

Beyond Einstein

The American Response to the Influx of Jewish Refugee Scientists, 1932-1945

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Introduction

On July 13, 1945, the *New York Times* published two letters to the editor responding to the Allied victory on the European front during World War II. The first, "Refugees Pose a Problem" by Johan J. Smertenko, called for the deportation of nearly nine hundred Jewish refugees living in a temporary haven in Oswego, New York. The article argued that their continued presence was a "violation" of the U.S. government's pledge that the refugees would not "worsen the employment situation in this nation."¹ The second, "Scientists Seen as Need" by Robert B. Sheridan, called for the active recruitment of scientists and students of science to fill vacancies in the field created during the war effort.² What is most notable about the juxtaposition of these two letters, printed side-by-side, is not merely the disconnect between Smertenko's fear of job competition and Sheridan's fear of job vacancies. Rather, it is that, despite the celebrity of several Jewish refugee scientists working for the American war effort—Albert Einstein and Leo Slizard, for example—Sheridan did not acknowledge the possibility of filling the vacancies within the scientific community from outside the United States. Yet, despite this oversight, Einstein and Slizard were only two of a large group of Jewish refugees who steadily streamed into the American scientific community between 1932 and 1945. With Germany's annexation of Austria in the 1938 *Anschluss*, and its subsequent

¹ Johan J. Smertenko, "Refugees Pose a Threat," *New York Times*, July 13, 1945.

² Robert B. Sheridan, "Scientists Seen as Need," *New York Times*, July 13, 1945.

invasion of Poland in 1939, the number of Jewish scholars seeking refuge in the United States skyrocketed.³

There is a tendency in the study of this period of American history to focus on a specific group of prominent German-Jewish refugee scientists who were actively recruited by a number of scholar-run refugee committees.⁴ These accounts rarely detail the reactions of the American public except in direct relation to the wartime scientific contributions of these men. However, an examination of the paths taken by several lesser-known Jewish refugee scientists and scholars attempting to gain entry to and employment in the U.S. reveals an unwillingness on the part of the American public to extend aid, and an ambivalence on the part of American scientists as they negotiated their national and scientific identities. The receptions of those who did manage to reach the U.S. were often colored by a combination of executive statements from the Roosevelt administration and representations in the media and popular culture that portrayed refugees as potential threats to the livelihood of the average American.

Historical Background

Jewish Intellectual Life in Germany: 1840–1933

With the advent of the dye industry in the 1840s, Germany transitioned from a largely agrarian society to an industrialized power. Leading scholars of German Jewry, including John Efron, Debórah Dwork and

³ See "German Jewish Refugees, 1933–1939," in *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter USHMM), available at <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005468>.

⁴ Such committees include the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars of the National Refugee Service, est. 1933; the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Medical Students of the National Refugee Service, est. 1933; and the Refugee Scholars Fund of American Council for Refugee Scholars, Artists, and Writers. For scholarly works related to these committees, see Stephen Duggan and Betty Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning: The Story of the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars* (New York: MacMillan, 1948); Peter I. Rose, ed., *The Dispossessed: An Anatomy of Exile* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005); Karen J. Greenberg, "The German Refugee Historians and American Institutions of Higher Learning," in *An Interrupted Past: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933*, eds. Harmut Lehmann and James J. Sheehan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 94-101; Gerhard Falk, *The Germans Jews in America: A Minority within a Minority* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2014).

Robert van Pelt, detail how the subsequent civic emancipation of the small Jewish community living in Germany allowed Jews to move to city centers, attend universities, and build up professions like modern laboratory medicine.⁵ By the early 1930s, Germany became a scientific center, taking thirty-three of the one hundred Nobel Prizes awarded in the sciences between 1901 and 1932. Of these, one-third were awarded to Jewish scientists, giving the impression that the Jewish community, though less than one percent of the total population, dominated German intellectual production.⁶

After World War I, Germany's Weimar Republic struggled to pay war reparations and the nation experienced an economic depression—the rate of unemployment doubled between June 1929 and June 1930 alone.⁷ The visibility of Jews in middle-class professions, alongside accusations of Jewish treason during the war, fed an increasing climate of anti-Semitism within Germany, and anti-Semitic political campaigns were on the rise.⁸ Soon after Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and the Nazi Party came to power in January 1933, over 1,200 university professors—ninety percent of them Jewish—were forced out of their positions.⁹ The majority of these were mathematicians and scientists.¹⁰ A public burning of books

⁵ The Jewish emancipation movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries yielded citizenship rights and political power for previously disenfranchised Jewish communities. The Jews of Germany were emancipated upon the 1871 unification of the nation. See John M. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 62; also Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich: Refugee Jews, 1933-1946* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009). For the transition to industrialized power, see Arjan van Rooij, "Knowledge, Money and Data: An Integrated Account of the Evolution of Eight Types of Laboratory," *British Journal for the History of Science* 44, no. 3 (September 2011): 427-48.

⁶ Thomas Adam, ed., *Germany and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 576; "Germany: Jewish Population in 1933," in *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, USHMM, available at <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005276>.

⁷ Donna Harsch, *German Social Democracy and the Rise of Nazism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 84.

⁸ Sarah Ann Gordon, *Hitler, Germans, and the "Jewish Question."* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 51.

⁹ Adam, *Germany and the Americas*, 576-77.

¹⁰ Henry L. Feingold. *A Midrash on American Jewish History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 49.

written by Jewish and non-Jewish academics was subsequently orchestrated by the Nazi Party, leading one German-Jewish scientist to recall Germany in his memoir as “a country in which the proud centres of learning and science have been dishonoured, where books have been burned, where Jews are outlawed and subject to persecutions of all kinds.”¹¹ The anonymous author deliberately establishes a link between universities, knowledge production, and Jews, suggesting that the scientific prowess of the nation was due solely to Jewish scientists.

Indeed, the near immediate exodus of eight hundred of the purged academics led contemporary American doctors and academics to comment not only on the loss of Germany’s “best minds,” but also on the “political stooges” appointed to replace them.¹² Without the presence of Jewish scholars, German universities became international embarrassments, at least to the scholars who visited them. Historians like Efron, Dwork, and van Pelt, however, tend to follow the narratives of those who remained in the Third Reich, rather than focusing on the ways in which those like the anonymous German-Jewish scientist mentioned above fled Germany.

Jewish Intellectual Life in America: Albert Einstein

In contrast, many scholars of American history do write on refugee narratives; though some, including Walter Isaacson, focus narrowly on the stories of one or two prominent scientists, like Albert Einstein, and their contributions to the American war effort.¹³ Born in Germany to a Jewish family, Einstein quickly built a career as a theoretical physicist, becoming an active member in several scientific and academic societies, including the Prussian Academy of Science. By the time he lost his position in the Prussian Academy, he had already toured the United States several times, earning a certain “celebrity status,” among scientists and non-scientists alike.¹⁴ The new Institute for Advanced Study soon created a position for

¹¹ *Why I Left Germany*, trans. Margaret Goldsmith (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1941), 2.

¹² “Found ‘Best Minds’ Driven from Reich,” *New York Times*, August 27, 1933; “Science: The Descent of Aryan Man,” *Time*, July 21, 1941.

¹³ See Walter Isaacson, *Einstein: His Life and Universe* (London: Pocket Books, 2007); Anthony Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America from the 1930s to the Present* (New York: Viking Press, 1983); Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

¹⁴ Isaacson, “The Refugee, 1932-1933,” chap. 18 in *Einstein: His Life and Universe*, 396.

him, which he accepted, and then able to enter the U.S. relatively easily.¹⁵ Using his sway within the academic community and with U.S. government officials he was able to find academic positions for other refugee scientists trying to enter the country.

Einstein's story, however, is unique, as are the stories of the relatively small number of scholars brought to the United States through the aid of refugee committees. Between 1932 and 1935, before the founding of the majority of these committees, over six thousand Jewish professionals—physicians and academics—arrived in the United States. Over the course of the next ten years, tens of thousands more would desperately apply for entrance visas. While these scientists enjoyed successful careers in Germany, very few had access to the same types of academic networks that Einstein or his colleagues formed. The author of *Why I Left Germany*, who published under the name "A German Jewish Scientist," wrote his memoir to tell the story of the average refugee scientist—a story that remains largely untold by modern historians.

Quotas and the Fear of Anti-Semitism

Much of American immigration policy was colored by the nation's involvement in World War I, after which it became increasingly isolationist. The Immigration Act of 1924, for example, established strict quotas that restricted the number of immigrants from each nation granted entrance visas.¹⁶ Not only were refugees subject to the same quotas without distinction, but also these quotas remained largely unfilled throughout the 1920s and 1930s, to the approval of nearly seventy-five percent of the American public.¹⁷

The Imaginary Einstein: A Set-Up for Failure

While Einstein's story of immigration was an exception among the vast majority of refugee scientists arriving in the United States during the 1930s, he was also the most visible member of this group. The cover story

¹⁵ Dwork and van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich*, 21.

¹⁶ See Helen F. Eckerson, "Immigration and National Origins," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 367, no. 1 (September 1966): 14.

¹⁷ "Obstacles to Immigration," in *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, USHMM, available at <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007455>; Verne W. Newman, ed., *FDR and the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 131.

of an issue of *Time* magazine in 1938 presented a portrait of Einstein sitting in a cozy armchair—the refugee, “exiled” in Princeton, which then became his home. Describing his transition to life in America, it reads, “He is no longer the timid bewildered man who visited the U.S. in 1930. He has acquired considerable poise in public.”¹⁸ The once foreign Einstein now he fit in with the American public. President Roosevelt even personally offered to introduce a bill to Congress expediting Einstein’s naturalization process (Einstein refused, though he became a naturalized citizen through the regular process several years later).¹⁹ Comparing Einstein’s entrance into American life to that of previous generations of immigrants, the American public was forced to reimagine the immigrant, previously pictured as a lower-class farmer, instead as a middle-class scholar.

Furthermore, *Time* magazine did not hide the fact that “many [Institute for Advanced Study] members are Jewish exiles from Germany,” just like Einstein.²⁰ The possibility other Jewish refugees as brilliant and capable as Einstein captivated a subset of the American public, who came to believe that the Jewish refugee, who once made Germany an intellectual powerhouse, could do the same for the United States.²¹ A series of committees were formed in order to find employment for refugee scholars, and appeals were made to the Roosevelt administration to exempt scholars and students from the quota limitations. The success of these committees was limited, largely due to a lack of funding—out of the six thousand scientists that sought help from the Emergency Committee of Displaced Foreign Scholars, fewer than three hundred were placed in academic positions. Those who were aided tended to have distinguished scientific experiences and not representative of the average German-Jewish scientist.²²

Despite the relative renown of the refugees rescued through such committees, not all pleased the American public as Einstein had years earlier. One might think that the perpetuation of the image of an Einstein-like, Americanized refugee scientist would make the American public

¹⁸ “Science: Exile in Princeton,” *Time*, April 4, 1938.

¹⁹ Isaacson, “The Refugee, 1932-1933.”

²⁰ “Science: Exile in Princeton.”

²¹ Duggan and Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, 51.

²² See “Records of Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars,” in *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, USHMM, available at <http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn511877>; Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise*, 79; Duggan and Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, 27.

more accepting of other German-Jewish refugees, but in fact it revealed underlying prejudices against those who were not deemed “American” enough. For instance, *Time’s* mention of Leopold Infeld, a Jewish scientist from Poland who joined Einstein’s research team, characterized him only by his accent, and thus his foreignness.²³ If Americans were at first inclined to believe that other refugee scientists might become part of American culture as seamlessly as Einstein had, then the refutation of that belief only enhanced previously held prejudices.

The Jew as the “Other”

While the quotas were theoretically created to regulate all immigration to the U.S., a comparison of two letters originating from the White House—one regarding Jewish refugees and one regarding Christian refugees—suggests a discriminatory element in their implementation. The first, a letter sent by Roosevelt to New York Governor Herbert Lehman in November 1935, responds negatively to a request for increasing the quota for German Jews.²⁴ In the letter, Roosevelt assured Lehman that “there is no immigration quota fixed for persons in the class described” (i.e. German Jews, as opposed to Germans of all faiths and ethnicities), but he acknowledged that the majority of applicants for the German quota were Jewish. He then stated that consular officers “must issue immigration visas, within quota limitations.” Here the word “must” has a coercive connotation. The officers were required to issue visas indiscriminately, yet Roosevelt did not write that officers “assign” visas. That American consulate workers only allowed Jewish refugees into the country because “they must” implies an aversion to them, either as foreigners or as Jews.

A memorandum from the Department of State to Roosevelt’s secretary written one year later, denied a request to allow entry to Christian refugees from Germany on the grounds that “it would be inappropriate for the President to support an appeal for assistance for one particular class of refugees.”²⁵ The memorandum does not mention filled quotas at

²³ “Science: Exile in Princeton.”

²⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt to Herbert Lehman, November 13, 1935, FDR and the Holocaust, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum (hereafter FDRH), available at <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/pdfs/holocaust.pdf>.

²⁵ Memorandum from Stephen Early to Miss LeHand, November 13, 1936, FDRH, available at <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/pdfs/holocaust.pdf>.

all, although the previous letter affirmed that the German quota would be applied to all German applicants, Jewish or not. This suggests an unspoken acknowledgment that the quotas were created for application in cases of non-white or non-Christian applicants—those who might not assimilate well into American culture. Furthermore, the State Department's request that the denial be expressed "by telephone rather than by letter" suggests a fear that publicity of the denial to help Christians could result in a public backlash. As no fear of backlash over the publicity of the denial to extend quotas for Jewish refugees existed, it can be assumed that the American public regarded foreign Jews as less worthy of aid than foreign Christians. Both refugee groups were foreign, yet only one was expressly limited by the quota restrictions. This demonstrates an undercurrent of anti-Semitism within the U.S. that transcended general xenophobia.

Indeed, a telephone conversation recorded between two American Jews working in the Roosevelt administration demonstrates the fear that support of Jewish refugees could result in a wave of anti-Semitism. In 1944, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., asked speechwriter Samuel Rosenman to attend a meeting on a newly compiled memorandum on U.S. compliance to the "murder of the Jews." Upon hearing that a third Jewish staff member and Roosevelt would be in attendance, Rosenman said, "I don't suppose there will be any leak on the thing...The thing I am thinking about is whether when you talk about refugees you want to have three Jews."²⁶ The idea of the American public finding out about the involvement of three Jews in the filing of the refugee report concerned Rosenman. He, the report's findings, or the president might be criticized. Morgenthau had to reassure him: "courage first."²⁷ Rosenman's reluctance to place three Jews in a room with Roosevelt, while discussing Jewish interests, hints at a fear that the American public might question whether Roosevelt's policy decisions were unduly influenced by his Jewish staffers.

This second concern becomes clear after a discussion of the prevalence of anti-Semitic thought in the media and popular culture. After the First World War, industrialist Henry Ford used his newspaper, the *Dearborn*

²⁶ Henry Morgenthau, Jr., Diary Book 693, pp. 206-07 January 13 1944, FDRH, available at http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/morg/md0978.pdf.

²⁷ Ibid.

Independent, to push forward the conspiracy theory of the “International Jew.” A description on the front page of one issue speaks of the Jew’s “Oriental love of display and... full appreciation of the power and pleasure of social position; a very high average of intellectual ability.”²⁸ This description effectively “others” American Jews, creating the image of them as foreigners infiltrating American institutions. The underhanded attribution of high intellect suggests the ability of American Jews to manipulate their position in the United States in order to gain influence. Thus, Rosenman’s fear of public backlash resulting from a group of Jews discussing Jewish concerns with Roosevelt is contextualized in the idea that accusations of Jewish involvement in international conspiracies were loudly voiced by distinguished citizens. Anti-Semitism, while perhaps not always so extreme, was alive and well in the nation.

Economic Obstacles to Acceptance

The mistrust of foreigners, reflected in the establishment of immigration quotas in 1924, only grew after the beginning of the Great Depression, as all immigrants—refugees included—were seen by underemployed Americans as competitors for the diminishing number of jobs.²⁹ Jewish refugees in particular experienced hostility in their attempts to find employment. Though Ford’s assertions a decade earlier of economic conspiracy among the world’s Jews were refuted by many, the increasing visibility of Jews, like Morgenthau and Rosenman, within the Roosevelt administration led some to call the New Deal, the economic program intended to create services and jobs for underemployed Americans, the “Jew Deal.”³⁰ The perception that Jews were favored for high positions in such a poor economy created simmering resentments that emerged with the influx of job-seeking refugee scholars.

Contributor, Not Rival

The 1941 book *Today’s Refugees, Tomorrow’s Citizens*, written by the refugee social scientist Gerhart Saenger, described the experiences of the average refugee, arriving in America and searching for employment. Saenger

²⁸ “The International Jew: The World’s Problem,” *Dearborn Independent*, May 22, 1920.

²⁹ See “Religion: Protestant Antipathies,” *Time*, December 8, 1930.

³⁰ Newman, *FDR and the Holocaust*, 56.

dedicates his book “to the American People for the kindness and understanding shown to the refugees who have come to start a new life.” However, the foreword expresses hope that the book might serve its American readers as a “challenge to our current attitudes” in regards to refugees, suggesting that the understanding and acceptance of refugees mentioned in Saenger’s dedication was more of a hope than a reality.³¹ Thus, when Saenger writes later in his book, “the professional man conceives of his colleague not so much as a rival but as a contributor to the common goal of the profession,” it is difficult to accept such a utopian portrayal as fact.³²

Throughout his book, Saenger desperately tries to allay the American academy’s reluctance to hire refugees. He seeks to recreate the image of the intelligent, collaborative scientist that many Americans first saw in Einstein. In a prophetic moment, he even suggests, “should a national emergency arise many refugees would prove to be of great value,” anticipating not only the coming world war, but also the prominent place of the refugee scientist in the war effort.³³

However, when the first refugee scholars arrived in the U.S., the depression was raging and many Americans with a Ph.D. were unemployed.³⁴ Finding a place in an academic institution depended greatly on one’s field—whether it was glutted or underdeveloped determined whether or not hiring a refugee would displace an American.³⁵ Often, positions could only be found at lesser-known teaching colleges, where refugee scholars, often unpracticed at English and accustomed to research universities, would have to reorient themselves around the American student.³⁶

While those with laboratory skills could easily transition into a new position by proving their knowledge, those in regulated professions were forced to start at the bottom of the employment ladder and begin again. Physicians, especially, encountered difficulties, as the American Medical

³¹ Gerhart Saenger, foreword *Today's Refugees, Tomorrow's Citizens: A Story of Americanization* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), v-x.

³² *Ibid.*, 123.

³³ *Ibid.*, 257.

³⁴ Heilbrut, *Exiled in Paradise*, 79.

³⁵ Adam, *Germany and the Americas*, 577; Saenger, *Today's Refugees, Tomorrow's Citizens*, 263.

³⁶ Lewis A. Coser, *Refugee Scholars in America: Their Impact and Their Experiences* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 7.

Association required foreign doctors to undergo American licensing examinations.³⁷ This process created stress for some—over a twelve-year period, twenty-six refugee scholars placed by the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Scholars died of cardiac problems induced by stress.³⁸ Others were devastated by the prospect of being barred from their profession—over half the physicians entering the U.S. remained unlicensed in their new country.³⁹ According to Saenger, many of these refugees continued to contribute to the scientific world through similar fields, becoming lab technicians, dieticians, or medical illustrators.⁴⁰ Whether their reception was warm or not, it would seem (and Saenger certainly agrees) that the refugee scientists lucky enough to find work in their field contributed to it, if not through the production of new research, then at least through its introduction to new students.

Institutional Anti-Semitism

While the American public could speculate on a Jewish conspiracy within the Roosevelt administration, a Jewish presence within academic institutions soon became even more noticeable. Jewish students were subject to a quota system during admissions processes, and universities tended to favor Jewish refugee scholars whose names did not sound Jewish.⁴¹ Once again, it would seem that the desire was for a rapid Americanization process among refugee scholars. Thus, when an identifiably Jewish refugee sought a position at an academic institution, they often became isolated, but also visible.

The distribution of refugee scholars at universities across the country was unbalanced. Among top research universities, the University of Michigan faculty contained a disproportionately low number of refugees, while Columbia University's faculty contained a disproportionately high number.⁴² Yet accounts of anti-Semitism were heard throughout. At

³⁷ Saenger, *Today's Refugees, Tomorrow's Citizens*, 194.

³⁸ Duggan and Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, 46-50.

³⁹ Arieh Tartakower and Kurt R. Grossman, *The Jewish Refugee* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1944), 123.

⁴⁰ Saenger, *Today's Refugees, Tomorrow's Citizens*, 207.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴² David A. Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth Century Americans Intellectual History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 135.

Michigan, students created an alternate version of the official fight song, "The Victors":

Hail to the crooked noses,
Hail to the sons of Moses,
Hail, hail to Michigan,
The Israel of the West!⁴³

The parody establishes a conscious discrepancy between itself and the original fight song, played at nearly every football game, which refers to the University of Michigan as the home of conquerors, heroes, and leaders.⁴⁴ The parody comments on these elevated traits, replacing them with identifiably Jewish traits (i.e. "crooked noses," "sons of Moses," and "Israel"). While proudly sung by Jewish students at the University of Michigan in the late 1960s, it was originally created by students at Michigan State University—a neighboring institution—as an anti-Semitic taunt against the University of Michigan.⁴⁵ It would seem that the song originated at Michigan State University in order to discredit the athletic prowess of the University of Michigan by creating a contrast between the victors of the original fight song, and the Jews present in the university, likely playing on stereotypes of the imperfect body of the unathletic Jew. In the context of the song, Michigan becomes the "Israel of the West"—a refuge for Jews on the American continent. This relation suggests the song was created to highlight, once more, the idea of the Jewish outsider coming into the American university and taking over.

While antipathy toward refugee scholars emerged at other universities around the country—student newspapers of the University of Kentucky and Harvard University both published a 1938 poll showing that nearly seventy percent of students did not want refugee scholars at their schools—such acts of antagonism often lay within either the hiring

⁴³ Lauren Cooper, "The Jewish Version of the University of Michigan Fight Song, 'The Victors'" (contribution, Folklore Archive, University of California, Berkeley, September 27, 2014).

⁴⁴ See the Official University of Michigan fight song, "The Victors": "Hail! to the victors valiant / Hail! To the conqu'ring heroes / Hail! Hail! To Michigan, / the champions of the West." Available at <http://www.umich.edu/~mgoblue/sounds/lyrics-victors.html>.

⁴⁵ "Michigan State University Football Chant (Sung to the University of Michigan Theme as a Taunt)," *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* 2, no. 2 (2010): 523.

administration or the student body.⁴⁶ Among the scholars themselves, according to the records of the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars, refugees were at the very least accepted as fellow faculty, if not as fellow Americans.⁴⁷ An account publicized by *Time* magazine about a 1939 joint petition to combat racism and anti-Semitism suggests an even greater kinship amongst American and refugee scholars than the polls above.⁴⁸ Working toward a common goal, whether in science or in society, nationality ceased to matter.

Reinventing the Résumé

While some refugee scholars experienced acts of anti-Semitism after accepting positions at universities, others applied to several positions, only to be turned away. As Germany prepared for war, the Nazi Party passed regulations preventing fleeing Jews from taking their savings with them.⁴⁹ As a result, refugees who arrived in the U.S. without any employment lined up were often forced to take menial jobs in order to support themselves.⁵⁰ If refugee scholars experienced little animosity when they remained in their field of expertise, the refugee's entrance into the unskilled labor market piqued Americans' fears of job competition.

The State Department and Department of Labor responded to these fears by making requirements for obtaining entrance visas stricter. Whereas before 1939, a refugee needed two sponsors to write affidavits vouching for their ability to work, after 1939, a sponsor would either have to be a close relative vowing to support the refugee financially, or an American employer guaranteeing work for the refugee.⁵¹ Furthermore, refugee scholars without a teaching job lined up no longer qualified for quota exemptions, making the process of obtaining an entrance visa even

⁴⁶ Joe Belden, "Survey Shows U.S. Students Reluctant to Aid Refugees," *Kentucky Kernel*, December 15, 1938; "Poll Shows Students Don't Want Reich Refugees Here," *Harvard Crimson*, December 14, 1938.

⁴⁷ Duggan and Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, 35.

⁴⁸ "Press: Hush-Hush Ends," *Time*, May 8, 1939.

⁴⁹ David Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938-1941* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), 29.

⁵⁰ Duggan and Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, 21.

⁵¹ Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 170.

more difficult.⁵² To make themselves more appealing to the consulate workers issuing U.S. entrance visas, scientists had to prove that they would not become a burden to the state. Some taught themselves new skills. Others reached out to the American scientific community for help in obtaining employment prior to their departure from Germany.

For those still in Germany, hearing that refugees already in the U.S. could not find jobs in their field was devastating. Unemployment, however, had its benefits—utilizing the free time they suddenly had, many scholars formed loose networks through which they could learn new technical skills. Robert Rosner, a chemistry student before he was forced out of his German university, learned how to apply his knowledge in chemistry to produce shoe polish. Others, learning that those with technical agricultural training could receive visas with few delays, trained on local farms. Those who were able to enter the U.S. now had the option of jobs in industry, in addition to academia.⁵³

Networking Among Colleagues

In presenting themselves to a potential sponsor, the scholar often had to think of what might hurt their chances of acceptance and what might benefit them. One scholar, writing to an acquaintance working in the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars in 1934, described in a friendly, if not detached, tone how he was removed from his position at a university because of his wife's Jewish heritage. Here he gave a detailed genealogy of his wife, concluding that she was only one-quarter Jewish. Possibly wary of the extent of American anti-Semitism he might face, the scholar carefully shifts the topic to his own dismissal being due to political disagreements, effectively distancing himself from Judaism.

Mentioning his previous good standing and listing several awards he received, the scholar ends the letter: "being a passionate teacher and lecturer, however, I should like very much, temporarily, to exercise such functions. If you could help me to find such opportunities, I should be most grateful to you."⁵⁴ While he touts his teaching ability, Saenger's

⁵² U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, hearing, *Extend Nonquota Status to Husbands of Ministers and Professors* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1930), 15.

⁵³ Dwork and van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich*, 129-32.

⁵⁴ Duggan and Drury, *The Rescue of Science and Learning*, 9.

description of German universities suggests that they placed little emphasis on teaching. Thus, it is possible that the author of the letter was trying to make himself look appealing to an American hiring committee. Likewise, the strategic use of the word “temporarily”—while possibly the scholar’s true intent—was likely effective in allaying long-term fears within the U.S. about job competition.

The Cold Call

While writing to a colleague would almost certainly yield more results, the average German scientist likely did not have connections in the international community. In such a case, the only option for finding employment was to write multiple letters to a variety of potential employers soliciting for a job.

One such letter was written by Dr. Zygmunt Binder in 1939 to Wendell M. Stanley, then a biochemist and virologist at the Rockefeller Institute in Princeton, New Jersey. Binder describes how he found Stanley’s name in a scientific publication, and asks the American to help him and his wife gain entry to the United States. In return, Binder offers to “prove [their] gratitude by [their] collaboration” on Stanley’s research team.⁵⁵ Though Binder tries to maintain a dignified tone, the urgency of his plea is reflected in the writing itself. There are grammatical and spelling errors throughout. Near the beginning, a word is added in with pen, and several mistakes are scratched out in the middle. The mere fact that a letter with these mistakes would be mailed out in a professional context suggests either a lack of time to retype the letter, or even a shortage of paper and ink due to the approaching war. The mistakes themselves might have resulted from continuous typing—it is likely that similar letters were mailed to other researchers throughout the U.S. to increase the chance that one might meet with acceptance. They could also be the result of the increasingly frayed emotional state of the typist (presumably Binder or his wife). Indeed, the syntactical errors associated with English as a second language (e.g. the lack of prepositions and the subject-verb reversal) seem to increase in frequency toward the end of the letter, mirroring the increasingly prominent tone of desperation.

⁵⁵ “Stanley, Wendell Meredith,” in *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, vol. 18 (Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2008). 841-48.

It is important to note that the entire letter is framed in terms of work. The claim that Binder learned of Stanley through an article in a scientific journal immediately establishes Binder's presence in the world of scientific research. Binder commoditizes science, offering his skills and interest "for a very small salary." Perhaps another indication of the author's belief that Americans would not sympathize with the plight of the threatened Jews, it is likely that Binder, and others in his position, felt the need to bargain with whatever skills they had. In the face of an upcoming war—even if it was not yet clear to Americans that they would become involved—it must have been clear that scientific advancements would become central to military strategy. An offer of scientific collaboration, therefore, could be considered tantamount to an offer of political allegiance.

Despite the cynicism reflected in this commoditization, Binder does not totally dismiss science as a bargaining tool. In his introduction, he states his "hope to find understanding and help sooner from a scientist [*sic*] than...from anyone else"—including, presumably, aid workers and philanthropists. Going so far as to portray his knowledge of science as an inherent part of him, he writes, "all what we long for is to live again under normal human conditions and to be able to follow our scientific interests."⁵⁶ Here, Binder portrays science as transcending ethnic and cultural barriers in a very real way. Through his scientific interest, he already felt connected to Stanley, a man halfway around the world whom he had never met.

Conclusion

The downside of examining the pleas of unknown scientists, like the unnamed scholar and Binder, is that their narratives remain incomplete. Both of their letters were saved by the respective recipients, but at a time when the State Department required more and more of American visa sponsors, it seems unlikely that Stanley, especially, would go out of his way to bring a stranger across the Atlantic, sight unseen. However, these letters reveal a great deal about the average refugee scientist's path to acceptance within the American scientific community.

Einstein was known to the American public well before his arrival in the U.S. as both a scientist and a Jew. Idolized for his intellectual

⁵⁶ Ibid.

production, his status as a refugee was traded in early for his academic prestige. While he, and other American scientists, tried to replicate this rapid Americanization process through the rescue of more and more refugee scientists, cultural differences soon overshadowed intellect in the minds of the American public. Drawing on anti-Semitic tropes of the interloping Jew, many saw Jewish refugee scientists as attempting first to move into jobs and displace American workers, and second to overtake American academic institutions entirely—the fact that many German Jews, especially, continuously talked of their wonderful years of employment in Germany, belittling their experiences in America, did not allay these fears.⁵⁷

Recognizing this unfavorable perception of themselves, refugees strove to present themselves in a way that the American public might approve of, learning new technical skills and presenting their interest in science as a means toward social progress. Binder's attempt to commoditize his scientific skills clearly exemplifies the way refugees felt they must market themselves. When society turned its back on Jewish refugees, their ties to the scientific community gave them hope. Binder's passion for science is not limited to its use-value. It is, rather, a result of the idea that within the scientific field, there are no barriers between people.

⁵⁷ Saenger, *Today's Refugees, Tomorrow's Citizens*, 84.

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