

# **Jewish Immigration to the United States**

## **Immigration of Eastern European Jews**

None of the early migratory movements assumed the significance and volume of that from [Russia](#) and neighboring countries. This emigration, mainly from [Russian Poland](#) and other areas of the [Russian Empire](#), began as far back as [1821](#), but did not become especially noteworthy until after the [German immigration](#) fell off in [1870](#). Though nearly 50,000 Russian, Polish, [Galician](#), and [Romanian](#) Jews went to the United States during the succeeding decade, it was not until the [pogroms](#), anti-Jewish uprisings in Russia, of the early 1880s, that the immigration assumed extraordinary proportions. From Russia alone the emigration rose from an annual average of 4,100 in the decade [1871-80](#) to an annual average of 20,700 in the decade [1881-90](#). Additional measures of persecution in Russia in the early nineties and continuing to the present time have resulted in large increases in the emigration, England and the United States being the principal lands of refuge. The Romanian persecutions, beginning in 1900, forced large numbers of Jews to seek refuge in the US.

By 1924, two million Jews had arrived from Eastern Europe. Growing anti-immigration feelings in the United States at this time resulted in the [National Origins Quota of 1924](#), which severely restricted immigration from Eastern Europe after that time. The Jewish community took the lead in opposing immigration restrictions, which remained in effect until 1965.

## **World War I**

As early as 1914, the American Jewish community mobilized its resources to assist the victims of the European war. Cooperating to a degree not previously seen, the various factions of the American Jewish community—native-born and immigrant, Reform, Orthodox, secular, and socialist—coalesced to form what eventually became known as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. All told, American Jews raised 63 million dollars in relief funds during the war years and became more immersed in European Jewish affairs than ever before.

## **Refugees from Nazi Germany**

In the years before and during World War II the United States Congress, the Roosevelt Administration, and public opinion expressed concern about the fate of Jews in Europe but consistently refused to permit large-scale immigration of Jewish refugees.

In a report issued by the State Department, Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat noted that the United States accepted only 21,000 refugees from Europe and did not significantly raise or even fill its restrictive quotas, accepting far fewer Jews per capita than many of the neutral European countries and fewer in absolute terms than Switzerland.

According to David Wyman, "The United States and its Allies were willing to attempt almost nothing to save the Jews." There is some debate as to whether U.S. policies were generally targeted against all immigrants or specifically against Jews in particular. Wyman characterized Breckenridge Long as a nativist, more anti-immigrant than just anti-Semitic.

U.S. opposition to immigration in general in the late 1930s was motivated by the grave economic pressures, the high unemployment rate, and social frustration and disillusionment. The U.S. refusal to support specifically Jewish immigration, however, stemmed from something else, namely anti-Semitism, which had increased in the late 1930s and continued to rise in the 1940s. It was an important ingredient in America's negative response to Jewish refugees.

About 100,000 German Jews did arrive in the 1930s, escaping Hitler's persecution

## **World War II and the Holocaust**

The United States' tight immigration policies were not lifted during the Holocaust, news of which began to reach the United States in 1941 and 1942 and it has been estimated that 190 000 - 200 000 Jews could have been saved during the [Second World War](#) had it not been for bureaucratic obstacles to immigration deliberately created by [Breckinridge Long](#) and others.

Rescue of the European Jewish population was not a priority for the US during the war, and the American Jewish community did not realize the severity of the Holocaust until late in the conflict. Despite strong public and political sentiment to the contrary, however, there were some who encouraged the U.S. government to help victims of [Nazi genocide](#). In 1943, just before [Yom Kippur](#), 400 rabbis marched in [Washington, D.C.](#) to draw attention to the plight of Holocaust victims. (See "[The Day the Rabbis Marched](#).") A week later, Senator [William Warren Barbour](#) (R; New Jersey), one of a handful of politicians who met with the rabbis on the steps of the U.S. Capital, proposed legislation that would have allowed as many as 100,000 victims of the Holocaust to emigrate temporarily to the United States. Barbour died six weeks after introducing the bill, and it was not passed. A parallel bill was introduced in the [House of Representatives](#) by Rep. [Samuel Dickstein](#) (D; New York). This also failed to pass.<sup>[13]</sup>

During the [Holocaust](#), less than 30,000 Jews a year reached the United States, and some were turned away due to immigration policies. The US did not change its immigration policies until 1948.