitzling, *(Un)heimliche Heimat*, 504.
6. Stefanie Fischer suggests that the trips to Germany were not very much discussed in the refugee communities abroad, and points in particular to an "absence of [such] trips in the Jewish family memory (*Familiengedächtnis*).” "Entangled Transnational Relationships: Former Jewish and Non-Jewish Neighbors in the Postwar Era," German Studies Association Paper Presentation, Denver, October 2013.
7. "Ernest Wolf," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 248.
8. Sommer did not say in the interview why he decided to visit. "Ernie Sommer," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 159.
9. *Ibid.*, 158–59. See also Betty Gradmann-Josef's experience during her visit to Nuremberg in 1961. "Besuch in der alten Heimat—Eine Dokumentation des AUFBAU über Besuchsprogramme deutscher Gemeinden für ihre ehemaligen jüdischen Bewohner," *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 15.
10. "Ernest Wolf," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 247.
11. *Ibid.*, 160.
12. Interview with John Best, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, January 3, 1972, LBI NY, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1326485>.
13. *Ibid.*
14. "Hedy Wolf," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 237.
15. *Ibid.*, 239.
16. *Ibid.*, 238.

17. E.g., "Reise und Verkehr," *Aufbau* 34 (13 September 1968); and *Aufbau* 35 (13 June 1969).
18. E.g., *Aufbau* 35 (23 May 1969).
19. See *Aufbau* and *Mitteilungsblatt*. Herbert Strauss pointed to the economic success of the refugees; they themselves frequently point out in interviews that while the beginnings were difficult, they were able to build a comfortable life in the United States. Strauss, *Jewish Immigrants*, 6:298ff.
20. Grossmann, "Family Files," 61.
21. "Ann 'Annchen' Ikenberg," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 104–5.
22. "Travelogue Frank White" and announcement of event, *Mitteilungsblatt* 20, no. 3 (March 1966); and "Frank White Reisebericht 1. Forts." *Mitteilungsblatt* 21, no. 1 (January 1967).
23. "Frank White Reisebericht 1. Forts." *Mitteilungsblatt* 21, no. 1 (January 1967).
24. "Die Wiedergutmachung in der Laien-Perspektive 4. Forts." *Mitteilungsblatt* 21, no. 6 (June 1967).
25. Niederland was born in 1904 in East Prussia and grew up in Würzburg, where his father was a rabbi. Via England, he came to the United States in 1940. Trained as a physician, he worked as a professor of psychology after the war and with people suffering from persecution and survival experience. "William Niederland," in Hartwig and Roscher, eds, *Die Verheissene Stadt*, 168.
26. E.g., *Mitteilungsblatt* 23, no. 1 (January 1969); *Aufbau* 34 (9 August 1968).
27. Margret Collin, "From the Editor's Desk: Easter Parade," *Mitteilungsblatt* 22, no. 6 (June 1968).
28. Lowenstein, *Frankfurt on the Hudson*, 242, 328. Lowenstein sent out 1,629 questionnaires in total, covering "a fairly large proportion of the middle of the religious spectrum in Washington Heights (excluding only the most Orthodox and the unaffiliated)." Of the 513 returned to him, 53.4 percent indicated that they had traveled. *Ibid.*, 267. He also found that it was more common for Reform Jews to travel to Germany (71.6 percent) than for Orthodox congregants (44.0 percent). *Ibid.*, 342.
29. See *Aufbau* 34 (20 September 1968); and *Aufbau* 35 (5 September 1969).
30. "Hilde Kracko," in Kirchheimer and Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, 229.
31. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 28.
32. Interview with Annelise Bunzel, conducted by Joan C. Lessing, Los Angeles, March 15, 1985, LBI NY, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1326565>.
33. C.F., "Berlin war eine Reise wert," *Aufbau* 35 (30 May 1969).
34. See "Das Beispiel Oberhausens: Gedenkbuch für die Opfer des Faschismus"; and "Synagogenöffnung in Osnabrück," both *Aufbau* 35 (4 July 1969).
35. Steinitz came to the United States in 1947—he had been interned in Gurs in France and survived in Switzerland. Unlike most *Aufbau* readers, he did not spend the war years in the United States.
36. "Hans Steinitz," in Kirchheimer and Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, 224.
37. In the original German: "kameradschaftlicher Offenheit." See Steinitz, "Aufbau, Neubau, Brückenbau," 17.
38. Kotowski, ed., *Aufbau: Sprachrohr. Heimat. Mythos*, 33.
39. "Hans Steinitz," in Kirchheimer and Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, 225.
40. Ads featured, e.g., Rheingold Bier, Asbach Uralt, and many real estate companies. *Die Welt* was founded after World War II by the British occupying forces and then taken over by Axel Springer and his publishing company. *Aufbau* 35 (23 May 1969).
41. *Ibid.*
42. For Axel Springer, reconciliation with Jews and support for Israel were of great personal importance. See Backhaus et al., eds, *Bild dir dein Volk!*
43. *Aufbau* was not a for-profit newspaper and needed advertisements to fund its publication. Especially when readership dwindled in the 1960s, this became more important.

44. *Aufbau* 35 (5 September 1969).
45. Steinitz, "Der 'Aufbau.'"
46. *Ibid.*
47. "München reicht die Hand," *Aufbau* 31 (20 August 1965).
48. Nikou, "Coming Back Home?"
49. Kräutler, *Dieselbe Stadt*, 13.
50. Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 17.
51. Weichmann had spent the war years in New York City and was brought back to Hamburg in 1948 by the former mayor Max Brauer, a Social Democrat who had also been an emigrant in New York. *Aufbau* 33 (30 June 1967); Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 27.
52. Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 27–28.
53. *Ibid.*, 18–19.
54. *Ibid.*, 21, 26.
55. In this approach, the Hamburg senate followed the approach of the city of Frankfurt, which had been sending out information materials since early 1960s. Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 25.
56. *Ibid.*, 25–26.
57. *Ibid.*, 23.
58. The name is an alias. Interview conducted by Beate Meyer, 1 August 1991. See Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 23 and note 37.
59. *Ibid.*, 28, 24.
60. *Ibid.*, 28–30.
61. See *ibid.*, 32–34, for more detail on problems with early invitations.
62. See *ibid.*, 38–61, for details. Also, see the examples of Constance and Heilbronn, where former Jewish citizens asked whether the city would not want to follow the precedent of other cities and invite them. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
63. In June of 1933, there were 160,564 people of Jewish faith registered in Berlin. Beyond that there were "a considerable number" of people who had been baptized, were from mixed marriages, etc., who would later also be subject to Nazi race laws: Annegret Ehmann, "Verfolgung—Selbstbehauptung—Untergang," in Ehmann et al., *Juden in Berlin, 1671–1945*, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005450>.
64. This section relies on two recent interviews of two Berlin politicians of the time, Hanns-Peter Herz and Klaus Schütz. While their recollections, as they acknowledged themselves, were not always entirely clear, and were occasionally contradictory, I have attempted to produce a coherent narrative conveying the general sense of their roles in the beginning of the Berlin visitor program and the various difficulties they faced.
65. Interviews with Hans Steinitz in Kirchheimer and Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, and interview with Hanns-Peter Herz, conducted by Lina Nikou, Berlin, 8 April 2011, provided to me by Nikou. In an interview with Leo Katcher in the 1960s, Herz, who is a Christian by religion, speaks about his Jewish background and treatment by the Nazis, which had a lasting effect on him: "I had enough of a Jewish background for the Nazis to call me a Jew and send me to a work camp, from which I was liberated by Americans in 1945. The effect of that imprisonment, of my suddenly finding myself included among Jews, has stayed with me." Katcher, *Post-Mortem*.
66. Interview Klaus Schütz. Schütz recalled that Hanns-Peter Herz had many relationships with former Jewish Berliners because of his family background (his father was Jewish). Schütz also recalled from his later ambassadorship in Israel that refugees were fond of Berlin.
67. Steinitz, "Der 'Aufbau,'" 37–38. Both Herz and Steinitz were very proud of this idea in hindsight. See also "Hans Steinitz," in Kirchheimer and Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, 225–26. There is no official documentation from the Berlin Senate Chancellery on the origins and early years of the program.



68. Interview with Hanns-Peter Herz, conducted by Lina Nikou, Berlin, 8 April 2011. Galinski was also close to Klaus Schütz.
69. Heinrich Albertz was governing mayor (*Oberbürgermeister*) of Berlin from December 1966 to October 1967. More details on him can be found at “Heinrich Albertz: Regierender Bürgermeister vom 2.12.1996 bis 19.10.1967,” *Der Regierende Bürgermeister: Senatskanzlei, Berlin.de* website, <http://www.berlin.de/rbmskzl/regierender-buergermeister/buergermeister-von-berlin/buergermeistergalerie/artikel.4626.php>, accessed 27 February 2014. It cannot be determined whether Albertz’s background was decisive in his approval of such a program.
70. Interview with Hanns-Peter Herz, conducted by Lina Nikou, Berlin, 8 April 2011. Also see section on Hamburg above.
71. Interview Klaus Schütz. The administrative costs connected to the program were covered through the general Berlin budget. Schütz held his post as mayor from 1967 to 1977.
72. *Der Senat von Berlin: Senatsbeschluss Nr. 1720/69* from 10 June 1969 re. “Einladungen an in der nationalsozialistischen Zeit verfolgte ehemalige Mitbürger,” cited in Nikou, “Coming Back Home?” Herz recalled a resistance to the focus on Jews that did not, in his view, derive from anti-Semitic attitudes, but because some people thought that Germany had already done a lot for Jews but nothing for other people who had had to leave Berlin. Klaus Schütz remembered no significant resistance: “It is in the nature of things, all things that [have to do] with emigration and Nazi things and Nazi persecution, it goes without saying that one deals with them together with everybody else and from my point of view there was never any fight or difference in opinion over this.” In his opinion, this was a clear decision also because, as he put it, Berlin was a Social Democratic stronghold and there was no doubt that it was a political effort.
73. Interview Klaus Schütz.
74. PA AA B5, F49: Letter from Tel Aviv Embassy to AA Bonn, Oct. 25, 1965. See Lavy, *Germany and Israel*, 130ff.
75. PA AA B5, F49: Letter from Deutscher Städtetag to AA, Dec. 28, 1965; Letter from Tel Aviv Embassy to AA Bonn, Jan. 6, 1966.
76. PA AA B5, F49: Letter from Washington Embassy to AA Bonn, Feb. 16, 1967. The Association of German Cities represents the interests of German municipalities and municipal self-government vis-à-vis the federal government, the federal council, the federal parliament, the European Union, and other organizations. See Kräutler, *Dieselbe Stadt*, 15, 55.
77. *Aufbau* 35 (20 June 1969).
78. “Viele Emigranten wollen Berlin besuchen,” *Aufbau* 35 (11 July 1969).
79. Between 1933 and 1939, about eighty thousand Jews left Berlin. For more information on the response, see, e.g., Hans Steinitz, “Berlins zweite Wiedergeburt: West-Berlin: ‘Boomtown’ hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang,” *Aufbau* 35 (3 October 1969); Hanns Peter Hertz in a letter to the editor *Aufbau* 35 (19 September 1969). See also *Aufbau* 35 (3 October 1969) and (17 October 1969).
80. Völckers, “Eine Chronik der Berlin-Besuche emigrierter Mitbürger,” 35.
81. See Schlör, “In weiter Ferne: Berlin.”
82. Original German. Several refugees from Los Angeles used these exact lines in their letters to the Berlin Senate Chancellery in the fall of 1969. SK (Senatskanzlei) Berlin, Charter und Dankschreiben, Folder: Frühjahr 1973 Charter Amerika Montreal / Los Angeles – Signatur 128.
83. “Viele Emigranten wollen Berlin besuchen,” *Aufbau* 35 (11 July 1969).
84. In German. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 45.
85. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 49. Rabbi Leo Trepp also traveled from California to his former hometown of Oldenburg in Lower Saxony every year starting in 1954. He also became involved in German Jewish reconciliation, something his widow celebrates on a website: <http://leotrepp.org/en/>.

86. "Re: 'Mahnmal' in Krefeld," *Aufbau* 34 (5 October 1973).
87. See also the case of James May *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1997): 6; and that of Mrs. Putziger *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 24.
88. The Jewish Communities in Konstanz and Weiden, e.g., *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 17–18.
89. See, e.g., Herf, *Divided Memory*, 245, 284.
90. "'Besuch in der alten Heimat'—Eine Dokumentation," *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
91. See also their involvement in Hamburg, Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*.
92. Michael Brenner and Norbert Frei, in Brenner, ed., *Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 259ff.
93. *Ibid.*
94. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 25.
95. Michael Brenner and Norbert Frei, in Brenner, ed., *Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 263–64.
96. Kansteiner, "Losing the War," 113.
97. *Ibid.*, 116ff.
98. Tom Dreisbach, "Transatlantic Broadcasts: Holocaust in America and West Germany," *Penn History Review* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2009), Article 7:77. Accessed at <http://repository.upenn.edu/phr/vol16/iss2/7>.
99. *Ibid.*, 89.
100. Judt, *Postwar*, 810–11.
101. While the 1970s saw less public and media attention to Nazi topics than the 1960s—partly due to the oil crisis in 1973 and domestic Red Army Faction terrorism, interest in the history of National Socialism once again increased in the late 1970s. Kansteiner, "Losing the War," 121–22.
102. "Ernie Sommer," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 160.
103. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994); or, e.g., "Das Schicksal der Nauheimer Juden," *Aufbau* 53 (19 June 1987). Kurt Shuler became friendly with the archivist of his hometown Nuremberg and contributed two articles to the series *Transit Nürnberg*. [http://www.rjjo.homepage.t-online.de/pdf\\_2/DE\\_NU\\_JU\\_shuler.pdf](http://www.rjjo.homepage.t-online.de/pdf_2/DE_NU_JU_shuler.pdf). In Crailsheim, an initiative from the Volkshochschule and a working group Jews in Crailsheim prepared the visits. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
104. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 40–41.
105. See *ibid.*
106. Part of a subtitle in Kansteiner, "Losing the War."
107. See Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 197–98.
108. See, e.g., Frei, *1945 und wir*; Funke, "Bitburg, Jews, and Germans"; Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past*; Eder, "Ein 'Holocaustsyndrom?'"
109. See Till, *The New Berlin*, 20.
110. Kansteiner, "Losing the War," 126.
111. *Ibid.*, 127; and Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 199. It is important to note that this attempt at "normalization" was not only of interest within the confines of the West German state but also with regard to Germany's place on the international scene. Kohl wanted to escape the special position (*Sonderrolle*) that the FRG still held because of its National Socialist past and the atrocities of World War II. See Eder, "Ein 'Holocaustsyndrom?,'" 634, and the extensive literature he cites on this larger topic.
112. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 33.
113. See Falk Pingel, "From Evasion to a Crucial Tool," 139. The special visitor edition of *Aufbau* includes reports of several high school projects on Jewish history that won prizes in such competitions—e.g., Lüdenscheid won the first prize in a state-wide competition.

114. "Hierauf kann jeder Mithelfer stolz sein," *Aktuell* 23 (September 1977). By 1994, Henry Marx, Steinitz's successor as *Aufbau's* editor in chief, believed that "by far the greatest part of those invited" had accepted the invitations to their cities. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
115. Original German, 10 August 1972, to SK Berlin, Dankschreiben 1975–76 (L-W).
116. Benz, "Rückkehr auf Zeit," 201.
117. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
118. Rosel Sievs lived in Ireland and wrote this letter in English. It was subsequently translated into German and upon the initiative of the city's public relations officer published not only in the commemoration brochure for the invitation program but also in the local newspaper. The invitation program in Aurich was carried out in 1992. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
119. Interview Larry Greenbaum.
120. On nostalgia, see, e.g., Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*; and Fritzsche, "How Nostalgia Narrates Modernity."
121. Different letters sent to the Berlin Senate Chancellery. One typical example reads as follows (orig. in German): "In the meantime I had heart surgery and my health is not the best. Since, as of today, I unfortunately still have not received an invitation, I would be very grateful if you could make it possible that I can once more see my old hometown before it will be too late." Letter from January 1987, SK Berlin, Folder 1988 (S).
122. Original German. Letter from 20 March 1983, SK Berlin, Folder 1983 (L).
123. In Berlin we see this in particular with Brigitte Roeper. When she died, rather young, in 1996, one former visitor wrote an obituary for her, which was published in *Aktuell* 58 (1996).
124. Originally in German. *Aktuell* 2 (June 1970).
125. This was the case in 1972 and in the mid-1980s. "Bilanz" documents provided by Rüdiger Nemitz, SK Berlin.
126. The 1994 special edition of *Aufbau* also includes critical voices, but the main tone by editor in chief Henry Marx was positive. See Henry Marx, "Fast 120 deutsche Städte laden ein," *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 1.
127. *Aktuell* 4 (December 1970).
128. Walter Bucky had himself been back to Germany three or four times. To the question of how long he stayed, he answered "two weeks, three weeks, until my restitution was settled, you know." Interview with Walter Bucky, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, January 2, 1972, LBI NY, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results?qttype=pid&term=1326552>.
129. SK Berlin, Letter from 13 August 1979.
130. After the *Aktuell* office sent out four little publications on the topic of persecution and resistance in Berlin, one woman from Berkeley wrote that she hoped they would receive a lot of publicity. She and her daughter would make sure to pass them around in their circles because she found it painful that it was always the image of the bad Germany that got publicity. *Aktuell* 37 (November 1983).
131. *Aktuell* 21 (Oktober 1976).
132. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
133. *Ibid.*, 8.
134. SK Berlin, Letter from 1 July 1974 (T).
135. On the memorial landscape in Berlin see Till, *The New Berlin*.
136. As happened in Aschaffenburg, *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
137. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 40, 33.
138. Jack de Löwe praised the efforts of his former hometown of Norden, Lower Saxony. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 33.
139. This is also the case for Hamburg in the 1980s (Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 57ff). Visitors either did not share their criticism with the German organizers of these programs or these letters were not kept.

140. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 5.
141. The example from Aurich actually dates from a visit in 1992. I use it because it illustrates my point of the divergence of official narratives and the persistence of more sinister ones very well. Even after Holocaust consciousness had become so central in public discussions and particularly in the context of German unification in 1990, the mayor still held this particular outlook.
142. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 15.
143. “Ann Ikenberg,” in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 113, 104.
144. Almost all reports include a reference to this. See, e.g., report “Ein Besuch in Lahr,” *Aufbau* 53 (31 July 1987).
145. “Laupheim,” *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 11.
146. See, e.g., *ibid.*
147. See Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*.
148. Frequently letter writers used popular phrases such as “Ich bin ein Berliner” or “I still have a suitcase in Berlin” to express their bond with the city. One woman from New York expressed in a letter to Berlin, seemingly without any resentment: “I myself am 85 years old today and my thoughts are often in my beautiful Berlin. I am happy that Berlin is so beautiful again and has blossomed through the fabulous government. I wish my old Germany only the very best.” Letter from 20 March 1976, from New York to Berlin Senate, SK Berlin, Dankschreiben, 1977–1978 L-W.
149. Letter from 10 November 1979, from New York to SK Berlin, Dankschreiben 1979.
150. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 13.
151. Letter to SK Berlin from 1983, SK Berlin, Folder 1983 (W).
152. Letter to SK Berlin from 21 November 1985, SK Berlin, Folder 1985 (W); letter from 22 June 1975 to SK Berlin, Folder: Dankschreiben 1975–76.
153. Only very few people did return after visiting Germany. The story of Margot Friedlander, who returned to Berlin when she was in her late 80s, has received quite a lot of publicity. There is a film about her first trip to Berlin, *Don't Call it Heimweh* (2005), and her story of return has received much press coverage in Germany, particularly in Berlin. See Thomas Lackmann, “Ein Leben im Zwischenraum,” *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 1 April 2010, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/ein-leben-im-zwischenraum/>.
154. Conversation with Lisa Schmitt, Los Angeles, 7 February 2014.
155. On the other hand, there are a great number of refugees to whom such pictures are very dear. The homes of refugees I visited often displayed historic images of German cities. Also, refugees often expressed their joy over receiving an issue of *Aktuell* that featured photos of historic Berlin.
156. Albrecht Strauss from the University of North Carolina wrote to Marburg on 18 August 1985, one and a half years after his visit. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 25.
157. SK Berlin, letter from 21 August 1979 (F), R. K. *Aktuell* 44 (August 1986).
158. See Till, *The New Berlin*, 15.
159. Letter from Hilde Burton to the mayor of Nidderau, *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 26.
160. 21 August 1979 SK Berlin (F).
161. Translation mine. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 6–7.
162. See also Darlene Leiser-Shely, “Courage,” *Newsletter of the Benefactors of the Jewish Club of 1933* (September/October 2008).
163. Translation mine. *Aktuell* 44 (August 1986).
164. Marianne Spitzer’s concept of “postmemory” is related to this in some respect; see <http://www.postmemory.net/>. In this case, however, it is often not the parents’ memory but the wider memory culture on Germany, German Jewish refugees, and the Holocaust that affected the memory and identity of those who left Germany as young children.
165. Excerpt from a letter in German by Lore May Rasmussen, *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 22.

166. *Aktuell* 37 (November 1983).
167. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 32.
168. Gerda Lowenstein is an alias I invented.
169. Letter in German to Eberhard Diepgen, 1 September 1986, SK Berlin 1987 (B-C).
170. Letter in German to SK Berlin, 17 March 1979, SK Berlin 1987 (B-C).
171. Letter in German to Eberhard Diepgen, 1 September 1986, SK Berlin 1987 (B-C).
172. For a general overview of the phenomenon of the historical witness (*Zeitzeuge*), see Sabrow and Frei, eds, *Die Geburt des Zeitzeugen*.
173. Hans Sahl, "Hier wächst eine Jugend heran, die sich nichts vormachen lässt," *Aufbau* 53 (18 December 1987).
174. *Aktuell* 46 (February 1987).
175. "Bilanz" and "Etat" documents provided to me by Rüdiger Nemitz, SK Berlin.
176. In regard to the second generation of German Jewish refugees, Henry Marx writes (in German) in 1994: "There would be thousands of people who one must bring to look with pride at their German Jewish heritage. The German cities should make themselves acquainted with such a task—a mission for the 21st century, through which Germany could win new friends, which it urgently needs. "Fast 120 Städte laden ein," *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 2.
177. At the same time, efforts to preserve German Jewish heritage increased within the community. Herbert A. Strauss of the Research Foundation for Jewish Immigration conducted over one hundred interviews together with colleagues. Also, Michael A. Meyer, born in Berlin and an immigrant to Los Angeles, became one of the leading historians of German Jewish history.
178. See Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 207–38.
179. On the rise of Holocaust consciousness in the United States, see *ibid.*; Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*; Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors*.
180. This only grew stronger with German unification, when the recognition of a "historical responsibility" became a founding principle of the united Germany making a particular commitment to Jews around the world.
181. On normalization discourse, see Goschler and Kauders, in Brenner, *Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 360ff.
182. Judt, *Postwar*, 811. See the last chapter, "From the House of the Dead: An Essay on Modern European Memory," in *Postwar* for a more detailed but still concise overview.
183. Kräutler, *Dieselbe Stadt*, 18–19.
184. See *ibid.*, 34.
185. This renaming of streets and other city features has been referred to as "naming as geography" by Joseph Massad, although Massad refers to how this process is used to exclude certain groups and I use it to include people. Massad, "The 'Post-Colonial' Colony," 315.
186. For a discussion of ideas of national redemption through reconstructions of Jewish sites and the resulting passivity toward and ignorance of present problems, see Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 163ff.
187. See, e.g., the stories of how Bert and Siegfried Kirchheimer were invited and hosted by Bremerhaven and Saarbrücken on several occasions. Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, 181ff.
188. Eder, "Ein 'Holocaustsyndrom?'" 633.
189. See *ibid.*; and Eder's book *Holocaust Angst*.
190. A memoir that gives a powerful account of the complexity of problems and emotions that a refugee's return to her former hometown caused, not only for her but also her daughter and the Germans involved in the program, is Chapman, *Motherland*.

*Conclusion*

## GERMANY ON THEIR MINDS?



This phrase, minus the question mark, is a chapter title in a recent work by Hasia Diner that tells the story of the centrality of the Holocaust in the consciousness of American Jews after World War II. In their postwar discourse on the Holocaust, American Jews remained conscious and vocal not only about the murder of six million Jews but also about the role of Germany and the Germans as the perpetrators. The Germany that most American Jews had on their minds was the ultimate villain. For the many Jews from Germany who had fled the country before the outbreak of the war and settled in the United States, however, the image of their former home was more complicated. Whether Germany should be on the minds of German Jewish refugees at all was itself not a given but was a highly contentious and often debated subject among them. Could one engage with German matters without losing Jewish self-respect? Could one be a good American while adhering to German culture or taking an interest in the country's postwar political direction? If so, how should one balance these things?

The German Jewish refugee relationship to Germany, then, had to do with who the refugees imagined themselves to be in the aftermath of Nazi oppression and flight, and later with the discovery of murdered family and friends among millions of Jewish dead, and it was a major factor in how they identified themselves and their community.<sup>1</sup> Germany was “on their minds” and agendas so frequently not simply because they particularly did or did not want to engage with it, but often because broader political circumstances somehow dictated that engagement, or because West Germany initiated contact, or both. Because of the close and strategically important postwar relationship between the United States and West Germany, German Jews who came to America faced many situations

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Notes from this chapter begin on page 217.

in which they were confronted with Germany directly or indirectly, and the U.S. relationship to Germany was always a significant factor influencing their own image of Germany, as well as relationships and interactions with Germans. This was particularly apparent when the refugees were classified as enemy aliens after the United States joined the war. During that time, their German background was the basis for their legal classification as German enemy aliens, which forced them to engage with their German identity. In response to this, many, especially politically active refugees on the West Coast, politicized and foregrounded their particular German Jewish identity and connection to Germany—as victims of Nazi persecution and prime enemies of the Nazis—in order to cast themselves as loyal to the United States. During this time, then, due to external pressures that differed from the East to West Coast, where the enemy alien act was far more stringently applied, community members drew closer to their identity as German Jews, paradoxically in order to make themselves better candidates for becoming Americans.

When changes in the enemy alien classification allowed it, German Jewish refugees supported the Allied military campaign against the Nazis as soldiers in the U.S. Army and on the home front. For refugee soldiers, this position of belonging to the United States radically changed their relationship to the Germans they encountered because they were now in a position of power. Refugees on the home front, meanwhile, engaged in slightly less immediate questions of retribution for Nazi crimes and were able to use some of their knowledge of these crimes to incriminate perpetrators through various U.S. government channels. In these ways, belonging to America transformed refugees' identity: they were no longer merely victims of the Nazis but now had some direct or indirect empowerment in relation to Germany and were able to “settle” with the Germans, gain some level of satisfaction, or simply fight (and win) against their former oppressors if they wished.

Toward the end of the war, as German Jewish refugees joined discussions of larger American organizations on the topics of reparation and restitution, they once again foregrounded their German Jewish identity. Instead of blending in with greater American Jewry, which some refugees hoped to do, refugee community leaders projected a German Jewish voice to advance their specific claims against Germany, as well as to assert their moral authority to make them. The formulation of these demands for restitution for the crimes committed against them meant that Jewish refugees foresaw engagement with Germany in the post-war period if the Allies won the war. However, there was no agreement over what the character and extent of this engagement should be. In their participation in the public debate in America during 1943 and 1944 over Germany's postwar future, German Jewish refugees did not present a unified voice. Nevertheless, they shared the view that they could legitimately engage with Germany only in the Jewish interest.

Under this presupposition, the German Jewish refugee press watched developments in Germany during the early postwar years very carefully. While the same may be said about the broader American Jewish press, German Jews took a particular interest in details, looking at developments on the federal and the local level, and judging with an expertise borne of close acquaintance and inside knowledge. They were not slow to voice their displeasure whenever the West German government misstepped or misspoke.

Nor was the West German government deaf to the criticism. The Western Allies had made it clear that postwar Germany would be judged, among other things, by the way it dealt with the group of people it had so recently tried to exterminate. Additionally, the new West German government sought to secure a solid position in the West and a close bond with the United States in particular. This, combined with more general public relations and an anti-Semitic narrative of great influence of Jews on U.S. policy, caused West German officials to take the opinions of the American German Jewish community very seriously. While a major change in the relationship took place at that time because West Germany was pressured to change, I have demonstrated that the refugees contributed to this change. The critical perspective from outside the geographic territory of the Federal Republic was an important factor in its re-engagement with German Jews. This was the first point at which the relationship between the organized German Jewish community in the United States and West German officials became mutually constitutive in the postwar period. One sees this in West German government decisions made with German Jewish positions and reactions in mind, and even with the input of German Jewish refugees. In the pursuit of good relations, the West German Foreign Office appointed officials who represented the projected ideal of a new Germany to areas with large Jewish—and particularly German Jewish—constituencies. These appointments, in turn, then contributed to change in the Foreign Office itself.

For German Jewish leaders who had demanded restitution, the West German restitution legislation, while not without its difficulties, was an acceptable point of engagement with Germany, being directly in refugees' interest. It was through this engagement and the interactions surrounding restitution, however, that fundamental change in the relationship took place. German government officials who were interested in making restitution work not only for the sake of promoting a positive image of Germany, but also to make up for the past and for the sake of the people it was intended to help, effectively communicated to the refugees that they mattered to them. In the interactions that developed in the 1950s, then, we see the development of a relationship between West German officials and the organized refugee community in the United States in which both sides looked to each other and affected each other's self-understanding. The contact allowed refugees, in a discourse of alternating praise and criticism (as they saw fit to comment on West German actions and policies), to see themselves as moral



guides in relation to Germany and to be acknowledged in this role. On the side of the Federal Republic, the sensitivity to the Jewish refugee position, even if only present in select individuals, contributed to a more accepting political climate and facilitated further improvement in the relationship.

Thus, the postwar relationship between German Jewish refugees and Germany was initially driven significantly by pragmatism, but also by the existence of leaders from both sides who did not want to see the Holocaust as the endpoint of relations and who desired reconciliation. The re-establishment of trusted relationships, which had survived the Holocaust, between individual German Jewish refugees and local West German citizens was tremendously important to facilitating a dialogue and promoting that dialogue in the respective communities. Many of those who drove the relationship had been politically active together before the war, and some on the non-Jewish German side had also suffered under the Nazis. From the German Jewish community, rabbis were frequently important mediators, as they were often knowledgeable about German conditions, having been invited to West Germany by the Jewish community in their former hometown or, as we have seen, by the West German government.<sup>2</sup> *Aufbau*, however, was highly influential in this process of “bridge building” through its general reporting on German developments and in its publishing of personal recollections from ordinary refugees who visited Germany.

Only small numbers of refugees visited Germany in the 1950s and came into contact with Germans working in the country’s diplomatic missions in the United States. For the most part, the relationship between most German Jewish refugees and West Germany was mediated by proxies until at least the 1960s: refugees who had interactions with Germans or traveled to West Germany reported on it, and developments in Germany were observed and debated from the United States. At the same time, only very few West Germans had interactions with refugees living in the United States. Beginning in the 1960, the visitor programs changed this and brought more immediate contacts for many more German Jewish refugees with West Germany and Germans. This major change in the relationship resulted from, on the one hand, the initiative of the few German Jewish refugees who had connections to and an interest in Germany and proposed such visits, and, on the other hand, West Germans who had an interest in reconciliation. Important drivers in this process were teachers and local historians, as well as members of Christian reconciliation movements, in particular the society for Christian Jewish cooperation, and Social Democrats. While the number of West German citizens who had such interests and interactions with German Jewish refugees remained comparatively small, more and more people from outside official government circles and those working at restitution offices got involved over time.

The visitor programs for Jewish refugees must be understood as both a driver and a symptom of West German processes of confronting the Nazi past. Propelled

by a growing climate of Holocaust memorialization nationally and internationally, these programs became most widespread in the late 1980s. During this period, the drive for change in the German Jewish relationship came primarily from West Germans, motivated by attempts to come to terms with the Nazi past, to demonstrate their good will, and to behave like “good Germans.” The refugee contribution to this effort, as survivors and witnesses of Nazi persecution, cannot be overestimated.

For visiting refugees, as we have seen, the visitor program deeply affected and intensified their German Jewish identity, though in highly variable and not always positive ways. While German organizers’ goal was to reconcile and reach a good relationship with refugees, some visitors suffered from homesickness, regret, or anger at what had been destroyed in Nazi Germany. Reconciliation with Germans of the present, even if it happened, could not undo the damage—repatriation for refugees who might have wanted it was not possible unless they could pay for it themselves, visits were limited and short, the dead could not be brought back to life, and terrible memories sometimes overpowered good ones.

However, most refugees seem to have accepted the visits as “gestures of reconciliation.”<sup>3</sup> In their reports, visitors said that the trip provided them with a sense of closure, was therapeutic, brought back positive memories, and in many cases gave their past a meaning because they were able to bear witness to younger generations of Germans. While individual reactions varied, the organized community broadly welcomed these programs, as one of their strongest consequences was an intensified connection to refugees’ German Jewish heritage. At the 1956 annual meeting of the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, chairman Max Gruenewald had lamented the fading group identity of German Jewish refugees:

What brought us together, what ought to keep us together, is the common heritage and our sharing in a historical experience of ghastly proportions. In a very short time this joint experience has lost much of its suggestive power, and the stock of common thoughts and joint memories has been all but spent. The talent of assimilation, one of the characteristics of German Jews, has developed in this country into an artistry of forgetting what lies behind us.<sup>4</sup>

German Jewish refugees’ relationship with Germany significantly revived their consciousness of common heritage. Heritage is intrinsically connected to notions of present and future identities. While the connection with Germany was based in their past, the refugees’ relationship to their former homeland went beyond the retrospective. Over the course of the fifty years mapped out in this book, their relationship to the concept and country of Germany changed from something one related to only in terms of the past to something important for their future—the future of individual families and the viability of the organized refugee community in the United States as a whole. For many refugees, it was important to

share stories of their German past with their children and grandchildren so that their own history would not be forgotten and their descendants could feel like a part of a distinct community, something that held and holds considerable significance especially in the United States. At the same time, future-oriented relations with Germany went beyond the focus on their own community. Feeling a responsibility toward educating young Germans so that they would not repeat the mistakes of their parents and grandparents, some refugees made it their mission to speak to them of persecution, flight, and murder, hoping that it would make the world a better place for generations to come.

In the history of the relationship between German Jewish refugees in the United States and Germany, each side contributed significantly to the other. The relationship changed as Germany changed, and the refugees played an important part in bringing this change about. Because of the history of persecution and murder, the relationship was never a happy or uncomplicated one. Yet, despite it constantly being questioned and fragile, the relationship between German Jewish refugees and Germany remained continually entangled, for good or ill, each affecting the other.

## Notes

1. For American Jews, this was similar in that the way they spoke about Germany was a “memorial obligation.” Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*, 217.
2. Cornelia Wilhelm is currently researching the history of German Jewish (refugee) rabbis in the United States. Her work promises further insight into their role in this process.
3. Henry Marx, “Fast 120 Städte laden ein,” *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 2.
4. Max Gruenewald, “Opening Address,” in American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, Inc., *Annual Meeting: Reports and Addresses*, 1956, 9.

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