

GERMAN TRANSATLANTIC OCEANLINER "ST LOUIS" SETS SAIL FOR??

THE SHIP NOBODY WANTED WITH 937 PEOPLE ABOARD

AKA : 1938 SS ST LOUIS – "THE VOYAGE OF THE DAMNED"

THIS ARTICLE HAS TWO PARTS: A&B

176A



The SS St Louis

The first thing to establish here is that this is a true story. Its controversy lies in the question "Did the United States do everything possible to alleviate this "situation"? Some articles on the subject say "yes" while others say "no" and blame President Roosevelt personally for, and I quote, "doing nothing" or "ignoring it". I've picked two articles that tend to represent each side of the "story". Both articles are shown here. The first article is taken from: <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005267> while the second comes from the following link: <http://www.historynewsnetwork.org/article/151897>

THE STORY BEGINS

On May 13, 1939, the German transatlantic liner St. Louis sailed from Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba. On the voyage were 938 passengers, one of whom was not a refugee. Almost all were Jews fleeing from the Third Reich. Most were German citizens, some were from Eastern Europe, and a few were officially "stateless."

The majority of the Jewish passengers had applied for US visas, and had planned to stay in Cuba only until they could enter the United States. But by the time the St. Louis sailed, there were signs that political conditions in Cuba might keep the passengers from landing there. The US State Department in Washington, the US consulate in Havana, some Jewish organizations, and refugee agencies were all aware of the situation. *The passengers themselves were not informed;* most were compelled to return to Europe.

Since the Kristallnacht (literally the "Night of Crystal," more commonly known as the "Night of Broken Glass") pogrom of November 9-10, 1938, the German government had sought to accelerate the pace of forced Jewish emigration. The German Foreign Office and the Propaganda Ministry also hoped to exploit the unwillingness of other nations to admit large numbers of Jewish refugees to justify the Nazi regime's anti-Jewish goals and policies both domestically in Germany and in the world at large.

The owners of the St. Louis, the Hamburg-Amerika Line, knew even before the ship sailed that its passengers might have trouble disembarking in Cuba.

The passengers, who held landing certificates and transit visas issued by the Cuban Director-General of Immigration, did not know that Cuban President Federico Laredo Bru had issued a decree just a week before the ship sailed that invalidated all recently issued landing certificates. *Entry to Cuba required written authorization from the Cuban Secretaries of State and Labor and the posting of a \$500 bond (The bond was waived for US tourists).*

The voyage of the St. Louis attracted a great deal of media attention. Even before the ship sailed from Hamburg, right-wing Cuban newspapers deplored its impending arrival and demanded that the Cuban government cease admitting Jewish refugees. Indeed, the passengers became victims of bitter infighting within the Cuban government. The Director-General of the Cuban immigration office, Manuel Benitez Gonzalez, had come under a great deal of public scrutiny for the illegal sale of landing certificates.

He routinely sold such documents for \$150 or more and, according to US estimates, had amassed a personal fortune of \$500,000 to \$1,000,000. Though he was a protégé of Cuban army chief of staff (and future president) Fulgencio Batista, Benitez's self-enrichment through corruption had fueled sufficient resentment in the Cuban government to bring about his resignation.

More than money, corruption, and internal power struggles were at work in Cuba. Like the United States and the Americas in general, Cuba struggled with the Great Depression.

Many Cubans resented the relatively large number of refugees (including 2,500 Jews), whom the government had already admitted into the country, because they appeared to be competitors for scarce jobs.

When the St. Louis arrived in Havana harbor on May 27, the Cuban government admitted 28 passengers: 22 of them were Jewish and had valid US visas; the remaining six-four Spanish citizens and two Cuban nationals--had valid entry documents. One further passenger, after attempting to commit suicide, was evacuated to a hospital in Havana. The remaining 908 passengers (one passenger had died of natural causes en route)--including one non-refugee, a Hungarian Jewish businessman--had been awaiting entry visas and carried only Cuban transit visas issued by Gonzales. 743 had been waiting to receive US visas. The Cuban government refused to admit them or to allow them to disembark from the ship. After Cuba denied entry to the passengers on the St. Louis, the press throughout Europe and the Americas, including the United States, brought the story to millions of readers throughout the world. Though US newspapers generally portrayed the plight of the passengers with great sympathy, only a few journalists and editors suggested that the refugees be admitted into the United States.

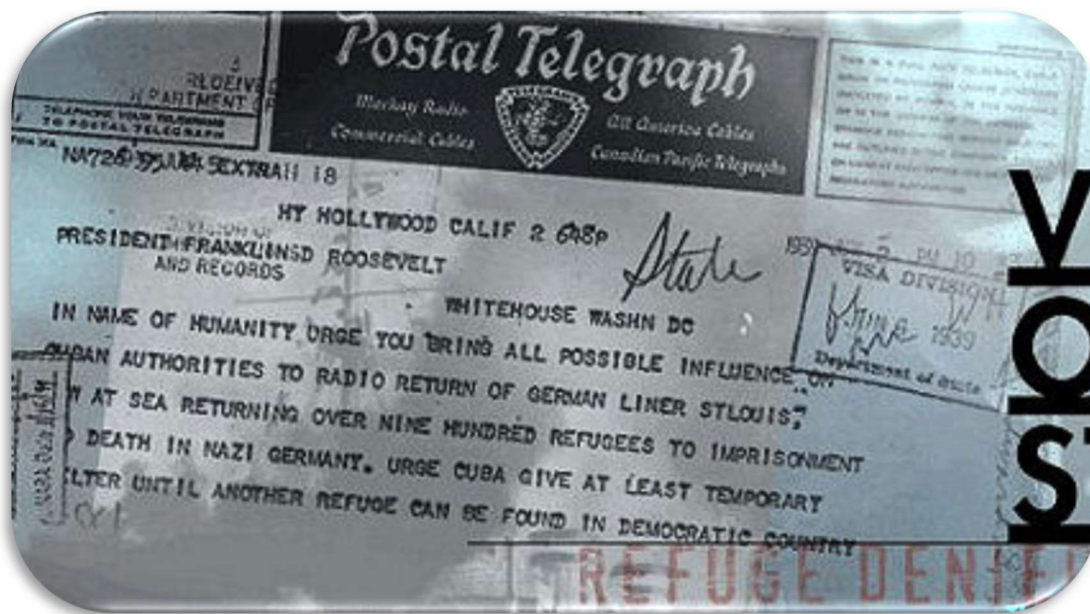
On May 28, the day after the St. Louis docked in Havana, Lawrence Berenson, an attorney representing the US-based Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), arrived in Cuba to negotiate on behalf of the St. Louis passengers. A former president of the Cuban-American Chamber of Commerce, Berenson had had extensive business experience in Cuba. He met with President Bru, but failed to persuade him to admit the passengers into Cuba. On June 2, Bru ordered the ship out of Cuban waters. Nevertheless, the negotiations continued, as the St. Louis sailed slowly toward Miami. Bru offered to admit the passengers if the JDC posted a \$453,500 bond (\$500 per passenger). Berenson made a counteroffer, but Bru rejected the proposal and broke off negotiations.



SS St Louis off the coast of Florida

Sailing so close to Florida that they could see the lights of Miami, some passengers on the St. Louis cabled President Franklin D. Roosevelt asking for refuge. Roosevelt never responded. The State Department and the White House had decided not to take extraordinary measures to permit the refugees to enter the United States.

A State Department telegram sent to a passenger stated that the passengers must "await their turns on the waiting list and qualify for and obtain immigration visas before they may be admissible into the United States." US diplomats in Havana intervened once more with the Cuban government to admit the passengers on a "humanitarian" basis, but without success.



The telegram that was supposedly ignored by FDR

Quotas established in the US Immigration and Nationality Act of 1924 strictly limited the number of immigrants who could be admitted to the United States each year. In 1939, the annual combined German-Austrian immigration quota was 27,370 and was quickly filled. In fact, there was a waiting list of at least several years. US officials could only have granted visas to the St. Louis passengers by denying them to the thousands of German Jews placed further up on the waiting list. Public opinion in the United States, although ostensibly sympathetic to the plight of refugees and critical of Hitler's policies, continued to favor immigration restrictions. The Great Depression had left millions of people in the United States unemployed and fearful of competition for the scarce few jobs available. It also fueled anti-Semitism, xenophobia, nativism, and isolationism. A Fortune Magazine poll at the time indicated that 83 percent of Americans opposed relaxing restrictions on immigration. President Roosevelt could have issued an executive order to admit the St. Louis refugees, but this general hostility to immigrants, the gains of isolationist Republicans in the Congressional elections of 1938, and Roosevelt's consideration of running for an unprecedented third term as president were among the political considerations that militated against taking this extraordinary step in an unpopular cause.

Roosevelt was not alone in his reluctance to challenge the mood of the nation on the immigration issue. Three months before the St. Louis sailed, Congressional leaders in both US houses allowed to die in committee a bill sponsored by Senator Robert Wagner (D-N.Y.) and Representative Edith Rogers (R-Mass.). This bill would have admitted 20,000 Jewish children from Germany above the existing quota.

Two smaller ships carrying Jewish refugees sailed to Cuba in May 1939. The French ship, the *Flandre*, carried 104 passengers; the *Orduña*, a British vessel, held 72 passengers. Like the St. Louis, these ships were not permitted to dock in Cuba. The *Flandre* turned back to its point of departure in France, while the *Orduña* proceeded to a series of Latin American ports. Its passengers finally disembarked in the US-controlled Canal Zone in Panama. The United States eventually admitted most of them.

Following the US government's refusal to permit the passengers to disembark, the St. Louis sailed back to Europe on June 6, 1939. The passengers did not return to Germany, however. Jewish organizations (particularly the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) negotiated with four European governments to secure entry visas for the passengers: Great Britain took 288 passengers; the Netherlands admitted 181 passengers, Belgium took in 214 passengers; and 224 passengers found at least temporary refuge in France. Of the 288 passengers admitted by Great Britain, all survived World War II save one, who was killed during an air raid in 1940. Of the 620 passengers who returned to continent, 87 (14%) managed to emigrate before the German invasion of Western Europe in May 1940. 532 St. Louis passengers were trapped when Germany conquered Western Europe. Just over half, 278 survived the Holocaust. 254 died: 84 who had been in Belgium; 84 who had found refuge in Holland, and 86 who had been admitted to France.



The most recent picture of some of Survivors

Seventy years after the MS St. Louis was turned away from the United States, the surviving passengers of the ill-fated voyage may be reuniting for the last time near where their chance at freedom was denied. **Thirty-three of the 75 survivors** — ranging in age from 71 to 91 are seen above. They signed a U.S. Senate proclamation issued earlier this year marking the first time the United States officially acknowledged the suffering of those aboard the ship when **FDR refused entry into the USA.** (See following article)

PART TWO

176B

THE REST (THE OTHER SIDE) OF THE STORY

Information taken from



Critics of Franklin Delano Roosevelt often use the ship the St. Louis as an emblem of FDR's alleged indifference toward the Holocaust. In Hollywood's version, now deeply engrained in American popular culture, the 937 German-Jewish passengers of the MS St. Louis undertook the "voyage of the damned." The president could have saved them and did nothing. As a result, most of them perished.

In our new book *FDR and the Jews*, we noted in passing that American officials did not order the Coast Guard to prevent the St. Louis from landing in the United States. Since our book appeared a few months ago our critics in the press -- and some surviving St. Louis passengers -- have complained about this particular statement.

Though US newspapers generally portrayed the plight of the passengers with great sympathy, only a few journalists and editors suggested that the refugees be admitted into the United States.



Captain Gustav Schröder

MS St. Louis Captain Gustav Schröder, the commander of the ship, was a non-Jewish German and an anti-Nazi who went to great lengths to ensure dignified treatment for his passengers. He arranged for Jewish religious services and commanded his crew to treat the refugee passengers as they would any other customers of the cruise line. As the situation of the vessel deteriorated, he personally negotiated and schemed to find them a safe haven (for instance, at one point he formulated plans to wreck the ship on the British coast to force the passengers to be taken as refugees). He refused to return the ship to Germany until all the passengers had been given entry to some other country. He was eventually honored in Israel and Germany following WW 2.

We do not dispute the recollections of St. Louis survivors that they saw and heard Coast Guard vessels while the ship steamed in waters near Florida. But the survivors could not have known the real mission of the Coast Guard.

Our work also reveals that the pre-history of this May-June 1939 voyage dates back to the previous year, and it hardly demonstrates American indifference toward the fate of Jews in Germany. The St. Louis never would have journeyed to Cuba with Jewish refugees aboard if not for successful prior initiatives of the Roosevelt administration.

Following the Nazi pogrom in known as the Night of Broken Glass (Kristallnacht in German) in November 1938, the Roosevelt administration pushed to find havens for German and Austrian Jews in Latin American countries, especially Cuba. After meeting with President Roosevelt in Washington, Cuban strongman Fulgencio Batista announced that he was "deeply moved by the sad plight of the political refugees" and that Cuban officials "would heartily cooperate with President Roosevelt in his plan to relieve the terrible situation abroad." Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, FDR's man in the State Department, asked all U.S. ambassadors in Latin America to communicate the administration's interest in providing places of refuge for persecuted Jews. Perhaps as a quid pro quo, Batista won the administration's agreement to reduce the tariff on Cuban sugar and to back economic, technical, and military assistance to his government.

The American immigration quota for Germany was then filled, and only an unsympathetic Congress could raise it. Several hundred thousand German Jews clustered on a ten-year waiting list for American visas. If they got out of Germany, wherever they went, they could wait their turn to enter the U.S. under the substantial German quota. Hence their interest in getting to Cuba.

In turn, Cuban officials profited by charging heavy fees for visas or tourist landing permits. By the summer of 1939, estimates of the total number of German-Jewish refugees in Cuba ranged from 5,000 to 6,000 in a country with a population of about 4.5 million.

Most of the 937 passengers on the *St. Louis*, which sailed from Hamburg on May 13, had what they thought were valid Cuban tourist landing permits, purchased from the German shipping line Hapag. While the ship was en route, the Cuban government, in response to pressures from Cuban anti-Semites, invalidated these tourist documents. Two additional ships with smaller numbers of refugees who had similar documents and problems arrived within days. They departed without leaving passengers in Havana, but the *St. Louis* remained.

If forced back to Germany, the *St. Louis* passengers faced the grim fate of imprisonment in concentration camps -- extermination camps would not exist for another two and one-half years. One veteran of Buchenwald slit his wrists and plunged into the harbor. The international press picked up a political story with spectacular human interest.

As the German captain of the *St. Louis* marked time for a few days by sailing along the Florida coast, telegrams from friends and relatives of passengers bombarded the White House and the State Department. Some wanted the U.S. to pressure Cuba; others wanted the U.S. to admit the passengers, at least temporarily.

Roosevelt was in Hyde Park when the deadlock in Havana harbor occurred. After he returned to Washington on May 31, illness confined him to his room for several days. Undersecretary Welles, a veteran of dealing with difficult and corrupt Cuban regimes, knew that an official American attempt to force Cuban acceptance of the *St. Louis* passengers would have ruined FDR's Good Neighbor Policy and undermined America's standing in Latin America generally at a time when war seemed near.



Voyage of the SS St. Louis

Welles and FDR also knew that any attempt to admit the passengers to America in violation of the quota limits and ahead of others on the waiting list would have jeopardized their top priority of getting Congress to ease the restrictive neutrality laws. This was a prerequisite to aiding nations resisting Nazi aggression in the event of war.

Once the ship meandered toward Miami, the Coast Guard began to track it. The Coast Guard had no reason to prevent it from landing at an American port: the passengers lacked American visas and could not enter or stay. There was no political asylum for refugees at that time. The official history of the Coast Guard indicates that Coast Guard ships had no orders to prevent a landing. High American officials still expected the Cubans to relent, so there was no need for another solution.

The State Department rejected as illegal a proposal for using the Virgin Islands as a holding area: the Virgin Islands could not take in tourists who lacked a permanent home to which they could return. But as late as June 5, the Cuban ambassador believed that his country would soon accept the passengers given sufficient financing.

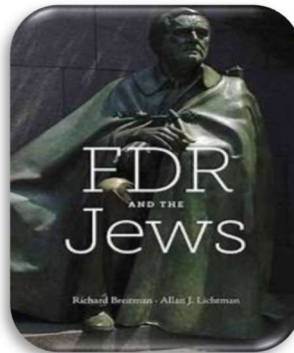
After the Joint Distribution Committee, which was negotiating on behalf of the passengers, lost contact with the ship, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. -- the only Jew in Roosevelt's cabinet -- asked the Coast Guard to locate and track it without any publicity. Phone transcripts reveal clearly that Morgenthau intended to keep the ship in sight during negotiations to find refuge for the passengers, in Cuba or elsewhere.

Morgenthau's sympathetic intervention remained unknown to some surviving St. Louis passengers nearly seventy-five years later. He knew that negotiations were underway, and he wanted the ship to head for the right haven.

The negotiations succeeded. Advocates for refugees, assisted by the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, a Roosevelt initiative, and the State Department found places for all the St. Louis passengers in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and Britain. These were safe havens in the summer of 1939, a time when the war and the Holocaust had not begun. Not a single passenger went back to Germany.

Tragically, the ill fortune of war and the Holocaust later threatened those passengers placed on the continent and caught up about one-third of them. But only those who could magically see into the future could have forecast this in the prewar summer or 1939. "Our gratitude is as immense as the ocean on which we are now floating," the passengers cabled at the time to a Jewish aid official. About two-thirds of the original St. Louis passengers survived the Holocaust and half of them eventually immigrated into the United States.

But for initiatives of the Roosevelt administration, they would not have made it to America, nor would 5,000-6,000 other German Jews have found safe haven in Cuba.



VIDEO BY CO- WRITER OF THIS ARTICLE & THE BOOK

(Copy and paste the link below into your browser)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iw7pZb8Wi0>

Richard Breitman, coauthor of *FDR and the Jews*, discusses his conclusions around a question which has become a hot topic over the past twenty years: could President Franklin D. Roosevelt have done more to save Jews from the horrors of the Holocaust? Breitman is a professor of history at American University and is editor of the journal *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, which is owned by the United States Holocaust

SHORT SUMMARY OF THE BOOK - FDR AND THE JEWS

In this fascinating, well-researched book, authors Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman seek to provide an answer to a controversial debate—whether Franklin Delano Roosevelt turned his back on the Jews of Hitler's Europe.

Nearly seventy-five years after World War II, a contentious debate lingers over whether Franklin Delano Roosevelt turned his back on the Jews of Hitler's Europe. Defenders claim that FDR saved millions of potential victims by defeating Nazi Germany. Others revile him as morally indifferent and indict him for keeping America's gates closed to Jewish refugees and failing to bomb Auschwitz's gas chambers.

In an extensive examination of this impassioned debate, Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman find that the president was neither savior nor bystander. In *FDR and the Jews*, they draw upon many new primary sources to offer an intriguing portrait of a consummate politician—compassionate but also pragmatic—struggling with opposing priorities under perilous conditions. For most of his presidency Roosevelt indeed did little to aid the imperiled Jews of Europe. He put domestic policy priorities ahead of helping Jews and deferred to others' fears of an anti-Semitic backlash. Yet he also acted decisively at times to rescue Jews, often withstanding contrary pressures from his advisers and the American public. Even Jewish citizens who petitioned the president could not agree on how best to aid their coreligionists abroad.

Though his actions may seem inadequate in retrospect, the authors bring to light a concerned leader whose efforts on behalf of Jews were far greater than those of any other world figure. His moral position was tempered by the political realities of depression and war, a conflict all too familiar to American politicians in the twenty-first century.



The people of the SS St. Louis –People with no home or country...and some still smile. Could you?



THE NAZIS THIRD REICH

There are way too many sources of History, Pictures, Archives, and Articles etc. for us to believe things like this didn't happen.....butTo each his own....

DISCLAIMER

PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT EVEN THOUGH THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM WHAT APPEARS TO BE AUTHENTIC WEBSITES I CANNOT ENSURE THAT ALL THE DATA IN THIS ARTICLE IS ACCURATE AND CORRECT.

Never let the things that you want make you forget the things you have !