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REFUGEES AND RELIEF:
THE AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE
AND EUROPEAN JEWS
IN CUBA AND SHANGHAI
1938-1943

by

ZHAVA LITVAC GLASER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2015

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Refugees and Relief:
The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
and European Jews in Cuba and Shanghai, 1938-1943

by
Zhava Litvac Glaser

Advisor: Professor Dagmar Herzog

Traditionally, pre-modern Jewish communities sensed an obligation to bind together to provide aid to Jews who found themselves in catastrophic situations; however, with the advent of modernity and the dissolution of Jewish communal authority, the fragmentation of Jewish communities, and the unprecedented stresses of the Holocaust, communal dynamics grew far more complex. The Jews of Cuba and Shanghai were two small and relatively remote communities overwhelmed by Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis. At their request, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee stepped in and provided both the funding and leadership that both of these locations so desperately needed.

The Jewish communities of Cuba and Shanghai provide an enlightening case study in Jewish communal dynamics in a time of catastrophe. The unrestrained menace of the Holocaust, rather than bringing these Jewish communities together to provide aid to those fleeing the Nazi terror, further fractured tenuous inter- and intra-communal relationships. Differences in national origin, religious observance, class, age and political views became more pronounced as communities fragmented, making it more difficult to provide the aid that was desperately needed. Yet in spite of their differences, the Jews who sought refuge in

these remote locations managed eventually to create transitory communities united by thriving cultural, educational and literary pursuits. It is this complexity in Jewish communal interactions in Cuba and Shanghai during the Holocaust that will be explored in this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

How do you thank people who have changed your life?

Nine years ago, Professor Elisheva Carlebach opened my eyes to the excitement of Jewish history as I took her class in Modern Jewish History and dipped my foot into this Ph.D. program to see if I would like it. I liked it!

Professors Bob Seltzer, David Berger and Robert Chazan have since been examples to me of excellence in teaching Jewish history. Professor Jane Gerber not only expertly introduced me to the fascinating world of Mizrahi and Sephardic Jewry, but affectionately shepherded me through the past nine years, always being there to encourage me and hold my hand when I needed it. The hug she gave me right before oral exams gave me the strength I lacked to get through the ordeal.

The History department at CUNY has been a pleasure to work with. Professor Helena Rosenblatt, who taught me in my first year how to research, showed endless patience along with Betty Einerman and Marilyn Weber as they smoothed any and all of my administrative bumps.

I am grateful to the members of my committee for taking the time to read this ponderous work without complaint and giving me invaluable advice on how to make it better. But especially, I want to thank my brilliant advisor, Professor Dagmar Herzog, for her encouragement, responsiveness and incisive suggestions throughout this whole process, and for having confidence in me that I myself did not have.

I am grateful to Shelley Helfand, Misha Mitsel, and the rest of the archival staff at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, both in New York and in Jerusalem, as well as to the research librarians at Yad Vashem for helping me delve into their archives. I am especially grateful to Professor Yehuda Bauer for giving me access to his yet-uncatalogued files that were essential to my work. I learned much from them on how to do archival research.

I am thankful to Dennis Dirks and Clint Arnold for believing in me, and to Gregg Hagg for not letting me give up when I was just about ready to do so.

I am grateful to my students over the years for understanding that their teacher, too, had to stay up late to study for tests and write papers, and for showering me with chocolate and “mazel tovs” when they could finally call me “Dr. Glaser!”

I am so grateful for my huge family for showing an interest in my research—or pretending to, if only to encourage me! The same goes for my new group of Shanghai refugee friends who welcomed me and shared their hearts and memories with me.

My daughters, Miriam and Jenni, have been my unabashed fan club. Their non-stop encouragement buoyed me when I felt like I was sinking and their beautiful hearts continue to bring me joy every day. They think I am their hero, but they are mine.

But I must above all thank my husband, Mitch, for showing his love to me in everything he did to make this possible: all the times that he arranged for me to get away and write, the trips he arranged to Israel, Spain, France and Shanghai so I could deepen my research, the hundreds of meals he cooked for me so I could eat something other than oatmeal, the many, many times he was my eager sounding board on our breakfast dates.

Above all else, I want to thank him for keeping his promise to help me get this done. I literally could not have done this without him.

But my greatest thanks go to HaShem for His love, guidance, and for giving meaning to my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Historiography of American Jewish Actions.....	8
JDC history and mission.....	10
The Jewish Community as an Entity.....	13
Laura Margolis Steps In	14
Sources Used.....	17
PART ONE—CUBA.....	19
CHAPTER ONE—THE JEWS OF CUBA.....	25
A Brief History of the Jews of Cuba.....	25
Local Aid Efforts.....	32
The Call for Help	55
CHAPTER TWO—ANTISEMITISM IN CUBA.....	76
The Rise of Antisemitism in Cuba.....	76
The St. Louis Affair	87
The Aftermath of the St. Louis Incident.....	127
PART TWO—SHANGHAI	142
CHAPTER THREE—SHANGHAI BEFORE PEARL HARBOR.....	148
The Jewish Communities of Shanghai	148
Community Aid Efforts.....	157
American Aid Arrives.....	171

CHAPTER FOUR—SHANGHAI AFTER PEARL HARBOR.....	208
Fundraising.....	209
Reorganization	233
Efficiency.....	239
Margolis and Siegel Interned.....	245
CHAPTER FIVE—ANTISEMITISM IN SHANGHAI.....	259
Local attitudes toward the Jews.....	259
The establishment of the "Shanghai Ghetto"	272
CONCLUSION	293
APPENDICES.....	315
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	318

LIST OF APPENDICES

A1 - The Career of Laura Margolis	305
A2 - JDC Representatives in Cuba, 1938-1941.....	306
A3 - Organizations affiliated with the NCC.....	306
A4 - JDC Expenditures per Person, 1938-1944	307
A5 - JDC Expenditures in Central and South America, 1939-1940	307
A6 - JDC Expenditures, 1938-1944	308
A7 - Flow of Refugees to JRC in Cuba from United States for Change of Status ...	309
A8 - Refugees in Shanghai, 1939.....	310
A9 - Migrants from Shanghai, 1946-1952.....	310
A10 - Emigration and Repatriation from Shanghai Mar. 1946-Aug. 31, 1948.....	311
A11 - Distribution of Jewish Refugees Estimate as of Dec. 31, 1939	312
A12 - Jewish Emigration by Area, 1933-1939 (Estimated).....	313
A13 - Jewish Emigration from Central Europe, 1933-1939.....	314
A14 - American Jewish Yearbook's Summary of Jewish Immigration	315
A15 - Distribution of Jewish Population in Europe	316
A16 - Estimated Losses in the Most Important Communities in Europe	317

INTRODUCTION

Anyone who preserves a single life, it is as if he saved the whole world.
— *Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5*

Throughout the course of World War II, the very physical survival of the Jewish people of Europe was in doubt. When Hitler and the Nazi party rose to power in the early 1930s, increasing anti-Jewish legislation forced Jews to flee Germany, leaving their loved ones, assets and often their identification papers behind, transforming them into penniless, stateless refugees. In response, most of the nations of the world closed their doors to this massive immigration, refusing to grant visas to Jewish people fleeing persecution, and placing an unprecedented demand on world Jewry to take action.

Holocaust scholarship is a vast field. While many have analyzed the world's reaction to this horrific event, few have examined its effects on the small, isolated Jewish communities that were called upon to aid thousands of their fellow Jews. Neglected are the rich communal dynamics in the interactions between these communities and the refugees who descended upon them in overwhelming numbers. This paper seeks to supplement the existing scholarship by focusing on the work of the umbrella relief organization, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, specifically in Cuba and Shanghai, two small, remote Jewish communities outside their main area of operation where Jewish refugees from Nazi Europe found themselves stranded.

Since many of the refugees sought to emigrate to the United States, the American response in particular needs to be understood. Beginning in the late 19th to early 20th

centuries, the United States had begun to impose restrictions on immigration, and the *Emergency Quota Act of 1921*, based on the *National Origins Formula*, greatly intensified these limitations. By restricting immigration to those of Northern European origin that were already established in the U.S., the Act limited the number of immigrants per year to 3% of the number of U.S. residents from the same country according to the 1910 census.¹ As a result of the *1921 Quota Act*, total immigration dropped from 805,228 in 1920 to 309,556 in 1921-22.²

The *Immigration Act of 1924*, in light of rising unemployment, further restricted immigration, lowering the 3% quota to 2%. The Act sought to limit the large numbers of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe (thus affecting Jews) that had flooded into the country just before the turn of the century, and favored Northern Europeans and wealthier immigrants. The Great Depression led to an even narrower interpretation of the “likely to become public charges” clause contained in the Act.³ The judgment of whether or not a potential immigrant was likely to become a public charge was left up to the consular offices abroad, but they received increasingly restrictive direction from the U.S. All of these quotas and directives had the effect of greatly limiting Jewish refugee immigration and therefore escape from Nazi persecution. With the new requirement to demonstrate substantial financial resources, and as Henry Feingold argues, perhaps due to an

¹ United States, “Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration to the Secretary of Labor,” *Bureau of Immigration*, 1913, 109.

² Ibid.

³ “Urges Extension of Quota to All,” *New York Times*, June 24, 1927, 11.

undercurrent of distaste for Jewish refugees,⁴ by 1930, immigration quotas were approximately 80% under-issued.⁵ A bill for a 90% reduction in quotas passed the House of Representatives in 1931 and according to David Wyman would probably have passed the Senate had not the legislative session come to a close.⁶

However, as conditions for the Jews of Germany grew more oppressive as a result of the passing of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, President Roosevelt lifted some of the restrictions on German refugee immigration. Much again depended on the overseas consuls, who were urged to treat Jewish refugees as favorably as possible as they made decisions to grant visas, but the financial requirements still posed a hardship for many. In light of Roosevelt's policy change, German immigration to the U.S. in 1936 increased by 20% over 1935, and 1937 was 78% higher than 1936.⁷

By 1938, with the *Anschluss*⁸ in March and *Kristallnacht*⁹ in November, President Roosevelt urged for the full use of the existing quotas for refugees from Nazi persecution.

⁴ Henry Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 78.

⁵ David Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938-1941* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), 4.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Immigration to the U.S. from Germany in 1935 was 5,436; in 1936, 6,538; in 1937, 11,648. (Ibid., 226.)

⁸ The *Anschluss Österreichs* was the occupation and annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in March 1938, in direct violation of the Treaties of St. Germain and of Versailles. Austrian Jews suddenly found themselves under the same antisemitic laws as had been gradually introduced in Germany.

⁹ *Kristallnacht*, or "The Night of Broken Glass," refers to the coordinated antisemitic violence that swept Germany on November 9-10, 1938 in response to the assassination of German diplomat Ernst vom Rath by Herschel Grynzspan. S.A. paramilitary forces and non-

According to the *New York Times*, by September 1938 German and Austrian immigration quotas were already completely filled.¹⁰

As extensive research has shown, the Roosevelt administration was under heavy pressure to restrict immigration just when the threat to European Jews was intensifying and an open policy most needed. Breckinridge Long, a personal friend of Roosevelt who in 1940 had become the Assistant Secretary for Special Problems at the State Department, had a paranoid fear of aliens and Jews and greatly influenced the president's restrictionist policies.¹¹ James G. McDonald, chairman of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Political Refugees and a friend of the Jews, tried but failed to persuade Roosevelt to loosen immigration restrictions. Long's influence was too strong.¹²

As the doors to American immigration closed, Jewish people in Europe desperately searched for havens, some finding refuge in such unlikely places as Cuba and Shanghai. The Jewish communities in these locations were soon overwhelmed. Aware of their inability to

Jewish civilians murdered more than 91 Jewish people and over 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and taken to concentration camps. More than 1,000 synagogues were burned and over 7,000 businesses destroyed. ("Slayer of Diplomat Acted in a Trance," *New York Times*, December 1, 1938; "Arrests of Jews Go on in Germany," *New York Times*, November 29, 1938.)

¹⁰ "German Refugees Fill Entry Quota," *New York Times*, September 13, 1938, 3.

¹¹ See, among others, David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); and *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938-1941*; see also David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, *America's Response to the Holocaust: New Questions, New Perspectives* (Boston, MA: David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, 2004); Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939-1945* (Jerusalem, Detroit, MI: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University; Wayne State University Press, 1981), 50.

¹² Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 64.

provide adequate help for the steadily rising wave of European refugees, the Jews of Cuba and Shanghai reached out to international Jewry for help.

In order to comprehend the significance of this study, one must consider the changes that Jewish communal patterns underwent with the advent of modernity. The traditional *kehillah*, or Jewish community, originated in Babylonia after the destruction of the First Temple in the sixth century C.E. Throughout the pre-modern era, Jews had the right of self-government under that autonomous *kehillah* system. All Jews, unless they converted, were under the jurisdiction of the *kehillah*, which would exercise authority over its members, among other requirements, to provide *tzedakah*, or aid, to Jews who found themselves in catastrophic situations. Traditionally, *tzedakah* was not a choice—it was an obligation. The process of modernization limited if not eliminated such communal authority, but the cultural impetus to provide for the needy remained. The adage, *kol yisrael areivim zeh b'zeh*—“all Jews are responsible one for another”—was ingrained in the Jewish consciousness. In some locations, Jewish poor could get no help other than from other Jews.

Jacob Katz, a pioneer in the sociology of Jewish communal dynamics, postulated that with the advent of modernity, the internal autonomy of the Jewish community, or *kehillah*, was seriously breached. As Jewishness became voluntary and the old Jewish community institutions lost their authority, the bond of the individual with the Jewish community loosened. Though Jewish society never went to the extreme of disintegration, the tendency toward secularization that emerged during the *Haskalah* (the Jewish Enlightenment) did undermine the unifying framework of Jewish communal life. The *kehillah* no longer had

compulsory power over the individual: the latter could not be forced, for example, to contribute to communal needs, nor could the individual be any longer controlled with the threat of *herem*, or excommunication.¹³

This did not, however, result in the disappearance of Jewry, as some sociological models predicted. Todd Endelman's study of English Jews in the early phases of modernization showed a community that, while having few impediments toward assimilation, did not disappear. Rather, though losing the basis for its former cohesion, it retained enough solidarity to maintain its social boundaries even while functioning among society at large.¹⁴ Lloyd Gartner reflected on the historic continuity and comparative stability of this community in Britain in the modern period.

Katz observed that in non-English-speaking countries, particularly in Europe, there was only a loosening, and not a complete separation between church and state. State-sponsored religious and communal institutions remained in place, but individuals gained

¹³ Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis; Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*. (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 214–218; and Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870* (Syracuse University Press, 1973). More recently, Paul Mendes-Flohr has collected primary materials documenting the radical transformation in Jewish life caused by emancipation and the dissolution of the European ghetto. See Paul R Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁴ See Todd M Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714-1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Older studies of the Jews of England are typified by authors such as Cecil Roth in *A History of the Jews in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), portraying English Jews as besieged by antisemitic hostility and plagued by intra-communal conflict that undermined Jewish solidarity.

freedom, and religious and ideological reform consciously occurred.¹⁵ Michael Meyer, discussing Jewish intellectual history, further demonstrated that in modern Germany, Jewishness lost its all-encompassing and unquestioned character, and came to form only a portion of a Jewish person's total identity and only one of his or her multiple loyalties.¹⁶

This study specifically will be limited to the two aspects of Jewish community organization that are most relevant to the communities being examined.¹⁷ The first, the need to provide for the welfare of the community, expresses itself in modernity in Jewish philanthropy.¹⁸ The strategies used by the Jews of Cuba and Shanghai as they attempted to meet the survival needs of the rapidly increasing influx of German refugees, and the effects of that crisis upon the different Jewish communities involved, will be considered. We will observe this dynamic in action as these two communities reached out to international Jewry for help, and American Jews responded. The second aspect of Jewish community organization is the need for self-defense against a sometimes hostile non-Jewish world.

¹⁵ Jacob Katz, ed., *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model* (New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Books, 1987), 2–4.

¹⁶ Michael A Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1749-1824* (Wayne State University Press, 1972), 8.

¹⁷ These two aspects are loosely based on Daniel Elazar's model of modern, voluntary Jewish community life. Although Elazar's study applies to American Jewish communities, it is also a helpful lens through which to view communities in general. (Daniel Judah Elazar, "Jewish Communal Structures Around the World," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 74 (1998): 120–31.)

¹⁸ For a very early study of the motivations and problems of Jewish philanthropy, see Boris David Bogen, *Jewish Philanthropy: An Exposition of Principles and Methods of Jewish Social Service in the United States* (Macmillan, 1917).

This study will show the response of the Jewish communities as the local non-Jewish populations became more and more influenced by Nazi propaganda.

Historiography of American Jewish Actions

The historiography of American Jewish responses to the Holocaust has fluctuated widely and has resulted in ongoing debates. Early studies, such as Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel's *The Incomparable Crime*, were critical of the role of American Jews, accusing them of being slow to comprehend the true magnitude of the problem.¹⁹ David Wyman concluded that American Jewish organizations did not do enough to challenge the conscience of America and increase the immigration quotas.²⁰ Others, such as Saul Friedman, accused American Jewish leaders of openly collaborating to preserve restrictive American immigration policies, due to their fear of increased antisemitism in the aftermath of the Depression.²¹ Henry Feingold also attributed this reticence to the "Jewish love affair" with Roosevelt that caused American Jews to avoid challenging the New Deal humanitarianism. In addition, Feingold blamed the divisions and squabbling among the various Jewish organizations as a critical factor that kept them from influencing President Roosevelt with a unified voice.²² Edward Pinsky posited that American Jewish

¹⁹ Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *The Incomparable Crime; Mass Extermination in the Twentieth Century; the Legacy of Guilt* (New York: Putnam, 1967).

²⁰ Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938-1941*.

²¹ Saul S. Friedman, *No Haven for the Oppressed: United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees, 1938-1945* (Wayne State University Press, 1973).

²² Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*.

organizations failed to unite due to divisive issues such as Zionism and assimilation, and differing socioeconomic class interests and viewpoints.²³

In contrast, authors such as William D. Rubinstein argue that there was nothing the Allies could have done, since Hitler was determined to destroy the Jews. Bombed railroad lines to Auschwitz could easily have been rebuilt within days, and the war effort had higher priorities.²⁴ Richard Breitman and Allan Lichtman take a middle road on the American response, challenging both extremes that the Roosevelt administration actively aided or prevented the Jews from escaping Europe. They argue that in some cases, politicians did act out of personal antisemitic sentiments, but in others they simply yielded to the public opposition to allow more immigrants into the country, particularly European Jews that raised the fear of Nazi infiltration. They pointed out that ultimately, domestic affairs and the war effort were America's highest priority and the plight of Jewish refugees was just a political liability in light of the larger efforts.²⁵

²³ Edward David Pinsky, "Cooperation among American Jewish Organizations in Their Efforts to Rescue European Jewry During the Holocaust, 1939-1945" (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1984).

²⁴ See William D. Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue : Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews from the Nazis* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005).

²⁵ Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 2013; see also Richard Breitman, "The Allied War Effort and the Jews, 1942-1943," *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 1985): 135-56; and Bernard Mano Julius Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (London; New York; London: Leicester university press ; Institute for Jewish policy research, 1999).

JDC history and mission

In retrospect, it is easy to place blame and conclude that American Jews did not do enough to help their fellow Jews during the Holocaust. There are others who suggest Jewish communal leaders did their best under the circumstances. This is a complex issue and the research can only go so far: the Holocaust was an unprecedented genocide in which six million Jews were ultimately murdered.

American Jews did unite to aid their fellow Jews, under the umbrella of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). Daniel Elazar has traced the philanthropic inclinations of North American Jewry, who “from their earliest years in the New World were prepared to make serious efforts to help their brethren, first at home and then increasingly abroad as well as the most serious problems shifted to the international arena.” He has also commented on the success specifically of the North American Jewish community to organize aid efforts entirely on a voluntary basis without the coercive powers of government, calling it “one of the amazing chapters in Jewish history.”²⁶

A 1909 study showed that there were 1,191 separate and distinct Jewish organizations providing Jewish relief in America.²⁷ According to Herman Stein, in the World War I era, the “pressure for coordination and centralization in fund raising,” together with the emphasis on overseas aid as a primary responsibility of the Jewish

²⁶ Daniel Judah Elazar, “Organizational and Philanthropic Behavior of the North American Jewish Community” (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs), 1, accessed July 16, 2014, <http://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles2/orgphil-najew.htm>; See also Daniel Judah Elazar, *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry* (Jewish Publication Society, 1995).

²⁷ Bogen, *Jewish Philanthropy: An Exposition of Principles and Methods of Jewish Social Service in the United States*, 7–8.

community, precipitated a united effort among Jewish charities.²⁸ In this atmosphere, JDC was established in 1914 to assist in the distribution of charitable funds raised by two of the larger relief committees, one Orthodox and one Reform, and forty smaller organizations. The JDC's early leaders were liberal-minded, wealthy German Jews who felt a moral obligation to help their less fortunate co-religionists.²⁹ The immediate need in 1914 was to aid the Jews in Palestine who were starving once Turkey had cut off their access to European aid. But the JDC continued to function after the World War I crisis was over, advancing American Jewish efforts to aid persecuted Jewish communities overseas, particularly helping relieve the intense poverty in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union following the First World War and rehabilitating victims of pogroms after the Communist Revolution.³⁰

After the Nazis rose to power in 1933, JDC concentrated on providing aid in three main areas: supporting Eastern European Jews in their desperate economic and social situation; providing physical and cultural sustenance for persecuted Jewish communities in Nazi-occupied areas; and facilitating emigration from these areas.³¹ To help Jews escape, they made travel arrangements, attempted to secure visas, and provided food, housing and medical aid to stranded refugees until they could be relocated. According to JDC's own statistics, by the end of 1939,

²⁸ Herman D. Stein, "Jewish Social Work in the United States (1654-1954)," in *American Jewish Yearbook*, ed. Morris Fine, vol. 57 (New York, Philadelphia: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), 18.

²⁹ Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 22.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 25.

JDC-supported organizations had helped some 110,000 Jews emigrate from Germany—30,000 in 1939 alone. In 1940, JDC was helping refugees in transit in more than 40 countries. From the outbreak of World War II through 1944, JDC enabled over 81,000 Jews to emigrate.³²

In some locations, JDC, representing American Jewry, was the main and sometimes the only international organization that responded to the cries of persecuted Jews for help. It functioned as a lifeline across Europe, its own staff members remaining in Warsaw and joining their fellow Jews when the Nazis emptied the Ghetto. And by its actions, JDC demonstrated to the Jewish refugees stranded in Cuba, Shanghai and other places that Jews in other parts of the world cared enough to come personally and bring them aid.

In providing this aid, the JDC was guided by four principles:

- A determinedly non-political commitment to Jews based on need
- A responsive support for Jewish communities in their place of choice
- A respectful inclusiveness for diverse Jewish beliefs and viewpoints
- A clear intention to help Jews help themselves—furthering self-sufficiency among individuals and communities³³

These guiding principles reflect JDC's non-religious, non-political, and especially non-Zionist perspective (note the careful wording of "in their place of choice"). Influenced by current social welfare trends, JDC's intention during this period was to act as a provider of financing and supervision, allowing local Jewish organizations to do the actual relief work, with the ultimate aim of keeping as many Jews as possible alive and making individuals and communities self-sufficient. In some circumstances, JDC was obliged to

³² "History of the JDC," accessed August 6, 2014, <http://archives.jdc.org/history-of-jdc/history-1930.html>.

³³ "A Joint Effort: JDC's Beginnings, 1914-1921," accessed August 6, 2014, <http://archives.jdc.org/exhibits/a-joint-effort/?depth=1>.

send representatives to oversee the relief efforts personally. In extreme cases, they operated kitchens and provided housing and medical aid.³⁴

In addition to these stated guidelines, another of JDC's goals during this period was to prevent further antisemitism and keep doors to immigration open by easing internal communal conflicts, building morale and relieving the burdens on those locations that were still willing to accept Jewish immigrants.

The Jewish Community as an Entity

Yehuda Bauer, in his three-volume history of the JDC,³⁵ understandably concentrated the majority of his research on Central and Eastern Europe, where Nazi brutality was most intense. This study has added to the conversation by focusing on JDC's wartime interaction with Jewish communities outside of these areas, specifically in Cuba and Shanghai, two of the last havens open to Jewish refugees.

The relatively small Jewish communities of Cuba and Shanghai, two of the last destinations open to Jewish refugees, provide a prime opportunity to observe the complexity of Jewish communal dynamics under stress. In these communities we see the tensions, in light of the disintegration of communal cohesion, between the philanthropic impulse and the obligation of the individual to provide for himself and his family. Small, existing Jewish communities were suddenly overtaxed by unmanageable numbers of

³⁴ Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 105.

³⁵ Yehuda Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper: A History of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1929-1939*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974); *American Jewry and the Holocaust*; and *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jews on Post-Holocaust European Jewry*, 1st ed. (Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1989).

destitute refugees. Far too many people were vying for too few resources. The resulting feeling of unfairness when some received more aid than others aroused envy, competition and mistrust. The ever-present threat of antisemitism exerted further psychological pressure to that already felt by refugees who had left everything behind. The established Jewish communities feared that the influx of destitute refugees would arouse anti-Jewish feelings toward themselves. These and other stresses further damaged the already tenuous relationships within the different Jewish communities.

This case study of the Havana and Shanghai Jewish communities will demonstrate that the unbridled menace of the Holocaust, rather than unifying the existing Jewish communities to provide aid to those fleeing the Nazi terror, fractured fragile communal interrelationships even further. Differences in religion, class, origin, politics and age became more pronounced as communities fragmented, making it more difficult to provide the aid that was desperately needed. Yet in spite of the inability of the established Jewish leaders to work together, positive forces were at work as well. The refugees themselves, although experiencing severe deprivation, managed to create a society united by cultural, educational and literary pursuits. It is this complexity in Jewish communal interactions in Cuba and Shanghai that will be explored in this study.

Laura Margolis Steps In

Laura Margolis (1903-1997) was the appointed JDC director in both of these locations. Born in Istanbul in 1903 of Ashkenazi Jewish parents, Margolis grew up with a strong sense of social responsibility. Her maternal grandfather, Solomon Schwartz, was personal physician to the Sultan of Turkey. Schwartz was also the leader of the Ashkenazi

Jewish community in Istanbul and had a special concern for the Jews who had taken refuge there from persecution in Eastern Europe. Her father, Herman, a European horticulturist and fervent Zionist, had lived in Palestine for a time, but became convinced he could do more for the Zionist cause by relocating to Istanbul and training and preparing the refugees to emigrate to Palestine. Margolis married Schwartz's daughter and the family eventually moved to Cleveland, where others in the Margolis-Kalvarisky family had settled. Laura was raised in the strong Cleveland Jewish community led by the well-known rabbi, Abba Hillel Silver. Since her teenage years, Margolis volunteered with local welfare services. Later, she received a degree in social work from Western Reserve University.³⁶

Margolis' career in social welfare dated from 1930 when she was employed by the Jewish Social Service Bureau in Cleveland as a caseworker and then as supervisor of the Jewish Big Sister Association, working with maladjusted girls, until 1934. She then became director of the Jewish Welfare Society in Buffalo, New York, where she served until she was recruited in 1939 to work in Cuba.³⁷

Margolis was trained in the predominant theory of social welfare at the time, which emphasized bringing order to the giving of relief through a thorough evaluation of the client's need and the "weeding out" of individuals who did not qualify. In addition, within Jewish social work specifically in the United States, there was an attitude that Jewish

³⁶ Now Case Western Reserve University.

³⁷ Philip Zimet to George J. Schoeneman, Esq., "RE: Laura Margolis," January 18, 1949, 1.

communities must “take care of their own.”³⁸ The training Margolis received, as well as her Jewish background, shaped her approach to social welfare, enabling her to provide for a large number of needy refugees in an organized way, and within a very limited budget.³⁹

Each overseas location where Laura Margolis served had unique political, historical and social contexts. Each demanded different strategies to interact with the civil authorities and the established Jewish communal leadership. But no amount of training could have prepared Margolis for the difficulties she faced working among Holocaust refugees in Havana and Shanghai. Due to her language skills (Margolis was able to communicate in French, Spanish, German, Turkish, Greek and Yiddish) and her unique background, motivation and training, she was the ideal candidate to work with JDC in these peripheral areas.⁴⁰

³⁸ Stein, “Jewish Social Work in the United States (1654-1954),” 20.

³⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁰ Sources of information for Margolis’ life include Menahem Kaufman, “Transcript of Unpublished Interview with Laura Margolis Jarblum” (Jerusalem: Institute for Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University, 1976); Linda Kuzmack, “Interview with Laura Margolis,” July 11, 1990, RG-50.030*0149 / 1990.422.1, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum collection of oral testimonies; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Interview with Laura Margolis,” July 11, 1990, RG-50.030*0149; Joel S. Fishman, Interview with Laura Margolis-Jarblum, July 2, 1974, *Het Centrum voor Onderzoek Naar de Geschiedenis der Nederlandse Joden*; Margalit Bejarano, “Unpublished Interview with Laura Margolis Jarblum” (Institute for Contemporary Jewry, Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1987); Evan Garelle et al., *Havana Nagila the Jews in Cuba* (Teaneck, N.J., Modesto, Calif.: Ergo Media, Inc.; Schnitzki & Stone Journalism, 1996); Laura Margolis, *Laura M. Holocaust Testimony (HVT-4355)* (New Haven, CT: Holocaust Survivors Film Project, 1980), http://www.worldcat.org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/title/laura-m-holocaust-testimony-hvt-4355-october-8-1980/oclc/702183940&referer=brief_results; Zimet to Schoeneman, Esq., “RE: Laura Margolis”; and Julie Kerksen, *Life’s Work: The Accidental Career of Laura Margolis Jarblum. Unpublished Master’s Thesis* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 2000).

Sources Used

As mentioned above, this dissertation has focused on JDC's interaction through Laura Margolis with the Jewish communities of Cuba and Shanghai during the Holocaust. To accomplish this, I have extensively utilized the New York and Jerusalem archives of the JDC, which contain the professional correspondence and official reports of Margolis, her coworkers and her superiors, as well as JDC promotional materials from the period. I have examined published articles by Margolis, as well as newspaper reports and the financial records of the local JDC operations that she supervised. Also analyzed were unpublished transcripts of oral interviews with Margolis that are located at the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Het Centrum voor Onderzoek Naar de Geschiedenis der Nederlandse Joden* in the Netherlands, and JDC archives. The Holocaust Survivors' Film Project at Yale University in New Haven offered a video testimony recorded by Margolis. Insight was added by "Lamp Unto My Feet: Tzedakah," a short video documentary featuring Margolis and produced by CBS News in 1968, located in the Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.⁴¹ Finally, the Yehuda Bauer collection, situated at the JDC archives in Jerusalem, contained many of Margolis' personal papers. In addition, Professor Bauer graciously granted me access to the as-yet-uncatalogued research files that he donated to the *Yad Vashem* archives in Jerusalem. *Yad Vashem* also granted me access to the uncatalogued files of the late Professor David Kranzler. Additionally of great help were the *YIVO* archives at the Center for Jewish History, as well as those of the New York

⁴¹ *Lamp Unto My Feet: Tzedakah* (Jerusalem, Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive at the Hebrew University: CBS News, 1968).

Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York and the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC; and additional supporting documentation for the period from contemporary archives and news services (see bibliography).

In closing, there is no simple way to describe the refugee experience. The individuals who fled the Nazi terror came from different social, economic, cultural, religious and geographic backgrounds. Most left behind their life savings, livelihoods, and loved ones, and were confronted with the need to reconstruct their lives with few or no resources. The small, established Jewish communities that met them were themselves divided along lines of geographic origin, political viewpoints, socioeconomic backgrounds and levels of religious commitment, as well as by personal rivalries. These established communities did not welcome the refugee inundation and offered relatively little by way of aid considering the immenseness of the need. With this in mind, this study will first focus on the refugee and established communities of Cuba, followed by a similar examination of the Jewish communities of Shanghai. The conclusion will compare the experiences of the two.

PART ONE

CUBA

By the late 1930s, Cuba, with its open immigration policy, was unique in that had become the major transit country for German refugees planning to enter the United States. After the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, refugees who wanted to enter the U.S. would be first admitted to the U.S. as temporary visitors and were sent to Cuba by the National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees and Emigrants (NCC)¹ or by relatives to wait for their U.S. quota numbers to come up.² Most of these refugees only spent a few days or weeks in Havana before reaching their U.S. quota number and returning to the U.S. They were expecting to return to America quickly, to conditions with which they were already familiar.

By 1938, due to the dramatic increase of German immigration to the U.S. after the *Anschluss* in March and *Kristallnacht* in November, the quota available to Germans wanting to enter the U.S. through the American Consulate in Cuba filled up, and affected the quick flow of refugees returning to the States with immigration visas. More and more refugees

¹ The National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees (NCC) was established (and largely funded) by the JDC in 1934. The U.S. State Department had suggested that a group be formed that would work closely with the Intergovernmental High Commission for Refugees to coordinate refugee relief work done by private organizations in the U.S. For a list of the organizations involved in the Committee, see Appendix. The National Refugee Service (NRS) succeeded the NCC in 1939 (For more on the NCC, see the "Archives of the National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees, 1932-1940," 1940, YIVO Archives, RG 247).

² Joseph Hyman to Herbert R. Bloch, April 8, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

found themselves stranded in Cuba for months and even years.³ Between 1938 and 1944, 12,000 Jewish refugees arrived in Cuba, most of them viewing the nation as a temporary haven in their attempts to immigrate to the United States. About half of them reached the United States before immigration slowed to a trickle, but 6,000 were left behind.

As these thousands of refugees began to flood Havana, the local Jewish leaders reached out to the international Jewish community for assistance, and the NCC responded. The NCC, in cooperation with the JDC, became the intermediary between refugees seeking entry into the United States and the American consulate in Havana. In December of 1938, Cecilia Razovsky of the NCC came across a job application from 35-year-old Laura Margolis, a social worker in the Buffalo Jewish community fluent in Spanish and German, and recruited her to a six-month term in Cuba to help with the immigration process. Margolis and a staff of about 100 Cuban Jews and refugees faced the challenge of providing food and shelter for the thousands of Jewish refugees while aiding their immigration efforts, all without sufficient funding.

Social tensions were also increasing between the small, established Jewish community and the new immigrants, who were faced with longer and longer stays in Cuba as their immigration opportunities evaporated. There were conflicts between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, Zionists and non-Zionists, and between those of orthodox and liberal Jewish outlooks. Additionally, the refugees, who were far from a homogeneous group,

³ Ibid.

struggled with the language, the climate, and the loss of their livelihoods, financial resources, family and social environment.

These were the challenges facing Laura Margolis when she arrived in Cuba. She regularly attempted to draw together representatives of the established Jewish communities to provide a more unified effort to contribute to the aid of the refugees. To better utilize available funds, she set out to completely reorganize the system of granting aid, requiring investigations into the corruption she discovered among the refugees, which was a source of much community dissention.

Margolis' reports from Cuba give us firsthand insights into the changing and complex needs of refugee communities. After the United States severely restricted its immigration quotas, the JDC through Margolis sought to provide vocational training, business loans, and job placement assistance to those refugees that remained in Cuba. All of this took place in the context of impending anti-immigration legislation and increasing antisemitic propaganda fed by the Cuban government and the military and disseminated by the Cuban press.

The growing antisemitic trajectory eventually culminated in the St. Louis crisis of June 1939. Many books and articles have been written about the voyage of the M.S. St. Louis,⁴ but very little scholarship has covered this period in light of the Jewish

⁴ See, for example, Jeffrey P Widem, "The Spirit of the Other St. Louis: The 1930's Refugee Crisis and Levels of Hope," 1998; Sarah A Ogilvie and Scott Miller, *Refuge Denied: The St. Louis Passengers and the Holocaust* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); John Mendelsohn, *Jewish Emigration: The S.S. St. Louis Affair and Other Cases* (New York: Garland Pub., 1982); Stefanie Fischer, *The Fiasco of the SS St. Louis: History and Myth*, 2002.

communal context in great detail. This study will highlight in detail the specific negotiations and the great efforts made by the JDC—representing the American Jewish communities—to ameliorate the crisis.

Robert Levine, in his comprehensive social history of the Jews in Cuba,⁵ focused on the role of antisemitism when discussing the World War II period. However, his analysis of this time period is not lengthy⁶ and his discourse on antisemitism does not differentiate between Cubans' fear of economic competition from the wave of Jewish immigrants that was a major factor in that country, and ideological antisemitism, which occurred sporadically yet was not rampant among the population.

Yehuda Bauer, the historian of the JDC, only mentions Cuba in passing in the context of general Latin American immigration.⁷ There have been no in-depth studies of the efforts of the JDC, the main relief body active at the time, to ensure the survival of the over 6,000 Jewish refugees stranded in Cuba just prior to and during the Holocaust.

This study will add to the conversation by focusing specifically on the aid provided by the American Jewish communities through the JDC, their umbrella relief body, examining the interactions between the different Jewish communities of Cuba. The JDC and its representative, Laura Margolis, through careful use of funds and efficient strategies,

⁵ Robert M. Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993).

⁶ Levine devotes only 20 of 410 pages to the wartime period and 30 to the St. Louis incident.

⁷ Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*.

played a central role in the survival of the victims of Nazi terror who found shelter in Havana.

The first chapter will examine JDC's early involvement in Cuba through Laura Margolis and her attempts to stretch limited funds to provide for the increasing need of the refugees from Nazism, as well as to bring the local Jewish leaders together and awaken their sense of moral responsibility toward their fellow Jews.

The second chapter will look at the effect of rising antisemitism upon the Jewish communities in Cuba. After Hitler rose to power, the German embassy in Havana attempted to incite anti-Jewish sentiments in the local population through the use of propaganda. The perfect storm formed by the convergence of U.S. immigration law, the influx of European immigrants and increasing Nazi propaganda, fueled the rise of antisemitic sentiment in Cuba. This culminated in the St. Louis incident, where over 900 refugees were refused entry into Cuba (and all other countries in the Americas), and found themselves stranded on the high seas. The details surrounding the St. Louis incident will be documented and attempts made by the established Jewish leaders and the JDC representatives to intervene in this crisis will be evaluated, highlighting the effects of the rise in antisemitism upon the existing and refugee communities.

In both chapters, a pattern will emerge: the lack of tolerance, reciprocity and trust among the leaders of Cuba's small Jewish communities hindered the work of rescue and relief among the European refugees. JDC representative Laura Margolis provided the leadership and the needed resources to mitigate—though not always successfully—the crises that arose. However, when that funding diminished significantly, some of the refugee

leaders responded positively and achieved enough unity to provide the social services that were needed to form a functioning and culturally flourishing refugee society.

CHAPTER ONE

THE JEWS OF CUBA

This chapter will begin by setting the context with a brief review of the history of the Jews in Cuba, tracing the immigration patterns of the established Jewish communities. Then, the state of the Cuban Jewish communities in the 1930s will be examined, followed by a focus on the waves of refugees who arrived in rapidly increasing numbers in the period under discussion. The chapter will evaluate the efforts of the local Jewish communities to provide for the welfare of the refugees, their call for international help, and the participation of the American Jewish organizations that stepped up to help.

The local Jewish communities, rather than contributing to provide the needed aid, instead erected obstacles against it. This was largely a result of the inability of the local Jewish leaders and factions to cooperate with each other. Fracturing under pressure along ethnic, class, economic, and language lines, their lack of unity impeded the work of rescue and relief among the European refugees, but the provision of funds and leadership by the JDC through Laura Margolis was a key factor in the survival of the 6,000 Jewish refugees stranded in Cuba and their eventual safe arrival at their permanent destinations.

A Brief History of the Jews of Cuba

Before the influx of German Jewish refugees, Cuba had a multiethnic Jewish population of between 10,000 and 12,000, composed of a mixture of Eastern and Western European, Turkish, and American Jews. Cuba established an open door immigration policy when it achieved independence from Spain in 1898 and liberated itself from U.S.

occupation in 1902.¹ Under U.S. occupation, the Jews attained freedom of worship and began holding religious services. In 1902, the Cuban Constitution declared freedom of religion and the separation of church and state.² These factors, as well as Cuba's proximity to the United States and the ease of immigration, made it attractive to Jews fleeing increasingly hostile treatment in Europe.³ This section will examine the waves of Jewish immigration and will survey the different Jewish communities that called Cuba their home in order to provide a context for the difficult communal interactions in the period being studied.



Immigration to Cuba had begun on a small scale—folklore has it that three members of Columbus's crew on his first voyage to the New World were Jewish. Whether this was true or not cannot be substantiated, but we do know that Portuguese individuals and families from Curaçao and Panama—*conversos* or crypto-Jews—did form a trading network and settle throughout the Caribbean as well as in Cuba before the 20th century.⁴ However, these early Jews did not found any community structures, since the Inquisition was still in

¹ Cuban independence came rather late in comparison to other countries in Latin America: Paraguay became independent in 1811, Argentina in 1816, Venezuela in 1818, Colombia in 1820, Uruguay and Peru in 1821, Ecuador in 1822, Bolivia in 1824, and Chile in 1826. Cuba only attained independence after three failed independence wars, the last of which resulted in U.S. intervention in the 1898 ten-week-long Spanish-American War. The 1898 Treaty of Paris allowed the United States temporary control of Cuba. (For an overview of the history of Latin American independence, see Jaime E. Rodriguez, *The Independence of Spanish America* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

² "Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba - HISTORIA," accessed January 7, 2014, <http://www.chcuba.org/english/community/history.htm>.

³ Margalit Bejarano, "Sephardic Jews in Cuba," *Judaism* 51, no. 1 (2002): 99.

⁴ Well into the 19th century, Jews were still banned from Spanish-controlled territories. (Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, 3.)

effect and it was illegal to be openly Jewish. According to Levinson, Cuban social aristocracy was based upon the length of time a family had resided in Cuba, and although the sources of historical and demographic information for these early centuries were “incomplete and of dubious validity,” the Jewish community nevertheless took pride in their historic presence in the land.⁵

Spain officially authorized Jews to enter Cuba in 1881, although religious services were not allowed.⁶ Between 50 and 100 families of Jewish origin—many of whom were intermarried with Catholics and raised in the Catholic religion, and others of whom were largely secular—migrated to Cuba in the late 19th century.⁷ In 1906, Romanian and other Eastern European Jews escaping from pogroms found a receptive haven in Cuba. By the early 20th century, Cuba’s culture had developed a distinctively European flavor where Jewish immigrants felt comfortable.⁸

Eleven American Jewish immigrants formed the first Jewish organization in Havana in 1904, the United Hebrew Congregation (UHC), and in 1906 purchased land in

⁵ Jay Levinson, *Jewish Community of Cuba: The Golden Age, 1906-1958*, 1st ed. (Nashville, TN: Westview Publishing Co., 2006), xviii–xix.

⁶ Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, 2.

⁷ Well-known Cuban Jewish families such as the Maduros and Brandons, some of whom had extensive links to family members in other parts of the Caribbean, established themselves in Cuba at this time. (Ibid.)

⁸ More than 850,000 new Europeans, mostly from Spain, arrived from 1898 through 1932; Cuba also had a population of over 300,000 Chinese and 250,000 Haitians and Jamaicans. (Ibid., 2, 10; for more on the indigenous tribes in Cuba, see Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, and Pamela María Smorkaloff, *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).)

Guanabacoa for the first Jewish cemetery.⁹ This affluent Reform congregation conducted services in English, although many of its early members were Yiddish-speaking Romanian-born Jews who had emigrated to the United States and been naturalized before going to Cuba. The enclave of American Jews did not associate with other Jews on the island. The UHC continued to function in Cuba until 1980.¹⁰

Meanwhile, according to historian Margalit Bejarano, Sephardic Jewish immigration to Cuba occurred in two waves, between Cuba's independence (1902) and the economic crisis of 1930. Just before World War I, in 1914, the first wave of Sephardic Jewish immigrants from Turkey arrived in Cuba. These Jews were part of a larger migration from the Middle East to the Americas due to the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the difficulties of life there during World War I.¹¹ The first Turkish Jews who arrived in Cuba were largely fleeing the mandatory military inscriptions which began in Turkey in 1908, and which, as part of the "Young Turks" revolution, were designed in part to assimilate minorities.¹²

Because of their Sephardic background and their knowledge of Ladino (a combination of medieval Spanish and Hebrew), Spanish-speaking Cuba was an ideal haven for these Turkish Jews, and the expansion of the sugar industry provided ample economic

⁹ Robert M. Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 2, 10; For more on the indigenous tribes in Cuba, see Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, and Pamela María Smorkaloff, *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, 3.

¹¹ Bejarano, "Sephardic Jews in Cuba," 1–2.

¹² Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 135.

opportunities. These Jewish immigrants did not cluster in Havana, but rather spread out throughout the country.¹³ Immigration from Turkey continued until after World War I due to increased antisemitism in that country. Following the War, the men who had immigrated to Cuba began to bring their wives and children to their new adopted country. According to Judith Laikin Elkin, between 1902 and 1914, 5,700 Jews had immigrated to Cuba.¹⁴ These Turkish immigrants established the first Sephardic synagogue, *Congregación Unión Israelita Chevet Ahim*.¹⁵

A third wave of Jewish immigration came between 1925 and 1935, when approximately 4,000 Eastern European Jews who spoke Russian, Polish and Yiddish migrated to Cuba to flee persecution in their home countries. The move to Cuba was in large part influenced by the United States' Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and Immigration Act of 1924, which tended to favor "old immigrants" from Northern and Western Europe (British, German, Irish and Scandinavian) versus new ones from Southern and Eastern Europe (Italians, Poles, Russians, Austro-Hungarians and others).¹⁶ The Eastern Europeans, like those Jews who came before them, found Cuba to be a place where antisemitism did not seem to be a factor in their everyday interaction with their neighbors. The climate was

¹³ Bejarano, "Sephardic Jews in Cuba," 1.

¹⁴ Judith Laikin Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America*, Rev. ed. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1998), 69; statistics found in the Leizer Ran collection at YIVO are also quoted in footnote 18 in Bejarano, "Sephardic Jews in Cuba."

¹⁵ Sapir, *The Jewish Community of Cuba*, 14.

¹⁶ See Helen F. Eckerson, "Immigration and National Origins," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 367 (September 1, 1966): 1–2.

favorable and the economy provided opportunities for economic advancement.¹⁷

In addition, these immigrants received assistance to become established in Cuba from JDC and the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)¹⁸ in the United States. In time, these Eastern European Jews settled largely in Havana and were able to blend in to Cuban culture and economic life.¹⁹ They founded the first Ashkenazic synagogue, *Adas Israel*, in 1925.²⁰

The Jewish community in 1930s Cuba was fractured along ethnic lines. The most deeply rooted community in Cuba prior to 1935 consisted of a small Portuguese-Dutch “colony” of Jews from founding families such as the Maduros (finance), Lobos (commerce),

¹⁷ “La Presencia Hebrea En Cuba,” 1, accessed October 13, 2013, <http://www.enlacejudio.com/2011/08/04/la-presencia-hebrea-en-cuba-parte-ii/>.

¹⁸ HIAS was originally founded as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society to aid Russian Jewish immigrants to the U.S. in the late 19th century. In 1909 it merged with the Hebrew Sheltering House Association to become the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society. HIAS provided immediate shelter, aid and medical care for newly arriving immigrants, first in the United States and then internationally. They also searched for relatives who could provide affidavits to facilitate immigration to the U.S. (“HIAS,” accessed January 20, 2014, <http://www.hias.org/>; See also Bejarano, “Sephardic Jews in Cuba,” 3).

¹⁹ Jaclyn A. Steinberg, “An Ongoing Jewish Diaspora—the Story of the Cuban Jews” (Emory University, 2007), 8.

²⁰ Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, 23.

and Poliakoffs (oil), who were highly esteemed and respected. Solomon Maduro²¹ and Adolfo Kates²² were among the leading Jewish men active during this time.²³

Among the Americans, Albert Hartman²⁴ had a social position similar to Kates and Maduro. The American Jews by and large continued to support the United Hebrew Congregation, now a Reform Temple, led by Rabbi Meir Lasker, a young rabbi from Providence, Rhode Island, who was also the Anti-Defamation League representative in Cuba.²⁵

The second group, the Sephardic Turks, were a close-knit society, mainly traders, who kept to their religious traditions. The third group, the Ashkenazic Eastern Europeans, known as the “*Polacos*,” had no leading personality but were represented by the organization known as the *Centro Israelita*, a Jewish community center for immigrants from

²¹ Solomon Maduro was a member of the prestigious Maduro family, one of the founding families of the Cuban Jewish community that had extensive familial connections throughout the Caribbean. A Dutch citizen, he was a respected attorney and one of the most influential Jewish men in Cuba. He was not outspoken about his Jewish heritage. (Joseph Hyman to Fred Ascher, July 28, 1939, 1933/44:507, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.)

²² Adolfo Kates, a Belgian Jew, was generally regarded as a key leader among Cuban Jews. He was a member of the American Chamber of Commerce, the Cuban Chamber of Commerce, and a founder of the Miramar Yacht Club. (Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, 225.)

²³ Frank Trager, *Havana Report*, August 30, 1939, 8, 1933/44:508, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

²⁴ Albert Hartman, the president of Chrysler in Cuba, served as co-Chairman of the Jewish Refugees Committee (JRC) in Havana until December 1938. (Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, 229.)

²⁵ Trager, *Havana Report*, 8.

Eastern Europe. Besides these were 6,000 German Jewish refugees who arrived after 1938 and who regarded themselves as transients.²⁶

Local Aid Efforts

The Jews of Cuba had been called upon to aid new arrivals in previous waves of immigration. The various Cuban Jewish communities, while forming their own societies for mutual benefit purposes, did not generally associate or cooperate with each other in doing so. The Sephardim and Ashkenazim continually found fault with one another, and the Americans did not associate with either. Few Cuban Jews contributed toward Jewish causes: a 1930 report on contributions from Keren Hayesod (“The Foundation Fund”), the central fundraising organization for Israel (at that time Palestine), placed Cuba at the bottom of the list of fifty-three countries worldwide in donations.²⁷ When faced with the need to provide for the thousands of refugees from Nazi Europe, the local Jewish communities’ aid efforts were not sufficient.



The U.S. National Council of Jewish Women²⁸ had been providing some aid to the Jewish immigrants since the 1920s, but their efforts proved to be insufficient. The

²⁶ Ibid., 8–9.

²⁷ Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, 25. See also Jack Brandon to Cecilia Razovsky, December 28, 1938, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

²⁸ The National Council of Jewish Women was founded in 1893 at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago to strengthen the connection of women to Judaism and pursue social justice. Among its stated tasks was the assisting of new Jewish immigrants to become self-sustaining. For more on the National Council of Jewish Women, see www.ncjw.org.

Emergency Relief Committee of the JDC stepped in, and together with HIAS, in 1924 set up in New York the Jewish Committee for Cuba to Help Jewish Arrivals.²⁹ They opened an office in Havana temporarily staffed by Cecilia Razovsky (1891-1968) in 1924. Cecilia Razovsky had a long and distinguished career in social services. She served as Executive Secretary for the National Council of Jewish Women's (NCJW) Department of Immigrant Aid; Executive Director of the National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees (1934-1939); Director of the New Migration Department and later Assistant to the Executive Director of the National Refugee Service (1939-1943). She also served in the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency and the JDC (1944-1948), HIAS (1957-1958), and the Boards of several other organizations. Razovsky was sent to Cuba for a short time in 1924 to assist and evaluate the poor conditions for emigrant Jews, and she served from 1925-1935 as Secretary of the Jewish Committee for Cuba.³⁰

In 1925, the United Hebrew Congregation opened the *Centro Israelita* (Hebrew Cultural Center), which was subsidized by HIAS in New York and took over most of the tasks of the Jewish Committee for Cuba. The *Centro* provided welfare, encouraged *Landsmannschaften* (mutual aid societies) and sponsored an orphanage and an anti-tuberculosis league, as well as cultural, educational and sporting events for the Ashkenazi Jewish community.³¹

²⁹ Sapir, *The Jewish Community of Cuba*, 13.

³⁰ Cecilia Razovsky, "Papers, 1913-1971" (Center for Jewish History, 1971); see also Bat-Ami Zucker, *Cecilia Razovsky and the American Jewish Women's Rescue Operations in the Second World War* (London, England; Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008).

³¹ Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, 44. See also Trager, *Havana Report*, 9.

Although Cuba's Jewish community grew with the various waves of immigration, the thousands of Jews who arrived in the late 1930s—mainly Central and Western Europeans—only intended Cuba to be a stopping place on their way to the U.S. and thus were not actively looking to establish themselves or obtain employment in Havana, where they had landed.³²

The efforts of HIAS through the *Centro* were proving insufficient to cope with the increasing Jewish immigration. In 1937, William Rosenwald, an American businessman and philanthropist,³³ with the help of Cecilia Razovsky, reached an agreement with Jack Brandon, a member of the long-established Brandon family in Cuba,³⁴ and other members of the American Jewish community of Havana to set up a new agency called the Joint Relief Committee (JRC) to care for the needs of the incoming refugees. Brandon served as Director of the JRC from its establishment in 1937 to the end of 1938, and was later knighted by President Fulgencio Batista Zaldivar.

This committee was to be responsible for the wellbeing of destitute German refugees who were sent to Havana by the NCC. The refugees would travel to Cuba to change

³² American Friends Service Committee, *Refugee Situation in Cuba: Summary of Findings and Recommendations*, May 12, 1939, pt. 1, 1, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

³³ Rosenwald, the son of Julius Rosenwald (former chairman of Sears, Roebuck), was an avid fundraiser to address the needs of Jews in distress. He helped establish the United Jewish Appeal in 1939, later serving as one of its three national chairmen. By 1948 his family foundation had brought over 300 family members from Europe to the United States, providing them with affidavits, employment and housing. He was also the organizer and first president of the National Refugee Service, which helped resettle refugees. For over 50 years, he was a member of the executive committee of the JDC. (Lawrence Van Gelder, "William Rosenwald Dies; Benefactor to Many Was 93," *New York Times*, November 1, 1996.)

³⁴ Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, 229.

their temporary immigration status in the U.S., so that they could return as full immigrants. This was an advantageous route for the immigrants to take because, at that time, the American Consulate in Havana had an allotment of German and Polish U.S. immigration quota numbers.³⁵ The JRC also worked with the NCC to handle the direct immigration to Cuba of concentration camp inmates who were imprisoned and then released on the condition that they leave Germany immediately.³⁶

The JRC's program began slowly in 1937 with 217 cases, and established medical, vocational and educational services for the new immigrants. From January to October 1938, as conditions for Jews in Germany and Austria worsened, the number arriving for a change of status began to increase. In October 1938, with no notice or warning, the allotment of quota numbers to Cuba was changed. Contemporary correspondence explains that this change was based on a new system of assigning quota numbers in order to service refugees throughout the world according to their date of registration. In Cuba this meant that many refugees who had arrived with the hope of quickly changing their status were forced to remain for much longer in order for their quota numbers to be reached.³⁷ It must be noted that this modification is not referenced in any official Acts of the U.S. Government. When this change came into effect in October 1938, Jack Brandon wired the NCC:

³⁵ Manuel Siegel, Leon Veissid, and Laura Margolis, *Study of Change in Status Cases from January 1937 to October 1940*, December 1, 1940, 1, 1933/44:510, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

³⁶ Herbert Katzki to Albert Lieberman, December 6, 1938, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba; Joint Distribution Committee, *Memorandum of Meeting Held in the Office of the Joint Distribution Committee*, May 23, 1939, 1, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

³⁷ Siegel, Veissid, and Margolis, *Study of Change in Status Cases from January 1937 to October 1940*, 1.

CONSULATE INFORMS EARLIEST GERMAN QUOTA OPEN NOW IS
JANUARY RELIEVES [sic] IN FORTNIGHT EARLIEST WILL BE JULY.³⁸

The following day, he sent this cable:

CONSUL INFORMS TODAY GERMAN QUOTA CLOSED FOR TIME BEING
MAKE EVERT [sic] EFFORT WASHINGTON RECONSIDER.³⁹

On October 26, the American Consulate in Cuba officially informed Brandon and the

JRC:

...You are informed that effective November 1, 1938, the German Quota numbers available at this office have been reduced to 8 non-preference per month, and 8 preference. Formerly the numbers available were 65 non-preference and 10 preference per month.⁴⁰

In response, Cecilia Razovsky and the NCC discontinued the change of status immigration to Cuba:

We are at a loss to know what to do now with the people who are here and want to go to Cuba to change their status. At the present time we have stopped them all from going.⁴¹

In spite of this, 59 new cases were sent to Havana in November and December 1938.

In 1939, 185 additional cases arrived, sent by the NCC. In addition, more and more refugees

³⁸ Jack Brandon to Cecilia Razovsky, "Cable," October 19, 1938, 1933/44:510, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

³⁹ Jack Brandon to Cecilia Razovsky, "Cable," October 20, 1938, 1933/44:510, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁴⁰ Jack Brandon to Cecilia Razovsky, October 26, 1938, 1933/44:510, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba. The 1924 Immigration Act defined "preference" immigrants as relatives of U.S. citizens, and immigrants who had agricultural skills. All others were "non-preference." ("History of U.S. Immigration Laws | Federation for American Immigration Reform," accessed January 9, 2014, http://www.fairus.org/facts/us_laws.)

⁴¹ Siegel, Veissid, and Margolis, *Study of Change in Status Cases from January 1937 to October 1940*, 3.

began to arrive who had sailed to Cuba on their own, without going through the NCC or any other agency. Many times these refugees did not have their papers in order nor the necessary referrals to fulfill the personal or monetary requirements of the U.S. immigration laws.⁴² These refugees who arrived on their own faced indefinite stays in Cuba in a strange environment where they had no opportunity to work, study, or retrain to prepare for a new life in still another land.

This influx of Jewish immigrants raised the concern that the Cuban government might consider limiting immigration. On November 18, 1938, shortly after the Evian Conference, Colonel Fulgencio Batista Zaldivar,⁴³ who was backed by the U.S. and virtually dominated Cuban politics through a series of puppet presidents from 1934 on (and who later ruled from 1940 until 1959),⁴⁴ issued a statement to American and Cuban newspapers that his country would “heartily cooperate” with the United States in assisting refugees, and that Cuba’s liberal immigration policy would continue:

Col. Batista and the Cuban Ambassador Martines [sic] Fraga⁴⁵ held a long conference at the Savoy-Plaza this morning with the Committee for Political Refugees of which Mr. Lawrence Berenson⁴⁶ was Chairman, to

⁴² Ibid., 4.

⁴³ For more on Batista and his career, see Frank Argote-Freyre, “Fulgencio Batista: From Revolutionary to Strongman” (Ph.D., Rutgers The State University of New Jersey - New Brunswick, 2004).

⁴⁴ Jacqueline West, *South America, Central America and the Caribbean 2002* (Psychology Press, 2001), 303.)

⁴⁵ Pedro Martinez-Fraga was Cuban Ambassador to the United States from March 1937 to December 1940.

⁴⁶ Lawrence Berenson (1891-1970) was a New York attorney and a personal friend of Fulgencio Batista. A Harvard Law School graduate, Berenson was honorary counsel for the NCC from 1938-1939. He served as counsel to the Republic of Cuba from 1934 to 1958 and as president of the Cuban-American Chamber of Commerce in the United States from

discuss ways and means for assisting political refugees entering Cuba.... Col. Batista stated that he was deeply moved by the sad plight of the political refugees and that Cuba has already adopted important measures to assist refugees entering Cuba. He stated that he and Cuban officials would heartily cooperate with President Roosevelt in his plan to relieve the terrible situation abroad. He expressed the hope that all Central and South America would join with Cuba in facilitating the entry to their respective countries of political refugees from Germany.⁴⁷

In addition to bolstering the image of Cuba as a supporter of U.S. policy, as long as American Jewish organizations were financially supporting the refugees, Batista and his government also profited from the increased trade brought about by the influx of immigrants. However, this open immigration policy resulted in greater and greater demands on those who were providing for the immigrants. Each boat arriving in Havana brought a new crop of refugees, who had to wait longer and longer for permission to enter the United States. Thus, the Jewish refugees became a steadily increasing financial burden on the JRC, the end of which could not be discerned.

On November 10, 1938, for example, a group of refugees arrived on the S.S. Hameln⁴⁸ and immediately went on the relief rolls. They were Polish, illiterate, and unable

1938 to 1944. He received three decorations from Cuba: the rank of Cavalier Carlos Manuel de Céspedes in 1934; the September Fourth Decoration and the rank of Commander in 1944. ("Lawrence Berenson Dies at 79; Counsel for Pre-Castro Cuba," *New York Times*, December 22, 1970.) Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles had advised Berenson to go to Cuba to negotiate personally with Batista on previous occasions. (Cecilia Razovsky to Paul Baerwald et al., November 29, 1938, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.)

⁴⁷ Fulgencio Batista, "News Release: Col. Batista Promises That Cuba's Liberal Policy for the Admission of Political Refugees Will Continue," November 18, 1938, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁴⁸ A steamer of the North German Lloyd Line that was later torpedoed *en route* from New Orleans to Veracruz and Tampico by a German submarine and sunk in 1942. ("HAMELN II CARGO SHIP 1941-1942," accessed January 24, 2014, <http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?152358>.)

even to attempt to support themselves because they knew neither English nor Spanish. They came with \$200 bonds, which would not permit them to remain in Cuba for more than 30 days, after which they would have to pay \$10 per person per month to renew their permits until the permits would no longer be able to be renewed.⁴⁹

The very apprehensive JRC then requested that the NCC in New York immediately reiterate to all the Jewish agencies in Europe not to permit the embarkation to Cuba of immigrants with less than \$500 for bonds unless they had affidavits of well-to-do relatives in the United States who would be willing to give them financial support while in Havana waiting for their visas.⁵⁰ The Cuban Jewish leaders could not possibly have grasped at the time that escape from Nazi Europe could mean the difference between life and death. They were concerned with their own ability to care for the refugees, and wanted to prevent them from becoming a public charge, lest the doors to immigration to Cuba and other havens close completely.

By early November 1938, before the even larger flood of immigrants began to arrive, the JRC was supporting 680 persons, which resulted in expenses of \$4,800 per month. The JRC, which was the only organization that had the personnel or was prepared in any way to handle the problems of the refugees, served to assist:

...those needing advice on immigration matters, localization of friends and relatives in the United States, registration as aliens, placing of bonds,

⁴⁹ Jack Brandon to Cecilia Razovsky, November 10, 1938, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

renewals of stay permits [to stay in Cuba], medical attention, possibility of employment, [and] social service or financial relief.⁵¹

The resources to maintain this level of expense did not exist within Cuba. Several years earlier, the NCC had sought to enlist the cooperation of the community. They prevailed on well-known residents to head up a local committee, but many difficulties arose. There was considerable resistance to the organization of refugee relief among some; among others there was tremendous apathy. Joseph Hyman later wrote in a letter to Rabbi Emil Leipsiger, president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis:

German, East European and Spanish Jews found it hard to sit down together and form one joint committee. It was especially difficult to secure financial help from any save a handful, for the unfortunate refugees.⁵²

Upon the JRC's request, JDC, as the organization that was providing most of the funding, agreed to come in directly and attempt a program of assistance. The alternative would have been to leave the newly arrived refugees practically to their own resources, in view of the Havana community's lack of unity and inability to raise funds.⁵³

Hyman went on to describe to Leipsiger how even an impoverished community such as the one in Poland took responsibility and bore nearly 80% of the total budget of the welfare, emergency, cultural and economic assistance programs. He also gave examples of

⁵¹ Jack Brandon, *General Survey of the Refugee Situation in Cuba*, November 15, 1938, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁵² Joseph Hyman to Rabbi Emil Leipzig, October 1, 1940, 1, 1933/44:510, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁵³ Ibid.

Swiss, French, and Swedish Jewish communities' participation in fundraising and community welfare organization.⁵⁴

In contrast, the attitude of many in the local Cuban Jewish communities was that they didn't care to have their names associated with any phase of refugee work. They regarded the coming of the refugees as an annoyance that created new problems for the native Jews. They viewed refugees as an American problem and considered it unnecessary to shoulder any real part of the financing, administration or social burden involved. Although there were men of considerable wealth in Havana, the total contribution from the community in 1939 amounted to less than \$10,000, while JDC was called on to spend almost \$200,000.⁵⁵

It was the feeling of JDC leadership that the Havana Jewish community was well situated enough to make a substantial contribution to finance the work of Cuban refugee aid. A small advisory Council was eventually set up, but it hardly met at all. Laura Margolis as JDC representative was later forced, lacking community support, to carry the burden of responsibility and find solutions to most of the problems.

One can hear the frustration in Hyman's words:

The great problem is how to persuade the Jews of Havana of all origins to get together and to make adequate contribution, and to assume social responsibility.... We earnestly hope that its... Committee may become a really representative body. We believe that the leadership and stimulation of all elements may be brought together in some coordinated form. We have more faith in the Jews of Havana apparently than they are willing to have in themselves. We should like more and more to turn over

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

the whole job to them.... The JDC does not want to run the Joint Relief Committee in Cuba; it does not want to do more there than it has been called upon to do in any other country in the world.⁵⁶

He attempted to end his report to Rabbi Leipsiger with a measure of hope:

In conclusion, may I say that we have only the friendliest and most cordial feelings for all the good people in Cuba, some of whom think that JDC has made many mistakes in its dealing with the situation, some of whom feel that they could have done a great deal more. The real test of the pudding is in the eating. If we can stir the people of Havana up to the point where they can sit down and work out the whole situation together on a truly representative basis, where German Jew and Spanish Jew and East European Jew may get together in a common cause, we feel that we should have rendered an enduring service.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, the different discordant elements of Havana failed to get together to meet this dire and pressing need.

The lack of participation of the Cuban Jewish community was acutely felt. To further complicate matters, on November 21, 1938, the Hamburg-Amerika shipping line,⁵⁸ which brought most of the refugees, notified the JRC that they were no longer able to cope with the difficulties presented by the Cuban Immigration and Cuban State Department to grant visas to the immigrants and enable them to embark. They asked the JRC to take over all of these cases and to present them to the Cuban Immigration and State Department.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ The *Hamburg Amerikanische Paketfahrt Aktien-Gesellschaft*, known in English as the *Hamburg-Amerika Line* or HAPAG, was a shipping line that brought German refugees to the Americas, and was the largest of the German shipping lines. In 1933 Hamburg-Amerika, founded by Jewish entrepreneur Albert Ballin, had elected a Nazi chairman and a new board of directors to replace Jews by Aryans. ("Jews Resign From Board Of Hamburg-Amerika Line BERLIN, July 26," *The Advertiser*, July 28, 1933.)

Jack Brandon agreed to do this, provided the immigrants bring with them a minimum of \$400 each in addition to their \$500 bond so that they could support themselves in Cuba for at least a year. Brandon realized the financial burden this would place on potential immigrants, but did not see how the JRC could support any more immigrants than were already in Cuba and the 350 others that were currently en route on the S.S. Orinoco.⁵⁹

Brandon was not alone in anticipating the dire results of the lack of funding. The co-president of the JRC, Albert Hartman, had resigned a few weeks earlier for this reason. Hartman had repeatedly stated that he did not approve of the JRC's building upon a foundation of economic insecurity. Brandon, however, determined for the moment to carry on, feeling that a way would be found to meet the emergency,⁶⁰ yet sounding the ominous note to the NCC on November 15 that, "The time for action is now, and we trust that a constructive suggestion will be forthcoming from you without delay, to enable the writer to continue his work."⁶¹ Yet Brandon too resigned his position (on December 31, 1938), stating that it was due to lack of assistance in fulfilling his responsibilities.⁶²

Hartman and Brandon's opinions about limiting immigration, however, did not reflect the policy of the NCC, whose stated purpose was to assist "all refugees entering

⁵⁹ On November 21, 1938, the Orinoco was still on the high seas on its way to Cuba. See Jack Brandon to Cecilia Razovsky, November 21, 1938, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁶⁰ Brandon, *General Survey of the Refugee Situation in Cuba*, 1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶² Jack Brandon to Emily Perlman, December 30, 1938, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

Cuba, whether Catholic, Jewish or Protestant, or any other refugees who have been compelled to leave European countries because of their religious or political beliefs..."⁶³ In November 1938, the NCC issued a guarantee signed by its chairman, Joseph Chamberlain,⁶⁴ to the government of Cuba⁶⁵ that they hoped would be accepted in lieu of the \$500 bond in exceptional cases⁶⁶ in which the refugees were recommended by the NCC but had no money for the bond (such as refugees from concentration camps):

THE NATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR AID TO REFUGEES AND EMIGRANTS COMING FROM GERMANY does by these presents hereby guarantee, warrant, represent to the Republic of Cuba and... does hereby indemnify and agree to protect the Republic of Cuba... as to all refugees who have heretofore entered Cuba upon the recommendation of the NATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE or who may hereafter be permitted to enter into Cuba upon its recommendation, that each of said refugees shall not directly or indirectly violate labor laws or any other laws of the Republic of Cuba in any respect whatsoever and that each and all of such refugees recommended by the NATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE shall not become public charges or subject to support or maintenance by the Republic of Cuba or any official department or any municipality or other official body of the Republic of Cuba. IT BEING UNDERSTOOD AND AGREED that this guaranty and indemnity shall be in

⁶³ National Coordinating Committee, "Guarantee by the National Coordinating Committee to the Government of Cuba," November 1938, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁶⁴ Joseph P. Chamberlain (1874-1951), a New York attorney, was professor of public law at Columbia University until his retirement in 1950. In 1911, he founded and then directed the Legislative Drafting Research Fund of Columbia University. He was also a consultant to various federal and state departments and was counsel and draftsman to the New York City Charter Revision Commission of 1935-1936. In 1938, Chamberlain received the gold medal of the Pi Lambda Phi fraternity for tolerance for his work with refugees. ("Prof. Chamberlain of Columbia Gets Gold Medal," *New York Times*, December 31, 1938; "Joseph Chamberlain, Law Ex-Professor," *New York Times*, May 22, 1951.)

⁶⁵ The guarantee was communicated through Lawrence Berenson, who had a relationship with Batista and the Cuban government. (Jack Brandon to Cecilia Razovsky, November 25, 1938, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.)

⁶⁶ Lawrence Berenson to National Coordinating Committee, December 20, 1938, 3, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

lieu of and in substitution for the regulation of the Secretaria de Trabajo [Secretary of Labor] requiring a deposit or bond in the sum of \$500.00 for immigrants entering Cuba.⁶⁷

The Cuban State Department agreed to take the matter under advisement, although they procrastinated on making a decision⁶⁸ while attempting to force the NCC to offer a bribe or graft of \$50 per visa for “diverse immigration expenses.”⁶⁹ Meanwhile, Colonel Manuel Benitez Gonzalez, Director-General of the Cuban Immigration Office and a protégé of Batista,⁷⁰ controlled the implementation of Cuban immigration policy. Benitez had been selling illegal landing certificates to the immigrants for \$150 or the highest price he could get.⁷¹ In order to sell these, he was circulating rumors that the \$500 bond would never be returned.⁷²

⁶⁷ National Coordinating Committee, “Guarantee by the National Coordinating Committee to the Government of Cuba,” 2.

⁶⁸ The guarantee was eventually accepted by Col. Batista by December 31, 1938. (Lawrence Berenson to David Bressler, December 31, 1938, 3, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.)

⁶⁹ Jack Brandon to Cecilia Razovsky, “Phone Call,” December 15, 1938, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁷⁰ Benitez’ son, Manuel Benitez Váldez, had played a prominent role alongside Fulgencio Batista during the Sergeant’s Revolt of 1933 and was allowed to make his father, Manuel Benitez Gonzalez, the Director General of Immigration. (Jeffrey Gurock, *America, American Jews, and the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 59.)

⁷¹ According to U.S. estimates, Benitez had amassed a personal fortune of U.S. \$500,000-\$1,000,000. When this became known, even though he was a protégé of Batista, he became subject to intense public scrutiny and was eventually forced to resign from office. (Joseph Hyman to Herbert Mallinson, June 2, 1939, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba. See also United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Voyage of the St. Louis,” accessed October 21, 2013, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=1,0005267>.)

⁷² Berenson to Bressler, December 31, 1938, 1.

Brandon had confidence in Benitez, repeatedly assuring Berenson that Benitez' landing certificates would be adequate and there would be no need for immigrants to put up a \$500 deposit. Berenson, in turn, continually asked Brandon to show him the provision of the law or regulation that allowed refugees to come into Cuba as permanent immigrants based on these landing permits, but Brandon never produced this.⁷³ Berenson requested that a translation of these laws be sent as soon as possible to the NCC office so that they might be carefully studied.⁷⁴ In the meantime, Berenson insisted that potential immigrants make the \$500 deposit in accordance with Cuban regulations.⁷⁵

Lawrence Berenson traveled to Cuba on December 20, 1938 and met with Brandon and administrator Emily Perlman, who had been sent down from New York to assist temporarily in the Cuban office.⁷⁶ It was Berenson's intent to point out to Benitez the possible danger in connection with accepting or demanding funds which were not official. Brandon, however, persuaded Berenson that if he approached Benitez, the amount that would be asked per case officially or otherwise would jump considerably.⁷⁷ Brandon suggested that he himself speak to Benitez and try to get the amount down to \$10 per person, as long as it was put in writing that the \$10 was being requested as a service charge in view of the excessive amount of work created by the refugee situation.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁶ Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, February 7, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁷⁷ Berenson to National Coordinating Committee, December 20, 1938, 1.

Berenson, perhaps naïvely, could not believe that anyone with any responsibility in the Cuban State Department was making demands or requiring extra payments, and strongly suspected some underling to be making them.⁷⁸ He suggested to the NCC a way of working out the program so that the lists of refugees would be vetted by the Secretary of Labor and then need the approval of the Acting Secretary of State, Dr. Juan Ramos, or the Sub-Secretary, Dr. Campa, thus bypassing the payment of the \$150 graft or any “service charge,” but keeping the \$500 bond as a requirement except in “exceptional” cases, which would be covered by the guarantee.⁷⁹

Immigrants arriving without the \$500 bond would be allowed into Cuba but held at the Tiscornia immigrant camp⁸⁰ until they could produce the bond money. On November 25, 1938, Benitez confidentially told Brandon through an intermediary that he would allow the immigrants to remain in Cuba for one year for a fee of \$50 to be paid through a special notary⁸¹ “recommended” by him and charging the exorbitant sum of \$10, plus \$2 for the services of two witnesses. Of course one could use any other notary, but because this

⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Originally a ranch known as Triscornia (the name later degenerated into Tiscornia due to the tendency of the Cuban language to elide the letter “r”), Tiscornia was the Cuban equivalent of Ellis Island, where immigrants were housed in small rooms until their immigration status could be established, and were charged \$1.00 per day for their room and board. The camp was converted into a school in 1959 when Fidel Castro came to power, but was abandoned after two years. (Michel Robert Moutal, *My Life, Reflections and Anecdotes* (Bloomington Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2008), 286.)

⁸¹ In Cuba, a notary is empowered to draw up contracts and function as an attorney.

authorization by Benitez was “problematical” the difficulties could be bypassed by going through his recommended channels.⁸²

In the meantime, while Benitez was requiring these extra funds from the immigrants, he was having his own run-in with the Cuban State Department, which suspected him of accepting illegal funds, and was therefore refusing to allow the Cuban Consul in Germany to issue visas upon cabled instructions from Benitez.⁸³

With the dramatic increase in immigration, Berenson felt that the JRC office was badly understaffed at the present time and that an adequate staff was essential. He urgently recommended to the NCC that Cecilia Razovsky come to Cuba to evaluate the situation herself,⁸⁴ and that “a capable woman executive and a young Cuban lawyer” be recruited so that the office could be “run smoothly by the clock without the necessity of expensive cables, long correspondence and unnecessary comment about political intrigues here.”⁸⁵ Needless to say, Berenson’s opinion of Brandon’s leadership was less than favorable.⁸⁶ Berenson reiterated that “this woman” should be a person who could maintain an office “to carry on efficiently, quickly and without friction... and should avoid the local gossipy influences which are constantly in play.”⁸⁷ He felt that “a real social worker” should be sent, who “should not be unduly worried about finances because there will be plenty to do

⁸² Brandon to Razovsky, November 25, 1938, 1.

⁸³ Ibid., 2. See also Lawrence Berenson to Joseph Chamberlain, January 10, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁸⁴ Berenson to National Coordinating Committee, December 20, 1938, 5.

⁸⁵ This was a backhanded statement about the way Brandon had handled his position in the JRC. (Ibid., 2.)

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 5.

without the additional burden.”⁸⁸ Ideally, of course, this person should speak Spanish, “at least enough to get by.”⁸⁹

In December, David M. Bressler,⁹⁰ JDC Vice-Chairman, who had previously served as chairman of the JDC Refugees Committee and had experience in handling refugee problems, traveled to Cuba and submitted a report on the situation. He too observed that very few of the local Jewish people took any interest whatsoever in the JRC and felt no obligation to help in the current emergency: “...They seem to feel that they are conferring a great favour [sic] upon the Jews of the United States in not objecting to having these immigrants come here.”⁹¹ Bressler admitted that this might be putting it a little strongly, but he did find the local community to be filled with divisions and jealousies, and his statement reflected the tenor of the situation.⁹² In his opinion, the Cuban Jewish community was:

...not one community but a dozen. Each one yells for its own prerogatives, influences, rights and what not. The so-called down-town element will have nothing to do with the up-town element, and there are divisions in both.... We must face the contingency of having to finance the entire

⁸⁸ David Bressler to Cecilia Razovsky, December 30, 1938, 6, 1933/44:505, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁸⁹ David Bressler to Cecilia Razovsky, January 2, 1939, 2, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁹⁰ Bressler served as Chairman of the JDC Refugees Committee (1924) together with Louis Marshall and Stephen S. Wise; he also served as chairman of the JDC Budget and Scope Committee (1937); and as JDC Vice-Chairman (1937-1942). (Joint Distribution Committee, “Who’s Who in the History of the JDC,” n.d., 3, AJDC Israel Records.) His personal papers, photographs and newspaper clippings can be found in the “Collection of the Ellen Brett Aibel Bierman Family, circa 1865-2002 (bulk 1900-1943)” (Center for Jewish History, 2002), *P-940.

⁹¹ Bressler to Razovsky, December 30, 1938, 1.

⁹² Ibid.

burden, with contributions from local people amounting to a very very small part of the sum that will be required.⁹³

In his comments on “uptown” and “downtown” Jewish elements, Bressler was referring to the well-known dynamics between bourgeois, liberal German Jews and “impoverished” and “ghettoized” Eastern European immigrants who migrated westward in different time periods as conditions became unbearable for them. The German Jewish “uptown element” tended to patronize the “downtown” Eastern European Jews, often regarding them as backward, uneducated and “dirty,” and in need of help to become accepted in society. Jack Wertheimer, in his analysis of this phenomenon in Germany between unification and World War I, acknowledges the common impression that German Jews “harbored a profound antipathy toward their [Eastern European] coreligionists that smacked of Jewish self-hatred, if not anti-Semitism [sic].”⁹⁴ Bressler projected this same dynamic onto the Cuban Jewish communities that he encountered.

While in Cuba, Bressler met with Coert Du Bois (1882-1960), the American Consul General in Havana, who offered his cooperation “in every possible way.” Du Bois had been in charge of the State Department’s Visa Office from 1924 to 1927. He also served as consul in Paris, Naples, Port Said, Java, India, Genoa, Naples and Havana (1937-1941). He went on lead the Caribbean office of the State Department and then was liaison officer for the State

⁹³ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁴ Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 3–4.

Department and the War Assets Administration for Central and South America and the Caribbean.⁹⁵

Du Bois assured Bressler that he was “very much interested” in the stateless immigrants because “after all they have no consul of their own” and he felt as if he were their consul.⁹⁶ Bressler sensed that Du Bois was “unquestionably a friend in need.”⁹⁷

As a result of his visit to Havana, Bressler realized that there would be more immigrants coming, and the JDC, who was funding the NCC, would have to face the proposition of providing additional funds to take care of them until they could be admitted to the United States.⁹⁸ He wrote to Cecilia Razovsky in a confidential communiqué:

To what extent JDC will feel justified in making such a tremendous provision for one little place, I do not know. That of course may prove a very bothersome thing. But what I fear much more and as of infinitely greater importance is that the Government [of Cuba] may not be led in response to the growing antagonism to legislate against immigration so drastically as to virtually close the door. That would be a calamity because other Latin American countries would not be slow to take note with its inevitable consequences.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ “Coert Du Bois, 78, Diplomat, Is Dead,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1960. (An interesting side note is that his two daughters, aged 20 and 23, chartered a plane and jumped off together, “mourning the death of their sweethearts in a Royal Air Force plane crash the week before.” “Suicide Letters of Two Sisters Given to Public,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, February 25, 1935, sec. Front Page.)

⁹⁶ Bressler to Razovsky, December 30, 1938, 4.

⁹⁷ David Bressler to Cecilia Razovsky, January 7, 1939, 1, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁹⁸ David Bressler to Cecilia Razovsky, January 12, 1939, 4, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁹⁹ Bressler to Razovsky, December 30, 1938, 4.

Bressler was also concerned when he saw the immigrants forced into idleness because of the Cuban labor laws. In 1933, the government of Ramón Grau San Martín¹⁰⁰ (1933-1934) had enacted the Law of Nationalization of Labor, requiring that 50% of salaried workers in industrial and commercial businesses be Cuban by birth.¹⁰¹ Understandably this created a hardship particularly for Jews, as any new immigrants would no longer be able to easily obtain employment. The new law resulted in an immediate decrease in the rate of immigration at that time.¹⁰² To overcome this obstacle, those Jews who were already established created new business enterprises in order to generate jobs for some of the immigrants, and in the process created jobs for native Cubans as well. However, this limitation to entering the labor market was the main cause of hardship for later waves of Jewish immigration.¹⁰³

Bressler was concerned about the inability of the refugees to find employment and the uncertainty of the length of their stay in Cuba:

One sees these immigrants almost everywhere.... They do nothing but while away the day.... I am asking myself... what happens to the morals of people, young men, young women, who must wait and wait and do nothing but wait, and in no way occupying their time in any useful

¹⁰⁰ Ramón Grau San Martín (1881-1969) was a physician and the president of Cuba from 1933-1934 and again from 1944-1948. Batista forced his resignation in 1934. He ran against Batista and lost in 1940 but won re-election in 1944, then withdrawing from public life in 1948.

¹⁰¹ For a detailed treatment of Cuban labor law during this period, see Aldo M. Leiva, "Cuban Labor Law: Issues and Challenges," *Papers and Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy* 10 (August 5, 2000): 481-91; See also Evangelina Vidana, "Labor Legislation during the Republic of Cuba: 1902-1958" (University of Miami, 1970).

¹⁰² Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America*, 87.

¹⁰³ "La Presencia Hebrea En Cuba," 2.

manner? I am not asking myself this as a rhetorical question, I am wondering if we should not look at the situation frankly in the eyes. The numbers are growing weekly. More and more people are going on relief. How long can this continue without decidedly unfavorable consequences?¹⁰⁴

Already in January 1939, David Bressler raised the concern that the rate of immigration was increasing to the point where the question was being asked,

... “How many Jews do you expect us to take in here?” ...If this were merely a rhetorical question, I would not be so much concerned about it, but more of this when I return and possibly earlier if it should prove more serious than I believe at this moment.¹⁰⁵

Even Batista, who was friendly and well disposed towards the Jews, began to view with some concern the increasing volume of Jewish immigration, considering the lack of employment opportunities and the hazards inherent in idleness, and the want of assurance that American Jewry would be able or willing to assume the burden of their maintenance for the four or five years he estimated it might take for their U.S. visas to be granted.¹⁰⁶

Bressler suggested to the JDC on January 7 that the volume of Jewish immigration to Cuba needed to be controlled, but he was “at his wits’ end to do very much about it.” He was concerned that immigration had increased to the point where the local papers “would...be able to play the thing up in large headlines...[as] considerable agitation is being spread because of the relatively large volume that has come to Cuba in so short a time.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Bressler to Razovsky, December 30, 1938, 4–5.

¹⁰⁵ David Bressler to Cecilia Razovsky, January 5, 1939, 3, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁰⁶ Bressler to Razovsky, January 7, 1939, 1. David Bressler to Cecilia Razovsky, January 10, 1939, 2, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁰⁷ Bressler to Razovsky, January 7, 1939.

Bressler was aware of the Nazi agents that were representing the German government in high places, disseminating their antisemitic propaganda. He felt that thus far the Nazis had not been able to do much damage in Cuba, but realized that they were persistent and efficient.¹⁰⁸

While Bressler recognized the need of German Jewry to leave Europe as quickly as possible, he nevertheless feared the consequences if a public outcry arose in Cuba against Jewish immigration:

Not only has it been the consistent policy and effort of the [Jewish] organizations to discourage every form of illegal immigration, but we went so far as to cable and write similar organizations abroad to use their influence to counteract in every possible way the fake handlers in human traffic. Unfortunately, all attempts to regulate the forced emigration from Nazified areas have been well-nigh impossible because of the ruthlessness and unbelievable cruelty of their government officials, resulting, as it has, in precipitate mass flight—anywhere to get away from the doom threatened those who cannot get away.¹⁰⁹

The victims, the refugees, are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. If they remain, God help them. If they take flight, hoping to get somewhere where life at least will be safe, they run up against immigration laws. They really have no alternative but in flight. Otherwise they might just as well carry out the death sentence virtually imposed upon them. It is a horrible situation all around, one which must be judged in the light of a deliberate government policy which knows no mercy.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Bressler to Razovsky, December 30, 1938, 5.

¹⁰⁹ David Bressler to S. L. Maduro, March 24, 1939, 1, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Caught between a rock and a hard place, JDC officials were doing everything humanly possible to check the flow of illegal immigration, notwithstanding their realization of the bitter price to be paid by those who were forced to remain behind.¹¹¹

While he was in Cuba, Bressler helped to form an Advisory Committee to the JRC made up of the most influential Jews in the Cuban Jewish communities.¹¹² The committee foresaw the dangers of immigration during the early months of 1939 and requested assistance from JDC, specifically that Lawrence Berenson be sent to Cuba because of his personal relationship with Colonel Batista. Berenson, though, did not actually travel to Cuba until the St. Louis incident several months later.

The Call for Help

When the local Jewish communities could no longer handle the demands placed upon them, they called upon the JDC to step in and help. In response, the JDC, working together with the NCC, sent Laura Margolis to head the work in Havana. Margolis, by working with the U.S. Consulate and applying her social welfare training, attempted to heal the fissures in the Cuban Jewish communities and was able to sustain the stranded Jews of Cuba until they could emigrate successfully to the United States.



¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² The members of this committee, which included Poliakoff, Hartman, Kates and Maduro, were willing to help the JRC in the capacity of advisors. However, they made it clear that they viewed the JRC as strictly an American organization, with American personnel, depending on American financing and American responsibility. They felt it was not created in Cuba through local initiative, and they all stated that they did not want their names to be publicly connected with it any way whatsoever. (S. L. Maduro to David Bressler, March 28, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.)

It was during Bressler's December 1938 trip that Jack Brandon finally tendered his resignation, and Emily Perlman was left with the entire responsibility as of January 1, 1939.¹¹³ Perlman was soon overwhelmed and discouraged by the amount of work constantly piling up and a staff that was "hardly up to par—in fact way below it."¹¹⁴

The search then began for a competent social worker to replace Brandon. Cecilia Razovsky was called upon to find such a person. At the same time, Laura Margolis was growing restless with her job directing the Buffalo Welfare Society. At the recommendation of friends, she applied for a job with the NCC where she could utilize her Spanish language skills to work with refugees in Cuba. Joseph Hyman of the JDC wrote:

In connection with Miss Perlman's situation, Miss Razovsky tried hard to secure a very competent social worker, familiar with casework and preferably with a knowledge of Spanish. This is not easy. She finally came to the conclusion that Miss Laura Margolis, Executive Director of the Buffalo Family Welfare Society, would be the right person. A message has gone to Mr. Warner¹¹⁵ in Mr. Baerwald's name asking him to take up the matter with the Board there. From the talks of Miss Razovsky with Miss Margolis, it will take about two weeks before she can wind up her work in

¹¹³ Bressler to Razovsky, December 30, 1938, 3.

¹¹⁴ Bressler to Razovsky, January 7, 1939, 1.

¹¹⁵ Harvard trained attorney Eugene Warner (1877-1943) was the Director of the Buffalo Jewish Federation for Social Service, also known as the Jewish Federation of Buffalo. Warner also served as Treasurer of the National Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds; president of the Jewish Federation for Social Service; president of the Buffalo Council of Social Agencies; president of the New York State Conference on Social Work for 1935; member of the Erie County Emergency Relief Board; and member of the board of trustees of the Buffalo Public Library and the Museum of Natural Science. ("Meet Eugene Warner, Who Has Buffalo in the 'Palm of His Hand,'" *JTA*, n.d., accessed August 22, 2014; *Buffalo Foundation Directory of Social Welfare and Allied Services in Erie County, New York* (Buffalo Foundation, 1921), 78; "Eugene Warner Obituary," *New York Times*, December 31, 1943, sec. OBITUARIES, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/106739189/citation/819B090B25654700PQ/2?accountid=7287>.)

Buffalo and go down. Perhaps she can be induced to go sooner, assuming that her Committee will be willing to release her promptly.¹¹⁶

Paul Baerwald,¹¹⁷ JDC chairman, immediately cabled Margolis' Board chair in Buffalo asking that Margolis be released from her duties to help with the emergency in Cuba:

DUE CONSIDERABLE NUMBERS REFUGEES CONSTANTLY INCREASING CUBA IMPERATIVE IMMEDIATELY HAVE COMPETENT WOMAN CASEWORKER PREFERABLE WITH KNOWLEDGE SPANISH. DAVID BRESSLER NOW HAVANA URGES IMMEDIATE ASSIGNMENT SUCH PERSON. IN VIEW EMERGENCIES MANY DIRECTIONS WE ASKING OUR FRIENDS DRAFT MOST SUITABLE PERSONS EVEN IF TAKEN FROM NORMAL DUTIES. THIS IS ONE OF THOSE SITUATIONS. AM ADVISED LAURA MARGOLIS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR YOUR FAMILY WELFARE SOCIETY WOULD BE ESPECIALLY HELPFUL THIS SITUATION. NATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE AND JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE WOULD BE MOST GRATEFUL TO YOU AS MEMBER OF OUR BOARD IF YOU DISCUSSED THIS OFFICERS BUFFALO WELFARE SOCIETY. WE HOPE SHE CAN BE SPARED IMMEDIATELY AS DELAYS AGGRAVATE SITUATION GREATLY.¹¹⁸

Bressler followed this up with a cable to JDC headquarters:

SITUATION FOR LONG TIME WILL REQUIRE A GOOD ADMINISTRATOR...AND ONCE HERE SHOULD BE PREPARED REMAIN

¹¹⁶ Joseph Hyman to David Bressler, January 12, 1939, 1, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹¹⁷ Paul Baerwald (1871-1961) was one of the founders of the JDC. He retired from his banking job in 1930 to devote his full energies to philanthropy. He served first as treasurer of the JDC from 1930-1932, then as chairman from 1932 and as honorary chairman from 1945 until his death. Baerwald was a close friend of New York Governor Herbert Lehman and served on President Roosevelt's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees during World War II. ("Paul Baerwald, Philanthropist, Banker, 89, Dead--Headed Joint Distribution Group," *New York Times*, July 3, 1961; for more on Baerwald, see "Paul Baerwald Papers, 1857-1961" (Columbia University Libraries Archival Collections MS#0059, 1961).)

¹¹⁸ Paul Baerwald to Eugene Warner, January 12, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

INDEFINITELY A MONTHS STAY WOULD NOT IMPROVE SITUATION
HOPE MARGOLIS COMES QUICKLY.¹¹⁹

Eugene Warner and the Buffalo Welfare Society agreed to release Margolis from her duties in Buffalo for six months, and she began work as director of the JRC in Cuba on January 28, 1939. Her salary was set at \$3,300 per year, with the Buffalo committee agreeing to pay for her first month in Cuba.¹²⁰

Emily Perlman was delighted to hear Margolis had accepted the position, and was hoping that Laura would be able to “stand the pressure” so she herself could return to the U.S.¹²¹ Perlman was worried that the JRC office would make a bad impression on Margolis upon her arrival:

The clients overcrowd the waiting room and stand around on the balcony talking in loud voices. Then too the superintendent of the building does not care to have our clients use the elevator and the men are forced to walk up four rather steep flights. We have been looking for a house or apartment because we feel that we would attract least attention to the place and we would have plenty of room for expansion. I am terribly sorry that we will be unable to move the office before Miss Margolis arrives because I am afraid she might receive a very poor impression.¹²²

¹¹⁹ David Bressler to Joint Distribution Committee, “Cable,” January 15, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba., David Bressler, “Memorandum,” January 23, 1939, 2, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹²⁰ Cecilia Razovsky to Joseph Hyman, February 9, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹²¹ Emily Perlman to Cecilia Razovsky, January 27, 1939, 3, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 1. The offices were located at O’Reilly No. 11, Room 307 in Havana.

Looking over the finances right away, Margolis was disturbed at the way they had been handled before her arrival. She estimated it would take at least a month to straighten out the bookkeeping in order even to begin to submit a budget:¹²³

From all I have been told, plus what I have observed, to date thousands [of dollars] were sent down here upon request and not until a lot of money had been spent [did anyone] from the North come down here to find out how that money was being administered. By that time the damage had been done.¹²⁴

She quickly learned that the funds she would receive would not be nearly sufficient to take care of the needs involved:

I was only here a few days when I realized that if all of my energies could be devoted merely to cleaning up the “back mess”, which had gained tremendous proportions, with the help of three home relief people, it would take at least several months to bring the budget down to anything approaching the Two Thousand Dollars, per week, appropriation for Cuba.¹²⁵

She found that relief was being handed to applicants without any kind of a home investigation to verify their claims. Margolis wrote to Razovsky, who was now her supervisor:

It might interest you to know that the Havana office has a reputation on the Continent already as being the one office which gives relief easily. In all my experience, I have never seen such a perfect example of how an organization was being “taken for a ride.”¹²⁶

¹²³ Margolis to Razovsky, February 7, 1939.

¹²⁴ Laura Margolis to Joseph Hyman, March 27, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, March 24, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

The existing files and records were not in any condition even to determine the number or type of clients in her caseload.¹²⁷ One refugee, Miss Ilse Schrier, had been placed in charge of all relief applications just prior to Margolis' arrival. Margolis wrote:

I have never known anyone more capable and efficient [than Miss Schrier] but certainly it is not within any human capacity to interview people at the rate of one half hour apart, make no home investigation, deal with hysteria and threats unless relief were given, and expect that person to do anything approaching an intelligent job.¹²⁸

One gets an impression of chaos and disunity among the refugees as each vied for more resources. In another letter, Margolis noted:

If I had nothing else to worry about, just cleaning up the internal relief situation, would be a forty-eight hour job in itself. Please remember, all of this is being done with inadequate staff. The staff is not only inadequate but jittery. The person who is carrying the whole burden of the relief at present, Miss Schrier, is herself insecure in her status here.¹²⁹

When Margolis arrived in Cuba in February 1939,¹³⁰ she had found an understaffed and disorganized relief operation that had been left behind by Jack Brandon. In spite of the state in which she found things, Margolis reported to Razovsky that Emily Perlman, who had stepped in temporarily, had "done a simply magnificent job" that Margolis could appreciate fully now that she was in Cuba.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Margolis to Razovsky, February 7, 1939.

¹²⁸ Margolis to Hyman, March 27, 1939.

¹²⁹ Margolis to Razovsky, March 24, 1939.

¹³⁰ See timeline of Margolis assignments in Moses Leavitt to Roy W. McDonald, "Letter OW-2-3-EMF," October 14, 1943, 2, AR 1933/44:130, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

¹³¹ Margolis to Razovsky, February 7, 1939.

However, Margolis had come expecting that there would be a man in charge and not that she would be the one responsible for the entire work:

When I was originally asked to come to Havana, I was told that a man was to come here to be in charge of the entire office and that I would concern myself with the relief and family welfare. As you know, the plans have now changed. I have been promised a relief worker from the States to assist me. Even with such a person here, the problem still assumes tremendous proportions.¹³²

Early on, Margolis showed sensitivity to Cuban culture and gender issues. She immediately requested that Cecilia Razovsky send additional staff appropriate to the culture, although her tongue appeared to be firmly planted in her cheek as she made the petition:

I do hope you are working on the plan of getting a man worker down here as soon as possible. The administration of this office is not simply one of getting relief. It is all tied up with local immigration problems, community relationships, and interpretation to community and our committee. My impression is that there are many situations where a man be [sic] much more effective than a woman because of the local Cuban attitude (Cuban women are not supposed to have too much intelligence).¹³³

David Bressler had made the same suggestion to Razovsky several weeks earlier:

“...Some very qualified man should be put in charge here and even if the woman social worker knows Spanish—which would be a great help—the administrator and executive and contactman [sic] with Government Departments and others should definitely be a he-man.... They will require a thorough acquaintance with the vast store of knowledge and experience accumulated here by Miss Perlman, Miss Schrier, and others....

¹³² Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, March 8, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹³³ Margolis to Razovsky, February 7, 1939.

I want to repeat quite definitely that the person in charge should be the male worker.”¹³⁴

JDC headquarters did indeed send a man, New York City social worker Edward Hochhauser, who arrived mid-January 1939 and stayed for about a month.¹³⁵ Hochhauser specifically evaluated the housing situation and outlined several housing projects to be undertaken outside of Havana; but pragmatically, Margolis did not believe they had the personnel or resources to take on such plans. She wrote to Razovsky:

... I am terribly sorry to have to tell you that at this point it is absolutely impossible for me to devote my time to work with any member of our Local Committee on any of these housing projects.... Even the selection of the refugees, who are to go into this place is a tremendous responsibility, since the success of any collective project depends on the people who are going to live together. Therefore, until some plan is made to send additional help here, I don't think we can proceed. Please don't feel that it is a matter of not wanting to take on additional work. It is simply humanly impossible to do any more, and it would be too bad to do half a job on housing which would cost money and be a complete failure....Would it be at all practical for someone from New York to come down here on a temporary basis to start one or two of these projects? I can assure this person he will receive from our office all the assistance that we can give.¹³⁶

Margolis' request was discussed by JDC committee in New York: “Miss Margolies [sic] expects a man to come down to take over housing, economic aid, and other aspects of

¹³⁴ David Bressler to Cecilia Razovsky, January 1, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹³⁵ David Bressler to Cecilia Razovsky, January 23, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹³⁶ Margolis to Razovsky, March 8, 1939.

the refugee work.”¹³⁷ In April, they sent Milton Goldsmith, also a trained social worker, to assist Margolis:

Mr. Goldsmith has already joined you, Miss Margolis, in Havana, and we all hope that at a very early date many of the difficulties you now have and which you mention in your letter will be under firmer control. In a measure, therefore, your suggestion as to increased professional staff by a trained worker has been met.¹³⁸

Margolis was pleased with the choice of Goldsmith.¹³⁹ She told Razovsky:

I don't believe I have officially registered my opinion of Mr. Goldsmith. You have certainly made an excellent choice and I don't think you could have found a better person to help with the local problem. He is working splendidly.¹⁴⁰

Within a week of her arrival, Margolis had already begun to evaluate the larger picture beyond the mere granting of relief. She felt it imperative that the local committee have permanent legal counsel at all times to advise them on immigration technicalities. She retained attorney Salo Bustamante for this task on the recommendation of Solomon Maduro.¹⁴¹ She also recognized the importance of legalizing the status of the JRC in Cuba and pushed Razovsky to act:

¹³⁷ Joint Distribution Committee, “Decisions of New York Committee Meeting,” February 8, 1939, 2, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹³⁸ Joseph Hyman to Laura Margolis and Milton Goldsmith, April 7, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.; see also David Bressler to S. L. Maduro, April 6, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹³⁹ Eventually, Milton Goldsmith was able to take over the work once Margolis had finished her first six-month term and returned to the U.S.

¹⁴⁰ Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, May 8, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁴¹ David Bressler to S. L. Maduro, March 1, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

...please take into consideration what we should do about legalizing our status in Cuba. We are continually being questioned about this. This morning an inspector came asking me all kinds of questions about the work of our Committee. I avoided all direct answers.... If we are to function here with any degree of security, this should be given immediate attention.¹⁴²

When the NCC did not act quickly, she was not shy about scolding Razovsky, and was also not above a little dissimulation in her problem-solving:

As I am dictating this letter there are two inspectors from the Labor Department in the next office... The situation here since about 4:30 yesterday afternoon has been extremely uncomfortable and even at the risk of talking out of turn, I must say, all of this could have been avoided had attention been paid to my repeated letters and cables sent to you regarding the legalization of the Joint Distribution Committee¹⁴³ here.... My first stall was that I pretended to understand no Spanish... and I ostensibly left the room to get an interpretor [sic]... [Our attorney] suggested that I place some of the people working here on a volunteer basis. In the list which I prepared I purposely left out Miss Schrier, Miss Dwoja Kohn and Mrs. Margaret Koch. All as you know, are here with incomplete bonds and are among the group of people for whom the Immigration Department is looking to be sent to Tiscornia... It certainly would be a beautiful mess here to have them all picked up and sent to Tiscornia, then we might just as well close the whole outfit.¹⁴⁴

By April, Razovsky and the NCC had listened to her and begun the legalization process as she requested.

Although the main emphasis of the JRC work was on relief, there were other phases to their work as well, such as providing help with immigration problems, efforts at uniting

¹⁴² Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, February 22, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba; see also Joint Distribution Committee, *Points Covered During Discussions Held in the Office of the Joint Distribution Committee*, March 21, 1939, 1, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁴³ Margolis meant the JRC, as a representative of the JDC.

¹⁴⁴ Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, March 17, 1939, 1-2, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

the local Jewish community, plans for a fundraising campaign, and studies of constructive projects to raise the morale of the refugees.¹⁴⁵ As noted, the Cuban laws did not permit refugees to work and Margolis was concerned, just as Bressler had been, that if the refugees remained idle during their long stay, it would result in rapid demoralization. Margolis also anticipated a steady increase in the relief rolls as more immigrants would continue to arrive and the resources of those refugees who were not yet on relief would slowly be exhausted.¹⁴⁶

Margolis saw that the JRC's relief allowance would soon become inadequate. It did not allow for clothing replacements, for necessary items such as soap, etc., nor for recreation. Margolis sensed the need to explore the possibility of establishing schools and cultural activities for the refugees,¹⁴⁷ as well as small projects and training and occupational centers, but the funds to do so were not available.¹⁴⁸

Margolis was forced to cope with a minimal budget and demands from ever-increasing numbers of refugees. She immediately utilized her organizational skills to streamline the systems and cut expenses, putting into action a "housecleaning plan." She recruited the services of "several superior and well trained refugees,"¹⁴⁹ some of whom were on work relief and some who volunteered their services full time. Several of her

¹⁴⁵ Laura Margolis, *Report of Activities*, July 12, 1939, 1, 1933/44:507, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, April 13, 1939, 1, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

recruits had experience with immigration and *Hilfsverein* (benevolent society) work in Berlin, Vienna and Palestine, so she utilized them and learned from their experience.¹⁵⁰

One immigrant in particular, Dr. Luis Planer, who had had experience in immigration from Germany and Austria into Palestine, helped her to set up several new offices and departments to streamline relief requests, which was overwhelmingly her first priority.¹⁵¹ Applicants for relief would be given an appointment with the Intake Department. This would serve as a triage—if the applicants did not need emergency relief, they were given a regular appointment with the Intake Office. If they needed immediate assistance, they received emergency relief.¹⁵²

In the Intake Office, applicants would fill out a form and be interviewed by refugee volunteers. They would then be referred either to the Investigation Office or the Emergency Plan Office. The Emergency Plan Office would not automatically dole out relief, but would provide temporary room and board pending the findings in the Investigation Office. Margolis made inexpensive arrangements with several hotels and restaurants, kosher and non-kosher, so that immigrants could receive room and board instead of cash, pending a thorough investigation. She had found that if they could not get cash, refugees often decided that their case was not, after all, an emergency.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵² Ibid., 1.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Margolis recruited several young men from the refugee community to staff the Investigation Office. Their job included making home visits and investigating relatives and resources in other countries. The refugees would then be referred to the Disposition Office where Miss Schrier would base her relief plan or refusal on the results of the investigation.

In this way, Margolis hoped to bring the budget under control and weed out those who were trying to “work the system” dishonestly. This new structure resulted in an entirely different attitude on the part of the clients as well:

They cannot create scenes or scare us into giving emergency relief because we have a very satisfactory alternative play for emergency relief already [sic] to offer them. We know that it is becoming generally known throughout the community that a “new wind is blowing at the JRC” so that certain relief requests which were pending prior to the present setup, have been withdrawn.¹⁵⁴

With the help of this system, Margolis was able to cut the budget significantly, but refugees were still pouring into Cuba. The newer immigrants were arriving with fewer and fewer resources and were making tremendous demands on the JRC’s finances.¹⁵⁵ She was constantly requesting more money from JDC in New York, complaining that she was sending yet “...another tale of woe about money. It seems all we do is cable for it and we’re short again.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, February 15, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

In light of the dramatic increase in immigration and its demands, Margolis made the following recommendations to JDC:

The Joint Relief Committee recommends the following points be carefully considered prior to sending people to Cuba for a change of status:

- 1) No one to be sent to Cuba until Quota numbers are available.
- 2) The number available monthly to be determined at the American Consulate by the Joint Relief Committee.
- 3) A regular flow to be maintained to take full advantage of the number available, taking into consideration the numbers both the Joint Relief Committee and the American Consulate in Havana can service effectively.
- 4) A careful selection of refugees to be sent after adequate preparation of their papers. (Pre-examination by the U.S. Justice Department and the shipping companies does not mean that the American Consulate in Havana will grant visas.)
- 5) Informing refugees of the dangers involved so that they will be prepared to take the necessary risks themselves.
- 6) Controls set up so that the program may be stopped or changed radically at a moments [sic] notice.
- 7) Use of the change of status referral blanks.
- 8) Education of the American public of the advisability of coming for a change of status under agency auspices.¹⁵⁷

In these balanced recommendations, Margolis was not advocating for a total restriction on immigration, but for a carefully controlled set of procedures to be followed in order to allow the maximum number of refugees to immigrate successfully to the States.

In March 1939 Margolis requested a budget of \$156,000 per year, although she had been told she could only be given \$100,000. The matter was discussed by the JDC in New York, where they determined, with an undertone of irritation, that “some indication should be given to Miss Margolis that the funds available for work in Cuba are not boundless.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Siegel, Veissid, and Margolis, *Study of Change in Status Cases from January 1937 to October 1940*, 8–11.

¹⁵⁸ M. Jacobsohn to Cecilia Razovsky, July 13, 1939, 1933/44:507, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

The budget remained at \$100,000,¹⁵⁹ which was David Bressler's suggestion,¹⁶⁰ and had been the original budget for all of Latin America just four months before.¹⁶¹ This was meant to include all activities, and not only relief and administration expenses. The executives further noted that "it should be indicated to her [Margolis] that it is impossible to find money for expenditures in Cuba at an increasing rate."¹⁶²

Margolis did not take this lightly. She wrote to Razovsky, "If we were to cut relief any more drastically than we are at the present time, we might just as well close the office."¹⁶³

Until this point, Margolis had been communicating only with Cecilia Razovsky, who was still her immediate supervisor, but now she escalated her request directly to Joseph Hyman,¹⁶⁴ executive director of the JDC. In her first communication with Hyman, among

¹⁵⁹ Joseph Hyman to Laura Margolis, March 21, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁶⁰ David Bressler, *Havana Report*, February 16, 1939, 2, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁶¹ Evelyn Morrissey to David Bressler, December 22, 1938, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁶² Jacobsohn to Razovsky, July 13, 1939.

¹⁶³ Margolis to Razovsky, February 15, 1939.

¹⁶⁴ Dr. Joseph C. Hyman (1889-1949), a New York attorney, left the practice of law in 1922 and joined the JDC as assistant to Herbert Lehman, then chairman of its Reconstruction Committee, which aided Jewish people in Europe after World War I. He became secretary of the JDC in 1925 and helped form the National Coordinating Committee for Refugees, the National Refugee Service and the United Service for New Americans. He took an active role in the fundraising bodies of the JDC, the Allied Jewish Appeal and later the United Jewish Appeal. He also served as vice chairman of the American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign service, which included groups of all faiths. In 1937 he became executive director of the JDC and in 1939 executive vice chairman until his retirement in 1946. ("Dr. J.C. Hyman Dies; Aided Relief Work," *New York Times*, February 9, 1949.)

other things, Margolis reasoned with him to increase her budget and her staff, if only for a few months to allow her to bring the situation under control:

Will you please consider the alternative. [sic] If you feel that you cannot afford to have the Havana Office work this problem out as we have been, then the only alternative would be to cut all our relief allowances 50% until such a time as we have balanced our budget. From one point of view this would be much easier... but I can assure you that it would be extremely uncomfortable working in this office and I cannot assure you that we would not have the kind of riots [by the refugees] which would give the JRC unfavorable publicity and only act as fuel to an already very intensive antisemitic campaign.¹⁶⁵

Margolis continued to request additional funding from Razovsky week after week. She pointed out the delicate situation that would arise if the budget were cut suddenly, and changed her strategy, recommending an immediate increase of U.S. funds, but with a gradual tapering off as the situation came under control.¹⁶⁶ She asked for additional funding just for the following four weeks,¹⁶⁷ but the fact remained that by April 1939, she had twice as many refugees as when she started, and she needed still more funds.¹⁶⁸ The JRC bank account was continually overdrawn.¹⁶⁹

The obvious remedy for inadequate funds was to secure financial participation from the local Jewish community, but this was unlikely, as mentioned above, due to the inability of the different facets of the community to cooperate with each other and their lack of

¹⁶⁵ Margolis to Hyman, March 27, 1939. The state of antisemitic sentiment in Cuba at the time will be surveyed in the next section in this chapter.

¹⁶⁶ Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, April 15, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Adolfo Kates to David Bressler, April 15, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

willingness to assume responsibility for providing aid to the immigrants. Margolis assigned Milton Goldsmith in May 1939 to launch a fundraising campaign, and held two conferences to this end. Those efforts, however, did not bear fruit. The local Advisory Board was no longer an active functioning body. Maduro had resigned as chairman, and neither he nor Kates would consider being official members of the Board—although both were willing to be of assistance in an unofficial advisory capacity.¹⁷⁰ Margolis wrote to Robert Pilpel,¹⁷¹ “Unless the picture changes radically, I cannot see any possibilities for raising funds locally.”

At around the same time, David Bressler once again pointed out to Adolfo Kates in Cuba that JDC was already spending “far beyond anything which the overwhelming demands from all over the world would justify,”¹⁷² and urged Kates and Maduro to try to raise local funds for the work. “The welfare of the refugees is not only our concern, but is

¹⁷⁰ Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, June 3, 1940, 1933/44:509, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba. The St. Louis affair, with its aftermath of bitterness and recriminations prevented this fundraising effort from yielding any fruit.

¹⁷¹ Robert Pilpel (1905-1987) a New York attorney by profession, served on the executive staff of the Joint Distribution Committee from 1939 to 1944 as secretary of JDC's Committee on Refugee Rehabilitation in Latin America, and as secretary of the JDC Subcommittee on Refugee Aid in Central and South America. Pilpel later served as assistant to Joseph Schwartz, European director of JDC, in coordinating relief and emigration aid to refugees at headquarters. From 1944 to 1952 he worked in refuge and relief with the JDC in its European executive offices. (“Robert Pilpel,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1987; “Robert Pilpel Joins Staff of J.D.C. in Europe; Will Leave for Lisbon Shortly,” *JTA*, February 23, 1944; “Jewish Rescuers of the Holocaust (1933-1945): Jewish Organizations Involved in Rescue and Relief of Jews,” August 25, 2012, <http://jewishholocaustrescuers.com/Organizations.html>.)

¹⁷² David Bressler to Adolfo Kates, March 15, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

the concern of every community in the world where they may find themselves.”¹⁷³

He noted in a letter to Maduro that “Cuba is about the only country which thus far has not bestirred itself to raise funds for the refugees...” and encouraged him to use his influence to raise funds locally.¹⁷⁴

Joseph Hyman again noted that Cuba was still “virtually the only country in the world...in which there is no appreciable contribution from the members of the Jewish community.”¹⁷⁵

Even under war conditions, among the Jews in Poland and in Central Europe, and practically everywhere else, JDC had always found a response from the local community. It had also always taken the position that there was a social responsibility of local leadership, and that that social responsibility must be evidenced by a financial contribution commensurate with the means of the community, as well as by active participation of leaders in administering and planning the work of emergency aid and relief.¹⁷⁶

Kates and Maduro did attempt, under the leadership of Milton Goldsmith, to raise funds from the local community. They worked out preliminary plans for a fundraising campaign and discussed various methods of securing cooperation between the various

¹⁷³ Jacobsohn to Razovsky, July 13, 1939.

¹⁷⁴ Bressler to Maduro, March 1, 1939.

¹⁷⁵ Joseph Hyman to Adolfo Kates, February 8, 1940, 1933/44:509, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁷⁶ Hyman to Leipziger, October 1, 1940. Hyman explained that in Poland, the Jews were bearing 80% of the total assistance budget; in Switzerland, even more; in France, the ratio was 50-50; in Sweden, where there were 7,000 refugees, a tiny population raised over \$150,000 in the first six months of 1942 for the immigrants.

Jewish groups,¹⁷⁷ but were unable to achieve a consensus. The Jewish community in Cuba was too divided, and the funds raised were minimal.¹⁷⁸

In April 1939, between 800 and 1,000 refugees arrived within one week, the majority of whom entered on the Benitez landing permits. Most claimed they had no other money, and the JRC office was flooded with relief requests.¹⁷⁹ Margolis asked Milton Goldsmith to write to Hyman to make their case, possibly thinking a man might gain a better hearing at headquarters.

Goldsmith began his appeal to Hyman by empathizing with the financial position that JDC found itself in, and agreeing that “Cuba was not the only sore spot on the map of the world” and thus they could not expect preferential treatment to the point that it would hamper JDC’s work in other needy areas. He pointed out, however, that between 1,200 and 2,000 refugees were arriving in Cuba each month, 35-50% of which came without funds. In addition, those refugees that were already in Cuba were exhausting the funds with which they had arrived and would soon need relief as well.¹⁸⁰

Goldsmith mentioned the local fundraising efforts and their hopes that they would yield results. However, under Margolis’ guidance and knowing the relief budget would not be increased, he did not ask for additional funds for relief, but rather made the case for money to fund productive refugee projects:

¹⁷⁷ Milton Goldsmith to Joseph Hyman, April 25, 1939, 2, 1933/44:529, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, April 19, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁸⁰ Goldsmith to Hyman, April 25, 1939, 1.

The monies being expended for relief are just so much water over the dam. We get no real return for them since it seems the more we spend in relief, the more of an invitation it becomes for refugees here to bring friends and relatives to Havana. To my mind it is quite important that we begin to work out some constructive projects such as cooperatives, housing, training projects which preferably should be outside of Havana, in order to siphon off the large number of refugees here, as it is becoming a matter for adverse comment and adds fuel to various campaigns being conducted against us.¹⁸¹

He closed the letter on a positive note:

The work down here keeps one on the jump every minute but I like it a lot. Miss Margolis has done a splendid job here and I am sure that with reasonable good fortune, we can continue to improve matters here.¹⁸²

The budget was finally increased to \$2,000 per week in July, 1939.¹⁸³

Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the history of the established Jewish communities of Cuba in order to provide a context for the situation that faced those communities when flooded with refugees from Nazi persecution. The efforts of the local Jewish communities to help have been examined, with the conclusion that their inability to work together rendered them unable to meet the challenges at hand. They could not raise the needed funds locally nor provide the services that the refugees needed. Concerned that the refugees would become public charges and thus reflect badly on themselves, the local leaders appealed to international Jewry to stop the refugee migration, to no avail. Overrun with the massive influx of refugees, they requested aid from international Jewry. The

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁸² Ibid., 3.

¹⁸³ Evelyn Morrissey to Paul W. Low, July 27, 1939, 1933/44:507, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

United States Jewish communities responded through their umbrella relief organization, the Joint Distribution Committee, who sent Laura Margolis to step in.

Margolis' task, to expedite emigration of the refugees, soon changed to one of providing relief, as the flow of emigration to America slowed to a trickle and 6,000 refugees were stranded on the island, unable to work due to increasingly restrictive Cuban labor regulations. Margolis tackled the task at hand, first obtaining the cooperation and aid of the American Consulate to process the existing visas, and then investigating the relief situation, which was in total disarray.

Constantly in need of funds, Margolis streamlined systems and cut expenses, utilizing the skills of the refugees to craft together a smoothly running machine. In spite of her best efforts, though, she ultimately was unsuccessful in drawing together the many factions that existed in the Cuban Jewish communities.

In summary, the lack of cooperation among the different contingents of the local Jewish community in Cuba impeded the ability of the JDC workers to properly assist the refugees. To worsen matters, the battles among the refugees for more funds impeded the limited aid from being fairly distributed. The local community members did not participate in organizing the effort, nor in any of the fundraising responsibilities. In view of the worldwide situation, the United States could not provide all of the necessary funds to carry on the work in Cuba. The next chapter will explore the antisemitic tendencies that culminated in the St. Louis crisis, and efforts by the local refugee community to pull together and supplement the American aid by providing for their own social, educational and cultural needs.

CHAPTER TWO

ANTISEMITISM IN CUBA

This chapter will examine the antisemitic sentiment that existed in Cuba during the Holocaust era, analyzing the impact of the refugee migration and Nazi propaganda on public opinion toward the Jews, and examining the strategies employed by the local Jewish communities to counteract it. Antisemitism in Cuba reached its climax in 1939 with the incident of the M.S. St. Louis, a ship with almost a thousand Jewish refugees who were ultimately refused entry into Cuba (and other ports in the Americas) and were forced to return to Europe as unwanted human cargo. The chapter will add to the current historiography that portrays this incident as an instrument of Nazi propaganda intended to demonstrate to the world that Germany was not alone in rejecting its Jews.

This incident, which presented an undeniably urgent need for Jews to speak to the Cuban government with one voice, underscored their lack of cohesiveness and coordination, and inability to unite. In spite of desperate attempts of American representatives to influence the Cuban government, they were unable to secure the admission of the refugees. Antisemitic expression gradually diminished following the St. Louis incident as the Jewish refugees began to emigrate in larger numbers to the United States with the assistance of the JDC and local State Department representatives.

The Rise of Antisemitism in Cuba

The Cuban government's attitude toward the Jews had been relatively neutral in the 20th century, as evidenced in part by their open immigration policy. The constitutions of

1902, 1928 and 1940 had established a legal basis for Jewish existence by officially separating church and state and declaring freedom of religion. This section will survey the general rise of antisemitism in Cuba in the Holocaust era as influenced internally by economic factors, as well as by Nazi propaganda, and explore its causation and its effect on both the established and the refugee Jewish communities of Havana.



In spite of the neutral attitude of the Cuban government, Jews still felt they were considered aliens.¹ Many of the early immigrants from Europe did not publicly acknowledge their Jewish identity, but identified themselves merely as Germans or Poles.² This was in spite of the fact that in a show of good will for the Jewish people, on April 30, 1919, the Cuban Senate adopted a formal resolution in support of the Balfour Declaration, which was publicly read in honor of the Jewish community.³

As Jewish immigration increased, however, so did anti-Jewish feeling. In December 1928 the Havana City Council banned peddlers—most of whom were Jewish—from standing at street intersections, and arrested fifteen of them.⁴ The Jewish peddlers were selling goods at lower prices than the established (mainly Spanish) retailers and the latter sought to establish regulations to eliminate this practice. The economic downturn in the

¹ “Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba - HISTORIA.”

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. David Blis was largely responsible for the positive attitude of the Cuban Senate. (“Cuba Favors British Declaration,” *Chicago Sentinel*, November 25, 1918, 21.)

⁴ There were over 500 Jewish peddlers in Havana at the time. The *Centro* posted bond and the fifteen peddlers were released without incident two weeks later. (Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, 48.)

early 1930s and the decrease in sugar prices caused further financial hardship throughout Cuba. A sense of rising nationalism, particularly among the Cuban elite, heightened antisemitic sentiment.⁵ In 1933, during the regime of Gerardo Machado Morales (1925-1933) the upsurge in Jewish immigration provoked a backlash from Spanish merchants, whose retail businesses were being undercut by the rising numbers of Jewish peddlers, which were beyond the control of labor laws. There were several attacks upon the Jews, particularly upon Jewish workers, who could do little in response since they were not Cuban citizens.⁶

Machado was ousted by an army revolt in 1933 and replaced by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes y Quesada in August of that year. In September, Céspedes was overthrown in the Sergeants' Revolt by then-sergeant Fulgencio Batista, who virtually controlled the Executive Commission of the Provisional Government of Cuba, a five-member coalition that took over the government. This Commission then appointed Ramón Grau San Martín, one of its members and a Cuban physician, as provisional president. However, in 1934, after being marginalized by Batista, Grau resigned, clearing the way for Batista, who was now a colonel and self-appointed chief of the armed forces, to appoint puppet presidents until his own election to the presidency in 1940.⁷

⁵ "La Presencia Hebrea En Cuba," 2; see also Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, 47.

⁶ "Jews in Cuba Made Scapegoat in Unrest," *JTA*, November 12, 1933.

⁷ For more on this period of political turmoil in Cuba, see Jorge I. Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978); Jaime Suchlicki, *Cuba: From Columbus to Castro*. (New York: Scribner, 1974); Wilber A Chaffee and Gary Prevost, *Cuba, a Different America* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1989); Argote-Freyre, "Fulgencio Batista"; Carl Richard Fournier, "From Empire to

After Hitler rose to power, a Hitlerite Fascist movement began to stir up nationalistic feelings and demand “Cuba for Cuba and for the Cubans.” They pressed for a law stipulating that a full 80% of the employees in any establishment be native Cubans.⁸ This law was not passed, but in 1933 the Nationalization of Labor Law was implemented that required that 50% of employees be Cubans (see below).

Nazi sympathizers met in the German Club of which Eric Tropel, the head of the German consulate, was president, and made the decision to carry on a widespread campaign to Nazify the country.⁹ Certain sections of the press started to spread anti-Jewish agitation and the military began blaming Jews for promulgating Communist propaganda.¹⁰ The newspapers *La Mañana* (The Morning) and *La Voz* (The Voice) reported “on the authority of the chief of police that the Jews are disturbing the life of Cuba” and that “the Jews in Cuba are leading immoral lives.”¹¹ An editorial in *El País Libre* (The Free Country) urged the deportation of the Jews and the closing of doors to all who might be suspected of wanting to “take advantage of Cuba.”¹²

Jews and other aliens began to be attacked. Already in May 1933 vandals had broken the windows and looted the business establishments owned by Luis Jurick, an

Hegemony: The Dynamics of United States Relations with Cuba and Mexico, 1930--1940” (M.A., Concordia University (Canada), 2001); Clifford L. Staten, *The History of Cuba* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Chomsky, Carr, and Smorkaloff, *The Cuba Reader*.

⁸ “Jews in Cuba Made Scapegoat in Unrest.”

⁹ “Nazi Propagandists Decide on Widespread Cuba Drive,” *JTA*, May 15, 1933.

¹⁰ Bressler to Razovsky, January 10, 1939, 2.

¹¹ “Jews Arrested, Injured, Accused As Communists in Cuba Riots, Turmoil,” *JTA*, October 10, 1933.

¹² “Jews in Cuba Made Scapegoat in Unrest.”

American citizen and the president of the Jewish Center.¹³ During a labor demonstration in December 1933, a Jewish worker had been killed and several others were arrested and charged with being Communist leaders due to their Eastern European origins. Later in December of that year, two other Jews had been killed when “a mob of soldiers and Negroes” raided a Jewish store in Havana.¹⁴

Since the Jews did not have any diplomatic representation in Cuba to defend them, and in light of this alarming escalation, Havana Jews created the *Comité Intersociál* (Intersocial Committee) and formed a *Comisión Jurídica* (Law Commission) to represent themselves. The communities had been unable to unite for the purpose of providing for the refugees, but the internal threat of antisemitism finally became an impetus for united action. In May 1933 the Committee staged a protest rally against continued Nazi attacks on the Jews in Germany,¹⁵ and made plans to intercede both with President Grau San Martín and with Batista, who was then army chief-of-staff.¹⁶ This organization only existed until 1935, when the government suppressed every effort by Jewish people to organize, branding all such efforts as Communist.¹⁷

In September 1938, Cuba legalized the Communist Party, encouraged by Batista, who declared that as long as it did not practice violence, it should have the same rights as

¹³ “Nazi Propagandists Decide on Widespread Cuba Drive.”

¹⁴ “The Week in Review: Cuba,” *JTA*, December 24, 1933.

¹⁵ “Havana Jews Staging Protest Rally Tomorrow,” *JTA*, May 15, 1933.

¹⁶ “Jews Arrested, Injured, Accused As Communists in Cuba Riots, Turmoil.”

¹⁷ “Jews in Cuba Made Scapegoat in Unrest.”

any other party in Cuba.¹⁸ In October of 1938, two other parties, the right wing of the “*Joven Cuba*” (Young Cuba) and the National Fascist Party, also became legal, their members emboldened by General Francisco Franco’s victory in Spain. About the same time, the Cuban Nazi Party was also legalized,¹⁹ but only once it agreed to the government request to delete portions of its founding literature that advocated racial discrimination.²⁰

During this period, Nazi agents sent to Cuba by Joseph Goebbels were disseminating reams of printed material to the press attempting to curry favor for Nazi Germany on one hand, and to advance antisemitism on the other.²¹ The antisemitic newspapers *Alerte* (Alert), *Avance* (Advance) and *Diario de la Marina* (Marine Daily),²² printed the Nazi material directly.²³ Nazi antisemitic propaganda was also being broadcast over the radio. The founder and president of the recognized Cuban Nazi Party, Juan Prohías, was a well-known commentator and had a daily “antisemitic hour” on one of the radio stations.

The Hamburg-Amerika Line office in Cuba was regarded as the center of Nazi activity. Louis Clasing, the HAPAG representative in Havana, actually worked with Benitez

¹⁸ Norman Berdichevsky, “Communist Party Support for Cuban Dictator Batista,” *New English Review*, August 2008.

¹⁹ “Nazi Party Wins Recognition in Cuba; Fascist Group Also Asks Legal Status,” *JTA*, October 19, 1938.

²⁰ *American Jewish Yearbook 1939-40* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1939), 355.

²¹ Nazi propagandists learned early on not to belabor the Aryan issue, due to the mixed racial makeup of the Cuban population. (Trager, *Havana Report*, 5.)

²² Pepin Rivera, a vocal antisemite, owned the Catholic newspaper *Diario de la Marina* and the newspapers *Popular* and *Información*. (“Hitler’s Hand Is Seen As Jews Are Berated by Cuba Terrorists,” *JTA*, July 1, 1934.)

²³ Trager, *Havana Report*, 7., D.J. Apte to Morris Waldman, May 20, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

to issue the illegal documents, as this furthered the goal of expelling the Jews from Germany. His assistant, Robert Hoffman, was regarded as the leading Gestapo agent in Cuba. During the St. Louis crisis, it was Hoffman who met with Otto Schiendick, and gave him several classified documents. Otto Schiendick was the *Ortsgruppenleiter* (Local Group Leader) on board the St. Louis. He had been posing as a steward and attempting to harass Jewish passengers throughout the trip.²⁴

A second source of antisemitism, which increased as the flow of immigration mounted, came from Cuban merchants of Spanish origin. Primarily Franco and Falangist sympathizers, they feared Jewish competition in their retail businesses. These Spaniards were the force behind the anti-immigration push, which was picked up by all the newspapers in Havana, including the Communist paper, *Hoy* (Today).²⁵

By early 1939, antisemitism had risen dramatically. Adolfo Kates turned to the American Jewish community for help, raising the alarm to David Bressler of the JDC in April 1939:

[I am disturbed]...when I think of the fine and noble spirited resolutions that were made at Evian, of the principles set forth at Lima, Peru, of the promises and assurances made by Batista when he was in the USA and then compare these with the chaotic and alarming facts that Jews face in Cuba due to the constant and fierce Nazi propaganda that is poisoning public opinion and engendering hatred and bigotry in this peaceful country. At least for our people, I feel that I am duty bound to give you a report of the situation as it is today, which is unfortunately already quite difficult, and what future developments may yet befall the Jews who are

²⁴ For more on this, see Gordon Thomas, *Voyage of the Damned* (New York: Stein and Day, 1974).

²⁵ Trager, *Havana Report*, 7.

here and those who are yet to arrive and give you this report before it may be too late.²⁶

Solomon Maduro also told Bressler of the increase in antisemitism, but his report clearly shows the internal fractures along geographic, language and cultural lines within the Cuban Jewish communities. Maduro recognized that the fear of competition by industrious German immigrants had drawn attention to the problem posed by increasing Jewish immigration, but he felt that the Polish rather than the German Jews were to blame for the anti-Jewish feelings:

The effective and ruthless radio and press campaign against the Jews, in which now practically every Cuban newspaper and broadcasting station participate [sic], has brought to light that the grudge is not so much against the German refugees, but that they are principally directed against the Polish Jews, numbering around 12,000,²⁷ who, as a general rule, conduct their business activities on the most condemnable, unethical lines. There is, of course, a matter of cause and effect involved, for if it were not for the fear that the German refugees would also start businesses and factories to the detriment of those so far existing, the fact that the Poles are not very scrupulous in their business tactics would not have come so prominently to the fore. If you add to these developments the fact that the immigration problem has been the subject of several parliamentary [sic] sessions, that a drastic law-project has been presented, and that Col. Benitez, notwithstanding accusations and denunciations, continues issuing landing permits, you will have before you a striking picture of the precarious conditions which we are facing here.²⁸

²⁶ Kates to Bressler, April 15, 1939.

²⁷ The numbers are hard to determine, but this number seems to be exaggerated. Most sources agree that there were around 12,000 refugees in total who passed through Cuba, but only 6,000 who were stranded there once U.S. immigration tightened.

²⁸ S. L. Maduro to David Bressler, May 24, 1939, 1-2, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

In July 1939, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency²⁹ (JTA) reported that “the authorities banned all Jewish radio hours on the pretext that the Government did not desire Yiddish spoken over the radio.”³⁰ However, the Communist newspaper, *Hoy*, immediately demanded that the prohibition “be cancelled as constituting race discrimination fostered by native and Spanish Fascists.”³¹

Due to the increase in antisemitic agitation, in May 1939 Maduro wrote to Joseph Chamberlain of the NCC asking him to warn the refugee agencies in Europe not to allow refugees to sail to Cuba, since the concern was growing daily among government officials that the refugees would become a public charge or take work away from Cubans. In this, he was not acting as a representative of the communities, but individually as an influential businessman. President Federico Laredo Brú³² had told Maduro that he was considering exacting an additional financial guarantee from JDC or the NCC for each refugee entering

²⁹ The Jewish Telegraphic Agency, an international news agency serving Jewish media outlets, was founded in 1914 as the Jewish Correspondence Bureau in The Hague and reestablished in 1917 in London as the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. The headquarters moved to New York in 1922. The agency continues to collect and disseminate news of interest to Jewish communities around the world. (Archives YIVO, *Guide to the YIVO Archives* (M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 143.)

³⁰ “Cuba Bans All Jewish Radio Programs,” *JTA*, July 10, 1939.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Federico Laredo Brú (1875-1946), an attorney, was president of Cuba from 1936 to 1940. He was originally vice-president under Miguel Mariano Gómez, but the latter was impeached due to the efforts of Batista, and Brú assumed the presidency. Under his leadership, the Cuban congress passed social welfare measures such as a minimum wage, pensions, limited working hours, and a measure protecting Cuban tenant farmers and guaranteeing them a share of the crops. He also issued a decree stipulating that all businesses should be led by Cuban nationals, thus preventing Jewish businessmen from beginning businesses. (Don Mabry, “Cuba 1934-52,” *Historical Text Archive*, accessed January 24, 2014, <http://www.historicaltextarchive.com/sections.php?action=read&artid=694>.)

Cuba. Considering the numbers of refugees that were currently arriving, the payment of additional funds was not a real possibility.³³

In May 1939, Margolis and Goldsmith called a meeting of community representatives, presided over by Solomon Maduro, to discuss fundraising to counteract antisemitism. The meeting was held at the home of Andreyeff Poliakoff, a Dutch citizen who had been in Cuba for about seventeen years at this time and was a well-established and respected businessman who had served on the NRC Advisory Committee and had been director of Shell Oil and Dutch Shell in Cuba.³⁴ The rising threat of antisemitism and the urge to self-preservation finally compelled the Polish, Turkish, American and Portuguese-Dutch Jews to meet under one roof as the Comité Central with the common goal of self-protection. The group concluded that it would take \$150,000 to launch an effective radio and press campaign against antisemitism in Latin America, but those funds were beyond their available resources.³⁵

As in other matters, there was no agreement on the part of the local Jewish communities on how to handle the crisis. Joseph Hyman wrote:

Aside from the devoted help of three or four men of prominence in Havana, JDC had no help whatsoever from the local leaders or from the great mass of the Jewish community of Havana. One group, the orthodox group, felt that it should be vested with the control of the situation. The reformed [sic] group objected. Organizational politics began to play a

³³ Maduro to Bressler, May 24, 1939, 2.

³⁴ Trager, *Havana Report*, Appendix I.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

part. Also, the situation was affected profoundly by elements of given politics and corruption.³⁶

In light of the failure of the communities to put together a plausible solution, some of the prominent Jewish men stepped in personally. Kates, Maduro, Hartman and Poliakoff all attempted individually to use their personal funds and influence to lessen and refute the anti-Jewish propaganda.³⁷ Kates, who did large amounts of newspaper advertising and had some influence with the papers, specifically arranged for the publication of articles in various news publications, and persuaded the editor of the newspaper *El Mundo* (The World), one of the conservative dailies, to speak out in opposition to the antisemitic attacks in *Alerte*, *Avance* and *Diario de la Marina*.³⁸ Maduro, although he did not participate in countering antisemitism in general, did pay for and distribute a pamphlet to some of the leaders in Cuban society.³⁹

In a letter to Bressler summarizing the situation, Adolfo Kates expressed his belief that some of the rise in antisemitism was due to the way the increased immigration of Jews to Cuba had been handled by the JRC before Margolis arrived.⁴⁰ He felt that due to the disorganized way in which relief had been doled out, many immigrants had spread the word back home among their friends and relatives that it was not only easy to get into Cuba, but that once there, the JRC would “take care of them.”⁴¹ The result was that every

³⁶ Hyman to Leipziger, October 1, 1940, 3.

³⁷ Kates to Bressler, April 15, 1939, 2.

³⁸ Trager, *Havana Report*, 14.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁰ Kates to Bressler, April 15, 1939, 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

boat that arrived from Europe brought constantly increasing numbers of refugees into Cuba—both legally and illegally—which caused public opinion to rise up against them. Nazi-initiated antisemitic propaganda then took advantage of the situation and used the airwaves and newspapers to make all sorts of accusations against the Jewish immigrants. They called attention to the illegal immigration, and portrayed the Jewish immigrants as being a threat to local commerce and Cuban labor.⁴²

The local Jewish communities, however, were not able to come together, even under an increasing threat to their own wellbeing and therefore were unable to take effective action against the rising antisemitic sentiment. Their efforts proved fruitless as personal agendas and religious, ethnic and social differences interfered with their ability to develop and implement a unified strategy for self-defense.

The St. Louis Affair

One of the best-known and most significant incidents of the World War II era occurred during Laura Margolis' time in Cuba. The M.S. St. Louis affair served to underscore the inability of the local Jewish communities to function together. At the same time, it highlighted the crucial role played by representatives of the United States Jewish communities in this pivotal international incident.



Arthur Morse, a journalist, was one of the first to focus attention on the voyage of the St. Louis, portraying the United States' reaction as coldhearted in turning away the

⁴² Ibid., 2–3.

Jewish refugees.⁴³ David Wyman in *Paper Walls* covers American refugee policy during the period, but only devotes one or two paragraphs to the St. Louis incident.⁴⁴ Henry Feingold, in his treatment of refugee policy in the Roosevelt administration, omits any mention of JDC's key involvement.⁴⁵ The popular treatment by Thomas and Morgan-Witts, *The Voyage of the Damned*, offers a mix of historical accuracy and fiction without adding to the scholarship. Irwin Gellman does provide an in-depth examination of the incident, portraying negotiator Lawrence Berenson as a naïve American who did not understand the true nature of the Cuban politics that precipitated the crisis.⁴⁶ C. Paul Vincent agrees that it was Berenson's naïve optimism, believing the assurances of the Cubans that the matter would turn out well, that handicapped him and prevented him from raising a sufficient alarm to JDC and the U.S. State Department. Had he done so, Vincent argues, the U.S. authorities might have chosen to intervene more aggressively on behalf of the St. Louis passengers.⁴⁷

Levinson, in his history of the Jews of Cuba, interprets the entire incident as a propaganda ploy by Germany to hide its atrocities and to demonstrate that "Germany was not the only country that did not want Jews." He notes that at the same time that the St.

⁴³ Arthur Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Random House, 1968).

⁴⁴ Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938-1941*.

⁴⁵ Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*.

⁴⁶ Irwin F. Gellman, "The St. Louis Tragedy," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 60 (1971): 144-56.

⁴⁷ C. Paul (Charles Paul) Vincent, "The Voyage of the St. Louis Revisited," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 25, no. 2 (2011): 265.

Louis sailed with great fanfare with an unprecedented number of Jews, Nazi agents were stirring up antisemitic sentiments in Cuba in anticipation of the ship's arrival.⁴⁸

The M.S. St. Louis,⁴⁹ a ship of the Hamburg-Amerika Line, sailed from Hamburg to Havana on May 13, 1939 with 937 refugees aboard and was denied admission to Cuba, and although the passengers held valid U.S. visas (albeit with quota numbers that had not yet come up), neither the U.S. nor any other ports in the Americas would allow the passengers to disembark.⁵⁰ The St. Louis was forced to sail back to Europe⁵¹ and became a public relations boon to the Nazis.

Although the factors that led to this debacle were many and complex, the problem was brought to a head due to political machinations in the Cuban government regarding immigration. The requirement for admission to Cuba had been the posting of a \$500 cash bond with the Cuban authorities as a guarantee against becoming a public charge or violating labor laws.⁵² The bond was to be returned when the refugee left Cuba. However, for some time, special "landing permits" had been sold by the Director of Immigration,

⁴⁸ Levinson, *Jewish Community of Cuba*, 115–135.

⁴⁹ The St. Louis is often wrongly referred to as the S.S. (Steam Ship) St. Louis. It was actually a diesel-powered ship, thus the proper reference is M.S. (Motor Ship) St. Louis.

⁵⁰ This study will focus on the role of the JDC in Cuba in the St. Louis incident. The role of the United States and other nations has been well researched and lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

⁵¹ Joseph Hyman, *Hyman Report*, June 15, 1939, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁵² David Bressler to Joseph Chamberlain and Cecilia Razovsky, January 14, 1939, 1, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

Manuel Benitez, through steamship agencies, travel agencies, lawyers, and directly through his Cuban Immigration Department, for a fee of \$150 and up.

It is believed that from 2,500 to 5,000 persons in Europe, particularly in Germany, had purchased these so-called "Benitez landing permits."⁵³ Other figures quote as many as 23,000 permits having been sold, often in batches with no names on them,⁵⁴ bought up by the Hamburg-Amerika Line and others and sold to people abroad. This was exactly what the civil side of the government was trying to stop.

The motivation and morality of Benitez in issuing false immigration certificates is beyond the scope of this paper, but the benefits incurred by both Benitez as well as by those Jews who through the permits were able to escape the Nazi Holocaust are indisputable. Coert Du Bois, the American Consul General, estimated Benitez' fortune at between U.S. \$500,000 and \$1,000,000, a huge sum in the depressed Cuban economy.⁵⁵ President Laredo Brú claimed a similar range (from \$300,000 to \$1,000,000) when speaking to Lawrence Berenson.⁵⁶

⁵³ "The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc., Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee," June 5, 1939, 1, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba., Lawrence Berenson and Cecilia Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, June 15, 1939, 3, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁵⁴ This was the figure quoted by President Laredo Brú to Lawrence Berenson in *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 3.

⁵⁵ Coert Du Bois, "Jewish Refugee Situation in Habana," June 7, 1939, RG-59, 837.55/39, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

⁵⁶ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 3.

Internal divisions arose within the Cuban government ostensibly regarding these landing permits, but in reality reflecting much deeper fissures. A struggle had been going on for some time in the government between the so-called military group (represented by Batista, Benitez and the military) and the civil group (currently represented by President Brú and his party). Bribery was a way of life in Cuba, and the feeling of the local Jewish leaders was that some of the money gathered by Benitez' landing certificates was not being divided equitably among those who held official office,⁵⁷ and the civil group were annoyed because they were not getting their share of the spoils.⁵⁸ The refugees, caught in the middle, as Joseph Hyman said in retrospect, "became a public football exaggerated and distorted beyond any reasonable appearance."⁵⁹

The JDC officers in New York City were aware of this sensitive political situation and debated whether they should go to Havana and intercede. They decided it was better not to get involved in the dispute between the military and the civil groups. They were concerned that, should they intervene, there was a chance that they might find themselves on the losing side. They agreed to let things continue in the hope that the Cuban Jews would find their own solution.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid.; see also Ibid., 7.

⁵⁸ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, "Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba," 4.

⁵⁹ Joseph Hyman to Joseph P. Loeb, July 19, 1939, 2, 1933/44:507, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁶⁰ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 3–4.

As late as April 24, 1939, in response to requests for information on the status of immigration in Cuba, JDC in New York sent out a memorandum regarding the possibilities of temporary asylum in Cuba for people who were waiting their turn on the American immigration quota. They mentioned the visas available through a \$500 cash bond plus a proper landing permit that were necessary for “the permanent immigration to that country.” However, they noted that such landing permits were generally not available at that time.⁶¹

They did, though, tell prospective immigrants from Germany and elsewhere that “temporary visas” were available by securing landing permits from the Commissioner of Immigration (i.e. Benitez):

The American relatives may individually be able to make such arrangements with one of the steamship companies or travel agencies. We understand that the charges vary anywheres [sic] from \$160.00 to \$300.00 per person. While we, of course, have no control over individual arrangements made, we would like to point out that when such relatives make arrangements, they should bear in mind that they will be responsible for the maintenance and care of the relatives during their stay in Cuba at the rate of approximately \$50.00 per month per person.⁶²

They ended the memo, though, with an ominous statement:

Whether this temporary permit may be extended indefinitely or whether the Cuban officials may later require a deposit of a bond or even the departure of the immigrant are all matters about which are Committee is unable to give any assurances at this time.⁶³

⁶¹ “Memorandum on Cuba,” April 24, 1939, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

The following day, April 25, 1939, was when Laura Margolis and Milton Goldsmith sounded the first alarm. They wrote to JDC headquarters telling them that the situation had become so bad that “the entire press of Havana was attacking the Jews and the refugees.”⁶⁴ They heard word that pogroms were planned, and that Havana was being canvassed by members of the Fascist group, trying to find out each house lodging Jews.⁶⁵ Margolis requested that Lawrence Berenson be sent down immediately to “...take care of the immigration situation here which is becoming quite explosive, due to various campaigns underway.”⁶⁶

The JDC in New York immediately brought Margolis’ warning to the U.S. State Department, who advised them that this particular story was exaggerated. While the State Department knew the newspapers were full of anti-Jewish sentiment, they did not believe there was any reason to fear a widespread attack. Heeding their word rather than that of their own representatives in Cuba, they did not act on Margolis’ warning.

Meanwhile, the corruption that existed in the Immigration Department soon became a major story and Cuban newspapers began attacking Benitez and his immigration racket.⁶⁷ The Chairman of the Cuban House of Representatives’ immigration committee, Congressman Pedro Mendieta, met with Cuban president Laredo Brú and asked him for a presidential decree completely banning the immigration of Jews from Europe and to

⁶⁴ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, “Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba,” 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Goldsmith to Hyman, April 25, 1939, 3.

⁶⁷ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 4.

invalidate the permits that had been issued to facilitate that immigration, including those of the nearly 1,000 German Jews scheduled to arrive on the M.S. St. Louis. He also demanded an investigation of the status of all political refugees, i.e., Jews currently living in Cuba under these permits.⁶⁸ Support for this anti-Jewish immigration push came from the liberal Havana newspaper, *El Pueblo*.⁶⁹

On May 5, 1939, to put a halt to Benitez' scheme, the Cuban government issued a new decree stating that only persons who had deposited the required \$500 bonds and held visas approved by three heads of the (civil) Cabinet—the Cuban Secretaries of State, Labor and Treasury, would be admitted into Cuba. Others would be denied entrance; in other words, Benitez' landing certificates would now be void.⁷⁰

The *Cuban Official Gazette* published the new decree, numbered 937, which modified Decree 55 of January 13, 1939 (published in the *Gazette* of January 16). Decree 937 regulated immigration requirements and the restrictions governing entry of foreigners other than Americans. The nature of the important changes was indicated in the following paragraphs:

Article I of Decree 55 provided that:

⁶⁸ "Refugee Ship Leaves Havana, Destination Indefinite; Brú Reported Seeing Berenson," *JTA*, June 2, 1939. See also The American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Yearbook 1939-1940*, 356.

⁶⁹ "Thousand Foreigners Will Arrive on the San Louis; Immediate Displacement of Our Workers," *El Pueblo*, May 4, 1938, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁷⁰ "The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc., Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee," June 5, 1939. For more on this decree, see page 43.

All persons who might become a public charge in the opinion of the Secretary of the Treasury, based on reports to be obtained from the Department of Labor, are excluded from admission into Cuba.⁷¹

Article II of Decree 55 stated:

Foreigners not included in the prohibition established by the preceding Article and in any other article, may be authorized to disembark in the National territory provided they furnish a bond of \$500.⁷²

The new decree 937 modified Article II by adding a further paragraph:

Such authorization is to be granted, personally, when they deem convenient, by the Secretaries of State and Labor, and communicated directly and by writing, by said officers to the transportation companies, prior to the embarkation of the authorized person in the port of origin.⁷³

Article IV of Decree 55 stated in part as follows:

There are excepted from the obligation of establishing the deposit to which Article Second of the present Decree refers: (a) Tourists, or that is to say, such persons as travel for pleasure and do not dedicate themselves to any work during their stay in the National territory.⁷⁴

The new Decree 937 revised subparagraph (a) to read:

Only tourists who are American citizens, or that is to say, such persons of that nationality as travel for pleasure and do not dedicate themselves to any work during their stay in the National territory. Tourists of other nationality will need to obtain the authorization to which paragraph Second of Article II refers, without necessity of furnishing any bond.⁷⁵

⁷¹ "Presidential Decree 937" (Cuban Official Gazette, May 5, 1939), 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid. Although this paragraph only mentions the secretaries of State and Labor, the secretary of the Treasury was responsible to determine that the immigrant would not become a public charge (see Decree 55, above).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

The visas stipulated in this new presidential decree were to be valid only for six months. If the immigrants remained more than six months, they would need \$5,000 per person to be deposited in a Cuban bank as a guarantee.⁷⁶

Essentially, Decree 937 drew a distinction between immigrants and tourists, and invalidated any previous permits granted to non-U.S. “tourists” to enter Cuba. The requirement that three Secretaries approve all visas also served to split the graft more evenly. In the opinion of David Bressler, “To us it appears that instead of removing ‘sole responsibility from one individual’ it may be a case of cutting the pie several ways.”⁷⁷

The information contained in the new decree was immediately made public and was officially given to the European shipping lines, including Hamburg-Amerika.

When JDC international leadership became aware of this in early May, they immediately cabled their Paris office to notify all refugee committees in Europe—the *Hilfsverein* and the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* (Reich’s Association of the Jews in Germany), the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien* (Vienna Israelite community), and all organizations dealing with emigration and immigration matters⁷⁸—that passengers who traveled to Cuba without observing the new regulations were taking a dangerous chance and should be dissuaded and prevented from embarking on this trip.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ This amount was reduced to \$2,500 by the time the law was passed.

⁷⁷ David Bressler to Cecilia Razovsky, January 19, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁷⁸ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, “Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba,” 2.

⁷⁹ “The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc., Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee,” June 5, 1939.

However, Benitez, who was responsible for the sale of the permits, continued to assure Jewish refugees through his agents in Europe that his certificates would be honored. He stated that “as long as there is ink and paper” he would continue to issue landing permits.⁸⁰ At the same time, he sowed rumors that refugees should not post the \$500 bonds because they would never be returned. When previous ships had landed in Havana, Benitez himself had personally arranged for the landing of the passengers who possessed his landing permits. Now, although the president had declared these permits invalid, Benitez emphatically assured everyone involved that the immigrants holding them would be allowed into Cuba.⁸¹

Even before the *St. Louis* sailed from Hamburg, the would-be immigrants had attracted negative publicity from Cuban newspapers. The newspaper *El Pueblo* carried a front page headline:

Thousand foreigners will arrive on the San Louis; immediate displacement our workers. Government efforts to alleviate unemployment will be frustrated if the immigration continues. Great problem for the government and the nation.⁸²

The article went on to talk about “strangers whose desire is only to enrich themselves to make a fortune and then to take their money with them.”⁸³ It should be kept in mind that unemployment at that time in Cuba was high. Cuban families were migrating

⁸⁰ Cecilia Razovsky to Milton Goldsmith, “Phone Call,” May 9, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “Thousand Foreigners Will Arrive on the San Louis; Immediate Displacement of Our Workers.”

⁸³ Ibid.

to Venezuela, Peru, and other Latin American countries in search of employment.

With sugar prices low and rumors that the U.S. Senate was going to further reduce the Cuban sugar quota, the mere presence of the German refugees in Cuba—even if they did not work or try to be employed—was perceived as a problem. As had occurred in many other times and places, the Jews were being made scapegoats of an economic crisis.⁸⁴

Public opinion was stirred up and on May 8, five days before the *St. Louis* sailed, a rally sponsored by Grau San Martín, the former Cuban president, was held. This was the largest antisemitic demonstration in Cuban history, drawing a crowd of 40,000, with thousands more listening over the radio.⁸⁵ Primitivo Rodriguez, executive member of the Fascist Party, incited the people “to fight the Jews until the last one is driven out of the country.”⁸⁶

On May 8, the high commissioner of the League of Nations’ Commission for Refugees advised the authorities of Germany of the change in the law, and warned the Hamburg-Amerika Line in a cable:

I AM INFORMED BY HICEM⁸⁷ PARIS THAT IT IS CONTEMPLATED TO
SEND 900 REFUGEES TO CUBA BY YOUR STEAMER SAINT LOUIS

⁸⁴ Maduro to Bressler, March 28, 1939, 1.

⁸⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Voyage of the St. Louis* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1999).

⁸⁶ *American Jewish Yearbook 1939-40*, 355.

⁸⁷ HICEM had been organized in Paris in 1926 to more efficiently help European Jews emigrate by unifying the work of three Jewish emigration organizations: HIAS in New York, the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA or ICA) in London, and the United Jewish Emigration Committee (EmigDirect) in Germany. The name HICEM is an acronym for HIAS, ICA and EmigDirect. The organization was largely funded by the JDC and most of its personnel were supplied by HIAS. EmigDirect withdrew in 1934 in a dispute over funds. After World War II, the HICEM organization was replaced by HIAS internationally.

SAILING ON MAY THIRTEENTH stop I UNDERSTAND THAT GREAT DIFFICULTIES ARE LIKELY TO ARISE IN REGARD TO THEIR ENTRY INTO CUBA AND I STRONGLY ADVISE THAT THE REFUGEES SHOULD NOT BE SENT THERE
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES REFUCOM⁸⁸

On May 9, Maduro and attorney Salo Bustamante met with President Brú, who asked them for a written guarantee from the JRC to the effect that none of the refugees then *en route* from Europe to Cuba would become public charges, and that they would not work or displace Cubans in business. Brú then asked whether the previous similar guarantee that Berenson had given Batista could be made in writing to him for the people now on the steamers headed for Cuba.⁸⁹ Maduro and Bustamante could not agree to this on their own authority. Because President Brú himself brought up Berenson's name, both men felt Berenson should come in person to Cuba immediately to hold negotiations with the president.⁹⁰

On May 10, JDC headquarters cabled Morris Troper,⁹¹ JDC's European director in Paris, warning that:

("Solution to Jewish Emigration Problem Is Sought by Hicem," *JTA*, April 27, 1927; "Hicem Unit Quit over Funds Tiff," *JTA*, December 18, 1934.)

⁸⁸ Lord Duncanan to The President, HIAS Emigration Association, "Cable," 8 1939, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁸⁹ Razovsky to Goldsmith, "Phone Call." The previous guarantee had covered only those people who had been vetted and sponsored by the NCC—the St. Louis passengers were people who had come on their own.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Morris C. Troper (1892-1970), an attorney and certified public accountant, was the chairman of the JDC European executive from 1920 to 1942 and spearheaded the search for havens for the St. Louis passengers. In 1942 Troper joined the U.S. Army as a colonel in the Office of the Fiscal Director and Chief of Finance, and attained the rank of Brigadier General in the Finance Reserve Corps. Troper received the French Legion of

ACCORDING TO NEW REGULATIONS WHICH ARE REPORTED AS BEING PROMULGATED BY CUBAN PRESIDENT ADMISSION WILL BE REFUSED TO REFUGEES NOW HOLDING TEMPORARY LANDING PERMITS stop WE ARE NEGOTIATING WITH REPRESENTATIVES IN CUBA SECURE ADMISSION EMIGRES [sic] ALREADY ON HIGH SEAS DESTINED CUBA stop CANNOT YET TELL WHETHER AND ON WHAT BASIS THIS CAN BE ASSURED stop SUGGEST YOU ADVISE ALL EUROPEAN COMMITTEES NOTIFY REFUGEES NOT TO SAIL UNTIL FURTHER ADVICES stop NEW LAW WILL REQUIRE FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS CASH BOND WITH VISA APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY SECRETARIES DEPARTMENTS LABOR TREASURY AND STAY VALID FOR SIX MONTHS stop PERSONS REMAINING LONGER THAN SIX MONTHS WILL BE REQUIRED TO DEPOSIT FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS PER PERSON.⁹²

On Saturday, May 13, 1939 at 8:00 p.m., HAPAG allowed the M.S. St. Louis to set sail from Hamburg with 937 passengers aboard.⁹³ The Hamburg-Amerika Line had been notified of the change in the immigration law. However, since Cuba was one of the last ports open to Jewish immigration, its closing would have resulted in a significant decline in business for the shipping line; thus, it was in their best financial interest to ignore the decree as long as possible. In addition, the shipping line had the assurance from Benitez that the refugees would be able to land.⁹⁴ Alternately, Levinson has argued that the Hamburg-Amerika Line, complicit in the Nazi propaganda plot to show the world that the

Honor for his role in aiding Jews in Europe and the Legion of Merit for his war service. ("Brig. Gen. Morris C. Troper Dies; Active in Refugee Work Since 1920," *JTA*, November 19, 1962; "Morris C. Troper, Accountant, Dies," *New York Times*, November 18, 1962.)

⁹² Joint Distribution Committee to Morris Troper, "Cable," May 10, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

⁹³ On the ship were 400 women, 301 men, and 236 children. Of the 937 passengers, 28 held valid visas and were able to disembark; one passed away during the voyage, and one attempted suicide and remained in a hospital in Havana, leaving 907 to return to Europe. (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, "Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba," 6.)

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

Jews were not wanted anywhere, intentionally did not prevent the St. Louis from sailing in order to cause precisely the international incident that ensued.⁹⁵

The ship had room for 400 first-class passengers who had paid 800 *Reichsmarks* each and 500 tourist-class passengers who paid 600 *Reichsmarks*. The passengers had also paid an additional “customary contingency fee” of 230 *Reichsmarks* to cover the cost of an unanticipated return voyage.⁹⁶ Because this was a significant expenditure, the Jewish passengers on the St. Louis passengers tended to be wealthy, and made a “dignified appearance.” This could be perceived as part of the Nazi plot to show that it was not just destitute refugees that were being rejected because of their poverty. Not even “respectable Jews” were wanted by any of the countries of the world.

On the week of May 14, the S.S. Iberia, which had sailed before the May 5 decree, arrived in Havana with the now-illegal Benitez landing permits. Benitez himself boarded the ship and took the passengers off in spite of the president’s statement that they would not be allowed to land. To save face, Brú had declared that because the ship sailed before May 5, the passengers would be allowed to disembark.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Levinson, *Jewish Community of Cuba*, 118.

⁹⁶ The *Reichsmark* was worth U.S. \$2.49 in 1939. According to the value of the consumer bundle, each *Reichsmark* would be equivalent to approximately U.S. \$10 in 2012. (“Measuring Worth - Consumer Bundle,” accessed January 23, 2014, <http://www.measuringworth.com/consumer/>.)

⁹⁷ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 1.

Knowing that the St. Louis had left Hamburg after the new law was promulgated and was on its way to Havana and that two other ships with Jewish refugees headed for Cuba⁹⁸ (the French S.S. Flandre with 104 Jewish refugees⁹⁹ and the British S.S. Orduña with 72¹⁰⁰), Margolis on May 22 urgently alerted Cecilia Razovsky of the impending emergency:

Altho [sic] the SS Iberia was allowed to unload its passengers, last week, we do not anticipate that with the developments as they are taking place here daily, that the next three boats will be allowed to do the same.¹⁰¹

The following boats are due this month. May 27th, "Orduna" [sic] from England; May 28th, "Flandres" [sic], French Line; May 29th, "St. Louis", special Hapag boat, bringing 800 people and due to return to Germany the next day. The "Iberia" was allowed to unload its passengers because the president issued a compromise, stating that all boats having sailed before May 5th, when his decree was issued, would be allowed to land their passengers. The above three boats however sailed after May 5 so that we now anticipate difficulty.¹⁰²

We feel the following is also significant. At a meeting here last week between Col. Benitez and the steamship companies... Benitez sent in his resignation, indicating that he was now going to run for the Senate. At this

⁹⁸ Thomas, *Voyage of the Damned*, 4.

⁹⁹ The Flandre's passengers were not allowed to disembark in Cuba. They sailed to Mexico but were not allowed off the ship. Eventually, they were forced to return to France, where they were admitted but interned by the French government. ("Cuba Bars 104 Refugees: Jews Sail On to Mexico, but May Return to Try Again," *New York Times*, May 29, 1939; "Mexico Bars 104 on French Ship," *JTA*, June 4, 1939; "Seeking Refuge in Cuba, 1939," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed January 3, 2014, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007330>.)

¹⁰⁰ Denied entrance to Cuba, the Orduña crossed the Panama Canal and made brief stops in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The JDC representative in Ecuador arranged refuge for four of the 72 Jews. Seven more disembarked in Chile, and the remaining 55 stayed at the Canal Zone Quarantine Station for over a year until they were admitted to the United States. ("Seeking Refuge in Cuba, 1939.")

¹⁰¹ Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, May 22, 1939, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

meeting nothing was said about the several thousand landing permits which have been issued and for which he already has been paid cash.¹⁰³

Margolis' analysis of the situation, like Bressler's, was that the president and some members of his Cabinet were getting very tired of having Col. Benitez get all the graft, so the presidential decree of May 5 was a means of stopping the immigration on the Benitez landing permit basis and at the same time hoping to strike a bargain with the JRC for a blanket guarantee for all persons coming in with the \$500 bonds and visas:

The proposition is of course ridiculous because there isn't enuf [sic] money in the whole USA to take care of any such proposition. On the other hand, Col. Benitez and his crowd were trying to hold onto the graft as long as possible and indirectly sending messages to us on the basis of pure love for the Jews, in order to get us to help them fight against the presidential decree and the antisemitic propaganda.¹⁰⁴

Margolis refused, however, to play the game:

Of course, so far... we have not played ball with either side and the result has been that Benitez has really resigned. The matter to date therefore is... that the new Immigration Commissioner¹⁰⁵ is refusing to allow the next three boats to land and in addition a new immigration law was proposed at the House of Representatives, copy of which I am attaching¹⁰⁶... It is interesting to note that the financing of this campaign to put this law across comes from a "slush" fund, set up by the local Spanish merchants in addition to Fascist funds.¹⁰⁷

She once again forcefully insisted that Berenson and Razovsky immediately become involved:

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, May 23, 1939, 2, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁰⁵ Margolis was referring to Candida Gómez Calá.

¹⁰⁶ There was no attachment in the JDC archives. It is possible Margolis was referring to Decree 937.

¹⁰⁷ Margolis to Razovsky, May 23, 1939, 2.

At the present time we are in a complete deadlock, waiting to see what is going to happen. I feel that Mr. Berenson and you folks [i.e. Razovsky and the NCC] who know the Cuban situation are in a better position to know whether any action should be taken or whether we should maintain this status quo.¹⁰⁸

She offered her opinion in no uncertain terms as to how the situation should be handled:

Under no circumstances would I be in favor of any financial bargaining with any part of the government to land these boats and I thoroughly agree that immigration into Cuba should be stopped. Still it would be a very bad commentary upon the JRC if we stood by while the boats left here, either to return to Germany or to sail to parts unknown.¹⁰⁹

As a result of Margolis' warnings, the JDC on May 23 cabled their Paris office to notify HICEM not to allow the 1,000 Viennese Jews who were about to travel to Cuba under the direction of the *Kultusgemeinde* to set sail, thus averting another incident like the St. Louis.¹¹⁰

On May 25, Margolis alerted JDC headquarters of rumors that district pogroms were being organized. Maduro had told her that he personally knew of a definite program to attack Jews in each section of the city. It had been worked out in close detail—Jewish homes and stores had been marked. However, even though Maduro did not identify publicly with the Jewish community, he had a close relationship with the chief of police, and thus was able to prevent any violence.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ "Timeline of St. Louis Incident," June 8, 1939, 2, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹¹¹ Joseph Hyman, "Memorandum on Trip to Havana," January 18, 1940, 5, 1933/44:509, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

In spite of the rising antisemitism, Paul Taussig, owner of the Taussig Travel Agency, assured Margolis that Benitez had promised to honor all permits issued before May 5, and that he would make sure that all passengers on the St. Louis would be able to land. However, Benitez now could not be found: he was on a two-month leave of absence, with the immigration offices practically closed.¹¹²

On May 26, the day before the St. Louis was scheduled to arrive, Maduro had dinner with Acting Secretary of State Juan Ramos, who promised him that all of the passengers on the St. Louis would be allowed to disembark, since the president was already “half convinced” that it would be feasible to do so. However, on May 27, Ramos stated that Brú had changed his mind, “being afraid of antisemitic campaigns and internal troubles.”¹¹³

The St. Louis docked in Havana on May 27, 1939. With the exception of 28 people whose relatives had previously deposited \$500 bonds in compliance with Cuban immigration law, the passengers, the rest of whom held Benitez landing permits, were not allowed to land and the ship was kept in Havana Harbor. Meanwhile, a large section of the Cuban press was conducting an intensive campaign against further refugee immigration into Cuba, and demanding that the papers of many of the refugees already in Cuba be re-examined.¹¹⁴

¹¹² “Timeline of St. Louis Incident,” 2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ “A Record of the Action Taken by the Joint Distribution Committee in Behalf of 907 Refugees Aboard the Hamburg-Amerikan Liner St. Louis,” June 9, 1939, 1, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

It was at this time that an unfortunate incident happened, highlighting some of the many problems in the existing Cuban Jewish communities. The *Centro Israelita* had urged relatives and interested parties to send \$500 to post the bonds that were required for the St. Louis passengers to disembark. In doing so, it had positioned itself as the representative of the Cuban Jewish communities when in reality it was no such thing. Of course, the funds had to be returned to the donors, but the *Habaner Lebn* accused the *Centro* of keeping 15% for “costs,” which turned out to be used to cover their own unrelated budget deficits. As a result of this lack of forthrightness, HIAS stopped working with the *Centro* and instead allied itself with the JRC.¹¹⁵

On May 28, conferences were held in United States at the home of Prof. Joseph P. Chamberlain, Chairman of the NCC, with Lawrence Berenson, Cecilia Razovsky, and Alfred Jaretski, Jr.,¹¹⁶ Chairman of JDC Committee on Central and South America.¹¹⁷

On Monday, May 29, at the insistence of Laura Margolis and Milton Goldsmith, Lawrence Berenson and Cecilia Razovsky flew to Havana. Margolis and Goldsmith met them, and the four of them worked together day and night in a hotel room for the duration

¹¹⁵ *Habaner Lebn* June 14, 1939. This and the HIAS policy change are noted in Levinson, *Jewish Community of Cuba*, 124.

¹¹⁶ Alfred Jaretski, Jr. (1893-1976), a Harvard-trained New York attorney and expert on investment companies, was an advisor to the U.S. delegation to the Evian conference and served as vice chairman of the JDC, also chairing the Committee on Refugee Aid in Central and South America. (“Alfred Jaretski Jr., 83, Lawyer Who Aided Investment Act, Dies,” *New York Times*, August 24, 1976. Note that Jaretski’s name is misspelled with a “z” in the *New York Times*. He signed his correspondence as Jaretski.)

¹¹⁷ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 16.

of the emergency.¹¹⁸ The team reported a condition of near panic, not only among the 907 people left on the boat, but also among the Jewish refugees currently in Cuba, who feared that they might be deported.¹¹⁹

Berenson had been told that President Brú would see him as soon as he arrived, but the situation was so tense that this did not happen. Instead, Benitez' attorneys made repeated efforts to see him, possibly to arrange some kind of a financial deal. Reporters for the leading newspapers and members of the Jewish communities also continued to approach him. Berenson declined these meetings, taking the position that he was there to speak only with the president himself. He then received word that the president had delegated negotiations to Major Garcia, the Chief of the Havana Secret Police, who was currently the Acting Secretary of the Treasury, but Berenson did not believe this. The following day, he received a threatening message saying he would be shot if he refused to see Garcia. On the same day he received an anonymous call threatening him with death if he did not leave Cuba immediately.¹²⁰ That night, there were four husky men waiting outside the hotel where Berenson, Razovsky, Margolis and Goldsmith were staying. The Americans directed their taxi through side streets and to a very public restaurant, where they remained until 2:00 in the morning. When they arrived back at the hotel, Benitez' son was there waiting for them. For \$450,000, he "guaranteed" that he would be able to take

¹¹⁸ Cecilia Razovsky to Joseph Chamberlain et al., June 3, 1939, 6023, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹¹⁹ "A Record of the Action Taken by the Joint Distribution Committee in Behalf of 907 Refugees Aboard the Hamburg-Amerikan Liner St. Louis," 2.

¹²⁰ "Cuba to Allow Refugees on St. Louis to Land on Isle of Pines; to Set Up Camp," *JTA*, June 5, 1939.

the ship to the Isle of Pines, an island thirty-one miles south of Havana, where the passengers could disembark. When Berenson refused, he offered to arrange a deal with Santo Domingo to take the refugees at \$400 a head. Benitez' son finally left, empty-handed, at 4:30 in the morning.¹²¹

On May 31, the Secretary of Agriculture, a friend of Berenson's, suggested he write directly to the president for an appointment.¹²² Berenson then met with the mayor of Havana and asked if he would intercede in the matter. He promised to do so. That night, the former Secretary of the Treasury and Agriculture, Dr. Lopez Castro, a man highly regarded by all parties, came to see Berenson at his hotel. He had just come from Batista with assurances that he would make sure the St. Louis affair would be satisfactorily straightened out. At 5:00 in the morning Batista's adjutant called and said he had arranged an appointment with the president for the next day, and that everything was going to be all right.¹²³

On the morning of June 1, the mayor of Havana went to see the president to intercede in the St. Louis affair. The Secretary of Agriculture also saw the president that morning, and both men assured Berenson that the president was intending to intercede in the matter. However, when Berenson arrived for his appointment at noon, Benitez had just come out of the president's office—he had resigned.¹²⁴ He was replaced as Director General

¹²¹ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 4, 7–9.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

of the Cuban Immigration Office by Dr. Candida Gómez Calá,¹²⁵ who immediately issued a statement saying she would strictly enforce the immigration laws.¹²⁶

Meanwhile on June 1 in New York City, in an emergency meeting of JDC officers and Executive Committee members, a special subcommittee was formed¹²⁷ that would work closely with Berenson and Razovsky and could act quickly to clear up the situation.¹²⁸ From that moment, the subcommittee members were continuously in contact with the Cuban representatives, including Margolis and Goldsmith, as well as with other officers of JDC, with their European office, with the U.S. State Department, the Hamburg-Amerika line, with Cuban Jewish leaders, and with agencies, organizations and officials all over the world.¹²⁹

The Executive Committee held extensive discussions on the handling of the St. Louis situation. They had been hoping until the last moment that a small payment would make the problem go away, but that was not to be the case. They were concerned that if they did

¹²⁵ Gómez Calá was the niece of one of the greatest Cuban generals, Máximo Gómez Báez.

¹²⁶ "Cuba to Allow Refugees on St. Louis to Land on Isle of Pines; to Set Up Camp."

¹²⁷ The members of the subcommittee were Alfred Jaretski (Chairman of the Committee on Central and South American matters and a member of the firm of Sullivan and Cromwell who had many international contacts); David M. Bressler (Vice-Chairman of the JDC and Chairman of its Budget Committee); I. Edwin Goldwasser (Treasurer of the JDC and a prominent banker); and Joseph Hyman (Executive Director of the JDC). The committee was supplemented by other officers and members of the Executive Committee, including Rabbi Jonah B. Wise, Edward Warburg, William Rosenwald, Henry Ittleson (President of the Commercial Investment Trust), and others. ("A Record of the Action Taken by the Joint Distribution Committee in Behalf of 907 Refugees Aboard the Hamburg-Amerikan Liner St. Louis," 2., Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 16–17.)

¹²⁸ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, "Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba," 20.

¹²⁹ "A Record of the Action Taken by the Joint Distribution Committee in Behalf of 907 Refugees Aboard the Hamburg-Amerikan Liner St. Louis," 2.

make a guarantee for the St. Louis passengers, there would immediately be other ships following and further funds would be required. At their June 1 meeting, Jaretski gave his opinion to this effect:

In spite of the threat of refusing to allow these passengers to land if we went down and allowed some kind of a guarantee there would immediately be some other ships following. No limit to what you let yourself in for. Now the situation in that respect has materially changed by what has happened. It is a horrible thing but almost necessary in order to prevent the continued shipment of what we must characterize as illegal immigrants.¹³⁰

However, Jaretski noted that with the departure of the St. Louis, no steamers abroad were taking passengers any more unless they had legal visas, so in his opinion, the problem was now quite different:

If we are able to help in some way with some limited guarantee or make some provision of some kind I feel it would be less apt to have harmful effects in the future.¹³¹

The committee did fear “refugee dumping” by the German government, forcing immigration where it was not permitted, and this fear was not limited to JDC. In fact, representatives of leading American and European relief organizations had conferred in Paris in January 1939 with the Assistant League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Gustave G. Kullman, on how to combat such “dumping.” The Gestapo was sending refugees from the Reich on German steamers bound for overseas locations to which entry

¹³⁰ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, “Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba,” 10.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

visas were not required for holders of German passports.¹³² Historians have long recognized that until Heinrich Himmler sealed Germany's borders to Jewish emigration on October 18, 1941, the Nazi *modus operandi* was to pressure the Jews to emigrate.¹³³

In a discussion about the St. Louis incident, JDC leadership referred to Nazi proliferation of conflicting claims based on speculation and rumor:

...a Nazi program to send unfortunate people who cant [sic] support themselves to places where they are not wanted and then having those people seem poor, penniless, useless persons (because they can't work) and make them the nucleus for spreading antisemitism into every quarter of the world.¹³⁴

James N. Rosenberg,¹³⁵ vice-chairman of JDC, reminded the group that they must not let their hearts run away with them, and that submitting to Cuban extortion by bribery could set a very dangerous precedent.¹³⁶ They also had to be mindful of the 2,500 Jewish people who were currently living in Cuba on the now-illegal Benitez landing permits.¹³⁷

¹³² "Paris Parley Maps Flight on Refugee-Dumping by Gestapo," *JTA*, January 30, 1939.

¹³³ Eric Jennings, "Last Exit from Vichy France: The Martinique Escape Route and the Ambiguities of Emigration," *The Journal of Modern History* 74, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 294–295.

¹³⁴ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, "Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba," 11.

¹³⁵ James N. Rosenberg (1874-1970), a senior partner in a New York law firm, left his law practice in 1921 for a year of volunteer service as chairman in Europe of the JDC. He retired from law in 1947 to become a full-time artist. (His lithograph, "Dies Irae" (Day of Wrath), depicting the Wall Street crash of 1929, appeared on the cover of the *New York Times* Sunday magazine, and his works now are on display in more than 25 museums in the U.S.) ("James N. Rosenberg, a Lawyer-Painter, Is Dead," *New York Times*, July 22, 1970.)

¹³⁶ Refugee ships were being turned away throughout Latin America. The German liner *Orinoco*, with 200 German Jews onboard heading for Cuba and holding Cuban landing permits, was ordered by radio from Germany on June 4 to turn back. The Germans demanded the immediate re-emigration of the Jewish passengers, threatening to send them

Brú, in the interim, had appointed a special commission to consider the question of the St. Louis passengers. He had not intended to meet with Berenson until the ship was out of Cuban waters, but they did meet that Thursday, June 1, and Brú allowed Berenson to present his full plea.¹³⁸ The President expressed his deep sympathy on the plight of the refugees and the unfortunate situation in which the passengers of the St. Louis found themselves. He reminded Berenson that Cuba had always had the greatest sympathy for political and religious refugees.¹³⁹ However, before any negotiations were allowed to begin, the president insisted that the St. Louis leave Havana and remain at least 12 miles outside Cuban territorial waters.¹⁴⁰ Brú was furious that the Hamburg-Amerika Line had listened to Benitez and not to him. He reminded Berenson that he had sent word to the Hamburg-Amerika line before the ship left Hamburg that it must not come to Cuba, and was

to concentration camps. The threat was then withdrawn when assurances were obtained by HIAS in Paris pending a search for a new haven. (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, "Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba," 10; "Refugee Ship Turns Back to Reich," *JTA*, June 5, 1939; "Concentration Camp Avoided for Jews Returned to Reich," *JTA*, June 5, 1939.)

¹³⁷ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, "Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba," 16.

¹³⁸ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, "Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba," 10; "Refugee Ship Turns Back to Reich"; "Concentration Camp Avoided for Jews Returned to Reich," *JTA*, June 5, 1939.

¹³⁹ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, "Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba," 5–6.

¹⁴⁰ "Negotiations for Admission of Refugees Go on As St. Louis Waits Outside Cuban Waters," *JTA*, June 5, 1939.

very angered by their action. He insisted that they knew of Decree 937 and deliberately flouted the authority of the Cuban Republic by bringing the immigrants against the law.¹⁴¹

Regarding President Brú's attitude towards the Jewish refugees, Berenson later told the JDC in New York:

His fury was against the Hamburg-Amerika Line. I can't say that he was antagonistic to us, to the refugees or to you folks up here. I think he was sincerely in sympathy with the refugees.¹⁴²

Brú was receiving many cables from individuals in the United States and Cuba urging that he allow the immigrants to land, and at the same time from constituents in Cuba threatening serious consequences if they did.¹⁴³ The Cuban Jewish communities, however, did not present a unified plea. The JTA reported that he and Batista received more than 2,500 telegrams from Cubans appealing for the humanitarian treatment of the refugees.¹⁴⁴ It is not clear what precipitated this telegram campaign. Many influential people in Havana visited him personally, including the Catholic Archbishop, who did this at the insistence of Solomon Maduro.¹⁴⁵ But the president would not back down. He had said the ship must

¹⁴¹ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 5.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *American Jewish Yearbook 1939-1940*, 356.

¹⁴⁴ "Cuba Gets Appeals to Admit Refugees As Ship Is Scheduled to Return to Reich," *JTA*, June 1, 1939.

¹⁴⁵ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 5. The Archbishop visited the president at the insistence of Solomon Maduro (*Ibid.*, 23.)

leave and refused to permit it to remain in the harbor.¹⁴⁶ He would not negotiate until the ship had gone. At 11:00 AM on June 2, the M.S. St. Louis left Havana and idled in Caribbean waters off the coast of Florida, awaiting the outcome of the negotiations.¹⁴⁷ The boat sailed so close to Miami that passengers could see the lights of the city.¹⁴⁸ The JTA reported:

The refugees got no sleep all night as floodlights lit up the ship to prevent passengers from jumping overboard. Most of the refugees lined the railings to greet friends and relatives who circled the ship in launches, but they saw hope vanish as the hours slipped by....More than a score of police and marine boats accompanied the "floating refugee camp" out of Cuba's territorial waters as thousands of Cubans and Jews gathered on the shore to watch what many termed "a funeral of the living." Some groups of Cubans shouted: "Expel the Jews from the country!" Others replied: "Down with a Government which supports Fascism!"¹⁴⁹

On the ship itself, the passengers were gripped with panic, fearing they would be sent back to Germany and to concentration camps.¹⁵⁰ The captain of the St. Louis, Gustav Schröder,¹⁵¹ formed a passenger committee and asked them to have the passengers send

¹⁴⁶ R. Hart Phillips, "Cuba Orders Liner and Refugees to Go: Navy to Escort St. Louis," *New York Times*, June 2, 1939.

¹⁴⁷ "Refugee Ship Leaves Havana, Destination Indefinite; Brú Reported Seeing Berenson"; see also "A Record of the Action Taken by the Joint Distribution Committee in Behalf of 907 Refugees Aboard the Hamburg-American Liner St. Louis," 4.

¹⁴⁸ "Refugee Ship," *New York Times*, June 8, 1939.

¹⁴⁹ "Refugee Ship Leaves Havana, Destination Indefinite; Brú Reported Seeing Berenson."

¹⁵⁰ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 6.

¹⁵¹ Gustav Schröder (1885-1959), captain of the M.S. St. Louis, was recognized by Yad Vashem in 1993 as one of the Righteous Among the Nations. Although his ship flew under a Nazi flag, Schröder treated his Jewish passengers with courtesy and respect and even brought down the portrait of Hitler in the ship's social hall in sensitivity to his passengers. When ordered to return to Germany, Schröder stalled as long as he could until

cables to family members asking for help. Some passengers cabled President Roosevelt, but received no reply.

Port police aboard the ship witnessed pathetic scenes among refugees, some of whom still held hopes of landing; others of whom were suicidal, with “women and children tearfully huddled in groups on the deck.”¹⁵² Captain Schröder said he wouldn’t be responsible for bringing the ship back to Germany, because the people were so completely hysterical that he didn’t know what would happen to the boat.¹⁵³

Berenson asked Brú if Cecilia Razovsky could board the ship to calm the passengers, but the request was denied.¹⁵⁴ Schröder feared that there would be mass suicides. One passenger, Max Loewe, just three days earlier had slit his wrists and jumped into the harbor. He was rescued from the water and brought to a local hospital in critical condition.¹⁵⁵ In an ironic twist, Loewe was the only one of the refugees with Benitez landing permits to actually get off the ship and remain in Cuba. The JTA reported that a second passenger attempted suicide by poison but was stopped when guards broke down his cabin door.¹⁵⁶

a safe haven had been found for his Jewish passengers. After the war, he was released from de-Nazification proceedings thanks to the testimony of some of the surviving passengers of the St. Louis. (“Gustav Schroeder - The Righteous Among The Nations - Yad Vashem,” accessed January 26, 2014, <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/stories/schroeder.asp>.)

¹⁵² “Late Havana News,” *JTA*, June 2, 1939.

¹⁵³ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, “Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba,” 4.

¹⁵⁴ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 6.

¹⁵⁵ R. Hart Phillips, “907 Refugees Quit Cuba Aboard Liner,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1939.

¹⁵⁶ “Cuba Gets Appeals to Admit Refugees As Ship Is Scheduled to Return to Reich.”

The passenger committee then organized thirty-six of the male passengers into “suicide patrols” to prevent any further incidents.¹⁵⁷

The international press picked up the story of the St. Louis and it became major news around the world. The *New York Times* reported that rumors were deliberately being spread to prevent additional panic among the St. Louis passengers:

To avert collective suicide attempts as the liner left Havana by Presidential order, word was spread on board that the United States Government had authorized their landing in New York if continuing efforts for their entry into Cuba failed. Kept from them was the news from Washington that government officials there said no arrangements had been made for them to land in New York or any other United States port.¹⁵⁸

Behind the scenes, as Berenson negotiated, Razovsky, Margolis and Goldsmith were busy dealing with the press that was demanding information and updates,¹⁵⁹ pressure from the passengers’ relatives in the United States, their relatives who were already in Cuba, and the Cuban refugee community in Havana who were there on Benitez landing permits and felt terribly insecure about their own status. They were faced with delegations of 200 people coming to them with the ultimatum that if they were not received, they would riot. The St. Louis incident finally caused the refugees, in desperation as to their own status, to pull together, even if all they could do was threaten to disturb the peace.

¹⁵⁷ Phillips, “907 Refugees Quit Cuba Aboard Liner.”

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 17.

Besides all this, the American social workers maintained contact with the ship's passengers and gave them reports every two hours to try to keep up their morale.

Razovsky later told JDC executives in a debriefing:

It wasn't very easy. It was very sad. People were weeping all the time. People who had wives and children aboard. I took the newspaper men around in a launch and they wept all the time. We have two excellent people in Miss Margolis and Mr. Goldsmith... Our record is clean... We are very fortunate in our staff... She[Margolis] has a beautifully running organization. We agreed for the next month or two to do nothing but to try to repair the financial and spiritual damages.¹⁶⁰

Although the relatives and the refugee communities were difficult, Razovsky did feel the support of the Cuban people themselves during this period:

I must say that the Cuban people were really kind. Everyone helped us except the politicians. There was one evening, Thursday, which was so bad, that I had to go down and address a large crowd of relatives and refugees. That was when they said that we'd be beaten up and one of the boys carried a billy.¹⁶¹

Meanwhile, at JDC headquarters in New York City, the Executive Committee met and approved the proposal that Berenson would be presenting to Brú.¹⁶² They felt that the Cuban President was merely trying to save face and that as soon as the steamship left, the negotiations would bear fruit.¹⁶³

Back in Havana, Berenson requested another interview with the president, who was now aware that the world's eyes were upon him. Brú agreed to meet with Berenson at his

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶² The Secretary of Agriculture was instrumental in helping Berenson shape the proposal. In Berenson's words, he was "sincerely cooperating and deeply moved." (Ibid., 6.)

¹⁶³ Ibid.

farm on Sunday, June 4 at noon. When Berenson met with Brú, he proposed to the president that in order to assure that the prospective immigrants would not become public charges and would not add to the congestion of the refugees in Havana, they be placed on the Isle of Pines or some other area of Cuba outside of Havana.¹⁶⁴ Brú demanded that the JDC post the required \$500 bond and guarantee the maintenance and complete care of all the St. Louis refugees. Intermediaries between the president's negotiating committee and Mr. Berenson had told him that the Cuban authorities were in favor of accepting this arrangement.¹⁶⁵ Berenson delivered this news to the JDC office, although cryptically because he was aware that the wires were being tapped.¹⁶⁶

The JDC subcommittee immediately met in New York City on Sunday, June 4, and agreed among themselves that they would provide the full \$500 bond per passenger if it was so required.¹⁶⁷ The following day, the Executive Committee ratified their decision. They went on to contact the U.S. State Department, who conferred with Cuban Ambassador Du Bois and advised JDC that "under no circumstances would it be necessary to put up this

¹⁶⁴ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, "Minutes of Informal Discussion with Reference to Cuba," 13. Although beyond the scope of this study, the archives of the JDC contain a lengthy discussion on the possibilities of the Isle of Pines being used as a haven for refugee Jews.

¹⁶⁵ "A Record of the Action Taken by the Joint Distribution Committee in Behalf of 907 Refugees Aboard the Hamburg-Amerikan Liner St. Louis," 5.

¹⁶⁶ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 12-13.

¹⁶⁷ The NCC had also been able to raise from relatives of the passengers over \$35,000 in cash or pledges to cover the bonds for their family members ("A Record of the Action Taken by the Joint Distribution Committee in Behalf of 907 Refugees Aboard the Hamburg-Amerikan Liner St. Louis," 5.).

money; they [the Cubans] were just bluffing.”¹⁶⁸ However, JDC leadership was prepared to pay if necessary.

The New York leaders naturally did not want to put up any more money than was needed, since JDC could not afford to devote so much money to this one proposition; but by Sunday they were convinced that this was a special situation and they would have to go the whole way. They felt they should not set a precedent in treating this as an instance of “refugee-dumping,” but rather they believed the whole debacle was the fault of the Hamburg-Amerika Line as well as of the Cuban government. In the debriefing at JDC headquarters after the incident, the Committee Chairman said:

It’s all a difficult question of policy. We can’t be spending these sums of money all over the world. People who have gone places without proper guarantees, deposits, etc. But we look upon Cuba as being near to home and most of the refugees ultimately come into this country and I think we have to deal more liberally with the Cuban situation than we are generally in a position to do. It’s just a question of making the funds go round.¹⁶⁹

On Monday, June 5, the Cuban government announced that it was willing to permit the Jewish refugees on the St. Louis to disembark in Cuba and remain in a provisional camp on the Isle of Pines,¹⁷⁰ under conditions satisfactory to the Cuban government.¹⁷¹ The President issued a statement:

¹⁶⁸ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 11.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁷⁰ R. Hart Phillips, “Cuba Opens Doors to 907 on St. Louis,” *New York Times*, June 6, 1939.

I have no words... to express the deep pity and sorrow produced by the plight of the persons upon the St. Louis, many of whom are aged men, women and young children. But my position has difficult obligations which drown the impulses of the heart before the harsh dictates of duty.¹⁷²

Major Garcia called Berenson Monday night and assured him that everything was going to be all right.¹⁷³

Berenson had an appointment with the president for the following day at 10:00 AM to conclude these arrangements. He arrived at the presidential palace at ten o'clock but was kept waiting until one o'clock in the afternoon. In the meantime, at noon and without any prior word or notice to Berenson, the Cuban Acting Secretary of the Treasury, Joaquin Ochotorena, announced to the press that the deadline to accept the Cuban offer had passed,¹⁷⁴ and that in view of the fact that the American Jewish organizations had not met the conditions of the president's offer up to that time, the offer had lapsed.¹⁷⁵

As the president had granted a 48-hour term, which ended today at noon, for a definite settlement, the Government rescinds the agreement and will flatly refuse the landing of the St. Louis refugees at any place in Cuban territory.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ "Cuba to Allow Refugees on St. Louis to Land on Isle of Pines; to Set Up Camp"; See also "A Record of the Action Taken by the Joint Distribution Committee in Behalf of 907 Refugees Aboard the Hamburg-Amerikan Liner St. Louis," 5.

¹⁷² "Cuba to Allow Refugees on St. Louis to Land on Isle of Pines; to Set Up Camp."

¹⁷³ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 12–13.

¹⁷⁴ "Cuba Recloses Door to Refugees; 48-Hour Limit on Offer Expires," *New York Times*, June 7, 1939.

¹⁷⁵ "A Record of the Action Taken by the Joint Distribution Committee in Behalf of 907 Refugees Aboard the Hamburg-Amerikan Liner St. Louis," 5.

¹⁷⁶ "Cuban Minister Announces Withdrawal of Asylum Offer, but Negotiations Go on," *JTA*, June 6, 1939.

This took the JDC representatives completely by surprise. Berenson knew nothing of such a time limit, and was still being kept waiting for his appointment, but with an increasing sense that something was very wrong. He did not learn that the negotiations had ended until three o'clock that afternoon, when Razovsky reached him and told him.¹⁷⁷ The JDC representatives believed they were deliberately misled into feeling that there would be a satisfactory solution so that the president could announce when the deadline was reached that he had done all he could and his offer had not been accepted.¹⁷⁸ They later learned from attorney Bustamante that the news release announcing the end of negotiations had been prepared at eleven o'clock that morning. They apparently had come to a decision that morning or the previous night not to admit the refugees.¹⁷⁹

In his debriefing before the New York JDC, Berenson recalled, "I feel particularly sad because I was confident it would go through. I must state that this was the first time they had ever done anything like that to me."¹⁸⁰

In spite of this announcement, JDC made one last attempt and arranged to have U.S. \$550,000 in cash available in the Havana branch of the Chase National Bank, and asked them to notify the president that the money was there.¹⁸¹ When the counsel for the Chase Bank went to the presidential palace on Thursday morning, June 8, the president told him

¹⁷⁷ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 13-14.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, 15-16.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

that he never intended there to be a time limitation to the offer, but the announcement was released to the press by Ochotorena and he had to stand by it.¹⁸²

On Wednesday afternoon, June 7, JDC vice-chairman James N. Rosenberg sent the following urgent cable to Laredo Brú:

URGENT CABLE TO THE HONORABLE THE PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF CUBA
YESTERDAY AFTERNOON WHEN WE WERE UNDER THE IMPRESSION
THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS AS TO DETAILS OF THE POSSIBLE
ADMISSION INTO CUBA OF THE REFUGEES ON THE STEAMER ST. LOUIS
WERE PROCEEDING IN HAVANA WITH YOUR GOVERNMENT WE
RECEIVED INFORMATION THAT YOUR GOVERNMENT CONSIDERED
THOSE NEGOTIATIONS LAPSED stop WE RESPECTFULLY HASTEN TO
ASSURE YOU THAT APPRECIATING YOUR DESIRE TO REACH PROMPTLY
A JUST AND HUMANE SOLUTION TO THIS DIFFICULT PROBLEM WE
HAVE SPARED NO EFFORT HERE TO PROVIDE THE NECESSARY FUNDS
TO COMPLY WITH THE GOVERNMENTS [sic] CONDITIONS stop WILL
PROVIDE \$500 DEPOSIT EACH REFUGEE ON BOARD SS ST. LOUIS [sic]
TO PERMIT ENTRY INTO CUBA UNDER APPROPRIATE CUBAN
REGULATIONS ALSO LIKE AMOUNT IN RESPECT EACH REFUGEE SS
FLANDERS [sic] AND SS ORDUNA [sic] SHOULD THEY ALSO BE
PERMITTED ENTRY CUBA stop CHASE BANK HAS RECEIVED FUNDS
FROM THE U.S. AVAILABLE FOR SUCH PURPOSE IN ADDITION THIS
COMMITTEE GUARANTEES THAT NONE OF THESE REFUGEES WILL
BECOME PUBLIC CHARGE TO CUBAN GOVERNMENT stop CONFIDENT
THAT WHILE ST. LOUIS SAID TO BE ON WAY BACK TO GERMANY IT IS
NOT TOO LATE TO RADIO TO HER TO RETURN TO HAVANA stop THIS
WE BEG YOU TO DO stop WE RESPECTFULLY REQUEST YOUR
EXCELLENCY TO GIVE THE FOREGOING YOUR IMMEDIATE AND
FAVORABLE CONSIDERATION.
AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE¹⁸³

Brú replied:

I REPLY TO YOUR CABLE IN REFERENCE TO THE REFUGEES ON BOARD
THE SS ST. LOUIS [sic] YOU KNOW DEAR MR ROSENBERG THAT CUBA

¹⁸² Ibid., 14–15.

¹⁸³ “A Record of the Action Taken by the Joint Distribution Committee in Behalf of 907 Refugees Aboard the Hamburg-Amerikan Liner St. Louis,” 5–6.

HAS CONTRIBUTED IN RELATION TO ITS RESOURCES AND POPULATION WITH MORE ELEMENTS THAN ANY OTHER NATION AND HAS GIVEN HOSPITALITY TO PERSECUTED PEOPLE NEVERTHELESS IT IS COMPLETELY IMPOSSIBLE TO ACCEDE TO THE IMMIGRATION ENTRANCE ON NATIONAL TERRITORY OF THE BOAT SUBJECT ST. LOUIS IS COMPLETELY ENDED BY THE GOVERNMENT LAMENTABLE FOR ME IN NEGATIVE SENSE TO REITERATE IMPOSSIBLE TO PERMIT COMING TO CUBA I WISH I COULD BRING IT ABOUT MY SINCERE WISHES
LAREDO BRÚ¹⁸⁴

At the last minute, the U.S. State Department in Washington sent its ambassador to the president of Cuba, but Brú would not stand down. The matter was closed.¹⁸⁵ Brú refused to change his mind.¹⁸⁶

After the matter was over, Berenson asked Bustamante what a deal could have been made for. Bustamante replied: "You could never have gotten a deal through for less than \$350,000 *in addition* [emphasis mine] to the [\$500 per person] deposits."¹⁸⁷

Joseph Hyman wrote privately to a constituent the following week:

It is not true that the terms of the Cuban government were not met. At all times, the Joint Distribution Committee was willing, able and ready to meet the legal terms of the Cuban government. Without going into details, the matter was one of politics and not one of money.

We were led to believe up to the very last minute that the arrangements were satisfactorily concluded and we were as shocked and disappointed and as astonished as any group of human beings in the world could be at

¹⁸⁴ "The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc., Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee," June 8, 1939, 3, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁸⁵ "Cuba Again Asked to Admit Émigrés. Cuba Holds Case 'Closed,'" *New York Times*, June 8, 1939.

¹⁸⁶ "Record of Discussions Re: St. Louis," June 9, 1939, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁸⁷ Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 14–15.

the change of attitude of the Cuban authorities. We had made all preparations to send down an able group of organizers, welfare workers and childcare workers; we had made arrangements with the American Quakers to set up a camp; we had called upon the American Red Cross for advice and assistance; and then, at the last moment, the government virtually had recourse to a highly technical interpretation of previous statements and refused to admit these people.¹⁸⁸

In a personal letter to another constituent, Hyman later confided what could not be put in the Board minutes. He specifically wrote this on his personal stationery and noted that it was his personal opinion and should not be regarded as coming from an officer of JDC:

The minutes will not say, and cannot say, that while all of the discussions were going on, overtures were being made to our representatives for the payment of a very large sum of money, almost one-half million dollars, quite apart from and independent of any guarantees and money deposits that might run into one-half million dollars or more.¹⁸⁹

It is quite conceivable that if we had yielded to this type of ransom or extortion some or all of the passengers might have been landed, but it would have meant opening ourselves up and many of the refugees in Cuba to continuous harassing and demands. But what the president of Cuba did was to make a humane gesture and then through a technicality make it appear that there had been a breach of agreement between our representative and the government. There had been no agreement. We are firmly convinced that there never was any intention of the Cuban authorities to admit those unfortunates, and I am personally quite as sincerely convinced that only by the payment of huge graft would there have been any real possibility of getting into Cuba.¹⁹⁰

This additional request for graft was kept quiet due to JDC's concern for those refugees already in Cuba with invalid Benitez landing permits. As Hyman noted, "We

¹⁸⁸ Joseph Hyman to Sam H. Bober, June 14, 1939, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁸⁹ Hyman to Loeb, July 19, 1939, 1.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

certainly do not want to do anything that will imperil their position or subject them to expulsion.”¹⁹¹

As soon as it was definite that the St. Louis passengers were not allowed to disembark in Cuba and were headed back to Hamburg, the JDC initiated an international effort to find a home for the refugees. They approached countries like Haiti, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and others, but they were not found feasible since the ship was too far out and could no longer return to the Americas.¹⁹² Through the intense efforts of Morris Troper in Paris; Paul Baerwald (the JDC chairman was on temporary assignment with the President’s Advisory Committee on Political Refugees in London¹⁹³) and Harold Linder¹⁹⁴ in London; and James N. Rosenberg in New York, havens were found by the time the refugees docked in Antwerp¹⁹⁵ on June 17: Belgium took 214 refugees, Britain 287, Holland 181 and France 224. The JDC allocated \$500,000 to provide for the refugees.¹⁹⁶

On June 15, the St. Louis passengers sent the following radiogram to Morris Troper:

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Joseph Hyman to Jack Danciger, June 13, 1939, 3, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁹³ Vincent, “The Voyage of the St. Louis Revisited,” 265.

¹⁹⁴ Harold Linder (1901-1981), an investment banker, joined the State Department and became Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs, and later (1968) Ambassador to Canada. Just before World War II, Linder worked in London with the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees and after the war became a volunteer representative in London of the JDC, helping to resettle Jewish refugees.

¹⁹⁵ “St. Louis Exiles to Be Landed at Antwerp; Troper Lauds Action by 4 Nations,” *JTA*, June 15, 1939; See also “St. Louis Émigrés Head for Antwerp,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1939.

¹⁹⁶ Ogilvie and Miller, *Refuge Denied*; See also “Return to Europe of the St. Louis,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed January 3, 2014, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005393>.

THE 907 PASSENGERS OF ST. LOUIS DANGLING FOR LAST THIRTEEN DAYS BETWEEN HOPE AND DESPAIR RECEIVED TODAY YOUR LIBERATING MESSAGE OF THE 13 JUNE THAT FINAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR ALL PASSENGERS HAVE AT LAST BEEN REACHED OUR GRATITUDE IS AS IMMENSE AS THE OCEAN ON WHICH WE ARE NOW FLOATING SINCE MAY 13 FIRST FULL OF HOPE FOR A GOOD FUTURE AND AFTERWARDS IN THE DEEPEST DESPAIR stop ACCEPT MR. CHAIRMAN FOR YOU AND FOR THE AMERICAN JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST FOR THE GOVERNMENTS OF BELGIUM HOLLAND FRANCE AND ENGLAND THE DEEPEST AND ETERNAL THANKS OF MEN WOMEN AND CHILDREN UNITED BY THE SAME FATE ON BOARD THE ST. LOUIS
SIGNED COMMITTEE OF PASSENGERS.¹⁹⁷

Less than three months later, World War II began and in May 1940 Germany invaded Western Europe. Many of these refugees found themselves once again under Nazi German terror: many were murdered by the Germans; others were sent to concentration camps and survived years of forced labor; yet others lived in hiding or managed to escape.¹⁹⁸

On June 21, 1939, the Executive Committee of the JDC unanimously approved a policy to be pursued with any future events of this type:

It should be obvious to all that, aside from the fundamental questions of policy which are involved, the financial and administrative burdens of such “dumped”, chaotic, forced and disorganized immigration are entirely beyond the scope of private philanthropic resources or the facilities of existing organizations... If the Joint Distribution Committee, under this type of terrorized pressure, were to be obliged to submit to this kind of program of enforced help, its entire resources for the whole year 1939 would be exhausted in taking care of from 10,000 to 15,000 emigrants... [This] would virtually deplete the treasury of the Joint Distribution

¹⁹⁷ St. Louis passengers to Morris Troper, “Radiogram,” June 15, 1939, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

¹⁹⁸ “Wartime Fate of the Passengers of the St. Louis,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed January 3, 2014, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=1,0005431>.

Committee and would deprive all of the other activities and programs of the committee of essential funds. Already the cost of providing guarantees for the 907 St. Louis refugees is equal to the entire budgetary allotment of JDC for all of the work of relief and assistance to Jewish communities within Germany during the first six months of the year.¹⁹⁹

Under these circumstances, the Joint Distribution Committee must place on record that it cannot regard its action in behalf of the St. Louis passengers, and the enormous sacrifices it has made in the financial commitments undertaken for this relatively small number of persons, as constituting a precedent for any similar action.²⁰⁰

It was to be understood that because these people had been granted permits which were later not honored, an exception had been made for them. The case of the St. Louis was not to constitute a precedent for other shiploads.²⁰¹

The Aftermath of the St. Louis Affair

This section will argue that rather than drawing the communities together, the St. Louis affair caused further divisions. While some attempts were made by the established Jewish leaders to unite and fight the antisemitic sentiment, these efforts ultimately failed. Panic overtook the refugees as JDC contributions diminished in light of wartime demands. It was only with the drastic reduction of U.S. aid that the refugees, with JDC guidance, began to draw together as a community and provide for their own social and cultural needs.



¹⁹⁹ Joseph Hyman, "Statement of Policy," June 21, 1939, 3, AR 1933/44:378, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ "Refuge Is Assured for All on Liner: Belgium, Britain, France and Netherlands to Admit 907 on a Temporary Basis," *New York Times*, June 14, 1939.

At a meeting to debrief the St. Louis affair, Razovsky had noted about Margolis, “She won’t stay. She finds it too difficult.”²⁰² Margolis’ six-month term ended at the end of July 1939 and she did indeed return to the United States, taking up work at the National Refugee Service (NRS)²⁰³ in Miami.²⁰⁴ Milton Goldsmith assumed responsibility for the work in Cuba.²⁰⁵

In January 1940, Joseph Hyman traveled to Havana and reported that relationships within the resident Jewish communities had fractured even further in the aftermath of the St. Louis incident:

...There is no real hope of setting up an effective collaboration among the so-called Spanish, Polish and American colonies. They simply will not talk to each other or sit at the same table. The committee established by Mr. Bressler was an achievement in itself as it represented the first time the discordant elements talked to each other about any common problem, but it broke up after the St. Louis matter and it has never met again nor has Mr. Goldsmith been able even to get the three men whom he calls his committee, Maduro, Kates and Hartman, to sit down together even as a committee of three. He has had to run from one to the other, reconciling their opposing views and doing the best he can.²⁰⁶

... The American rabbi, Lasker, I am told, is non-cooperative. The American colony... are quite indifferent to the whole situation, and the Polish group are too poor and too obsessed with their own problems in the large colony in Havana to do very much or to do anything.... The process of working out a better relationship among the groups is not one

²⁰² Berenson and Razovsky, *Report on the JDC Efforts in the St. Louis Affair (Highly Confidential)*, 18.

²⁰³ Founded on May 15, 1939, the NRS was a reorganization of the NCC.

²⁰⁴ Hyman, “Memorandum on Trip to Havana,” 7.

²⁰⁵ His monthly salary was raised from \$217 to \$300 to match what Margolis had been making. (Cecilia Razovsky to Herbert Katzki, April 28, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba; see also Cecilia Razovsky to Joseph Hyman, June 14, 1939, 1933/44:507, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.)

²⁰⁶ Hyman, “Memorandum on Trip to Havana,” 2.

for an organization like JDC, in my opinion. It is a problem of community organization...²⁰⁷

However, when it came to fighting antisemitism after the St. Louis incident, some unity was achieved. The Central Committee of Jewish Societies of Cuba, legalized on June 29, 1939 and consisting of representatives of 18 organizations, initiated a program to combat antisemitism which included plans for radio broadcasting, publication of material in Spanish and Yiddish, the distribution of pamphlets and a monthly publication. The group claimed to have raised \$4,000 or \$5,000, opened an office, employed a Cuban lawyer, and distributed 50,000 copies of a pro-Jewish manifesto put out by Dr. Fernando Ortiz, a well-known representative of anti-racism in Cuba.²⁰⁸ They did not, however, have the confidence or the cooperation of the leading and influential Jewish families; and while Adolfo Kates did provide them with advice, neither he, Maduro nor Hartman wished to be publicly associated with them, feeling they lacked the experience to accomplish their goals.²⁰⁹ There is actually no record that any of those goals were accomplished.

The political situation at the time was full of uncertainty preceding the calling of a constitutional convention and an election that finally took place in July 1940,²¹⁰ and this

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 4.

²⁰⁸ Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969), president of the Cuban National Association Against Racial Discrimination was a well-respected attorney, jurist, anthropologist and journalist. ("Fernando Ortiz," accessed January 26, 2014, <http://www.encaribe.org/en/article/fernando-ortiz/138>.)

²⁰⁹ Trager, *Havana Report*, 11, 17.

²¹⁰ Batista defeated Grau San Martín, gathering 56.6% of the vote.

distraction served to bring a lull to the anti-Jewish activities which had increased to frenzied levels over the previous months.²¹¹

As previously mentioned, antisemitism in Cuba had been promoted mainly by Spanish and Nazi sources, and had been aggravated by the problems raised by the large-scale German Jewish immigration. As the Jewish refugees reached their quota numbers and left Cuba, the issue of competition with the Spanish merchants diminished. On June 23, 1939, Dr. Fernando Ortiz urged the public “not to pay attention to the anti-Jewish campaign being conducted through the radio and the press.”²¹² In May 1940, President Laredo Brú officially ordered the strict enforcement of a decree forbidding Nazi and Communist propaganda, and after Batista rose to power in October 1940, antisemitic influence diminished as well.²¹³ By September 1941 the climate in Cuba was such that a Cuban court sentenced Franz Thol, a local Nazi leader, to six months in prison for distributing antisemitic propaganda and conducting anti-Jewish agitation.²¹⁴

Immediately following the St. Louis incident, the stringent enforcement of immigration laws by Dr. Candida Gómez Calá, who replaced Benitez as Director-General of the Cuban Immigration Office, slowed immigration to a trickle,²¹⁵ and a general despondency prevailed among the 6,000 refugees who remained in Cuba waiting for their

²¹¹ Hyman, “Memorandum on Trip to Havana,” 1.

²¹² *American Jewish Yearbook 1939-40*, 356.

²¹³ Trager, *Havana Report*, 11.

²¹⁴ “Cuba Imposes Severe Punishment Upon Nazi Leader for Anti-Jewish Propaganda,” *JTA*, September 4, 1941.

²¹⁵ Trager, *Havana Report*, 3.

U.S. visa numbers to come up.²¹⁶ Rumors were flying that those who held Benitez permits were going to be deported.²¹⁷ Other rumors said a Cuban bill was being considered that would deport all Jews who had entered Cuba since 1937.²¹⁸ Whether this was true or not is difficult to substantiate,²¹⁹ but it is a fact that in mid-June 1939, 38 of the refugees who had arrived on the S.S. Iberia with Benitez permits and had been allowed to disembark were in the process of being deported,²²⁰ because even though they sailed before the May 5 date, they did not have proper visas.²²¹ Their expulsion was stopped at the last minute by a presidential decree.²²² All of the refugees arriving on the S.S. Flandre had also been rejected.²²³

²¹⁶ Joseph Hyman to William Rosenwald, June 20, 1939, 1933/44:507, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

²¹⁷ According to a July 1939 letter from a Dr. M. Jacobsohn to the NCC, the Cuban Immigration Department had announced and partly adopted measures which aimed at deporting all the refugees. A number of refugees who had even posted the \$500 bond which was required by the government had been summoned to the Immigration Department, threatened to be arrested unless they appeared, and ordered to leave Cuba within 30 days or face deportation. (Jacobsohn to Razovsky, July 13, 1939.) See also "Cuba Bans All Jewish Radio Programs." This article mentions 57 Jews who were about to be deported.

²¹⁸ "Cuban Bill Would Deport All Jews Entering Since 1937," *JTA*, June 5, 1939; See also *American Jewish Yearbook 1939-40*, 356.

²¹⁹ David Bressler to Adolfo Kates, June 13, 1939, 1933/44:507, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

²²⁰ "Cuba to Deport 38," *JTA*, June 16, 1939.

²²¹ Jorge Garcia Montes to Alfred Jaretski, June 24, 1939, 1933/44:507, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.; see also Laura Margolis to Cecilia Razovsky, June 16, 1939, 1933/44:507, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

²²² Jorge Garcia Montes to L.A. Crosby, "Phone Call," June 26, 1939, 1933/44:507, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

²²³ Hyman to Rosenwald, June 20, 1939.

Those remaining in Cuba were faced with an uncertain future, regarding themselves as “temporary residents” yet faced with possibly years of stagnation.²²⁴ The inability of the majority of them to work (other than simple peddling) due to Cuban labor laws produced not just a social but also an economic problem, since many of those refugees who had some means when they arrived were beginning to exhaust their savings.²²⁵

In January 1940, Milton Goldsmith, who had been in charge of Cuba since Margolis' departure in July 1939, accepted the job of South American director for HICEM and JDC, and JDC was faced with replacing him. Their first choice was to bring back Laura Margolis, since “the local leaders think well of her,”²²⁶ and she had consistently received high praise from those who worked with her:

Adolfo Kates said about her:

While it is true that in the past I have complained to you about my experiences with social workers, who had been sent down here before, I am really happy to say that Miss Margolis is an exceptional person. Not only is she thoroly [sic] efficient, but her capability is coupled with a fine understanding and a good heart. She has the rare gift of feeling intensely [sic] and yet not letting her feelings interfere with her calm and acute reasoning.²²⁷

David Bressler, responding to Kates, wrote:

It is a compliment to your power of discernment and excellent judgment that you echo so unreservedly our own estimation of Miss Margolis' high

²²⁴ Margolis, *Report of Activities*, 1.

²²⁵ Trager, *Havana Report*, 4.

²²⁶ Hyman, “Memorandum on Trip to Havana,” 7.

²²⁷ Kates to Bressler, April 15, 1939.

qualities of mind and heart. We know exactly what a job she has had to face and how splendidly she has stood up to her task.²²⁸

Milton Goldsmith, who worked closely with her, said when she first left:

Too high praise cannot be given to Miss Margolis for the very splendid job she has turned in here. We shall do our very best to keep the work at the same high standard.²²⁹

Joseph Hyman was hoping she would be willing to return to Cuba, particularly if the job was limited to a six- to nine-month term.²³⁰

On January 31, 1940, Robert Pilpel notified Alfred Jaretski that Margolis had agreed to return to Cuba and the NRS was willing to release her so she could do so:

Miss Laura Margolis has consented to take up again the job of directing the work of the Joint Relief Committee in Havana. The possibility that she might succeed Mr. Goldsmith had earlier been discussed with Messrs. S.L. Maduro, Adolfo Kates and Albert Hartman, all of whom have a high regard for her.²³¹

Margolis did return in February 1940, and immediately began collecting statistics about the JRC's present caseload and the refugees who might be remaining in Cuba for several more years. She noted in a March 1940 report to Pilpel:

In the six months I was away from here I noticed a great change in the nature of our caseload. Our new intake consists entirely of those persons who came here with some means, whose means are exhausted and find relief very difficult to take. There is also a large group whose funds are not yet exhausted but whose funds will be at an end if they have to

²²⁸ David Bressler to Adolfo Kates, April 19, 1939, 1933/44:506, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

²²⁹ Milton Goldsmith to Joseph Hyman, July 17, 1939, 1933/44:518, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

²³⁰ Hyman, "Memorandum on Trip to Havana," 7.

²³¹ Robert Pilpel to Alfred Jaretski, January 31, 1940, 1933/44:130, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

remain here another six months or a year. Whether we should just think in terms of relief or the possibilities of a more constructive and preventative program here, is something I am not prepared to say, at this moment; but I feel I should give you a picture of trends so that you will be aware of changes and developments.²³²

As the war progressed, JDC found itself with great fiscal burdens around the world. The major Jewish organizations that had cooperated with them financially in Europe were no longer able to make any contributions in light of the war. The JDC began 1940 with appropriations at the rate of about \$900,000 a month for all the needs of Jewish life that they supported worldwide. Their income was no longer sufficient and they were forced to cut their grants. In the last quarter of 1939, they had spent about \$250,000 a month for their European and general programs,²³³ including helping with:

...starvation conditions in Poland, the emigration needs of German Jews, the terrible plight of Polish refugees in Lithuania, the effect of racial laws in Italy, Hungary and Roumania [sic], [that] have added enormously to the misery of our people.²³⁴

Despite all this, in 1940 they tried to keep from cutting the appropriation for Cuba that provided for the relief needs of 800 to 900 of the approximately 2,500 refugees who were still in Havana at the beginning of the year. However, they did not have the funds to provide for their social needs.

The *Unión de Refugiados* (Refugees' Union) stepped into that gap, and it is at this point that we see the beginnings of cooperation in the refugee community. The *Unión* was originally organized back in March 1939 when immigration to Cuba had increased greatly

²³² Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, March 25, 1940, 3, 1933/44:509, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

²³³ Hyman to Leipziger, October 1, 1940, 3-4.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

and the JRC was finding it necessary to set in place some very stringent policies. Many of the active members at that time had been discontented persons whose own relief had been discontinued for valid reasons. Margolis had met with their representatives several times but finally made it clear to them that she would not negotiate with any group attempting to influence the relief policies.²³⁵

The *Unión* then became very active during the St. Louis affair, pretending to represent the refugee community but actually only representing a small element that was anxious to know about the St. Louis negotiations. By the end of June 1939, this original *Unión* had dissolved.²³⁶

In the fall of 1939 a second *Unión de Refugiados* was organized with new leadership. This time, they did not discuss issues of relief with the JRC, but rather agreed to cooperate and abide by JRC policies, while representing to them the voice and the needs of the refugee group in Havana.²³⁷ The major purpose of the new group was to concern itself with the educational, vocational, social and recreational activities of the refugee colony, thus relieving the JRC of that function. Membership cost 10 cents per month and by March 1940 they had about 1,000 members. With the exception of two people who collected dues and were paid a small commission, all in the leadership were volunteers. They legalized their status in Cuba and organized an Executive Committee and a Board of Directors.²³⁸

²³⁵ Margolis to Pilpel, March 25, 1940, 1.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid., 4.

²³⁸ Ibid., 2.

During the period of their existence, they organized monthly concerts and lectures, utilizing local volunteer talent. They also launched several vocational training classes to prevent the refugees' morale from deteriorating and to help prepare them for a new life in the U.S. They held classes in "glove making, tailoring, locksmith and electrical work, corrective gym, beauty culture, bartending," and more. They charged a small fee for these courses, most of which were held in the homes of the teachers.²³⁹

Rabbi Lasker and the American congregation had begun a small American-oriented secular school in April 1939 to provide for the education of the refugee children,²⁴⁰ with funding help from B'nai B'rith.²⁴¹ Because of their ambiguous legal status, these children had been excluded from Cuba's public school system and most could not afford private schools.²⁴²

In spite of the budget constraints, the JRC did begin an Americanization program in October 1939 under the supervision of Manuel Siegel²⁴³ and Joseph Kleiman,²⁴⁴ who had

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Hyman to Leipziger, October 1, 1940, 4.

²⁴¹ B'nai B'rith appropriated \$500 to provide salaries for teachers and obtain textbooks and other school materials. The school's 100 students were grouped into five classes, from first grade through the first year of high school. ("School for Refugee Children in Havana Gets B'nai B'rith Backing," *B'nai B'rith News Service*, February 6, 1941, Vol. 3 #2 edition, 1933/44:511, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.)

²⁴² Lasker's school closed at the end of January 1941 due to the rapid emigration from Cuba. (Laura Margolis to Jane Evans, National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, February 20, 1941, 1, 1933/44:511, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.)

²⁴³ Manuel "Manny" Siegel, a social worker, served with Margolis at the JRC in Cuba from 1940-1941 and then in Shanghai from 1941-1945, sent there by the JDC at her request.

²⁴⁴ Kleiman served in Cuba from 1939 to 1940; he and Siegel worked together on the JRC Americanization program.

come to Cuba to assist Margolis. English classes had been conducted by the JRC early in 1939, but were discontinued with the onrush of emergencies that overwhelmed the constantly growing refugee community. In October 1939 there were a number of “English teachers” in Havana, ranging from refugees who were self-taught and were only a few lessons ahead of their students, to those who taught in full-fledged English business schools. Tuition varied from a few cents per hour in classes of 60 to 80, to over a dollar per hour privately. English teaching was a thriving and competitive profession in Havana.²⁴⁵

In contrast, the JRC began to organize free English classes with free books in what they viewed as “a first and essential step in the teaching of the democratic process as a way of life.”²⁴⁶ The emphasis of these classes was on speech and conversation as opposed to the study of grammar, rules, and lists of vocabulary as was generally the German practice. The *Sephardic Club Social Chevet Ahim*²⁴⁷ cooperated in the effort by allowing the JRC the use of their rooms for the nominal fee of \$15 a month, and qualified teachers were selected from among the refugees and trained for four weeks in how to prioritize Americanization in the teaching of English. The goal was to acquaint students with the everyday life, history and current problems in the United States. The JRC received books and educational materials

²⁴⁵ Joseph Kleiman, *Report of the English Classes and Americanization Program of the Joint Relief Committee in Havana, Cuba October, 1939 - April 1940*, May 2, 1940, 2, 1933/44:509, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ This was a social club sponsored by the Sephardic congregation.

from the U.S. after consulting with educational councils for immigrants, state boards of education, and national bodies for information and advice.²⁴⁸

In addition, there were discussion groups that provided a forum for advanced English students to further discuss American life, problems, and refugee adjustment:²⁴⁹

The subjects discussed included: "The Roots of Democracy," "The New Deal and its Economic Program," "Jews in the USA," "Jewish Community Life," "Refugees in the USA," "Resettlement for Refugees," and "Elections in 1940." There was keen interest and participation in all subjects, with particular emphasis on Jewish life in relation to refugees. Fear of antisemitic movements in the U.S. was repeatedly voiced.²⁵⁰

The teachers and students began to obtain their visas and leave Cuba and the number of refugees dwindled: in 1941, the Americanization program was discontinued.

Because of the war, people remaining in occupied territories were generally unable to travel, so on February 4, 1941, the U.S. State Department re-distributed the block allotments of quota numbers of Nazi-controlled nations to U.S. consulates in Canada, Mexico and Cuba. This redistribution resulted in the clearing up of the bottleneck that had existed in Cuba, Canada and Mexico.²⁵¹ By the end of 1941, no more than 200 of the 6,000 who had taken refuge in Cuba remained on the island.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Kleiman, *Report of the English Classes and Americanization Program of the Joint Relief Committee in Havana, Cuba October, 1939 - April 1940*, 3.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁵¹ "U.S. Redistributes Quota Numbers to Aid Refugees," *JTA*, February 4, 1940.

²⁵² "JDC in Action: Refugee Problem in Cuba," *American Hebrew*, February 21, 1941, 1933/44:511, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: Cuba.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the rise in antisemitism in Cuba from the time the Nazis came to power in Europe. Stirring Cuban nationalistic feelings, Nazi agents and sympathizers in Cuba disseminated propaganda targeting the Jews through the use of the press and radio. The antisemitic attacks motivated the fractured Jewish communities to attempt to unify to devise counter measures, but their efforts were futile, as they could not come to agreement on how to handle the crisis. In light of the failure of the greater communities to act, some of the prominent men stepped up personally, using their own funds and influence to battle the antisemitic blight individually.

Things came to a crisis with the St. Louis incident. Margolis was the first to sound the alarm, warning JDC headquarters that the ship bearing almost 1,000 Jewish refugees was likely to be turned away from Cuba. Although her initial appeals were not heeded, Margolis persisted, and eventually succeeded in bringing attorney Lawrence Berenson and Cecilia Razovsky to Cuba to intercede with the government. Although the Americans were unsuccessful, Margolis' warnings served to prevent a similar incident, as another ship of 1,000 refugees had been about to sail for Cuba. The local communities were unable to unite to cause any effective change during this crisis, but the American Jewish communities stepped in through the JDC to attempt, albeit unsuccessfully, to bring about a positive conclusion.

Immediately following the St. Louis incident, relationships between the Jewish communities fractured even further and influential Jewish leaders refused even to sit down together in the same room. A general despondency came over the Jews of Cuba. As the War

progressed and fewer funds became available, the refugees began to take responsibility for their own needs. They formed self-help committees, and solicited the advice of some of the local leaders. The *Unión de Refugiados*, consisting of volunteer refugees, worked closely with Margolis to provide educational, vocational, social and recreational opportunities that were needed to boost the deteriorating refugee morale. The Sephardic Jews offered them space for their activities. Rabbi Lasker of the American congregation contributed by starting a school for refugee children. Margolis began an Americanization program to teach English, practical skills, and to prepare the refugees to function in a democratic society. By 1941, most of the refugees had reached their quota numbers and the refugee crisis was a thing of the past.

Looking back, some Jewish residents of Havana accused JDC of doing the local community a disservice: had they not come to Havana at all, had they not given funds for relief and assistance, had they kept out and let the refugees fend for themselves, they claimed, the Havana community would have had to assume that burden and would have done so as a matter of self-defense. Was there truth to this statement, or was it just a way for these people to justify their inaction? While the communities did come together once the JDC was unable to provide some necessary social services, it needs to be kept in mind that by that time, the number of refugees had dwindled to a manageable number, and with American quotas increasing, there was a visible end to the crisis. In actuality, there is no way to know whether JDC's action prevented Jewish community cohesion. JDC was seriously concerned that if Cuba closed its doors due to the refugee burden, it would affect the attitude of other Latin American countries like the Dominican Republic, Argentina,

Brazil and others. They could not take that chance if there was anything they could do to prevent it, and they knowingly poured disproportionate amounts of funds into aiding the Cuban refugees as long as they were able, with the larger goal of allowing as many to leave Hitler's clutches as was humanly possible.²⁵³

²⁵³ Hyman to Leipziger, October 1, 1940, 4-5.

PART TWO

SHANGHAI

Shanghai, an open port that required no visas, was a city flooded with refugees in the World War II era. In the middle of the 19th century, Westerners had begun to expand their trade into China, viewing the coastal town of Shanghai as an ideal location to develop into a port city for international trade. After military conflicts known as the Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1857-1860), a series of treaties were signed¹ that opened five Chinese ports to trade² and gave Western powers rights of territoriality. These rights included the ability of the Western powers to function under their own legal jurisdictions, governed by their own municipal councils and fielding their own police forces. France established a French Concession in Shanghai, and in 1863, Britain and America jointly established an International Concession.

As a result of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-1905, Japan gained a foothold in the northern Chinese area known as Manchuria, but lost it after the Russian revolution of 1917. In 1931, Japan again seized territory in Manchuria and established the puppet state of Manchukuo. Further skirmishes and battles followed, climaxing in the 1937 Battle of Shanghai, when the forces of the Japanese Imperial Army invaded that city. This battle was the first of twenty-two battles now known as the Sino-Japanese War, and one of the

¹ Known as “unequal treaties” because they favored the Western powers, these included the treaties of Nanjing and Bogue with Britain in 1842 and 1843, the Wangxia treaty with the United States, and the Whampoa treaty with France in 1844. (Marcia R. Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort: The Diaspora Communities of Shanghai* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 7.)

² The five ports were then known as Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai.

fiercest. Following this campaign, which involved almost a million troops, the Japanese occupied those parts of Shanghai that were administered by the Chinese, respecting the Western treaties, leaving in place the International and French Concessions, and allowing Shanghai to remain an open port. This status quo remained until World War II, when Japan joined the Axis powers, attacked Pearl Harbor (1941), and the British and Americans became enemy nationals and were imprisoned in Japanese internment camps.³

Meanwhile, among the many groups that had found shelter in the city were Jews who were fleeing the Nazi terror. Unlike the Cuban refugees, most of these people did not have visas to the US or other locations. For them, Shanghai became a temporary refuge as they awaited permission to emigrate to a permanent destination. The existing Jewish communities attempted to assist them but were soon forced to reach out to the international Jewish community for help. One focus of this study will be on the American response to that request for help through the JDC and its interaction with the local Jewish communities. Another focus will be Japanese response to the increasing Nazi pressure to oppress the Jews who had sought refuge in Shanghai.

This study will serve as a partial rebuttal to the historiography that has often been critical of American Jewry, charging them with inaction in light of the dire need of European Jews. Through funding, leadership, and moral support, the presence of the Joint Distribution Committee representative in Shanghai was the key element that enabled these

³ For more on the Russo- and Sino-Japanese wars, see John W. Steinberg and David Wolff, *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005); and Mark R. Peattie, Edward J. Drea, and Hans J. Van de Ven, *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011).

refugees to survive the War. And as in Cuba, it will become apparent that differences among the local Jewish communities hindered the relief work that was being organized and funded by the JDC. However, once JDC support was cut off due to a new theater of war opening in the Pacific, the refugees did manage to unite to provide for their own social and cultural needs.

Much of the documentation from this period was lost or destroyed by the end of the War. David Kranzler, in his early study of the Jewish refugee community of Shanghai, laid the foundation for new and more detailed historical scholarship by painstakingly gathering documentation from private sources and personal accounts. Although some have argued that his analysis tends to be biased in favor of the Orthodox elements, his book, *Japanese, Nazis & Jews*, is still considered one of the standard histories of the Jewish refugees in Shanghai.⁴

Several recent studies have focused on individual communities in Shanghai. Chiara Betta addressed the myth of the Baghdadi Sassoon family as the “Rothschilds of the East,” refuting the distorted view of Baghdadi Jews as “wealthy, Anglicized, and thoroughly integrated in British social circles” and highlighting the class divisions that existed within Baghdadi communities.⁵ Marcia Reynders Ristaino focused her extensive primary research on the complex interrelation between two other exiled communities in Shanghai: the

⁴ See also David Kranzler’s doctoral dissertation at Yeshiva University, “The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945” (Bernard Revel Graduate School, Yeshiva University, 1971); this later became the book, *Japanese, Nazis & Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976).

⁵ Chiara Betta, “From Orientals to Imagined Britons: Baghdadi Jews in Shanghai,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 4 (October 1, 2003): 999–1023.

traditionally antisemitic White Russians, remnants of Admiral Alexander Kolchak's "White Army" who fled to Shanghai in the 1920s, and the Central European and German refugees.

The German and Austrian refugees, who were forced to leave their possessions behind and who arrived penniless, viewed Shanghai as a temporary destination and found themselves completely dependent on the resources of the existing Jewish communities.⁶ The local communities did provide assistance but were quickly unable to cope with the increasing influx of impoverished immigrants and splintered into several groups and factions organized to aid the refugees. This lack of cohesiveness prevented them from working together to provide the needed support. Powerful individuals in each faction attempted to wrest control, behaving toward the refugees in a hard and dictatorial manner. The absolute control they demanded opened the door for widespread corruption, as they would not accept financial or leadership accountability. These many factions in the established Shanghai Jewish communities lacked the mutual trust that would have enabled them to work together effectively.

The JDC responded to the request for help by sending one of their key workers, Laura Margolis. Margolis, who could have remained in America as the Pacific War loomed, instead traveled to East Asia in 1941 to expedite the emigration of the stateless refugees. She established contact with the American consulate and developed systems to expedite

⁶ For a theoretical study on the dynamics of immigration chains, see Christian Helmenstein and Yury Yegorov, "The Dynamics of Migration in the Presence of Chains," *Journal of Economic Dynamics and Control* 24, no. 2 (2000): 307–23.

the refugee emigration process. Once she felt her task was well on its way, seeing the great need for relief, she remained there in order to provide for the refugees.

Margolis, as the representative of American Jews through the JDC, not only brought with her American funds and efficiency, but also attempted to infuse American democratic ideals into the refugee communities. In doing so, she acted as an intermediary between the warring factions and a force for moral responsibility to spur the fractured Jewish communities of Shanghai into cohesive action.

The following chapters will first examine the history of the Jewish settlements in Shanghai, the arrival of the refugees from Nazism, and the response of America's Jews through the JDC to the call for help. After this, the changes in Shanghai after the Pacific War broke out will be explored. At that time the American workers became enemy nationals and all funds and contact with the United States were lost. The final chapter in this section will trace the encroachment of antisemitism in Shanghai under Nazi influence, which culminated in the "ghettoization" of the German and Austrian refugees.

Using mainly the extensive materials in the JDC archives, the Shanghai Collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and the archives of *Yad Vashem*, these chapters will examine the many difficulties encountered by the disparate Jewish communities of Shanghai during the Holocaust, and the American efforts to maximize aid. Context will be provided by the records of the Union of Sephardic congregations, HIAS-HICEM records, newspaper articles from the *Chushan Road Chatter* (a newspaper published by the refugees), contemporary issues of the *American Jewish Yearbook*, as well as archives of the

Jewish Telegraphic Association, the *New York Times*, personal memoirs, and additional periodicals and archives.

CHAPTER THREE
SHANGHAI BEFORE PEARL HARBOR
AN UNLIKELY HAVEN

The Jewish Communities of Shanghai

This section will set the context to understand the multifaceted Jewish communities that resided in Shanghai at the time of the arrival of the refugees from Nazism. Made up of different waves of immigration from various locations, the Jews of Shanghai were not one community but many. It was these differences of national origin, religious observance and ideology that prevented the existing Jewish leadership from acting in a unified manner to aid the incoming refugees from Nazi Europe.



In 1941, Shanghai had a Jewish population of over 25,000. The first wave of Jewish immigrants had arrived in 1845, when Shanghai became one of five new Treaty Ports opened at the end of the First Opium War (1839-1842). The Treaty of Nanking, which set aside ten square miles of Shanghai for foreign residence, opened up trade, and Sephardic Jews from India and Iraq under British protection migrated there to participate in the opium trade,¹ the sale of cotton yarn, paper and flour and other commercial activities. The

¹ Opium was not illegal in England at the time, and was made legal in China after the Second Opium War in 1860. For the Jewish participation in the opium trade, see Maisie J. Meyer, "Baghdadi Jewish Merchants in Shanghai and the Opium Trade," *Jewish Culture and History* 2, no. 1 (1999): 58-71.

Sephardic community was small in numbers—at its peak it numbered around 700—but was influential because of its wealth and international connections.

These Sephardic Jewish immigrants came to play a large part in the development of trade in China, and participated in civic councils.² By the end of the 19th century, many of them had achieved success in banking, public utilities, the stock exchange, real estate markets and industrial development.³ The most successful of the families were the Sassoons,⁴ Kadoories,⁵ Hardoons,⁶ Ezras and Hayims, who were able to establish branches of their family enterprises as well as purchase land in the small village of Shanghai at very low prices. These immigrants later built many of the city's major buildings, such as the Cathay Hotel, Cathay Mansions, the Metropole Hotel, Sassoon House, Grosvenor House, Hamilton House and the Embankment Building. In 1887, this community organized Congregation Beth El, which in 1920 became the Ohel Rachel Synagogue, named after Lady

² See Betta, "From Orientals to Imagined Britons."

³ Maisie J. Meyer, "Baghdadi Jews in Early Shanghai," *The Sino-Judaic Institute*, accessed September 9, 2013, http://www.sino-judaic.org/index.php?page=shanghai_history; See also Maisie Meyer, *The Sephardi Jewish Community of Shanghai 1839-1939 and the Question of Identity*, 1994.

⁴ The pioneer of the Sephardic Jewish community in Shanghai was Elias Sassoon (1820-1880), the son of David Sassoon (1792-1864), patriarch of the Baghdadi Jews in Bombay. The family was the most prominent in Shanghai, and known as the "Rothschilds of the East." (Péter Vámos, "'Home Afar': The Life of Central European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai during World War II," *Pacific Rim Report, University of San Francisco*, November 2001, 2; see also Cecil Roth, *The Sassoon Dynasty* (Arno Press, 1977).)

⁵ For more on the Kadoorie family history and activities in Shanghai, see Gang Yuan Hu, *Shanghai, Hong Kong, the Kadoorie Family* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Heritage Project, 2010).

⁶ For more on the Hardoon family, see Chiara Betta, "Silas Aaron Hardoon (1815-1931): Marginality and Adaptation in Shanghai," 1997.

Rachel Sassoon, the wife of Sir Jacob Elias Sassoon. Ohel Rachel was the first of seven synagogues to be built in Shanghai.⁷

While Stanley Jackson, Cecil Roth and others⁸ have helped to perpetuate the myth that Baghdadi Jews were wealthy, Anglicized and thoroughly integrated into British social circles, the reality was far more complex. Betta argues that there were deep class divisions within the Baghdadi Jewish community. The affluent Baghdadis “...were forced to confront painfully their own ‘other’: destitute vagrant co-religionists who hailed from the Middle East and India and roamed between the various nodes of the Baghdadi diaspora.”⁹ Betta argues that the wealthy Baghdadi families were loath to undermine their imagined British identity. Thus, while generous to their own workers, they were “...not always inclined to aid poorer co-religionists, especially vagrant Jews of Middle Eastern origin who sought alms in the communities of the Baghdadi trade diaspora,” lest they be identified with them.¹⁰ When it came to aiding Russian and European Jewish immigrants, however, the wealthy Sephardic families from Baghdad rose to the occasion.

The second wave of immigration began as Russian Jews fled Czarist persecution and the pogroms of the early 20th century. These Russian Jews came to Shanghai in four waves: 1895-1904, 1905-17, 1932-34, and 1937-39.¹¹ The pace of immigration increased after the

⁷ “Shanghai Jewish History,” *The Second Wave of Jewish Migration to Shanghai (1920-1937)*, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://www.chinajewish.org/SJC/Jhistory.htm>.

⁸ See, for example, Stanley Jackson, *The Sassoons* (New York: Dutton, 1968); see also Roth, *The Sassoon Dynasty*; and Meyer, “Baghdadi Jews in Early Shanghai.”

⁹ Betta, “From Orientals to Imagined Britons,” 999.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1004.

¹¹ Meyer, “Baghdadi Jews in Early Shanghai.”

Russian Revolution of 1918, when Jews fled the Communist takeover via the Trans-Siberian Railway and Harbin. Shanghai, by then a relatively modern city, attracted the immigrants. The majority of those who arrived after the Revolution were poor, Russian-speaking immigrants who had suffered persecution.

Although the Russian immigrants were culturally different and spoke a different language, the Sephardic community extended aid to them, and in time they were able to establish retail businesses, boarding houses, and bars for the many foreign soldiers who were stationed in Shanghai. By the 1930s, they had grown to around 6,000 persons—six times the population of the Sephardic Jews—and established several synagogues of their own. This Ashkenazi community never did attain the wealth or distinction of the Baghdadi Jews,¹² but because they arrived at a time of economic growth in Shanghai, they eventually constituted a comfortable middle class, largely made up of merchants, brokers, and dealers in the import-export trade.¹³

The general population of Shanghai increased greatly between the wars, growing to 4.5 million inhabitants. Real estate in Shanghai's International Settlement and French Concession¹⁴ went up in value tenfold as Shanghai became the fifth greatest harbor in the world, its port handling a major portion of China's imports and exports.¹⁵

¹² "The Chronology of the Jews of Shanghai from 1832 to the Present," accessed June 25, 2013, <http://www.jewsofchina.org/jewsofchina/Templates/showpage.asp?DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=84&FID=890>.

¹³ Laura Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," *Survey Graphic*, March 1944, 168, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC Israel Records, Shanghai 1938-1947.

¹⁴ Shanghai was divided into three districts, with the Chinese sections in the northern and southern parts of the city separated by foreign concessions—the

This prosperity was interrupted in July 1937, when the “Battle of Shanghai” broke out between China and Japan, resulting in three months of heavy fighting and fierce air assaults and culminating with the Japanese occupying the city. Thousands of civilians died and within weeks hundreds of thousands of destitute Chinese fled to Shanghai from the surrounding areas that were devastated by Japanese attacks. Bombed out homes where once one or two families had lived suddenly housed hundreds of homeless Chinese.¹⁶ But soon, committees and camps sprung up to care for the refugees—by December 1937, there were 161 camps in the International Settlement alone, providing for approximately 97,000 refugees.¹⁷ According to Christian Henriot, Chinese society was structured in a “dense network of associations, especially native place associations, that bore the brunt of supporting and managing the refugee population.”¹⁸ Because of the strong civic support network and through family and friends, many of the displaced Chinese were able to find a

International Settlement, which was British and American and governed administratively by the Shanghai Municipal Council, composed of British, Japanese, Chinese and American officials; and the French Concession, governed by the French Consul General. These areas were responsible to maintain their own courts, police, and armed forces (Vámos, “‘Home Afar’: The Life of Central European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai during World War II,” 1–2; for more on the geographic organization of Shanghai, see Irene Eber, “Overland and By Sea: Eight Centuries of the Jewish Presence in China,” *Chinese Journal of International Law* 4, no. 1 (June 2005): 235–56).

¹⁵ “The Chronology of the Jews of Shanghai from 1832 to the Present.”

¹⁶ Christian Henriot, “Shanghai and the Experience of War: The Fate of Refugees,” *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 5, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 225–226.

¹⁷ Shanghai Public Health Department, December 1937, U15-1-1032, SMA, cited in *ibid.*, 227.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 244.

solution within eighteen months and the crowded conditions in Shanghai were somewhat eased.¹⁹

It was soon after this major upheaval, in 1938, that the third and largest wave of Jewish immigration began. The Jews of Germany had been exposed to various degrees of antisemitism and had slowly experienced the erosion of their rights and the loss of their citizenship. The discrimination for Austrian Jews occurred much more suddenly after the *Anschluss*. Under this increasing pressure, German and Austrian Jews were faced with the difficult decision to abandon everything and flee their homeland, at a time when most of the world was shutting its doors to Jewish immigration. However, Shanghai in 1938 did not require visas or landing permits, and thus became one of the last available destinations for Jews seeking to flee the Nazi menace.

At the time, the thought of Shanghai as a possible refuge would have been frighteningly alarming to most German Jews. Stella Dong describes Shanghai's reputation in the 1930s and 1940s as:

...the most pleasure-mad, rapacious, corrupt, strife-ridden, licentious, squalid and decadent city in the world... greed was its driving force... calamity was always at the door... it catered to every depravity known to man... misery stared one brazenly in the face...[and] morality was irrelevant.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Stella Dong, *Shanghai: The Rise and Fall of a Decadent City* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 2000), 1.

Many Jewish leaders did not consider Shanghai a viable option at all,²¹ but after the Evian Conference in July 1938, as the nations of the world began to close their doors to further immigration, Shanghai became just about the last choice for the immigrants.

Running out of options, thousands of refugees seeking to escape from Germany and Austria traveled by train to Italy, and the majority then boarded ships of the Lloyd-Triestino line, which ran a luxury service between Italy and Shanghai. The most common route was a thirty-day cruise from Genoa to Port Said to Suez to Colombo, Ceylon, to Singapore to Manila and then to Shanghai.²²

The refugees, however, took comfort in the fact that Shanghai was only a temporary refuge for their eventual entry to the United States, England, Australia, or Palestine. They never imagined they might be stranded there for seven years or more.²³

The German and Austrian refugees who arrived in China were not a homogeneous group. They represented a variety of economic, religious, political, class and cultural backgrounds and rifts frequently formed between them. But no matter how wealthy they

²¹ Avraham Altman and Irene Eber, "Flight to Shanghai, 1938-1940: The Larger Setting," *Yad Vashem Studies* 28 (2000): 53.

²² Other ship lines traveled to Shanghai as well, including the North German Lloyd line and the Hamburg American Steamship Company, as well as various Japanese lines. (See Alvin Mars, "A Note on the Jewish Refugees in Shanghai," *Jewish Social Studies* 31, no. 4 (October 1969): 286; see also David Kranzler, "Restrictions against German-Jewish Refugee Immigration to Shanghai in 1939," *Jewish Social Studies* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 1974): 54; see also Susanne Wiedemann, "Transnational Encounters with 'Amerika': German Jewish Refugees' Identity Formation in Berlin and Shanghai, 1939--1949" (Ph.D., Brown University, 2006), 14.)

²³ Wiedemann, "Transnational Encounters with 'Amerika,'" 69.

had been, in late 1938 refugees leaving Germany were required to pay heavy exit taxes and were only allowed to take one handbag and ten Reichsmarks out of Germany, and an additional 150 Reichsmarks in “on-board” money to spend on the ship.²⁴ Forward-thinking refugees used these funds to purchase as many luxury items as they could on board, in order to resell them later in Shanghai and be able to sustain themselves or establish small businesses.²⁵ But overall, the refugees who arrived in Shanghai during this period had very few resources of their own.

By the end of February 1939, 2,500 Jewish refugees had come to Shanghai, and by March the number had reached 4,000 as hysteria spread in Europe. By April, there were 7,000 Jewish refugees, and by May 9,000 had arrived in Shanghai.²⁶

This massive German-Austrian exodus to Shanghai continued until August 1939, when the Japanese Authorities of the Army, Navy and Consulate General took up the matter of refugee immigration. Finally, on August 21, 1939, the Japanese placed strict restrictions

²⁴ Some of the earliest arrivals were allowed to bring some of their possessions, including tools and instruments of their profession in addition to their personal baggage. This practice was later stopped. (Felix Gruenberger, “The Jewish Refugees in Shanghai,” *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 4 (October 1, 1950): 330; see also Vámos, “‘Home Afar’: The Life of Central European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai during World War II,” 4.)

²⁵ Mars, “A Note on the Jewish Refugees in Shanghai,” 287.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 288.

upon any further immigration to Japanese-occupied Shanghai.²⁷ By then, over 17,000 refugees had made their way to the port of Shanghai and were struggling to survive.²⁸

In spite of the Japanese ban, in 1941 there was a small additional migration of 900 to 1,000 Polish Jews, including the entire Mir Yeshiva, which had set out together as a school, and was the only yeshiva in which all its members survived the Holocaust.²⁹ These religious Jews had traveled by train from Poland to Lithuania, then to Vladivostok via the Trans-Siberian Railroad, and from there by ship to Kobe, Japan, where they had settled temporarily until the Japanese relocated them to Shanghai. The refugees had been able to land in Kobe because they possessed bogus landing permits to Curaçao issued to thousands by the Japanese Vice-Consul in Lithuania, Chiune Sugihara.³⁰

²⁷ Koreshige Inuzuka to Captain Herzberg, September 17, 1941, 1, AJDC Israel Records, Shanghai 1938-1947.

²⁸ As Ristaino and others have observed, refugee figures in Shanghai were inherently unreliable, since there was a great deal of movement in and out of refugee camps and services. (Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 5.)

²⁹ For more on the Mir Yeshiva, see Marvin Tokayer, *The Fugu Plan: The Untold Story of the Japanese and the Jews during World War II* (New York: Paddington Press, 1979); Andrew Tewner, *Miraculous Journey: The Escape of the Mir Yeshiva from the Holocaust*, 1987; see also "Religious Schools and Yeshivas," 1941, YIVO Archives, Shanghai Collection, Cultural and Educational Activities, 1929-1947, RG 243, 50 (3/510). For a comparative study of Chinese and Jewish memory tradition, see Vera Schwarcz, *Bridge Across Broken Time: Chinese and Jewish Cultural Memory* (Yale University Press, 1998).

³⁰ Joseph Fizman, "The Quest for Status: Polish Jewish Refugees in Shanghai, 1941-1949," *The Polish Review* XLIII, no. 3 (1998): 441. See "Japan Bars Further Transit of Polish Jewish Refugees; Cites Congestion," *JTA*, March 18, 1941; see also Hillel Levine, *In Search of Sugihara: The Elusive Japanese Diplomat Who Risked His Life to Rescue 10,000 Jews from the Holocaust* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

Community Aid Efforts

Guided by strong traditional values, each of the preexisting Jewish communities of Shanghai attempted to the best of their abilities to provide for their incoming coreligionists. However, the different factions of the established communities were not able to combine their efforts, resulting in an inability to adequately provide for the increasing number of refugees who came to them for help.



Before the current refugee crisis, the Jews of Shanghai had reached out for aid through international Jewish connections. In 1937, they had appealed to American Jews to aid Jewish victims of Japanese attacks during the Battle of Shanghai, and the Americans had responded.³¹ In November 1937, Alfred M. Colin, president of B'nai B'rith, announced that the B'nai B'rith emergency relief fund was cabling "a substantial sum" to the Jewish Emergency Relief Committee of Shanghai. This was in response to a story carried earlier that month by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) charging American Jewry with "apparent indifference" to the plight of Shanghai's Jews.³² The JTA's reference to this "apparent indifference" to the plight of Shanghai's Jews contains an element of shaming

³¹ *American Jewish Yearbook 1938-39* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1938), 153. B'nai B'rith continued to support the local Shanghai committees at least until 1939. ("B'nai B'rith Leader Calls for Greater Efforts on Behalf of Palestine," *JTA*, January 30, 1939.)

³² "B'nai B'rith Acting to Help Shanghai Jewry; Efforts Started Early in Month," *JTA*, November 17, 1937.

reminiscent of the *herem*, which while traditionally invoking the threat of excommunication, in this case served to exert social pressure to provide the needed aid.³³

Shanghai had no organized social agencies in the Western sense to provide for the huge wave of immigration that began in 1938.³⁴ At first, the existing Jewish communities reached out to help. The Kadoories personally sponsored a meeting of the Sephardic Jewish leaders to formulate a plan to aid the refugees. Sir Victor Sassoon (1881-1961), scion of one of the richest Jewish families in Shanghai, contributed large sums to aid the refugees. Sassoon turned the first floor of his Embankment Building into an intake center for the new arrivals. There they were registered, received their first meal and temporary housing. He personally provided more permanent housing for around 2,500 new immigrants when living places were nearly impossible to find. He also purchased bombed-out houses in Hongkew, where the refugees settled, and encouraged the refugees to rebuild them in exchange for free housing.³⁵

Sir Victor also established a \$150,000 loan fund which enabled the refugees to begin small businesses such as bakeries, cafés and other services.³⁶ Some refugees pooled their loans and purchased houses that they then rented to others. As the businesses became

³³ For more on the use of herem as a form of social control, see Katz, *Tradition and Crisis; Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*.

³⁴ Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," 168.

³⁵ Vámos, "'Home Afar': The Life of Central European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai during World War II," 5.

³⁶ Meyer, "Baghdadi Jews in Early Shanghai."

established the loans were repaid and lent to other refugees. With each ship bringing 700 or more refugees, even this generous offer was soon insufficient.³⁷

The first official committee set up to aid refugees was the International Committee for Granting Relief to European Refugees, organized and funded by Sassoon on August 7, 1938. Known as the “International Committee” [IC],³⁸ or the “Komor Committee,”³⁹ it was headed by Paul Komor, a Hungarian businessman who had lived in Shanghai since 1898, had been involved in relief work through the Komor Charity Fund and had been chairman and treasurer of the Hungarian Relief Fund since 1924.⁴⁰

The IC provided temporary housing and a makeshift kitchen facility to feed the new arrivals, who were not expected to stay long in Shanghai and were therefore not expected to be able to provide for their own needs. Two other kitchens were also established, one in a synagogue and the other in the refugee reception center in the Embankment Building. Even though most refugees were not religiously observant, the kitchens served kosher food out of respect to those who were.⁴¹

³⁷ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 119.

³⁸ Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, “Letter 20,” August 11, 1941, 3, AJDC Israel Records, Shanghai 1938-1947.

³⁹ Vámos, “‘Home Afar’: The Life of Central European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai during World War II,” 4.

⁴⁰ See “International Committee for Granting Relief to European Refugees,” 1938, YIVO Archives, Shanghai Collection, Relief Activities, 1931-1944, RG 243, 38 (2/1011).

⁴¹ Vámos, “‘Home Afar’: The Life of Central European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai during World War II,” 5.

Michel Speelman, a prominent Dutch Jewish resident of Shanghai, headed the second major group, the Committee for the Assistance of European Refugees in Shanghai [CFA],⁴² founded in 1938 and more commonly known as simply “the Committee.” Margolis noted in 1941 that she felt Speelman was beginning to get senile. She described him as a very nice and good-hearted person who had been involved with the relief situation since the beginning and was getting worn down. Because of this, he was “satisfied with anything as long as the refugees don’t bother him.”⁴³ To run the CFA, Speelman employed A. Herzberg, a captain in the Shanghai Jewish Volunteer Corps, about whose background little is known other than he was a German Jew born in Shanghai.⁴⁴

As refugees began streaming in, the CFA provided aid in the areas of food, shelter, and medical care. As with the IC, the CFA intended this aid to be temporary until the refugees were able to emigrate to their final destinations. The Committee had no professional staff and no social workers; caseworkers “were usually professional people who happened to stop by looking for work.”⁴⁵ Always in need of funding, Speelman repeatedly requested help from JDC and even reached out internationally as the IC had

⁴² See “Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai,” to 1944 1938, YIVO Archives, Shanghai Collection, Relief Activities, 1931-1944, RG 243, 38 (2/1011); 37 (2/970).

⁴³ Laura Margolis to Moses Leavitt, July 29, 1941, AR 1933/44:488, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

⁴⁴ Ibid.; for Herzberg’s title as Captain, see Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 306.

⁴⁵ Ernest G Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge: A Memoir of the World War II Jewish Ghetto* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 90.

done, traveling to Europe in June 1939 to seek additional financial support.⁴⁶ This committee functioned until the middle of 1942, when the Japanese disbanded it in order to set up their own, more “cooperative” Jewish aid committee.

In November 1939, the German and Austrian refugees organized themselves into the *Jüdische Gemeinde* to represent their own interests that were not being met by the existing committees. Since their housing, food and medical needs were provided for, their initial function was to provide educational resources and mediate refugee disputes. Later a legal department was established that formed an arbitration court to provide binding rulings on such disputes, while allowing for a system of appeals. The legal department also provided birth, death, and marriage and divorce certificates to the refugees, as well as conducted civil wedding ceremonies according to Chinese law.⁴⁷ After Jews living overseas lost their citizenship in January 1942,⁴⁸ when Germany and Austria refused to renew their passports, the IC attempted to issue its own identification cards for the now stateless refugees.⁴⁹

Pan Guang, director of the Institute of European & Asian Studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, has argued that the Chinese people of Shanghai also tried their best to help the Jewish refugees, opening their homes to them and treating them in Chinese

⁴⁶ “News Brief,” *JTA*, August 13, 1939.

⁴⁷ Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, 92; see also records of the “Jewish Community of Central European Jews (Jüdische Gemeinde),” 1941, YIVO Archives, Shanghai Collection, General, 1932-1948, RG 243, 10 (1/599); 42 (3/3); 47 (3/174).

⁴⁸ Germany passed a law in November 1941 stripping Jews living abroad of their citizenship, but the law was not implemented until the following January. See Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 190.

⁴⁹ Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, 89.

hospitals, although it is debatable how much the Chinese were actually able to do in view of their own impoverished state at the time. In spite of the differences in language and culture, some friendships did develop between Chinese and Jews living side by side in such close quarters.⁵⁰

As the German and Austrian refugees continued to arrive *en masse*, the JDC, along with the British Section of the Council for German Jewry⁵¹ (mainly at the insistence of the JDC) and the Jewish community of Cairo (for a time) began to send additional funds to the local relief committees that were set up to assist the newcomers.

The British Council stopped sending funds at the start of the War in September 1939, and JDC assumed approximately 90% of the responsibility for the maintenance of the refugees in Shanghai.

ORT,⁵² an international Jewish organization founded in Poland in 1880 to provide education and training in agriculture and practical occupations to the Jews in the Pale of Settlement, opened their first vocational training school in Shanghai in September of

⁵⁰ Pan, "Shanghai: a Haven for Holocaust Victims"; see also Pan Guang, *The Jews in Shanghai* (Shanghai: Shanghai Pictorial Publishing House, 1995).

⁵¹ In 1939 the British Central Council for Jewish Refugees spent close to U.S. \$3,000,000 to supplement the JDC refugee aid programs (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, *Aiding Jews Overseas* (New York, NY: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1941), 6.).

⁵² ORT stands for *Obcesowo Remeslenogo Truda* (Association for the Promotion of Skilled Trades, or Organization for Reconstruction and Training).

1941⁵³ and held six-month training courses for the refugees in twenty-one crafts to prepare them for eventual emigration. By 1947 they had trained a total of 2,375 students.⁵⁴

Although JDC was the major backer of the refugee program, we should not overlook the other organizations and communities that, although beyond the scope of this study, eventually also played a role in rescuing and aiding Jewish refugees in Shanghai. They include the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, the World Jewish Congress in New York, the *Va'ad ha-Hazalah* (Orthodox), the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Polish Relief Committee for War Victims, the Jewish community in Kobe, the Jewish community in Harbin, *Arbeitsausschuss zur Hilfeleistung für Europäische Juden* in Stockholm, and the *Comité Comunidade Israelita de Lisboa*.⁵⁵

The Society of Friends, or Quakers, partnered closely with JDC as well. In the closing of Margolis' initial report to headquarters, sent by diplomatic pouch,⁵⁶ she noted that she

⁵³ "ORT Opens Training School for Refugees in China," *JTA*, September 21, 1941.

⁵⁴ See "ORT - China, Correspondence and Minutes," 1941, YIVO Archives, Shanghai Collection, Cultural and Educational Activities, 1929-1947, RG 243, 33 (2/813); see also "ORT and the DP Camps: Shanghai ORT Report," 1947, 2, <http://dpcamps.ort.org/dp-reports-intro/shanghai-ort-report/>.

⁵⁵ These groups, too many to be listed in their entirety, are mentioned in Pan, "Shanghai: A Haven for Holocaust Victims." See also Frans Hüsken and Dick van der Meij, *Reading Asia: New Research in Asian Studies* (Psychology Press, 2001), 187.

⁵⁶ Communication at the time was through diplomatic pouches: "With security of U.S. diplomatic mail in doubt, President Roosevelt worked to restart the Department of State's courier service. He was displeased when he learned that the Department had cut the courier service, and he told Congress that he supported renewed funding for couriers. In 1935, Congress appropriated \$24,000 to the Department, permitting the operation of three couriers out of Paris and a limited service in Asia. For fiscal year 1939, Congress raised the appropriation to \$35,000. The reinitiating of the courier service led to changes in the

had availed herself of the letters of introduction from the Friends and they had been extremely helpful, particularly in orienting her with regard to the local scene, and in supplementing some of the (unspecified) unmet needs.⁵⁷ The Friends also helped by working with the residents at the Seward Road Camp, the largest of the five camps set up to provide for the refugees, that housed approximately 1,000 people. They taught the residents how to govern themselves democratically, organized classes in English, and took over clothing distribution from the JDC.⁵⁸

By 1939, the ever-climbing number of German Jewish refugees was beginning to tax both the resources and the good will of the Shanghai Jewish communities.⁵⁹ The Shanghai Municipal Council, the governing body of the International Settlement that included powerful commercial representatives of various countries,⁶⁰ began to put pressure on world governments to halt the immigration. Both Alvin Mars and Felix Gruenberger have argued that the major fear was of economic competition by the refugees, as many believed that the economy could not support such a large influx of people. Rumors spread that

routes. The Department created a new route in northeast Asia; from its base in Peiping (now Beijing), the route ran between Peiping, Tientsin, Nanking, and Shanghai, with Tokyo added later." (Telegram, Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, to Phillips, U.S. Embassy Paris, April 27, 1934, Folder—121.67, Box 336, DF 1930-39, RG 59, NA. Grover, "A Brief History of the U.S. Diplomatic Service," *Foreign Service Newsletter* 80 (October 1953): 17.)

⁵⁷ Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, "Letter 4," May 28, 1941, 3, AR 1933/44:488, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

⁵⁸ Laura Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, September 1943, 12, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁵⁹ Kranzler, "Restrictions against German-Jewish Refugee Immigration to Shanghai in 1939," 41.

⁶⁰ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 11, 13.

Jewish refugee laborers would encroach on the job market and replace White Russian workers, who had themselves at one time been immigrants and whose rate of unemployment was already 50%.⁶¹ Kranzler agrees and adds that the severe housing shortage in Shanghai and the antisemitic feelings among the White Russians increased this pressure to stop immigration.⁶²

Michel Speelman reported to the JDC in June 1939:

In the course of my conversation with the Shanghai Municipal Council and the French authorities in December last, I brought to their attention the danger of an unlimited influx of refugees to Shanghai, which is now in a state of war and completely isolated from the rest of China, and where a large number of employment seeking people cannot be absorbed.⁶³

Kranzler has argued that it was this report that influenced Cornell Franklin, Chairman of the Shanghai Municipal Council, to appeal to their governing authority, the Shanghai Consular Body, to halt Jewish immigration in August 1939:⁶⁴

I have the honour of bringing to the attention of the Consular Body that the Shanghai Municipal Council is gravely concerned at the influx into Shanghai of Jewish refugees from Europe. There is already in Shanghai an acute refugee problem which is taxing to a great degree the resources both of the municipality and of private philanthropy. There is to be considered not only the provision of accommodation and subsistence, but

⁶¹ Mars, "A Note on the Jewish Refugees in Shanghai," 289; Gruenberger, "The Jewish Refugees in Shanghai"; see also Robert W. Barnett, "Shanghai's German Refugees Face Uncertainties," *Far Eastern Survey* 8, no. 21 (October 25, 1939): 252; John Hope Simpson, "The Refugee Problem," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939)* 17, no. 5 (September 1, 1938): 613.

⁶² Kranzler, "The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945," 111, 114.

⁶³ Michael Speelman, "Report on Jewish Refugee Problem in Shanghai," June 21, 1939, 1, Israel JDC - AJDC Israel Records, Shanghai 1938-1947.

⁶⁴ Kranzler, "Restrictions against German-Jewish Refugee Immigration to Shanghai in 1939," 52.

the degree to which any further number of refugees could be absorbed without still further impairing the standard of living of the present community... I have the honour to request that the interested Consuls may take any steps within their power to prevent any further arrival of Jewish refugees in Shanghai.⁶⁵

Was this a veiled threat that the established Jewish communities of Shanghai would be held responsible for lowering the standard of living of the entire population? Or did the established communities sense a threat to their own standard of living? Either way, the alarm of the Shanghai refugee committees was picked up by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in December 1938, which provided the news to United States Jewish communities.⁶⁶ The major Jewish organizations in the U.S., England and France responded positively to Shanghai's request to curtail immigration.⁶⁷

In February 1939 JDC joined in actively discouraging further immigration:

We have advised the European agencies so far as is in their power to try to discourage further emigration to Shanghai. To stop it altogether, as you undoubtedly know, is most difficult, for large numbers sail for Shanghai without consulting the agencies; and, then again, even though warned, these people, harassed as they are, take the earliest boat for any country in which they might be permitted to land.⁶⁸

In response to this JDC request, the *Hilfsverein* in Germany responded:

In the present plight of German Jewry it would probably [be] impossible for us to stop the migration to Shanghai even if we absolutely wanted to

⁶⁵ Cornell Franklin, Chairman of SMC to A. J. Alves, Consul-General for Portugal and Senior Consul, December 23, 1938, 1, AR 1933/44, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

⁶⁶ "Shanghai Jews, Funds Exhausted, Fear Arrival of Refugees," *JTA*, December 9, 1938.

⁶⁷ See also Speelman, "Report on Jewish Refugee Problem in Shanghai."

⁶⁸ Herbert Katzki to Roswell Barnes, February 17, 1939, Israel JDC - AJDC Israel Records, Shanghai 1938-1947.

do this... The situation being what it is, no Jewish organization in Germany is able to prevent their migration to any place they can get to. Quite apart from the abovementioned considerations, we are convinced that most of the emigrants are far better off in Shanghai—in spite of all the drawbacks of the situation—than they would be in Germany.⁶⁹

In retrospect, neither the international nor the American Jewish leadership really grasped the significance of Shanghai as one of the last options available to the Jewish refugees. The *Hilfsverein* in Germany, who were the closest to the flash point, seemed to be the only ones who truly understood the magnitude of the Nazi war machine and realized that, no matter how bad the conditions were in Shanghai, they could not possibly be worse than the current predicament of the German and Austrian Jews.

In the meantime, the Japanese, who had controlled Shanghai since 1937, had not yet imposed any restrictions on Jewish immigration. Marvin Tokayer, David Kranzler and others argue that the Japanese did not want to alienate the Jews, wishing to make use of Jewish political and economic influence.⁷⁰ Péter Vámos specifically argues that they did this out of concern that any restrictions on the Jews would antagonize the American Jewish community, jeopardize Japanese-U.S. relations and thus limit the flow of American funds, which were needed for economic reconstruction and the industrialization of Manchuria, an area that had been recently conquered by the Japanese.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Arthur Israel Frinz, *Hilfsverein* to American Joint Distribution Committee, February 10, 1939, AR 1933/44, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

⁷⁰ For more on Japanese-Jewish attitudes, see Tokayer, *The Fugu Plan*; See also Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis & Jews*.

⁷¹ Vámos, “‘Home Afar’: The Life of Central European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai during World War II,” 3.

The final impetus for Japanese action to restrict immigration came on May 25, 1939, when Sir Victor Sassoon and Ellis Hayim, two key leaders of the Jewish community, complained to the Japanese Investigating Committee about the relief committees' lack of funds and the ineffectiveness of foreign governments to curtail immigration. Sassoon and Hayim assured the Japanese that restrictions on immigration would not cause any widespread opposition on the part of world Jewry—this had been a large part of Japanese concern—since this would be done for the good of those Jews who were already in Shanghai.⁷²

Although this was perhaps done partially out of self-interest, one can also argue that they were hoping to avert a further crisis, which could result in an antisemitic backlash from Japanese and other Shanghai residents. Regardless of the interpretation, the Baghdadi leading families estimated that the peril to themselves and the Jews currently in Shanghai was higher than that of the Jews attempting to flee Europe. The compassion for the incoming refugees had subsided.

On August 9, 1939, under increasing pressure from the SMC as well as the existing Jewish communities, the Japanese passed the first serious restriction, “temporarily” forbidding new immigrants from taking up residence in Hongkew, since residential space was becoming difficult to obtain in light of growing Japanese settlement there. This was tantamount to stopping immigration altogether, as Hongkew was the only area where the refugees were allowed to settle. This restriction was especially difficult for those refugees who were expecting the immediate arrival of family members, but they received word that

⁷² Kranzler, “Restrictions against German-Jewish Refugee Immigration to Shanghai in 1939,” 55.

four boats that were already in transit carrying 631 passengers would be permitted to land.⁷³ On August 11, the Japanese Naval Landing Party Headquarters in Shanghai ordered the registration of all refugees already in Japanese-controlled areas,⁷⁴ and placed a virtual ban on further immigration after August 21, 1939.⁷⁵

According to these new regulations, further immigration to Shanghai was limited to persons able to show a deposit of U.S. \$400 as “guarantee money”; a resident’s immediate family; someone with a contract for a job in Shanghai; or the intended spouse of a Shanghai resident. These regulations addressed the economic issues while continuing to allow limited immigration. The wealthier, more influential Jews could still come to Shanghai for a time and not cause public relations harm to the Japanese.

Population estimates are difficult to establish, especially since many of the records of this period have been destroyed. Avraham Altman and Irene Eber estimate that about 1,000 additional Jews entered Shanghai since the implementing of these new regulations;⁷⁶ but according to Susanne Wiedemann, between 4,000 and 6,000 additional Jewish

⁷³ “Part of Shanghai to Exclude Jews: Japanese-Ruled District of International Settlement Will Bar Refugees,” *New York Times*, August 12, 1939; see also Kranzler, “Restrictions against German-Jewish Refugee Immigration to Shanghai in 1939,” 56–57; see also Mars, “A Note on the Jewish Refugees in Shanghai,” 290.

⁷⁴ “Japan Orders Registration of Jewish Refugees in Shanghai,” *JTA*, August 24, 1941.

⁷⁵ “Shanghai Bars Refugee Entry,” *JTA*, September 12, 1939; see also Barnett, “Shanghai’s German Refugees Face Uncertainties,” 252. This was expected to create legal difficulties because the concession statute did not provide for limitation of immigration, but the legality of the decision was never questioned. (“Refugees Banned from Jap-Ruled International Zone in Shanghai after Aug. 21,” *JTA*, August 13, 1939.)

⁷⁶ Altman and Eber, “Flight to Shanghai, 1938-1940: The Larger Setting,” 78.

immigrants entered Shanghai after these restrictions were passed.⁷⁷ By April of 1940, it was unofficially made clear to the refugee committees that very few additional refugees would be permitted to enter Shanghai. When Italy entered the War in June 1940 as Germany's ally, that popular sea route to Shanghai closed.⁷⁸ From that moment on, the Japanese strictly maintained a "policy of exclusion," and immigration was effectively stopped.⁷⁹ In 1941, only 33 Jewish refugees entered Shanghai.⁸⁰ The local Jewish community leadership had succeeded in curtailing Jewish immigration... but in retrospect, at what cost?

The lack of humanitarian concern evinced by the committees and some Jewish organizations in discouraging Jewish immigration to Shanghai needs to be seen in its context. While it may be distressing to see this exclusionist attitude in JDC and other Jewish organizations in light of the intense persecution that German Jews were experiencing, their cooperation can be understood when one considers the pressure that the Shanghai Municipal Council and the CFA were putting on American and European powers. They were desperate to stop the immense flow of destitute immigrants due to their inability to cope with the situation and the uncertainty of the Japanese response. It must also be kept in mind that in spite of the overwhelming need of Jewish people worldwide, JDC continued to

⁷⁷ Wiedemann, "Transnational Encounters with 'Amerika,'" 70.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Kranzler, "Restrictions against German-Jewish Refugee Immigration to Shanghai in 1939," 58; see also Mars, "A Note on the Jewish Refugees in Shanghai," 291.

⁸⁰ Wiedemann, "Transnational Encounters with 'Amerika,'" 70.

increase the disproportionately large financial support that they provided to the stranded Shanghai immigrants.⁸¹

American Jewish Aid Arrives

As the flood of Jewish immigrants continued to increase, additional funds alone were no longer enough to cope with the needs of the refugees. The Shanghai Committee had been asking JDC to send a trained social worker to help them manage refugee efforts to emigrate, and in 1941 the JDC responded when the U.S. State Department became involved. Laura Margolis was sent to Shanghai to represent the American Jewish communities through the JDC. It was the provision of U.S. funds, along with Margolis' leadership and organizational skills, that enabled the Jews who took refuge in Shanghai to survive the War.



During Margolis' time in Cuba, Avra Warren, who was head of the Visa Division in the State Department, had heard about her through the American consulate and embassy in Havana. Warren traveled there several times and watched her in action. Her ability to streamline the immigration process in Cuba and work with the American Consulate impressed him, and he requested that JDC send her to Shanghai where similar work was needed. Margolis remembered:

Avra Warren said to JDC, "We in the State Department are having a lot of trouble in Shanghai; there is a bottleneck there. The consulate there isn't

⁸¹ Throughout 1940, this support was \$16,000 per month. (See "American Aid Continues to Pour into Shanghai for European Refugees," *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury*, December 10, 1940, AR 1933/44:482, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, Publicity.)

getting people out and there are 20,000 refugees sitting in Shanghai. Would you send Laura Margolis over? She did the job in Havana.”⁸²

Moses Leavitt, who had been secretary of JDC since April of 1940⁸³ and was formulating most of the policy decisions during this period, summoned Margolis to New York and asked her if she was willing to relocate to Shanghai. Against the wishes of her family and friends, who were concerned for her safety in light of a possibly impending war, Margolis agreed to go. Leavitt gave her specific instructions to cooperate with the State Department:⁸⁴

Look, we’re sending money to a committee in Shanghai to feed 8,000 on relief. The local committee is handling the relief problem. You can look into it if you want to, but it’s more important to start working with the embassy and getting people out to the States.⁸⁵

It is interesting to note that, although JDC was contributing financially, in line with their stated policy they expected the local country committees to manage the task of providing for the needy. It was only at the request of the U.S. State Department that they finally agreed to send a qualified staff member, and even then it was not to assist in the relief work, but to work with the Consulate to expedite emigration from Shanghai and thereby ease the strain on the local Committee.

⁸² Kaufman, “Interview,” 15.

⁸³ American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, *Aiding Jews Overseas*, 12.

⁸⁴ The Executive Director of the American Committee for Christian Refugees also requested that Margolis look into the problem of any Christian refugees she might discover in Shanghai. Joseph Hyman of the JDC agreed. (Joseph Hyman to E. Brent Woodruff, April 4, 1941, AR 1933/44:130, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.)

⁸⁵ Kaufman, “Interview,” 15.

Margolis, who was by now experienced in dealing with refugee immigration issues, did not relish the thought of going to China, but she went out of her own sense of duty. She packed her things, traveled to Cleveland for one last visit with her family, and set out for the Far East. On April 17, 1941 she sailed from San Francisco to Hawaii and on April 30 flew across the Pacific to Hong Kong on Pan American's China Clipper. The flight took five days, stopping every night on a different island and flying during the days.⁸⁶

Margolis reached Shanghai on May 12, 1941, about three years after the first wave of refugees had come. She wrote of her trip to the Far East:

It was a great adventure. When I landed in Hong Kong, I saw a sea of Chinese faces that all looked alike to me... When I had been in Buffalo there had been a lot of rice bowl dinners for Chiang-Kai-Shek's fundraising. I had been roped into some of those dinners and knew about the overseas relief program for Chiang-Kai-Shek's China—so as I was walking along the streets of Hong Kong I saw the name of that organization: The Far East Rice Bowl Dinner Campaign. I walked in [and] introduced myself as an American on my way to Shanghai....We talked, and when I got back to the hotel I found an invitation to dinner—at the home of Mrs. Sun Yat-sen. I would be picked up in the evening by a General [Morris] Cohen, Sun Yat-sen's former bodyguard....It was a delightful evening.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Pan American's China Clipper, the luxurious "Flying Boat," flew passengers from 1936 to 1945 across the Pacific in first-class comfort with fine food served on fine china. Originating in San Francisco, the flight stopped in Honolulu, Midway Island, Wake Island, Guam, Manila, Macau and Hong Kong. The 74 passengers would have each paid \$950, the equivalent of \$14,650 today. (Rosen Travel Agency, "Itinerary No. 11317 for Miss Laura L. Margolis," April 9, 1941, AR 1933/44:130, AJDC NY Records, Personnel, Margolis, Laura; see also Carl Nolte, "China Clipper's Flight Made History 75 Years Ago - SFGate," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 22, 2010.

⁸⁷ Kaufman, "Interview," 16–17.

General Morris Cohen, known as “Two-Gun Cohen,” had been a juvenile delinquent on the East End of London. Sent away by his parents to Canada after reform school, Cohen became a professional gambler and through his connections with the Chinese underworld, became personal bodyguard and *aide-de-camp* to Sun Yat-sen. According to biographer Daniel Levy, the facts of his life are difficult to substantiate: Cohen’s life is shrouded in myth thanks to his colorful personal memoirs and a hagiography written by his close friend, Charles Drage.⁸⁸

Margolis became “very good friends” with Cohen, who escorted her in Hong Kong. She also related that she became good friends with Mme. Sun Yat-sen, who invited her to dinner a second time during her stay in Hong Kong.

When Margolis finally arrived in Shanghai, she carried a letter of introduction from Paul Baerwald, chairman of JDC, to Sir Victor Sassoon. Sassoon was housing her at his Cathay Hotel, one of the most prestigious hotels in Shanghai. She recalled being shocked at the stark contrast between the extravagant luxury of the “white man” and the misery and poverty of the Chinese—whom Margolis called “coolies”—starving to death and lying dead in the streets.⁸⁹

Sassoon was away, but Margolis was able to meet with the members of the Shanghai aid committee. A reception was held in her honor at the Jewish Club, attended by representatives of various Jewish organizations, as well as the president of the Jewish

⁸⁸ For more on Morris Cohen, see Daniel S Levy, *Two-Gun Cohen: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997); see also Charles Drage, *Two-Gun Cohen* (London: J. Cape, 1954).

⁸⁹ Kaufman, “Interview,” 17.

community of Tientsin, China. Margolis, in a speech, related JDC relief activities throughout the world, and described the difficult circumstances under which these activities were being conducted, hoping perhaps to make the Shanghai Jewish leaders feel responsibility for their own as part of the world Jewish community.

It is interesting that the U.S. representative of JDC was welcomed in such a manner. The local Jewish leaders temporarily put aside their differences to host a reception in her honor, and the president of the Tientsin Jewish community traveled almost 700 miles to attend. This was a momentous event that demonstrated the high regard in which the local Jewish community held the JDC, and wanted to display toward their American Jewish benefactors. The fact that Margolis discussed the worldwide needs that faced JDC and the American Jewish communities at this first event was perhaps her way of lowering their expectations for JDC help in Shanghai; after all, she had been sent to ease the emigration bottleneck, not to provide additional relief.

Margolis later recalled that she felt forced to “play the game” of high society in order to make the contacts she needed with the American Embassy:

Life became a round of parties, one after the other. I had flown out with a minimum of luggage and work clothes, but there I couldn't function unless I had a different evening gown every night. I played the game and hated every minute of it, but I began my contacts with the American Embassy; that was what I was sent out to do.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Ibid. In her list of personal losses in Shanghai submitted to the JDC upon her return, Margolis lists four “evening dresses” valued at U.S. \$300. (Laura Margolis, “Losses in Shanghai,” December 21, 1943, AR 1933/44:130, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.)

This aversion to “playing the game” was also seen in her correspondence when she first arrived in Shanghai. In a handwritten note, she wrote to Robert Pilpel, who was again her supervisor:

Please remember me to the staff. For all the “wining and dining” of which there has been plenty—it’s lonesome as can be. I hate Shanghai. But I’ll see it through...⁹¹

Margolis’ first task was to work with the U.S. State Department to move as many people out of Shanghai as possible. Europeans could never compete in the labor market in China. Resettlement into other parts of China was impossible because of the Sino-Japanese War. In Shanghai, employment possibilities were practically nonexistent, as a good proportion of technicians and artisans had already been absorbed. It was imperative that the refugees find new, permanent homes elsewhere.⁹²

Margolis soon found that the American consulate in Shanghai was processing few visas, not due to obstructionism on their part as David Wyman and others have claimed occurred in some locations,⁹³ but rather because they did not have much experience with the problems involved with helping refugees to emigrate. To them, except for being Jews and persecuted by Hitler, the refugees were just a mass of people. Margolis began by orienting the consular staff and helping them put systems in place in order to begin

⁹¹ Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, “Handwritten Letter,” June 18, 1941, AR 1933/44:461, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

⁹² Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 4,” 3.

⁹³ See, for example, Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938-1941* and ; Rafael Medoff, *The Deafening Silence* (New York, NY: Shapolsky Publishers, 1987).

interviewing applicants. She also became their interpreter, as no one in the consulate spoke German, the language of most of the refugees.

In a letter written to JDC headquarters two weeks after her arrival in Shanghai, Margolis reported on the situation with the American consulate:

Not one local committee or individual had ever established any working relationship with our Consulate... Rumor is rampant about why visas are not being issued. Every rumor is absolutely unfounded. I went directly to Mr. Lockhart the Consul General (even though everyone warned me against a direct approach) and his only recrimination was that I hadn't come in immediately upon arrival. I explained that I wanted to be at least slightly intelligent about the general refugee problem here before discussing immigration to America. The kernel of the situation is actual lack of staff and not being geared for visa work because of the heavy demand on this Consulate in other very important areas.⁹⁴

From Margolis' comments we can infer that the local committees had been focused inwardly— they had not attempted to liaise with the consulate in order to expedite emigration and ease their relief burden. Their attempts to solve their refugee problem had resulted only in an effort to stop the immigration altogether.

One wonders also why they warned Margolis against approaching Frank P. Lockhart, the 60-year-old Texas-born Consul General, who had the authority to help in this way. Their apprehensions, though, did not stop her from going directly to him. As it turned out, Lockhart was ready and willing to work with Margolis, but the American Consulate in Shanghai was poorly staffed. The visa section had had no attention in months. Lockhart called a conference that very morning with his two visa officers and they talked through the entire matter with Margolis.

⁹⁴ Margolis to Pilpel, "Letter 4," 2.

The two men assigned to the visa section were sympathetic but brand new to the job and insecure. Margolis recalled that they were “...bending over backwards on technicalities which Havana would never have even noticed.... One simply cannot expect people who don’t know a field to take chances.... Putting it bluntly, they’re new and scared.”⁹⁵ They were willing to work out a plan whereby Margolis would help them evaluate in six months’ time the 6,000 individuals currently registered, to determine which of them were eligible for visas. The goal was to remove the existing uncertainty and to learn how many must be absorbed in Shanghai or elsewhere.

After several months of working together, Margolis was very pleased with the attitude of the American consulate:

This experience has been completely satisfactory, and gratifying, not only in terms of tangible results which numerically are negligible, but it is a perfect example of what can be done where people are sincerely interested in helping, but are simply misguided or misinformed... During these months of working together, I’ve seen an entirely different attitude develop. What existed at first was simply the impression that “this bunch” here was pretty much the “dregs of humanity” and not many of them should be allowed to go to America. I have traced this attitude to its source, namely, members of the CFA...[and] I couldn’t help but contrast the attitude of these Americans, and Christians, towards our people, with the attitude of our own CFA.⁹⁶

Through Margolis’ comment we can perceive the attitude of the local Jewish communities toward the refugees. The consulate officials’ perception of the refugees as the “dregs of humanity,” which she labored to correct, had been in fact a reflection of the attitude of the CFA, the Jewish relief committee. It was this same committee that had

⁹⁵ Margolis to Leavitt, July 29, 1941.

⁹⁶ Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 20,” 7–8.

lobbied to curtail refugee immigration. Margolis was angered by the local Jewish community's disregard for the dignity of the refugees, and saw the Americans and "Christians" (referring to the Consulate officials and perhaps to the Quakers) behaving more in accordance with Jewish values than the Jews themselves. In portraying the refugees in such a negative manner, the local leaders were boosting their own self-image to the detriment of the thousands who came to them for help.

In order to counteract this negative impression fostered by the CFA, Margolis began to handpick the cases to present to the consulate, presenting first the "most desirable," and thinking, "Why not give those people [the best qualified] at least a chance to get out?"⁹⁷

Margolis had been working from her room at the Cathay Hotel, but she felt that her ability to continue to work there would be short-lived:

Regarding office. There just isn't any to be had, so I'm continuing to use my room [at the Cathay Hotel]. The desk has complained because of the number of callers, etc.; but I've convinced them for another few weeks, I hope. I've employed a secretary; a man who can be trusted to handle all the Consulate material and will be here to take messages etc. when I'm out. For this service am paying \$45 a month.⁹⁸

She soon cabled headquarters asking for (and obtaining) approval to open an office in Shanghai to "set up this entire scheme with the Consulate."⁹⁹ This would enable her to do the technical work involved as well as interview people: "Once we know where we stand on

⁹⁷ Margolis to Pilpel, "Letter 20."

⁹⁸ Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, "Letter 11," July 2, 1941, 2, AR 1933/44:461, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

⁹⁹ Margolis to Pilpel, "Letter 4," 2.

immigration; we shall know what our residue is.”¹⁰⁰ One by one, she began to interview applicants for emigration who were ready, sending summaries to the consulate and awaiting responses from Washington. The responses, however, were slow to come.

In mid-1941, Margolis began to hear from several trusted sources that due to the State of National Emergency declared by President Roosevelt, new instructions had come from Washington that would affect the issuing of visas, even if the persons should qualify. President Roosevelt did indeed issue a State of Unlimited National Emergency on May 27, 1941 in response to Germany’s increasing threats of world domination. The declaration stated, in part:

I call upon loyal state and local leaders and officials to cooperate with the civilian defense agencies of the United States to assure our internal security against foreign directed subversion and to put every community in order for maximum productive effort and minimum of waste and unnecessary frictions.¹⁰¹

This declaration, and a regulation issued to consuls in June 1941, served to restrict the immigration of persons who had close relatives in German-controlled territories in the guise of national security.¹⁰² This, of course, would affect most of the refugees. Moses Leavitt notified Margolis of the new visa restrictions:

...every case is now going to be severely scrutinized. The process of emigration will now become a highly selective one, and a great deal of work will have to be done on each individual application in order to effect a favorable response.... Unfortunately, none of us is clear as to how the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Proclamation of Unlimited National Emergency” (Department of State Bulletin, May 31, 1941, May 27, 1941), <http://research.archives.gov/description/299968>.

¹⁰² Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 51.

regulation will be applied. You realize of course that the whole purpose of the new procedure is based on the emergency and that the United States must take every precaution to see that aliens admitted to this country are desirable ones.¹⁰³

Nothing had been said officially, however, and Margolis intentionally continued to work as if nothing had happened, but she felt as if she were “sitting on a volcano.” The pressure of the constant demands of needy refugees was so intense that she felt the local efforts could collapse at any moment. “We are absolutely ready to handle the job here if Washington will give us something to do,” she wrote in a letter to Moses Leavitt.¹⁰⁴

In light of the tightened visa restrictions, Margolis casually mentioned the possibility of utilizing a corporate affidavit for those people who had no hope of obtaining the required sponsors in the States but “would actually make excellent American citizens given the opportunity.”¹⁰⁵ The consulate officers were pleased to hear that this was even a possibility. But this problem could not even be addressed until the 6,000 individuals had been screened. By October 1941, Margolis reported to JDC headquarters that the Consulate was working beautifully. Cases were beginning to clear regularly through Washington, and every case in which she had taken a personal interest had been granted a visa.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Moses Leavitt to Laura Margolis, June 30, 1941, 2–3, AR 1933/44:461, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

¹⁰⁴ Margolis to Leavitt, July 29, 1941.

¹⁰⁵ Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 4,” 2.

¹⁰⁶ Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, “Letter 27,” October 26, 1941, 4, AR 1933/44:462, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

Once a plan was in place to ease the immigration bottleneck, Margolis' assignment was completed and she could have left Shanghai. Instead, in spite of her dislike for the city, she stayed and turned her attention to the great need for relief work.

The Hongkew area, where the refugees were to settle, was in ruins. An industrial section of the International Settlement, it had taken heavy damage in 1932¹⁰⁷ and 1937¹⁰⁸ during Chinese-Japanese clashes.¹⁰⁹ To provide for the 1938 influx of German and Austrian refugees, five camps had been set up by the local Committee, with JDC aid, that could house 2,500 refugees.¹¹⁰ The camps had been improvised from a barracks, a warehouse, two schools and the ruins of five bombed houses.¹¹¹ Since the refugees' stay in Shanghai was expected to be temporary, no efforts had been made, either by the existing communities or by the refugees themselves, to improve the housing conditions. Some of the camps had double-decker beds lined up side-by-side, with 150 men, women and children all living together. The sanitary conditions were poor: in the barracks, for example, there were just two toilets to serve 400 people; in some of the camps, the facilities were outdoors.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Hallett Abend special Cable To The New York Times, "Wild Turmoil in City," *The New York Times*, January 31, 1932.

¹⁰⁸ Hallett Abend, "Death Stalks Shanghai: A City Racked by War," *The New York Times*, October 10, 1937.

¹⁰⁹ Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," 168.

¹¹⁰ The camps were Alcock, Ward, Wayside, Choufung and Pingling. (Lotte Marcus, "Survival in Shanghai," *Bulletin Igud Yotzei Sin - Association of Former Residents of China, English Supplement*, May 2010, 84.)

¹¹¹ Irene Eber, *Voices from Shanghai : Jewish Exiles in Wartime China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 13.

¹¹² Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," 168.

Ernest Heppner, who lived in Shanghai from 1939 to 1947, related his personal experience:

These camps, euphemistically called by the German name *Heime*, meaning homes, eventually housed and supported about 2,500 destitute refugees who could not afford to rent even a little room. Most of them were over forty years of age and without marketable skills, or they were in ill health... The *Heime* housed up to 150 men, women, and children in one large room, divided by sheets strung on ropes and furnished with double steel bunks. Each "personal" area was no larger than the aisle in front of the bed. Suitcases were used as tables, and some families had a stool, but there were not even nails in the walls to hang up clothing. They had showers, but some had no basins or lavatories. Those facilities were outdoors, and it was a long walk to wash or use the latrines. The atmosphere and the general conditions were depressing. Light and air were at a premium; there were no facilities to clean or repair clothing, and no storage was available for the residents' few precious possessions. In order not to break up their families, men, women, and children were put together in the same room.¹¹³

According to Heppner, the truly destitute were children who could not provide for themselves, those whose physical or mental health was failing, and immigrants over forty who did not possess any marketable skills. Once they had sold the few goods they had smuggled out of Germany, they had no means of sustenance.¹¹⁴

It was also difficult for the older and infirm refugees to recuperate from the Nazi abuses they had experienced and to cope with the difficulties of relocation with no resources in such an alien environment. The fact that this stay was perceived as temporary further served to discourage these refugees from making the considerable effort that relocation required.

¹¹³ Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, 87.

¹¹⁴ Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," 169.

Heppner continued:

...As time went on, the three Hs—hunger, heat and humidity—took their toll...Death was caused not only by unsanitary conditions but also by inadequate nutrition. The inmates were hungry, and not just for a day or week or month; since their arrival in Shanghai they had not received sufficient nourishment. Fathers and husbands became desperate when they sold the last item of their personal belongings and realized they would no longer be able to supplement the food their families received from the committee.¹¹⁵

The *Heime* population did not remain static. Some inmates found jobs and, craving privacy above all else, left the camps and rented a room. Some who could have left stayed on—afraid to leave the food kitchens and medical care—and did nothing. Others who had lived in rented rooms and then lost their jobs, or who could no longer afford medical services, moved back into the camps. Used to being productive all their lives, some refugees became sullen and dehumanized by the process of trying to obtain help. Eventually they were forced to resign themselves to becoming *schnorrers*, a Yiddish term for someone asking for a handout.¹¹⁶

Eventually there were inmates who could no longer leave the *Heime* because they had neither shirts nor shoes to wear. Cut up burlap bags served as pants. During the summer months, when the heat would melt the asphalt, some were forced to stay indoors because they did not own even straw sandals like those worn by rickshaw coolies. It was scandalous to see these poor people in tattered rags, barely able to walk, slowly moving about in the vicinity of the *Heime*. It reflected badly not only on the refugee community but also on all foreigners.¹¹⁷

Many of the refugees had come from comfortable, middle-class lives in Germany or Austria. Those who came from culture-specific professional backgrounds, including professors, attorneys, engineers, and others whose skills were superfluous in Shanghai, found it especially difficult to make the adjustment. The demoralization inherent in their inability to provide for their loved ones, and the wretchedness of the foreign living

¹¹⁵ Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, 87.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 88–89.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

conditions, now caused them to plummet into a descending spiral of despondency. Although these refugees were free from intense religious and political persecution, their very struggle to survive each day was a challenge.

Many did remain long-term in the *Heime*, but about two-thirds of the 17,000 refugees eventually were able to somehow carve out a living for themselves and “escape” the deplorable living conditions.

Philip Lilienthal of the Institute of Pacific (Ocean) Relations, who had spent the year 1940 in Shanghai, reported on the labor conditions of the self-supporting Jewish immigrants there, the majority of whom were employed as wageworkers.¹¹⁸

He noted that compared with the Chinese population, the immigrants in general earned wages that were not essentially higher, and in some cases were even lower than those of native workers.¹¹⁹ In many cases, Jewish artisans were used as competitors against the native workers, yet were expected to deliver European workmanship.¹²⁰

Most of the wage-earning immigrants were employed by enterprises owned by other immigrants. They were delivery boys, launderers, messengers, drivers, etc. Their

¹¹⁸ Robert Pilpel, “Introduction to Labor Conditions Report,” September 4, 1941, AR 1933/44:462, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China. Incidentally, Lilienthal met Laura Margolis and spoke very highly of her and of the way in which she carried on in an extremely complicated and difficult situation.

¹¹⁹ *The Jewish Chronicle*, May 6, 1941, quoted in Philip Eugene Lilienthal, “The Labour Conditions of the Jewish Immigrants in Shanghai,” September 4, 1941, 1, AR 1933/44:462, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

¹²⁰ *The Jewish Chronicle*, May 20, 1941, quoted in *ibid.*

living conditions were such that they were compelled to accept very low wages. A letter to the editor in the immigrant newspaper, *Die Laterne*, on June 21, 1941, gave an example:

In the *Corso Garten* (a Jewish owned Garden restaurant) is employed an older man with the cleanry [sic] of the cups and dishes. His wage is Ch\$1.00 a day, besides this dollar he gets a cup of coffee and a roll. The Chinese boy gets a monthly salary of Ch\$40.00 and that boy declared himself ready to lay down his work if the immigrant didn't want to work for this "wage."¹²¹

Lilienthal gave other examples:

On May 1941 a chemical factory has been established by immigrants in Honkew [sic], East Seward Road. This enterprise employes [sic] more than 20 immigrants for very hard work [who] get only Ch\$70 a month. That is a wage far lower than the Chinese workers of the same branch get. Ch\$110 is the least those Chinese workers earn in the foreign or Chinese owned chemical factories.¹²²

Some immigrants are employed as night-watchmen by a Jewish owned company. They get per night Ch\$1.50-2. Indian watchmen get for the same work Ch\$5 to 8.¹²³

When immigrants were wanted as strikebreakers, however, they were offered higher wages than the Chinese, but were generally dismissed once the strike had ended. In fairness, occasionally immigrants were employed in better conditions than the Chinese workers, but according to Lilienthal, those cases were the exceptions that only confirmed the rule that the Jewish immigrants would work cheaper than the Chinese or even any

¹²¹ *Die Laterne*, June 21, 1941, quoted in *ibid*.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²³ *Ibid*.

other foreigners. In addition, immigrant wages did not keep pace with rising inflation rates.¹²⁴

Those immigrants who were employed as wage earners nevertheless had very low living standards. They were able to survive either with financial help from their relatives abroad, by pawning or selling the few valuables they had brought with them from Germany, or by accepting partial support from the Jewish relief institutions.¹²⁵

But the needy refugees were not just handed cash by JDC. Margolis, reflecting her U.S. social welfare training, tried to provide them with meaningful work so they could “earn their living” rather than just receive charity:

Instead of being given relief checks, they [the refugees] are assigned to certain duties—given jobs, if you will—and paid salaries for their efforts. Surely, this type of procedure is far more rehabilitative in nature than keeping people on relief and making them live on charity... The sums spent for their salaries are part of the relief budget and are not administrative costs.¹²⁶

Of course only a small number of refugees could receive salaries, and although these “salaries” were small, Margolis intended this strategy to help the refugees retain some manner of dignity.

In spite of these handicaps, some of the refugees applied themselves to bettering their lives, and indeed succeeded in becoming self-supporting. They reconstructed entire streets with material from the ruins of Hongkew. Those who had skills set up shops as

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹²⁶ Joint Distribution Committee, “The Truth about Shanghai: Refuting the Mistaken Allegations of Mr. Lazar Epstein” (Unpublished Document, November 18, 1941), 3–4, AR 1933/44:482, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, Publicity.

leather and metal workers, designers, managers, tailors, milliners, bakers, confectioners, and more, and were able to eke out a living.¹²⁷ Some started delicatessen stores serving Viennese sausages and opened sidewalk cafés that offered Viennese coffee and pastries.¹²⁸ The area around Chusan Road, where many of these restaurants and stores were located, once a “small, dingy, typically Chinese lane,” became known as “Little Vienna,” a sophisticated area that reflected and preserved German and Austrian culture.¹²⁹ Paradoxically, “Little Vienna” became an area where German nationals would come to have a semblance of life as it had been in Germany.

The refugees managed to construct a rich cultural life as well. The Shanghai refugees produced three daily newspapers—two morning and one evening, as well as many weeklies, journals and magazines.¹³⁰ Refugees offered lessons in English, the sciences, and professionals such as prominent music teachers offered their skills as well.¹³¹ Refugees played their instruments at cafés, formed orchestras¹³² and put together theater and opera

¹²⁷ “17,000 Refugees Admitted to Shanghai in 1939,” *JTA*, February 13, 1940.

¹²⁸ Margolis, “Race Against Time in Shanghai,” 168.

¹²⁹ Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, 84–86; see also Wiedemann, “Transnational Encounters with ‘Amerika,’” 17.

¹³⁰ A complete list of refugee publications in Shanghai can be found in “Shanghai Collection, 1924-1950 (bulk 1939-1948) RG 243,” n.d., Series IV, accessed August 24, 2012; see also Kranzler, “The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945,” 212–219. The first Jewish daily newspaper in the Far East began publication as the *Shanghai Jewish Chronicle* in August 1939. (“Jewish Daily Started in Shanghai; Organ of Refugees,” *JTA*, August 18, 1939.)

¹³¹ Wolfgang Fraenkel, a Jewish composer and performer, was the first person to introduce the “Barless” music skill system to China. Many of China’s current composers were his students (*The Jews of China: Volume One, Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 8.)

performances.¹³³ The refugees organized educational lectures and discussion groups on many subjects,¹³⁴ schools for refugee children,¹³⁵ and various political groups that were active in the different refugee camps.¹³⁶

In spite of the ability of some to adapt to the new environment, there still remained thousands of refugees who could not provide for themselves. Margolis submitted a preliminary report to Pilpel, noting her own alarm at the refugee situation:

The so-called “*Heimes*” were a terrific shock. In some of them the refugees are so crowded; the atmosphere is so depressing; and the people look so completely hopeless and lost that one visit is enough to know that ultimately this condition must be alleviated. And of course it is self-evident that one meal a day is not enough. The answer, however, is not more money, at least not from us.... That there was actual graft [in the previous year] is admitted by everyone; hence the refugee director was let out and Captain Herzberg took the job.... But there is constant friction

¹³² For a list of orchestral and instrumental concerts, see “Shanghai Collection, 1924-1950 (bulk 1939-1948) RG 243,” folder 58; see also Kranzler, “The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945,” 227–233. For additional information on the impact of Jewish musicians in Shanghai, see Yating Tang, “Reconstructing the Vanished Musical Life of the Shanghai Jewish Diaspora: A Report,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13, no. 1 (June 1, 2004): 101–18.

¹³³ For a list of theaters and theatrical productions, see “Shanghai Collection, 1924-1950 (bulk 1939-1948) RG 243,” folders 56–57, 59; see also Kranzler, “The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945,” 219–223.

¹³⁴ “Shanghai Collection, 1924-1950 (bulk 1939-1948) RG 243,” folder 33.

¹³⁵ Baghdadi Jew Sir Horace Kadoorie (1902-1995) had a special interest in providing education to refugee children. The Kadoorie School, which opened in January 1942, had 17 teachers who taught 600 refugee children. The language of instruction was English, but Chinese and French were also taught. After the Japanese occupation, German and Japanese were introduced as well. (See Kranzler, *The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945*, chapter XI; see also Meyer, “Baghdadi Jews in Early Shanghai”; and Vámos, “‘Home Afar’: The Life of Central European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai During World War II,” 5.)

¹³⁶ “Shanghai Collection, 1924-1950 (bulk 1939-1948) RG 243,” Series II, Subseries 3.

and tension, and a terrific hatred of the Committee and its leadership exists throughout the community; not only among the refugees; but on the part of everyone.... Aside from being an excellent disciplinarian and organizer, unfortunately, the Captain has no understanding of handling people. He is fair enough, I think; but his whole manner is one which leads to heel clicking and obedience and fear of authority. One has the constant feeling of being in the German army.¹³⁷

The mutual animosity between Herzberg, the CFA and the refugees was inevitable, given the low opinion the CFA held of the impoverished German and Austrian Jews, and the reputation the CFA had for financial corruption and showing favoritism toward its own “employees.” The refugees resented having to live in such deplorable conditions and being treated as sub-human by Herzberg and his committee. Margolis’ reference to Herzberg’s “heel clicking” and engendering fear of authority must have been particularly vexing to the refugees in light of their experiences under the Nazis. They did not expect to be treated thus by their own.

As soon as Margolis was able to attack the relief situation, she made some immediate improvements:

...I recommended an additional appropriation for an evening meal for the people in our homes...because the food is so poor; the people so terribly sad looking; that I didn’t feel it was fair to them to let them wait, while I was investigating, and we were trying to decide what to do. In the interim, this evening meal has helped considerably. Most of the time the food is so bad, it can’t be eaten. At least with two meals, there may be more which is edible. It is obvious that the chief cook, the whole kitchen personnel needs to be changed; but the attitude of the Committee is that ...”you can’t please the customer.” This week there was a riot in the dining hall. The refugees threw all the boiled potatoes at the cook.... When I ask Captain Hertzberg [sic] how everything is, the answer is “fine.”¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 4,” 1.

¹³⁸ Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, “Letter 16,” July 17, 1941, 2, AR 1933/44:461, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

The refugees' anger had boiled over at the horrendous conditions and the self-righteous attitude of Herzberg and the CFA workers. Herzberg, by reporting to Margolis after this incident that everything was "fine," either accepted this behavior as something to be expected from "ungrateful brutes," or did not want her involvement in what he felt was an internal matter that she had no business interfering with. But Margolis knew that something had to be done. In a handwritten note to Pilpel, she wrote:

Dear Bob: I simply had to get this off my chest! The actual "handling" of the people by the joint staff is much worse than I want to put into an official report. No one knows better than I what a bunch of "crooks" our friends can be; but I'm getting awfully set up on hearing them called crooks and... seeing the glint of joy when someone is "caught..." There's plenty "rotten in Denmark" in areas which will have to wait for the telling and remain my headache for the moment. But I've made myself one promise since I've been here. Never never will I say "yes" again in such a hurry....

She perceived that some attention needed to be given to the recreational and leisure time of the large group of unemployed refugees, so that the deterioration that already had set in would not continue to increase.

Besides these frictions, Margolis also had to concern herself with infighting between the two committees, the IC and the CFA. Margolis communicated to JDC headquarters that the staff and committee members of both relief committees had at first been very cordial to her and claimed to be ready to work with her, but she felt that the traditional local feuds existing long before her time would make any real integration impossible.

Sir Victor Sassoon was willing to sponsor the refugee program, but he did not like working with other committees and would stand for no interference. He wanted the CFA (led by Speelman) to continue to receive money from JDC, but under his control, which

Speelman refused to do. Sassoon was not living in Shanghai at the time and therefore would control the program through the IC led by Paul Komor. Margolis had great respect for Komor but saw him as a subjective and emotional idealist who could not see limitations when it came to helping people and would need constant supervision. She felt that he was “a master at rubbing some very necessary people the wrong way.”¹³⁹

Margolis perceived that neither additional money nor the need of the refugees would heal the deep rifts that existed within the mutually antagonistic factions. Her later reminiscences show that her training and her expectation that the mere need for charity and community welfare would pull together discordant factions of the Jewish community left her unprepared for this level of conflict.¹⁴⁰ She did her best, however, not to become too involved in the politics of the committees and to retain an open mind in regard to the refugees.

From the moment of her arrival, Margolis had been besieged with letters and phone calls from refugees wanting her to listen to their complaints and volunteering to give her “the real low down” on the committees. She refused to listen, having concluded that the greatest “irregularities” were only among the refugees working in the kitchens, who may slip a few potatoes into their pockets or give their friends better measure, infractions which she considered unimportant. She offered to listen in the presence of Captain Herzberg, but if they refused to do so, she would not hear them out.¹⁴¹ She warned JDC headquarters that

¹³⁹ Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, “Letter 21,” September 10, 1941, 1, AJDC Israel Records, Shanghai 1938-1947.

¹⁴⁰ Stein, “Jewish Social Work in the United States (1654-1954),” 20–21.

¹⁴¹ Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 4.”

they may get letters complaining about her unwillingness to hear “the truth,” but in her strategic desire to be fair and neutral, she stressed that she was willing to listen to stories from disinterested refugees and to note what she could see for herself.¹⁴²

Her intuition proved to be correct. She determined, after talking with many refugees and investigating for herself, that the criticism of the Committee was “100% accurate, whether from refugees, local residents, or mere passersby.”¹⁴³ She wrote to Pilpel in a confidential letter:

From everyone I got the same reaction. The food is very bad; the refugee staff employed is absolutely dictatorial and overbearing to the refugees needing the Committee; there is “squeezing” in the kitchens; and just generally the attitude is much the same as if one throws a crust of bread to a dog. Military discipline is the ultimate. There is an unnecessary amount of bitter feeling and hatred of the personnel, ranging from the very top to the bottom.¹⁴⁴

She felt the responsibility for this lay at the feet of Captain Herzberg, a Shanghai-born German Jew and the only non-refugee on the Committee’s payroll. She had originally expressed doubts as to the competency and even the honesty of the CFA committee members, writing to headquarters that “they all stood by while money was being taken right from under their noses.”¹⁴⁵ But since the appointment of Herzberg, she felt the finances were now being well handled.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Ibid., 1.

¹⁴³ Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, “Letter 10,” June 18, 1941, 1, AR 1933/44:461, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Margolis to Leavitt, July 29, 1941.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

In Margolis' estimation, Herzberg was a good, honest man, a hard worker and efficient. However, his approach to the refugees was a combination of "coolie and German dictatorship":

... there is absolutely no feeling and understanding for human beings. Anything he [Herzberg] controls I'm sure is honest; which is definitely not true of the administration he took over. He had a worse mess on his hands than we inherited in Cuba. The actual mechanical part he handles well. But I'm frankly surprised that no refugee has struck him.¹⁴⁷

Captain Herzberg's premise was that the refugees—those not on his "staff"—were "...all a bunch of crooks and thieves trying to 'take' the Committee for everything they can get..."¹⁴⁸ Margolis herself noted that Herzberg's appraisal was not totally without foundation:

That plenty of them do try to get all they can from us I know very well from former experience but that there are plenty really needy ones among them I am also sure of. And the present set-up and methods will never weed them out. We are sure that anyone willing to put up with one of our "*Heimes*" must need it desperately. But I am sure that considerable could be saved by a thorough investigation of the 6,000 living outside who come and get their noon meal daily, some free, others paying varying amounts depending on income. This graded scale is also the cause of terrific ill-feeling.¹⁴⁹

She did believe that if she could personally supervise the re-investigation of those 6,000, there would be money to feed those living in the *Heimes*—the group that really needed it—twice a day. But any such investigation would be sure to rankle the refugees. "If and when it is ever tackled there will be plenty of excitement," she wrote.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Margolis to Pilpel, "Letter 10," 1.

¹⁴⁸ Margolis to Pilpel, "Letter 4," 1.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 2.

The powerful personalities in the established community were the ones that posed the greatest obstacles, as they angled to retain control at all costs. Speelman had already shown defensiveness when Margolis had mentioned the need for reevaluation of the program. She was concerned that he would resign from the CFA, and along with him wealthy community leader Ellis Hayim who was vice-chairman and in charge of housing and disbursement. The problem was that she was aware that Hayim was known to sabotage anyone who crossed or criticized him. She could not afford to have Hayim against her, since the losers in the end would be the refugees. Ellis Hayim was definitely a problem to be reckoned with.¹⁵¹

Herzberg, she felt, would also walk out if it became necessary to do things differently: "He simply hasn't the brains to absorb certain things."¹⁵² By November 1941, Margolis had somewhat alleviated the situation, not by firing Herzberg, but by confining his duties to ordering food, supervising the building and purchasing of supplies, and to "working with those things which had no feelings."

B. Kahn, the chairman of immigration for the CFA, was "another person we must be very careful of." Margolis felt that eventually the immigration department of the CFA could be done away with and the work turned over entirely to HICEM. But she was concerned that Kahn could make things extremely uncomfortable for the refugees. "To date we're 'very good friends'; but that's because I've kept quiet about the CFA."¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Margolis to Pilpel, "Letter 21," 2.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Margolis realized that until she could find substitute leadership it would be risky to lose the present, as bad as she felt it was. She had to tread lightly around these powerful men:

I cannot count on their co-operation; in fact quite the opposite. And in an emergency, particularly of a political nature, there isn't one person who would stand by for the sake of the refugees, if his ego had been hurt.¹⁵⁴

If the committee members were to quit and the responsibilities fall back upon her, she felt that "...certainly it would be a sad state if I was left with buying, building and equipment problems. After all, Cuba was practically like working in the States, as far as learning local resources is concerned. But this is the Orient, and very very different."¹⁵⁵ However, she was reluctant to take over and absolve the local Jewish communities of their moral responsibility:

You see I'm terribly reluctant to jump in at this point and "take over" as we did in Cuba; because it will be the last excuse which the local people have for asking JDC to do the whole job. They feel absolutely no responsibility themselves which will be more and more obvious as you hear of later developments and incidents... Bad as this committee is I want them to continue to struggle with the problem, because so far I've found nothing better.¹⁵⁶

Although Margolis had reservations, she took a chance by recommending that JDC in New York let the CFA know at least that the administration of the monies had not been

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, "Letter 29," November 5, 1941, AR 1933/44:488, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

found satisfactory in terms of benefit to the refugees and that a reorganization with their cooperation would be appreciated.¹⁵⁷

In spite of the greatest tact and diplomacy which can be used; my...suggestion that the program needs to be re-organized will create tremendous hostility among the members of the Committee.¹⁵⁸

She anticipated that the committee members might not accept graciously any “American interference” coming directly from her, so she deflected the possible anger from herself and turned to JDC headquarters to suggest it, since they were the ones providing the funding on which the committees depended.

She eventually approached Ellis Hayim directly about the need for reorganization in the Committee, and even though she could not afford to alienate him, she was nevertheless passionately honest:

I let him [Hayim] know, that the relief show was not efficiently run; and that the refugees were not getting one hundred cents on the dollar out of what we were sending. He asked if I'd be willing to go out there; and run it for a month or so. I said, I wouldn't run it; but I might consider, teaching and re-organizing the staff, that when I left they'd know how to operate themselves. He agreed to speak to Hertzberg [sic]. I've heard nothing more; and shall of course take no more aggressive steps.¹⁵⁹

The refugee crisis intensified greatly when in August 1941 the Japanese transferred around 900 religious East European Jews from Kobe to Shanghai, introducing yet another

¹⁵⁷ Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 20,” 7.

¹⁵⁸ Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 21,” 2.

¹⁵⁹ Laura Margolis to Robert Pilpel, “Letter 18,” July 29, 1941, 1, AR 1933/44:461, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

layer of communal complexity due to the religiously observant and separatist nature of the group.¹⁶⁰ The JDC reported in October 1941:

The Jewish refugee committee in Kobe was obliged at short notice to evacuate to Shanghai the 800 to 900 Polish Jewish immigrants from Lithuania who had been stranded there since the beginning of the year. Although this virtually liquidated the problem in Japan...it simply shifted the burden to Shanghai. Substantial additional monthly grants are being made for the maintenance of these transplanted refugees in Shanghai. Arrangements have been made to house them and to furnish them with kosher food which many of the refugees from Kobe, being rabbis or yeshivah [sic] students, require.¹⁶¹

Margolis began to work closely with the Polish Ambassador, Tadeusz Romer, to move the 900 to 1,000 Polish refugees out of Shanghai as soon as possible. After Pearl Harbor, however, the Polish presence was no longer temporary and therefore Margolis felt that relief should be administered on the same per capita basis.¹⁶²

The established Ashkenazi (Russian) community formed a committee called the "Committee to assist Jewish refugees from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia" [Eastjewcom or EJC] with Alfred Oppenheim as chairman and Joseph Bitker as vice-chairman.¹⁶³ The committee aimed to raise funds for the added expenses that the Polish immigrants' religious lifestyle would require, and this created friction with the CFA

¹⁶⁰ "Japan Deports Stranded Jewish Refugees," *JTA*, August 20, 1941.

¹⁶¹ Joint Distribution Committee, "The Status of the JDC as of October 10, 1941" (Unpublished Document, October 10, 1941), 7, AR 1933/44:462, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

¹⁶² Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 10.

¹⁶³ Yehuda Bauer lists Bitker as vice-chairman and treasurer of Eastjewcom in *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 307, but Bitker himself says he was vice-chairman of the CFA and chairman of the finance committee of the CFA; see J. Bitker, "Memorandum," February 12, 1951, 1, AJDC Israel Records, Shanghai 1938-1947.

committee that was providing for the German immigrants, in regards to the distribution of JDC monies.¹⁶⁴ Alfred Oppenheim, chairman of EJC, wrote to Speelman, chairman of the CFA:

The Committee of the EJC...has been created upon the initiative of the Shanghai Jewish Ashkenazi Congregation for the purpose of giving additional support and aid to the Refugees from Poland and Lithuania. The donors to the EJC are solely Russian, Polish and Lithuanian Jews of Shanghai.... The aim of the EJC is only ADDITIONAL aid to Polish and Russian Refugees, whereby the main care of the Refugees is to be with your Committee, who are taking care of all the needs of all Refugees however not for account of local supporters of the case, but for account of the JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE in N.Y., who are supplying your Committee with the necessary funds.¹⁶⁵

Eastjewcom was different from the other committees in that it was raising money independently to supplement the needs of the Polish Jews from Kobe. The leaders of the EJC were not willing to pool their funds with the other refugee committees, lacking trust in them and fearing that if their money were put into a general treasury, their own communities would be neglected.

When the Kobe immigrants arrived, there were disputes regarding the housing situation, which naturally involved finances, and Eastjewcom turned to international sources for help. They approached the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada, who in turn appealed to JDC in 1941 to give further special consideration to these 900-plus religious Polish Jews:

¹⁶⁴ From this point the CFA was sometimes referred to as the "German committee," as opposed to the EJC, which provided for the Polish refugees.

¹⁶⁵ A Oppenheim to M Speelman, October 2, 1941, 1, AR 1933/44:462, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

To throw these refugees in the existing homes for German refugees and under the supervision of the local committee will physically and morally undermine these refugees. Because of religious, communal and language motives, these refugees, mostly Rabbis, Yeshiva students and religious persons, cannot sociologically be established with the others. These refugees need especial consideration and assistance...¹⁶⁶

The CFA did not accept Eastjewcom's argument and insisted that the Polish refugees use the same camps as the German immigrants, which they refused to do. The EJC in turn retorted that as long as they could manage outside the homes with the same cost they should be allowed to do so. Margolis had no problem with this, since the *Heime* were already desperately overcrowded. She wrote to Pilpel:

I agreed to this, primarily because I couldn't conscientiously feel that our camps were a fit place to live in and I was hoping that in some way we could relieve the congestion rather than increase it; and since the EJC was not asking for anymore [sic] to house their people privately I had no objection.¹⁶⁷

As well as receiving money raised by the EJC, the Polish immigrants were also drawing a larger proportion of JDC contributions to meet their special needs, which naturally raised problems of fairness. JDC headquarters reported that:

...this is hardly a situation of which we are proud...the newly arrived Polish refugees receive about \$5.00 monthly for their support compared with the \$1.50 a month which is the average subvention given to the German refugees. It is not right that there should be two classes of assistance for two classes of Jews. All Jews who are in need are equally deserving of JDC assistance and support to the extent that our funds permit us to render such assistance.

¹⁶⁶ Union of Orthodox Rabbis of United States and Canada, "Memorandum to the Joint Distribution Committee in the Matter of the Polish Refugees Being Evacuated from Kobe, Japan to Shanghai, China," 1941, AR 1933/44:462, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

¹⁶⁷ Margolis to Pilpel, "Letter 27," 1.

One of the principal reasons for the larger subvention given to the Polish Jewish refugees is the lesser experience of the EJC in administering relief funds and also because it has many fewer people to care for. Obviously, the German refugee committee, which does business on a wholesale basis, is able to effect certain economies in the purchase and preparation of food, which a smaller committee cannot do. Another reason is that most of the German refugees who are supported by the committee in Shanghai eat at large community kitchens, where again food can be prepared in great masses, whereas the Polish Jewish refugees are scattered in various small groups.¹⁶⁸

The distinction between religious Eastern European Jews and German and Austrian Jews, and the demands being made by the religious, rankled the more secular JDC leadership as well as the local Committee.¹⁶⁹ The necessity to provide for their special needs was reluctantly acknowledged and justified, not on a religious basis, but rather under the guise of the lack of efficiency of economics. In truth, the threat to JDC's fundraising monopoly by the *Va'ad HaHatzalah*, the group that raised funds in the U.S. for the Shanghai Orthodox Jews, was a driving factor in the reaching of a compromise.

The CFA nevertheless complained to JDC that the extra allotment for the Polish Jews was unreasonable and unfair:

Right from the start, they demanded U.S. \$6.- per month for the upkeep of their people, whereas we at the time were compelled to come through with approximately U.S. \$2.50 per month per capita. This, of course, we did not agree to, as you yourselves intimated that the same treatment was to be rendered to all Refugees. We still are of the opinion that the policy of allowing the Polish Jews U.S. \$5.- per month per capita... is unfair, but

¹⁶⁸ Joint Distribution Committee, "The Truth about Shanghai: Refuting the Mistaken Allegations of Mr. Lazar Epstein," 4.

¹⁶⁹ For more on the social and cultural tensions between German and Eastern European Jews, see Steven E Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

we had no other option and in view of the serious consequences which may arise, we are forced to accede to their demands.¹⁷⁰

The following report by Margolis puts a human face on the internecine friction between the CFA and EJC:

The CFA was absolutely unprepared to house the new group. For the Rabbis they made room in an old Synagogue. Old dirty mattresses were placed on the floor, etc. About half the new immigration were Rabbis; and half of this group were Mirrer Yeshivah students and their teachers. Since the EJC refused to give direct relief as they were no longer cooperating with the CFA on the old basis; Rabbi Ashkenazi, chief Rabbi of the local Ashkenazi community approached the CFA directly for relief of the Rabbinical group. Excluding all the well-known facts that kosher living is always more expensive, and the fact that prices have been rising daily, the way this Rabbinical group was organized, it was absolutely impossible to ask them to manage on an allowance given the German refugees. But more in order not to be annoyed with Rabbi Ashkenazi (Speelman absolutely refused to see him at all, and the poor old man had to talk to Herzberg, who has no respect for age, beard or anything), he was finally granted a direct allowance of Sh. 2.50 per day, for food; and Sh\$20.- per month for rent. This is the equivalent of about U.S. \$5.- per month per person... beyond, giving Rabbi Ashkenazi this allowance for the Rabbis in order to “get rid of him”; nothing more was done by our committee to help this group get settled.¹⁷¹

This friction did not escape the notice of international Jewry. The *Jewish Morning Journal*, published in New York City, reported on December 16, 1941: “Although the Jewish

¹⁷⁰ M. Speelman to Joint Distribution Committee, “Letter 160,” October 4, 1941, 1, AR 1933/44:462, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

¹⁷¹ Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 27,” 2. Rabbi Avraham Kalmanowitz, who had arrived in America from Poland in 1940, became the honorary leader of the Mir Yeshiva in the U.S. and actively advocated for the yeshiva members marooned in Shanghai. He helped to raise funds for the Shanghai group for five years through the *Va’ad haHatzalah*, a body established to rescue rabbis and yeshiva students in World War II that transmitted funds through the International Red Cross in Switzerland, something the JDC refused to do so as not to go against the U.S. government. Later, Kalmanowitz was instrumental in the emigration of the entire Mir Yeshiva to the United States; see Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 308; see also Alex Grobman, *Battling for Souls: The Vaad Hatzala Rescue Committee in Post-Holocaust Europe* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2004).

settlement in Shanghai is young, quarrels among the various Jewish groups have already started.”¹⁷²

Not only did the two groups not get along, but when Captain Herzberg was thrown into the mix, the interpersonal relationships became nearly impossible to deal with. When Margolis suggested a working committee that would include representatives from both groups, they refused even to sit down with each other and as a consequence impeded the progress of the relief work. Margolis then began a series of meetings with each group separately, as well as with the representatives of the Mirrer Yeshiva. This small yeshiva, which had migrated as a group from Poland, considered itself a separate entity, refusing to accept the authority of Rabbi Meir Ashkenazi,¹⁷³ a Russian Jew and member of Chabad-Lubavitch who had been the chief rabbi of the Russian Ashkenazi community since 1925.¹⁷⁴

As an outsider and an American, Margolis was able somewhat to mediate; and as the provider of funds she had additional leverage. Following long and difficult meetings with the members of the EJC, Margolis was forced into a compromise in the early part of 1942 because it was evident that they could not raise money without the backing of the Ashkenazi community.¹⁷⁵ They therefore agreed to maintain the higher level of support for the Polish refugees. Although the Polish Jews only represented one eighth of the refugee

¹⁷² A. Reichman, “News of Jews in Shanghai,” *Der Morgen Zshurnal (Jewish Morning Journal)*, December 16, 1941, AR 1933/44:462, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

¹⁷³ “Shanghai Jewish History.”

¹⁷⁴ Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 27,” 3.

¹⁷⁵ The “Ashkenazi Community” represented the interests of the Eastern European immigrants, as opposed to the German immigrants.

population, they received one sixth of the support (\$5,000 of the \$30,000 monthly allotment from JDC headquarters). Margolis felt this was wrong, and it was only after a bitter struggle that she gave in and compromised. Because of this, she was able to get the help of the Ashkenazi community in raising money for all the refugees, and kept them from raising money separately for the Polish Jews alone.¹⁷⁶

Through her strategy of early “shuttle diplomacy,” Margolis was also able to convince everyone to acknowledge that the religious Eastern Europeans needed a place to study and pray, so separate housing for them was then acquired. Margolis also pointed out that there was extra money going to the German refugees from Sir Victor Sassoon’s International Committee, and this was analogous to the extra funds the EJC was giving to the East European immigrants.

The groups also agreed that Rabbi Ashkenazi would no longer have a separate committee but would work with the EJC, which would become a subcommittee of the CFA responsible for all the problems confronting the Eastern European group. They would give basic relief, after investigation, to the extent of U.S. \$5 per month per person, for which CFA would reimburse from the JDC budget (upon submission of detailed accounts). The CFA auditor would audit their books.

The EJC did not trust the CFA and refused to contribute to them, but they agreed that they would provide for the East Europeans’ particular needs through funds they raised independently. Margolis would have complete supervision of the work of both committees

¹⁷⁶ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 11; see also Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 27,” 1.

and would act as liaison with the understanding that this working agreement would be subject to change as the situation warranted.¹⁷⁷

Moses Leavitt, JDC General Secretary, reported the outcome to the JDC Executive Committee:

Some of our problems in Shanghai, particularly the problem created as a result of the influx of 1,000 East European Jews transferred from Japan recently, now seem on their way to solution. Miss Laura Margolis, whom we sent to the Far East early this year... has evolved a working arrangement between the German refugee committee and the East European refugee committee. The new arrangement will require a larger monthly grant for Shanghai than we have hitherto been sending, namely \$26,000 monthly, but we have arranged to send this sum for October and hope to continue it in future months. The increased grant is needed not only because of the necessity to set up special homes for the East European Jews, but also because of the drastic rise in prices. One home for 250 Mir yeshiva students has been rented for a year, and Miss Margolis is seeking to find another home to house an additional 150 persons.¹⁷⁸

Having overcome the immediate crisis, Margolis realized that she needed additional help in Shanghai:

I fully appreciate the confidence you have in me and in my ability to handle the Shanghai situation. I have never been known for my modesty with regard to my abilities; but I am also fully aware of my limitations. I have absolutely no desire to tackle the situation which is definitely beyond my capacity to resolve.... I must have help, and experienced help. I want to be perfectly fair about this. If you think you have someone, who

¹⁷⁷ Margolis to Pilpel, "Letter 27," 3. In 1939 the JDC was spending U.S. \$1.80 per month to feed each refugee in Shanghai. ("8,000 Refugees in Shanghai, 2,000 on Way, Sassoon Reveals," *JTA*, May 15, 1939.) By comparison, it cost the JDC U.S. \$9 per month to feed one refugee in Belgium, \$10 in France, \$12 in Holland, \$10-12 in England, and \$14 in Switzerland (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, "550,000 Jews Now Under German Rule," June 15, 1939, 2.).

¹⁷⁸ Moses Leavitt, "Report of the Secretary to the Executive Committee Meeting of the Joint Distribution Committee, Wednesday," October 22, 1941, 6, AR 1933/44:462, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

on the basis of my findings thinks he or she can handle the proposition alone, I am perfectly willing to turn the tasks over to this person; and if you so wish, stay out here just long enough to initiate them, and then return. This is just beyond my capacity. And please remember, that in addition to the re-organization of the relief show; the immigration work will continue; and if we stay out of war, and the Washington machine gets going; this work may be heavy. Please give this your utmost consideration; and advise accordingly.¹⁷⁹

Margolis requested that JDC send 30-year-old Manuel “Manny” Siegel, with whom she had worked successfully in Cuba. Mr. Siegel agreed to come, and arrived in Shanghai on November 26, 1941, a week and a half before Pearl Harbor.¹⁸⁰

Conclusion

The multifaceted Jewish communities in Shanghai—which differed in religion, background, socioeconomic status and class—fractured under the added stress and attempted separately to provide aid to the refugees who began pouring out of Nazi Europe in the late 1930s. This chapter has demonstrated that the local Jewish communities went to great lengths to provide for the incoming refugees until the immigrant surge proved to be too large for their resources. When they reached out to the international Jewish communities, the JDC, as America’s umbrella Jewish relief organization, responded to their pleas by sending Laura Margolis to help the refugees emigrate from Shanghai. The refugees themselves also organized to provide for those social services that the JDC funding could not afford.

¹⁷⁹ Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 21,” 3.

¹⁸⁰ Moses Leavitt, *Affidavit*, April 1, 1943, 1, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944. See also Leavitt, “Report of the Secretary to the Executive Committee Meeting of the Joint Distribution Committee, Wednesday,” 6.

The U.S. State Department representatives did indeed cooperate and assist the refugees to emigrate until the Pacific War stopped them. This chapter has served to respond to the argument that claims American Jews “did not do enough” to save Jewish people during the Holocaust.¹⁸¹ The work of the JDC is a good example of determined and concerted American Jewish effort to provide desperately needed relief and resources.

¹⁸¹ This subject has evoked an intense scholarly debate, which is beyond the scope of this chapter, on just what would have been “enough” to have been done to help the Jews of Europe under the circumstances.

CHAPTER FOUR
SHANGHAI AFTER PEARL HARBOR—
THE STRANDED STATELESS

The Pacific War began in Shanghai on December 8 with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and immediately JDC representatives became enemy nationals and lost their access to American funding. In exploring Margolis' desperate attempt to raise the funds needed for the survival of the refugees, this chapter will affirm Yehuda Bauer's argument that JDC's commitment to working exclusively in accordance with U.S. government policy hindered them from providing the desperately needed aid to the stranded refugees in Shanghai. Bauer attributed this to a combination of loyalty to the United States and to JDC's perception of the American Jewish community's vulnerability to antisemitism. He postulated that there were essentially two JDCs: the U.S. based organization that adhered to U.S. State Department policies, and JDC functioning on the field, which did what was necessary to aid people in need.¹

An example of this was the "creative" funding that took place to provide needed resources to the Jewish refugees in Shanghai. Because of the Trading with the Enemy Act, JDC felt it could not even communicate with its American staff in Shanghai, even if it meant the discontinuation of essential relief activities. This caused tremendous hardship for the JDC representatives in Shanghai, who had no assurance that the funds needed for their work would be forthcoming once the U.S. entered the War. Laura Margolis and Manuel

¹ For more on this, see Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*.

Siegel were able to “creatively” secure substantial loans from local wealthy Jews in exchange for repayment of those loans to their families or representatives in the United States. Their ingenious circumvention of this very Act enabled thousands of impoverished Jewish people in Shanghai to survive the War.

Fundraising

This section will analyze how Margolis used the implied promise of American funds and the implementation of democratic methods to attempt to heal the growing fissures within the Shanghai Jewish communities. These attempts to unify disparate communities regularly failed, as intra- and inter-communal frictions rose again and again to the surface. In spite of Margolis’ repeated efforts to call community meetings, appoint representative committees, provide oversight and instill a sense of moral responsibility, it was only when the Shanghai Jews were at the end of their rope, with no means of obtaining funding or receiving any outside help, that they made a serious effort to provide for their own basic needs. Through the use of German-style Patenschaften, or sponsorships, the refugees themselves implemented a successful system reminiscent of medieval Jewish corporate taxation. Margolis’ moral exhortations, together with the refugees’ dire need, helped to ameliorate a seemingly intractable situation.



On Monday, December 8, 1941, everything changed in Shanghai. Laura Margolis and Manny Siegel had planned to begin restructuring the CFA that morning, but at 4 a.m. a new Battle of Shanghai began simultaneously with the attack on Pearl Harbor and was

immediately followed by the Japanese occupation of Shanghai. America had joined the War, and overnight, Margolis and Siegel lost contact with the United States.²

As the city panicked, the JDC workers immediately began to shred by hand and dispose of the carbon copies of all their correspondence and records. The only copies of documents that remained were those that had been sent to America.

As enemy nationals, Margolis and most of the IC and CFA committee members were confined to their quarters except for Captain Herzberg, who was German and had been born and raised in Shanghai. Herzberg was faced with a serious financial difficulty, since the \$30,000 JDC December payment had not yet arrived. He immediately reduced the 8,000 refugees who received assistance from two meals a day to one, and reduced the bread rations from 12 to 6 ounces per person in order to be able to function through the end of December. When he notified the staff of 570 employees³ that the Committee could not assume responsibility after January 1, this led to chaos and panic both in the refugee community and among the staff.⁴

The *New York Times* reported that post-Pearl Harbor, Japanese-held Shanghai became:

² "JDC Representatives Marooned in Shanghai; Departure of Rabbis for Canada Prevented," *JTA*, December 9, 1941.

³ Lazar Epstein, "Jewish refugees, multimillionaires and the JDC," *Der Worker*, November 1, 1941, 2, AR 1933/44:482, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, Publicity.

⁴ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 2.

...a city of desperate hunger, and anti-British and anti-American propaganda, and sharp rivalry between the Japanese Army and Navy over division of the vast wealth of enemy property.... Americans and Britons have relative freedom of movement within the city, but live under the menace of arrest.⁵

Matters eased up a week later, when the Japanese allowed enemy nationals their freedom “for the present”⁶ as long as they obeyed military regulations.⁷ Margolis approached Michel Speelman, chairman of the Committee for Assistance, and Ellis Hayim, vice-chairman,⁸ and suggested they let the Japanese know that no more funds would be available to refugees after the end of the month, since under the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917, the United States was prohibited from any activities that might be viewed as assisting the enemy, such as sending money to a belligerent nation.⁹ When Speelman and Hayim attempted to meet with Captain Koreshige Inuzuka (1890-1965), head of Jewish Affairs for the Japanese Naval Landing Party, he refused to meet with them since he felt they had constantly defied the Japanese prior to Pearl Harbor.¹⁰

⁵ Karl Eskelund, “Shortage of Food in Shanghai Grave: Threat of Arrest Hangs Over American-British Colony,” *New York Times*, January 6, 1942.

⁶ Margolis, “Race Against Time in Shanghai,” 169.

⁷ “Shanghai Americans Are Reported Well: But Red Cross Official’s Cable Tells of Lack of Funds,” *New York Times*, January 18, 1942.

⁸ According to Margolis, the two men had no fondness for each other but Hayim, who was very wealthy, would contribute if given power, so Speelman would defer to him in everything “even when he knows a thing is wrong.” (Margolis to Pilpel, “Letter 20,” 3.)

⁹ 40 Stat. 411, enacted 6 October 1917, codified at 12 U.S.C. § 95a et seq.; for more on the Trading with the Enemy Act, see Martin Domke, *Trading with the Enemy in World War II*. (Central Book Co., 1943); see also Samuel Anatole Lourie, “The Trading with the Enemy Act,” *Michigan Law Review* 42, no. 2 (October 1, 1943): 205–34; for the text of the law, see “12 U.S. Code § 95a,” n.d., <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/12/95a>.

¹⁰ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Interview with Laura Margolis,” 10.

After Pearl Harbor, Inuzuka moved his offices into the Cathay Hotel, the best hotel in Shanghai, and occupied Sir Victor Sassoon's penthouse.¹¹ This was the same hotel where Margolis and Siegel were staying,¹² so Margolis decided to approach Inuzuka herself. She had actually met him at various dinner parties and horse races in the pre-Pearl Harbor days and had made a favorable impression.

Margolis phoned Inuzuka, who remembered her and invited her up to his offices. He received her "graciously" with a tea ceremony within two hours of her request.¹³ Also present at that meeting were Manny Siegel and J. Bitker, who was at that time Vice-Chairman of the CFA and the Chairman of their subcommittee on finance.¹⁴ Margolis painted a picture for Inuzuka of how dire the refugee situation would become if funds were not available, and appealed for his help on a humanitarian basis as well as a political one, saying, "You, as an occupying power, cannot afford to have hungry people riot."¹⁵ Reasoning with him, she pointed out that they were in the midst of a problem that had to be dealt with regardless of external circumstances. This was the approach she used with

¹¹ The hotel, built by Sir Victor Sassoon and the most prestigious hotel in Shanghai, was at the entrance of Nanking Road, the commercial center of Shanghai, and in the middle of the Bund waterfront district. It was also close to the war front, with bullets often whizzing by and walls pierced by shrapnel. Now called the Fairmont Peace Hotel, it is still one of the most luxurious hotels in all of Shanghai. ("Wartime Shanghai: A Tycoon Triumphs Over the Emperor," *History Net: Where History Comes Alive - World & U.S. History Online*, accessed June 18, 2013, <http://www.historynet.com/wartime-shanghai-a-tycoon-triumphs-over-the-emperor.htm>.)

¹² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Interview with Laura Margolis," 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Bitker, "Memorandum," 1.

¹⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Interview with Laura Margolis," 10. Note that Margolis had used the same threat of rioting while in Cuba, to attempt to get more funds from the JDC.

Captain Inuzuka throughout all her dealings with him and found it to be the most effective.¹⁶

In the meantime, Margolis and Siegel had immediately contacted the American Red Cross for any possible help, and were able to get a promise of 5,000 sacks of cracked wheat that were already in Shanghai, if the Japanese would release them to the JDC staff.

Margolis asked Inuzuka's permission to release the wheat and borrow local funds, showing him a cable she had received from JDC headquarters office authorizing her to borrow the equivalent of \$180,000 U.S. to cover six months of expenses should U.S. funding be cut off.¹⁷ This same JDC policy had been in place and had proven effective during the First World War.

Margolis also requested that Committee funds in Chinese currency that were frozen in the Chase Bank be released until the above money could be borrowed.¹⁸ She told Inuzuka

¹⁶ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 2-3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2; see also Henrietta Buchman to Isaac Seligman, January 5, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944. The JDC had given the same authorization to other local committees in areas where communications might be cut off. (Moses Leavitt, "News Release: the JDC Pays Loan for Funds Aiding Refugees in Shanghai," October 3, 1943, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.) In Shanghai, this authorization was initially given for two months but later extended to six months. (Leavitt, *Affidavit*, 4; see also "J.D.C. Will Continue Overseas Relief Work on a Wartime Basis, Warburg States," *JTA*, December 16, 1941; and "J.D.C. Will Continue to Aid Jewish Refugees Stranded in Shanghai," *JTA*, December 11, 1941.)

¹⁸ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 2-3.

she was prepared to help him, taking over the whole refugee operation in Shanghai and continuing to feed the people, if only he would give her permission to raise the money.¹⁹

Captain Inuzuka assured Margolis that she could depend upon his full cooperation as long as the money was borrowed only from neutrals and no money came from enemy countries abroad.²⁰ He also agreed to attempt to release the frozen funds and the wheat from the Red Cross, which was more than he had done for any other charitable or civic group.²¹ He demanded, however, that the existing Committee for Assistance (CFA) be disbanded and that Captain Herzberg be fired. He was also antagonistic to the International Committee, which was financed by Sir Victor Sassoon, but was willing to work with Margolis and the JDC because of the deference she showed him. He also allowed them to continue to work with Speelman, who apparently had not displeased him as much as the other members of the Committee.²²

Inuzuka quickly released the funds from Chase Bank (CRB \$30,000),²³ which enabled them to operate until the first six days of January.²⁴ To quell the panic, Margolis assured the staff that they would be paid for their work in December.²⁵

¹⁹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Interview with Laura Margolis," 10.

²⁰ Bitker, "Memorandum," 1.

²¹ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 5.

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²³ CRB stands for currency of the Central Reserve Bank, which replaced the Chinese *fabi* currency, first on a one-to-one ratio and then more as the *fabi* was devalued over time.

After this meeting, Margolis immediately cabled JDC headquarters to apprise them of the situation:

Japanese authorities cooperating fullest meeting refugee problem but continuation impossible without American Jewry signify slightest possibility receiving help via Red Cross cable reply immediately via Beckelman.²⁶

In addition to needing to raise funds for the community, Margolis and Siegel were faced with their own personal crisis—their own monthly stipends from JDC had ceased. For a few weeks, their hotel allowed them to pay their bills with promissory notes, but by the first of January they were notified that they needed to move out. The best accommodations they could find were two unheated rooms in the home of a White Russian family, so far from Hongkew that it meant four hours of travel a day, by train, rickshaw, bus and on foot, to reach the refugee community. Later, they were able to get rooms in another White Russian home, without heat and very sparsely furnished, but nearer to Hongkew.²⁷

On January 5, Speelman called a meeting of 30 prominent and wealthy Jews and included members of the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities and the *Jüdische Gemeinde*

For more on changes in Shanghai currency, see Zhaojin Ji, *A History of Modern Shanghai Banking: The Rise and Decline of China's Finance Capitalism* (M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

²⁴ See Laura Margolis to JDC, "Cable," January 10, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

²⁵ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 3.

²⁶ Beckelman, who later became Director General for Overseas Operations for the JDC, was stationed in South America from 1941 to 1942. ("Moses W. Beckelman, J. D. C. Director-General, Dies of Heart Attack," *JTA*, December 12, 1955, <http://www.jta.org/1955/12/12/archive/moses-w-beckelman-j-d-c-director-general-dies-of-heart-attack>.)

²⁷ Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," 171.

to represent the refugees. He and Margolis made a plea to them to help raise the needed funds. Admittedly it was an achievement to get these leaders to meet under one roof, but the appeal for funds received little or no response at the meeting.

Two days later, Margolis received an anonymous phone call to be at a given address at a set time. There, they found a Siberian Jewish man named Zimmerman who offered to loan them CRB 3.5 million, which would have allowed them to function for the next six months. Zimmerman agreed to give the funds as long as ten local Jewish people would underwrite the JDC loan. Speelman himself underwrote the loan for U.S. \$10,000, but they were unable to find backers for more than an additional U.S. \$15,000, and the promised loan never came through. The attitude of Mr. Abraham, the representative of the Sephardic community and the most religious of the group, was, "Since the Japanese took Shanghai they could also worry about the refugees."²⁸

When Margolis realized she would get no help from either the Sephardic community or the wealthy Jews living in Shanghai, she approached J. Bitker and a Mr. Rabinowitz, leading members of Ashkenazi community, and asked for their help in calling a meeting of the Ashkenazi community to see what could be done about raising the needed funds.²⁹ There is no record that this meeting ever took place.

When they recognized the difficulty of the situation, the refugees themselves organized an effort to raise funds from the wealthier among them, and were able to raise

²⁸ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

another CRB \$30,000. This kept the relief operation functioning for six more days.³⁰ The Committee continued to operate from day to day. Without the financial assurance necessary to continue, Margolis seriously considered the possibility of closing down the JDC work and turning the “problem” over to the Japanese. However, the Japanese had made it clear that they could not concern themselves with the Jewish refugee problem any more than they could with the “masses of poor and starving Russians and Chinese who filled Shanghai.”³¹

On January 10, the Committee only had enough funds to feed the 8,000 people on relief for four more days, or they could choose to feed 4,000 people for eight days. Rather than make the decision herself, Margolis decided to put democracy into action and allow the *Jüdische Gemeinde* to bring the matter to the refugee community to decide. They opted to cut 4,000 refugees and feed the other 4,000—the poorest of the poor—for eight days. They kept on relief the children, the aged, the sick, and those whose malnutrition was so serious that their lives were in danger.³² The Committee was also able to continue operating two hospitals during this time.³³

³⁰ See also “Relief and Charitable Activities in Shanghai,” 1942, YIVO Archives, Shanghai Collection, Relief Activities, 1931-1944, RG 243, 43 (3/45); and Margolis, “Race Against Time in Shanghai,” 171.

³¹ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 5.

³² Margolis, “Race Against Time in Shanghai,” 171.

³³ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 5. According to an article in the JTA, “... the Shanghai (International Settlement) municipality had demanded that the Jewish community take care of the refugee ill” (“9,000 Refugees in Shanghai Dependent on Charity; Hospital Needs Held Urgent,” *JTA*, September 12, 1939.)

By mid-January, funds had practically run out and the situation had reached a critical point. It was at this time that a reporter from the *Shanghai Times* approached Margolis. Knowing that the Japanese did not want publicity, Margolis and her team had avoided all media. However, at great personal risk, Margolis granted an interview to the newspaper.³⁴ They published it on January 16 under the title, "Hungry Starving Refugees in Hongkew," and various other newspapers picked up the story as well. The plight of the Jewish refugees in Shanghai became the subject of editorials and feature articles, and was carried by radio stations, who began making appeals to the community at large for donations. Money began coming in in small amounts, but this enabled them to continue to function from day to day.³⁵

The Japanese Gendarmerie, however, was furious that any news about disorder in Shanghai should get into the papers, and issued an order for the arrest of Margolis and Siegel. Inuzuka was furious as well. Margolis received a call from the Japanese Consulate asking her to come and explain herself. But Carl Brahn, a German Jew who had lived in Shanghai for some time, knew a Mrs. Nogami, who worked with the Gendarmerie, and through her efforts, the order for their arrest was canceled.³⁶

Although there had been no mass meeting, the leaders of the Ashkenazi community had appointed a Finance Committee to find investors for the JDC loan. On January 20, a Mr. Schumacher, head of the Chase Bank in Shanghai, spoke to a Mr. Kaufman, a wealthy

³⁴ Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," 171.

³⁵ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 6.

³⁶ Ibid.

German Jew and long-time resident of Shanghai, and convinced him to lend the money against the "Immigrants' Deposit Account," which was a frozen account. This appealed more to Mr. Kaufman than lending money based upon the promise of future JDC repayment, and resulted in a U.S. \$10,000 loan, the first substantial sum of money they received.³⁷

Immediately after Pearl Harbor, Margolis had sent a message to JDC headquarters through Moses Beckelman in neutral Argentina telling of the dire situation of the refugees, saying that they risked starvation if funds could not be raised.

She asked if the JDC could pay \$90,000 to an American citizen in the U.S., so that an equivalent amount could be made available in Shanghai for the relief needs. The JDC immediately took up the matter with the Treasury Department in Washington.³⁸ B.E.L. Timmons of the Foreign Funds Control Department of the Treasury replied that he would be prepared to grant a license for this:³⁹

Since this transaction would enable an American here to salvage some of his funds in Shanghai and at the same time serve a humanitarian purpose by keeping alive thousands of refugees there without helping the economy of the aggressor states, they would be inclined to license such a transaction.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Joe Hyman to Moses Leavitt, "Memorandum RE: Letter to Admiral Cooke," January 19, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

³⁹ Moses Leavitt to Lt. Commander F.H. Creech, Arlington Medical Center, January 17, 1942, 1, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁴⁰ Joseph Hyman to Moses Leavitt, "Memorandum," January 9, 1942, 1, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

Transferring funds in this way would preserve the adherence to the Trading with the Enemy Act and provide for the needs of the refugees without being viewed as aiding the Japanese in their war effort.⁴¹

The JDC was concerned, however, that this person be someone who would fulfill his commitments so that the \$90,000 would indeed arrive in Shanghai. They requested the name and address of the American citizen so they could verify his ability to fulfill his part of the arrangement.⁴²

The “American citizen” was Aron Shriro, American brother of Joseph Shriro,⁴³ who was a resident of Shanghai. Through the efforts of the Ashkenazi Finance Committee, Margolis had met Shriro, an extremely wealthy Russian Jewish man. Fearful that the Japanese would confiscate his money and property,⁴⁴ Shriro was anxious to transfer his wealth to the United States. Because of his unique ability to provide large sums, he

⁴¹ For a legal perspective on the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917, see Joseph W. Bishop Jr., “Judicial Construction of the Trading with the Enemy Act,” *Harvard Law Review* 62, no. 5 (March 1, 1949): 721–59.

⁴² Moses Leavitt to J.W. Pehle, Assistant to the Secretary, Treasury Department, January 22, 1942, 2, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁴³ The Shriro Group, founded by the Shriro family in 1906 in Harbin, China, began trading fur and leather and grew into an international commodities firm. They still exist today, with 3,500 employees in offices worldwide. (“The Shriro Story,” accessed September 24, 2013, http://www.shriro.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56&Itemid=55&lang=en.)

⁴⁴ The danger of Japanese confiscation was very real. Mr. Bitker, a Polish national and a member of the Ashkenazi community, was aware of this and took on the role of financial advisor to Margolis. He kept informed about Japanese plans to devalue certain currencies and alerted Margolis so she could plan accordingly, purchasing food and supplies ahead of the devaluations. (Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 7.)

demanded concessions in interest rates, and Margolis had no choice but to accept his terms.⁴⁵

Aron Shriro, the American brother, made a very good impression on Leavitt and the JDC, giving them all the information they requested, assuring the JDC leaders that he was acting purely as a depositary for his brother and that the funds would remain blocked pending the release by the Federal Reserve Bank of the funds to his brother in Shanghai. Leavitt applied to the Federal Reserve for a license⁴⁶ to pay Aron Shriro the sum of \$50,000 for the benefit of his brother in Shanghai.⁴⁷

This amount of money was only sufficient to maintain the refugees for a few months. Thus began a series of cables from Margolis to JDC. Although JDC was very careful to follow U.S. State Department policies, Margolis was faced with a severe crisis on the field and found it necessary to get the needed funds in ways that sometimes skirted the prohibitions of the U.S. government. She ignored the Trading with the Enemy Act and continued to channel her messages to JDC through Moses Beckelman in South America:

April 7, 1942 - Margolis advises amount now 138,500 same payees⁴⁸ stop requests confirmation execution⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid., 6-7.

⁴⁶ Application #452 (the JDC) and #NY-372248 (Treasury Department).

⁴⁷ Moses Leavitt to B.E.L. Timmons, Treasury Department, January 25, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944; see also Leavitt, *Affidavit*, 2.

⁴⁸ Shriro made the majority of the loans, and of the \$180,000 raised in the first JDC loan by the end of April, the JDC had repaid \$138,500 to Shriro's wife in America ("Treasury Department Permits J.D.C. to Pay Loan for Relief Funds in Shanghai," *JTA*, October 5, 1943.) Each person who participated in the remainder of the \$180,000 loan was given a regular loan contract issued in U.S. dollars. Due to Japanese restrictions, it was not possible to bring

April 16, 1942 - Six months guarantee completed amount raised 180,000 stop Funds only through May stop Urgently need guarantee next six months of 40,000 monthly⁵⁰

But JDC headquarters would not respond. On January 10 Leavitt had requested permission from Admiral H.D. Cooke of the United States Navy to communicate with Margolis through their South American representative, Moses Beckelman.⁵¹ He received this permission from the Headquarters of the Commandant of the Third Naval District and could have responded through this channel.⁵² But he was overly cautious. Instead, he called his contact in the Treasury Department, M.L. Hoffman, who had replaced B.E.L. Timmons, double-checking if he could cable Margolis to let her know she had permission to make this guarantee, emphasizing to Hoffman that this would in no way bring aid or comfort to the enemy. Hoffman replied that the matter would probably have to be discussed with the State Department, and that they would have to explore whether granting JDC permission to

back the names of any of the people who loaned money, but the Shanghai JDC kept a full record of the persons and amount owed, and they were repaid in the United States. The rate of exchange varied on each contract depending upon the urgency of the need for money in the official and black market rates. (Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 22.)

⁴⁹ Laura Margolis to Moses Beckelman, April 7, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁵⁰ Laura Margolis to Moses Beckelman, "Cable," April 16, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁵¹ Moses Leavitt to Admiral H.D. Cooke, February 10, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁵² Admiral H.D. Cooke to Moses Leavitt, January 15, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

send such a cable would create a precedent that would be difficult for them to follow in other instances.⁵³

Moses Leavitt wrote, memorializing this conversation,

Obviously, we will not do anything that is contrary to American policy and it was for this reason that we have presented the situation to him in all frankness. We put the matter on the basis of an informal exploration and advised him that we did not wish to make a formal application until we knew what the attitude of the Department was.... The problems which we raised are matters of policy and will have to be considered both by the Treasury and the State Department⁵⁴

Margolis, though, insisted in a cable to Beckelman, her only remaining JDC contact:

May 9, 1942 - Must have yes or no answer next six months budget...stop advises personal maintenance arranged.⁵⁵

Leavitt later requested from Hoffman permission to respond with this message through Beckelman: "In absence our ability to communicate Margolis we have every confidence she will make her own helpful decision." Hoffman pointed out that all communication, whether direct or indirect, as a matter of policy was prohibited between Americans and persons in enemy-occupied countries. He said that if JDC wanted to send such a cable, they would be at liberty to do so, but the Treasury could not authorize the

⁵³ Moses Leavitt, "Memorandum on Conversation with Mr. M.L. Hoffman of the Foreign Funds Control Office of the Treasury Department, Washington DC—May 8, 1942," May 8, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1; see also Buchman to Seligman, January 5, 1942, 1.

⁵⁵ Laura Margolis to Moses Beckelman, "Cable," May 9, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

sending of one. He repeated that the matter was in the hands of a special division of the State Department and that JDC ought to take up the matter directly with them.⁵⁶

Even though Leavitt was told he would be at liberty to communicate with Margolis, this assurance was not sufficient for him. Leavitt traveled to Washington on Monday, May 18, and spoke with a Mr. Green, Chief of the Special Division of the State Department, who agreed to send a cable to Margolis letting her know that JDC had approved a commitment for another six-month period. However, Mr. Green subsequently advised Mr. Leavitt by telephone after his return to New York that he would require the approval of the Treasury Department to send the cable.⁵⁷

Leavitt returned to Washington on July 22 and met with Sumner Welles, Under Secretary of State and one of Franklin Roosevelt's foreign policy advisors. Welles reiterated that it was the general policy of the government not to make exceptions to the general policy—but he did not define what that “general policy” was. He did say that everyone was very much concerned with the situation in Shanghai and was very anxious to try to be of help, provided the method used would not be an exception. Leavitt also informed Welles that the International Red Cross had agreed to act as an intermediary to supervise the distribution of JDC funds in Shanghai.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Moses Leavitt, “Memorandum on Telephone Conversation between Mr. Levitt and Mr. M. L. Hoffman of the Foreign Funds Control Office of the Treasury—May 13, 1942,” May 13, 1942, 1, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁵⁷ Moses Leavitt, “Memorandum Regarding Meeting with Sumner Welles,” July 22, 1942, 3, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Essentially, the attitude of the government officials was that regardless of the method employed in bringing aid to the civilian population in occupied zones, the question was whether the Allies should relieve the burden which was on the occupying powers. They were sympathetic with the suffering and hardships of the populations in occupied countries, but they would not make an exception in any one case lest they be swamped with requests from other areas. The Trading with the Enemy Act had to be administered without exception, and no communication of whatever nature could be authorized. The position of the Treasury was that the denial of such applications was part of the war effort.⁵⁹ The JDC refused to do anything that was not consistent with the regulations of the United States government:⁶⁰

...we have undertaken to assure that there will be the requisite funds for refugee aid in Shanghai during the first six months of 1942. *We, as an American organization, cannot be involved in anything that has the remotest color of trading with the enemy. We cannot, therefore, make any remittances to any Japanese-occupied territory* [emphasis mine]. Long before the outbreak of the war, we anticipated the possible interruption in communication. We therefore arranged that local committees in the various overseas countries, including Shanghai, should themselves continue their activities on the basis of our latest appropriation prior to the interruption in communication, and with the assurance that as soon as world conditions permitted, JDC would make reimbursement for funds thus borrowed locally. This follows the old pattern that JDC adopted during the First World War.

In countries that are not occupied by enemies, of course, we are still able to continue the legitimate transfer of funds through the general clearance methods approved by our Treasury. However, in cases, as indicated above, where the enemy is in possession, local committees were told, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, to borrow locally the necessary sums

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁰ Moses Leavitt to Peter Wehrli, August 24, 1943, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944; see also "Wartime Difficulties in Fund-Raising Outlined at Conference of Jewish Federations," *JTA*, February 4, 1942.

to an amount equal to JDC monthly budgetary appropriations at the time of break in communications—this to continue for a period of six months. We therefore have reason to believe that the work with JDC has been subventioning in such areas heretofore, is being continued under local auspices.⁶¹

Leavitt went to great ends to obtain permission to communicate with Margolis. Even when he had the tacit approval of Admiral Cooke to communicate with her, he insisted on going to the highest echelons of the U.S. government to obtain the proper permission merely to send a cable. Bauer's argument that JDC scrupulously observed American legalities is clearly seen in Leavitt's actions.

In light of this black comedy of red tape, Beckelman took it upon himself to ask JDC in La Paz, Bolivia, to communicate with Margolis. He assumed that Margolis was unaware of the reasons why she had not received a reply to her last telegram, and thought it was only fair that she should know what the situation was. His request was denied.⁶²

In retrospect, it is tragic that JDC at the very least did not avail itself of the existing International Red Cross conduit for messages of 25 words or less,⁶³ or of the offer of Paul Ruland with the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church to transmit

⁶¹ Buchman to Seligman, January 5, 1942, 1. Emphasis mine. See also American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, *Aiding Jews Overseas*, 5.: "...the objective of the JDC was first and foremost to conform with American public opinion and with the policies of the Government of the United States. Long before our Government had crystallized such policies, the J.D.C. took the position that none of the funds expended for humanitarian objectives should be placed where they might benefit the forces of totalitarianism."

⁶² Moses Beckelman to Joseph Joint Distribution Committee, "Letter 225," May 23, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁶³ Article 79 of the Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners had empowered the International Red Cross in Geneva to transmit messages of 25 words or less to obtain information about prisoners of war and could only be about family news. (<http://usmilitary.about.com/library/milinfo/genevacon/blart-79.htm>)

messages.⁶⁴ Rather, as Bauer has forcefully argued and this interchange has demonstrated, they rigidly abided by the declaration of the U.S. Treasury and State Departments that they could not communicate with staff in enemy-occupied countries.⁶⁵

Through the loan from Shriro, Margolis had obtained enough funds to function for six months. But since the wealthy Jewish men in Shanghai were considered enemy nationals from the moment their countries joined the war against Japan, they could no longer contribute financially. Margolis explained this to the CFA and encouraged them to make an intensive effort to obtain as much money as possible locally. Everyone would have to contribute something.

Lutz Wachsner suggested a *Patenschaft* (sponsorship) plan, based on a German Jewish pattern of community responsibility. He estimated that CRB \$50 per month would feed one refugee, and he began working on a plan whereby the whole community would be canvassed for *Patenschaften*, each sponsorship being CRB \$50 per month. Mr. Peretz of the International Committee was enthusiastic about this idea and began working on a campaign for canvassing the whole community to contribute money.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Paul Ruland of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, offered to send funds as well. Leavitt responded: "Unfortunately, the suggested transmission of funds to Shanghai is contrary to the Trading with the Enemy Act, and is in effect illegal. I am sure that it is only because Mr. Ruland does not know the provisions of the Trading with the Enemy Act that he has made such a suggestion." Moses Leavitt to Samuel Boorstin, December 4, 1942, Israel JDC - AJDC Israel Records, Shanghai 1938-1947.

⁶⁵ Robert Pilpel to Walter Kallman, May 21, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁶⁶ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 12-13.

But even the dire need of the refugees could not bring about unity. Soon, a split arose within the Ashkenazi community, which had until this point been supporting only the Polish refugees. Some within the Russian community felt they should be participating in the *Patenschaft* plan, while others refused to consider helping the German refugees in any way. According to Margolis, “The issue became so vital within the ranks of the [Russian] Ashkenazi community that it split the community in half and at one time became so violent that brothers were not talking to each other because of this issue.”⁶⁷ The Russian group that wanted to support the Germans formed itself into a new committee, called the Centraljewcom,⁶⁸ led by A. Rogovin, and took on the responsibility of raising funds to feed 500 German children.

Margolis felt that this was a real victory—the first real expression on the part of the established Russian community to take some responsibility toward their German brothers and sisters. Naturally, there was some friction between the Centraljewcom and the Eastjewcom, as both were drawing money from the same community but for a different group of refugees—Eastjewcom for the Polish refugees and Centraljewcom for the German needy.⁶⁹

Although there was no longer a Committee for Assistance after July 1942, some of the men who had been members of the Committee agreed to take over local fundraising and organized an active body of wealthier refugees into a committee called the “Kitchen

⁶⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁸ Some sources spell this Centrejewcom.

⁶⁹ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 13–14.

Fund,” which incorporated the *Patenschaft* idea of community responsibility. Their leader was a Dr. Jacob Berglas, a refugee Polish national, whom Margolis felt was a weak leader. She believed he was being used as a figurehead and was controlled by more dominant members of the group: a Mr. Silberstein and a Mr. Pulvermacher, two powerful, controlling refugees who had established successful businesses in Shanghai. These were the men who back in January 1942, when the Committee had been operating from day to day, had raised CRB \$30,000 in one week. According to Margolis, “They are men who have tremendous drive and who once they get power do not delegate responsibility or privileges to anyone outside their own small intimate group of friends.”⁷⁰

Interestingly, in 1939 the Institute of Pacific Relations’ *Far Eastern Survey* covered the “Berglas Plan,” a “pretentious effort to provide a permanent home in China for German refugees.” The Yunnan Provincial Government had consented to allow 100,000 refugees to settle in their province and become Chinese citizens as long as each refugee could support him or herself for one year (£50). The Berglas Plan, however, seems to have remained “pure speculation,” reaffirming Margolis’ opinion of him as a weak leader.⁷¹

But with Silberstein and Pulvermacher in charge of the Kitchen Fund, problems began within a week of the time it was established. Immediately upon the transfer of all bank accounts to themselves, they decided that most of the personnel of the Committee,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 15; for a list of Kitchen Fund staff, see “Kitchen Fund: List of 189 Employees, with Identification Cards,” 1941, YIVO Archives, Shanghai Collection, RG 243, 18/I-VII.

⁷¹ Barnett, “Shanghai’s German Refugees Face Uncertainties,” 252.

which had been reduced from 500 to 100, were dishonest. They were, furthermore, convinced that they themselves could run the office more efficiently.

Margolis attempted to convince these men to create a separate governing board and executive staff, but she soon realized that her efforts were futile. When she tried to show them how JDC's monthly statistical reports should be completed, they balked and told her that there was no need for all this detail and they were going to set up their own system of bookkeeping.

Within a few weeks, the remaining members of the leadership and administration of the Kitchen Fund all resigned. They realized they were not wanted and were working with a dictatorial and fundamentally dishonest group of men. The situation was tragic but Margolis and Siegel had no alternative, since no one else was ready or capable of stepping in. They begged the Russian Ashkenazi community to take ownership, but they flatly refused. The JDC representatives had to reconcile themselves to leaving the new leaders of the Kitchen Fund in charge.⁷²

The members of the Kitchen Fund did work very hard and raised more money than had ever been raised locally before. Their attitude toward the refugees, however, was the same hard and dictatorial one that the old Committee for Assistance had shown.⁷³

⁷² Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 17.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

By August 1942, Margolis recognized that all potential financial resources had been tapped, yet there was still inadequate funding to maintain the relief programs.

P.M. Anderson, representative of the American Red Cross in Shanghai, corroborated this:

Ms. Margolis and Mr. Siegel have been managing to keep the refugee activities going and have borrowed both from local Jews and from the Chinese. However, most of the local Jews are British, their accounts are entirely blocked and no funds will be forthcoming from that source.⁷⁴

As mentioned above, the Japanese had frozen the accounts of foreigners with whose countries they were at war; in addition, both the U.S. and Britain, under their respective Trading with the Enemies Acts, were prohibited from transferring funds that in any way would aid the enemy's war effort, even indirectly.⁷⁵

Boris Topas, now chairman of the Ashkenazi community, called a private meeting with Margolis, Siegel and a few others, and asked if Margolis would issue another loan in the name of JDC without telling the community that they did not have JDC's outright permission to do so. Margolis explained that JDC representatives had never misrepresented the situation and could not personally be responsible for receiving money from people the JDC might not repay. She suggested the alternative of drawing up a contract that clearly explained their position, namely, that Margolis and Siegel firmly believed the JDC had the

⁷⁴ American Red Cross, *Memorandum of Meeting with Mr. P.M. Anderson, Representative of the American Red Cross in Shanghai*, August 28, 1942, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁷⁵ For more on wartime monetary policy, see Henry Simon Bloc and F. Bert, *Hoselitz, Economics of Military Occupation: Selected Problems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944); F.L. Block, *The Origins of International Economic Disorder: A Study of United States International Monetary Policy from World War II to the Present*, Campus Series (University of California Press, 1977); and Gregg Huff and Shinobu Majima, "Financing Japan's World War II Occupation of Southeast Asia," *The Journal of Economic History* 73, no. 4 (2013).

money to help and wanted to help but that due to wartime regulations was unable to contact them. Cornell Franklin, an American lawyer in Shanghai and the head of the Shanghai Municipal Council, drew up the contract, and on the basis of this document they began negotiations with Joseph Shriro for additional money.⁷⁶

Although Margolis was sure that JDC wanted to help in Shanghai, she felt she could not be 100% convincing, because she did not know what the situation really was in the United States after they were completely cut off. It was easy to get a distorted picture of what might be happening, and there were times when they even questioned whether JDC was functioning at all. In light of this, it was necessary for JDC members to compromise and accept unreasonably low rates on this second loan.⁷⁷

Shriro was understandably hesitant to loan his money without a legal obligation on JDC's part to repay. Margolis and Siegel had to admit that if JDC did not want to meet this obligation, they did not have to, but they tried to convince him that to the best of their knowledge, JDC would repay these commitments. In September 1942, Shriro agreed to lend the sum of 100,000 Swiss francs (CHF), but at an extremely low rate of CRB \$3.00 to CHF 1.00 (Margolis recalled that at that time the official rate of the CRB dollar to the Swiss franc was 10.5 or 12 to 1). As reluctant as Margolis and Siegel were to accept this rate, there was no other person who had as much free cash to give at one time as Shriro, and by September

⁷⁶ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 16.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 22; see also Moses Leavitt to John W. Pehle, December 10, 1943, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

1942 the existing funds were dangerously low.⁷⁸ This loan bought the JDC a few more months to support the refugees. At great difficulty and without much help from the fragmented Jewish communities, the JDC workers managed to raise enough funds to keep alive the thousands of refugees who depended on them for their daily existence.

Reorganization

This section will demonstrate how Margolis implemented the values of representative democracy while at the same time working with the Japanese to obtain the best possible outcome for the refugees, noting her attempts to involve the different communities in the decision-making process and impress them with their responsibility to provide for those less fortunate. Margolis' efforts were successful as the committees began to function under newly recruited and capable administrators, largely due to her ability to deal fairly with all the different factions.



Once Margolis was able to obtain the loan of U.S. \$180,000—mostly from Shriro⁷⁹—and the immediate financial pressure was relieved, Margolis set out to reorganize the administrative machinery and the Committee that led it, as she had planned to do before Pearl Harbor.

The staff of 570 employees that was in place when Margolis arrived was cumbersome and inefficient, and again Margolis felt that the existing Committee, under

⁷⁸ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 17.

⁷⁹ Leavitt, "News Release: JDC Pays Loan for Funds Aiding Refugees in Shanghai."

Herzberg's leadership, had treated the refugees in a humiliating manner, not only underfeeding them for years, but also depriving them "of every remnant of self-respect as adult human beings."

In a scathing article in the Yiddish paper, *Der Werker*, Lazar Epstein had noted the disproportionately large staff maintained by the CFA in Shanghai:

The JDC allotted (until August [1941]) about sixteen thousand dollars per month. This would amount to a little more than \$2.50 for each needy person, if a part of this money were not spent on aid to the other third, partially needy, and if...almost half of the sixteen thousand dollars were not spent for the huge apparatus consisting of 570 officers ruling the unfortunate refugees. Thus, every refugee gets a subvention out of the American funds to the extent of 60¢ per month. At a time when the very minimum cost of existing and maintaining one's self-respect amounts to at least \$18.00 per month.⁸⁰

By February 1942, Margolis and Siegel felt that something had to be done to disband the CFA and create a new and much more representative community committee. They called a meeting of the existing Committee and told them frankly that the Committee "was badly organized; was filled with corruption, and that the refugees had been treated worse than coolies." The executive whom they had appointed, Captain Herzberg, was "a man not worthy of dealing with human beings," and many of the refugee staff appointed by him "were the type of people who would eventually have to be dismissed because they were people of his caliber and mentality." All of the committee members resigned except for Mr. Speelman, who received the criticism graciously and agreed to help going forward.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Epstein, "Jewish refugees, multimillionaires and the JDC," 2.

⁸¹ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 9.

Margolis then called a meeting of the 570 staff members, most of whom were depressed and hopeless, badly clothed and badly fed. She spoke to them frankly about the financial situation and about the hostility and antagonism that existed toward them, admitting to them that to a large extent these feelings were justified. She warned them that the staff would have to be cut, as the maintenance of over 500 employees was not only unnecessary but also financially impossible, and urged them to try to find employment elsewhere. She issued IOUs for their January pay, promising to compensate them when monies once again arrived from America, and to apprise them of the financial situation from month to month. After this meeting, only one staff member resigned.⁸²

Margolis also called separate meetings of the residents of each of the five refugee camps and gave them a full explanation of the situation, attempting to foster community spirit and putting into play her agenda of organizing the refugees democratically. She encouraged the residents to take more interest in the running of their camps, since the Committee no longer could afford to keep paid staff. She pointed out that the camps in fact belonged to the residents, and that their maintenance, sanitation and administration should be their responsibility.⁸³ Each camp then organized a committee of five people to discuss plans with Margolis regularly. She also organized a small representative committee of those refugees on relief who were living outside the camps.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid., 7–8.

⁸³ Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," 190.

⁸⁴ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 8.

In keeping with her training and views of “best practice” in social work,⁸⁵ Margolis felt that implementing a democratic system in the community was one of her key victories in Shanghai. Although there were often clashes, she felt the process was ultimately beneficial to the refugees:

It was amazing to watch those semi-starved people suddenly roused from their lethargy. For weeks the camps buzzed with election activities. Much of the leadership came from the lawyers, who knew how to talk persuasively.... There were speeches, meetings, and “electioneering.” In one camp election activities became so violent that the police actually had to be called in to settle a quarrel. Camp committees were elected and reelected. The people were at first very clumsy in using the techniques of Democratic organization, which do not come naturally to those of German background, but they learned, and learned fast.⁸⁶

Throughout this period, Margolis had kept in constant touch with Captain Inuzuka, sending him reports and updates of the developments in Hongkew. She had told him that she was going to form a new committee, and he asked only that it be composed of non-enemy nationals, and that he be given every name for approval.

Margolis was determined that this time the new, reorganized Committee would be governed democratically and consist of a representative of every segment of the Shanghai Jewish communities. She personally contacted the leaders of the Sephardic community (representing the Baghdadi and Near Eastern Jews), the Ashkenazi community

⁸⁵ Stein, “Jewish Social Work in the United States (1654-1954),” 18.

⁸⁶ Margolis, “Race Against Time in Shanghai,” 190.

(representing predominantly white Russians), and the *Jüdische Gemeinde* (representing the refugees and German Jews).⁸⁷

The new Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai met early in March 1942, composed of members of each of the above communities as well as a few members at large. This was a real achievement in light of the previous refusal of the different community representatives to even be together under the same roof. There were approximately 25 men present, including a member of the police force representing the Japanese Municipal Council. Margolis organized this large committee into subcommittees for housing, feeding, fundraising, finance and budget, purchasing, and rehabilitation.

She later recalled the conditions under which the staff committee meetings took place:

At the end of each month the staff committee met with Mr. Siegel and me. These were staff conferences under difficulties, with the committee crowded into our cramped little office in the old barracks. The stove always smoked. The air always was fouled with odors from unsanitary and inadequate plumbing. The rain—and it rained practically every day in the Shanghai winter—dripped through the cracked ceiling. We managed to serve afternoon coffee with sandwiches or cookies, because otherwise the staff committee members were too hungry to think.⁸⁸

She explained to those present that it was never JDC's policy to take over the responsibilities of the community, but that the situation in Shanghai after Pearl Harbor was so unique that they had to act decisively in response to emergency conditions. She impressed upon the Committee their responsibility to care for the community, and

⁸⁷ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 9.

⁸⁸ Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," 190.

expressed JDC's sincere desire to step out of leadership as soon as the local leaders were able to take over. They hoped to replace themselves with a full-time professional executive, whether paid or volunteer, and would search for such a person in the next few months. Every representative at that meeting agreed to work on one or more subcommittees.⁸⁹

The new subcommittees began to function, and in April 1942, the rehabilitation subcommittee began working with the refugees to plant vegetable gardens in their various camps. This helped to boost the spirits of the underfed refugees. They also asked ORT, which had a functioning school in Hongkew, to start teaching classes in JDC camps, with JDC providing the space and paying for any necessary equipment. However, ORT was not willing to change their program, and insisted that the young people come to them, something Margolis felt she could not ask of the young people who barely had enough to eat and did not have the energy for the 20-minute walk.⁹⁰

Once the subcommittees were in place, Margolis turned her attention to the finances. The bookkeeping system was in disarray and she could not get the accurate figures she desperately needed in order to plan ahead. She dismissed the old personnel and employed Alfred Edel, a refugee and a competent public accountant who had worked at a

⁸⁹ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 10.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

leading firm in Shanghai before Pearl Harbor. Edel reorganized the books and the entire relief and statistical system.⁹¹

As part of her reorganization, Margolis recruited extensively to fill the different administrative positions. She hired Dr. Lang, a man who had set up the Social Security and Public Employment Service for Austria, to help start an employment service in the spring of 1942. Mr. Avraham Levenspiel was in Hongkew daily, directing the various gardening projects and the building of a new kitchen.⁹² Carl Brahn, through his contact with Mrs. Nogami at the Gendarmerie, helped secure the necessary permits that had to be obtained whenever anything had to be moved from the International Settlement to Hongkew, including even the daily delivery of bread.⁹³ Margolis' organizational efforts were beginning to bear fruit.

Efficiency

Nearing the end of their ability to raise funds, Margolis utilized her organizational skills to heighten efficiency and maximize the use of funds. She provided a modern kitchen to feed the refugees more efficiently, although with tactics that may have contravened JDC policy. Facing overburdened refugee camps with no solution in sight, Margolis turned to her American social work training to alleviate an intractable situation. She immediately began a process of investigation, evaluating each of the refugees to determine who had the greatest need so that resources could be fairly apportioned. And seeing that no

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² See page 58 below.

⁹³ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 12.

communication would be forthcoming from JDC's American headquarters, she then reached out internationally for help. Even the aid that did come in from overseas Jewish communities was not sufficient, forcing her to make even more drastic cuts in order for the poorest of the refugees to survive.



One of Margolis' favorite stories was the building of a new, more efficient kitchen. Margolis had met Avraham Levenspiel, a Polish Jewish engineer who had lived in the Far East for many years and was familiar with life in Shanghai. He had been pointing out to the Committee the inefficiency of the current kitchen, which was feeding 8,000 people one meal a day that consisted of one bowl of vegetable or bean soup and a three-ounce slice of bread.⁹⁴ Levenspiel had been consistently ignored by the local committees, but Margolis listened to him. His argument was that it was costing CRB 60 cents per meal per person, of which 50 cents was coal consumption and 10 cents was actual food. Levenspiel suggested a plan whereby for CRB \$100,000 (U.S. \$5,000) they could have a very simple, modern and efficient steam kitchen that could feed 10,000 people at one time. In order to do this, they would need a special type of steam boiler that could not be purchased in China. However, the Cathay Land Company owned by Sir Victor Sassoon possessed one of these and had not used it for many years.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," 168; see also Gruenberger, "The Jewish Refugees in Shanghai," 338.

⁹⁵ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 8.

When Margolis approached the Cathay Land Company and asked them to lend them the boilers, the British employees refused, fearing that if they even mentioned that the boilers existed, the Japanese might confiscate them.⁹⁶ Margolis felt justified in taking possession of these boilers, since she knew that sooner or later the Japanese would confiscate them anyway and they would not be of use either to the Cathay Land Company or to the refugees. With the help of Mrs. Nogami and her connections with the Gendarmerie, she procured a permit for the removal of these boilers and presented it to the Cathay Land Company. The Japanese supervisor in charge of the Cathay Land Company then gave them permission to use the boilers as long as necessary. They signed a statement affirming that it was only a loan and allocated the CRB \$100,000 for the kitchen immediately.

June 1942 brought a major devaluation of Chinese currency,⁹⁷ but by the time the devaluation came, all the materials for the kitchen had been purchased and building had begun.⁹⁸

In December 1942, the new kitchen—erected with JDC money—was dedicated and officially opened in a ceremony at which many Japanese officials were present. These officials expressed thankfulness to the Jewish organizations that had provided for the refugees. Margolis and Siegel did not attend, since by that time all enemy nationals were

⁹⁶ Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," 171.

⁹⁷ Ji, *A History of Modern Shanghai Banking*, 215.

⁹⁸ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 9.

required to wear special red armbands and anti-American and anti-British feeling was rising.⁹⁹

By May and June 1942, problems had begun to multiply. Margolis had to keep cutting staff because the little money they had was needed to purchase food. The camps were badly deteriorated and in constant need of repairs; the refugees were living in terrible sanitary conditions. The summer of 1942 saw a dramatic rise in cases of typhus and the Committee hospitals were overcrowded. The general situation in Shanghai and the insecurity of the refugees themselves resulted in a state of panic among those people not living in the camps, and hundreds of persons a day came to the Central Administration office to apply for admission to the already overcrowded camps.¹⁰⁰

Margolis knew that many of those living in the camps had been admitted at a time when inefficient systems were in place, and had less need than some of those living outside. She instituted systems to reinvestigate each case by hiring Lutz Wachsner, a member of the Board of the *Jüdische Gemeinde*, to work on the housing problem full time. Wachsner took charge of admitting new refugees and investigating those residing in the camps, as well as those receiving relief outside.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁰ The American Marines' Club had donated their building to the Jewish community prior to the complete occupation of the city, thus providing limited but much-needed additional shelter. ("Thousands of German Jews Beg for Bread in Shanghai Streets; Mortality Mounting," *JTA*, October 20, 1942.)

¹⁰¹ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 11.

Cut off from the support of JDC headquarters, Margolis realized that Shanghai Jewry was entirely on its own and would have to survive on its own resources. She reached out beyond JDC and enlisted the cooperation of groups such as the Society of Friends and ORT. She appealed to the International Red Cross as well, but their Swiss delegate, Edouard Egle, who was sympathetic, explained that his organization could only act as an agency for the transmission of cables. He agreed to supervise funds transmitted for the use of the refugees, but the International Red Cross could not provide direct financial help.¹⁰²

Still desperate for funds, Margolis sent cables to Jewish communities in Sweden, Turkey, Portugal, and Switzerland, asking for contributions. There was no response from Turkey or Switzerland, but the Swedes and Portuguese sent the following aid:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Amt. CRB</u>
2/12/1943	<i>Arbeitsausschuss zur Hilfeleistung für Europäische Juden in Stockholm</i>	\$18,000
3/23/1943	<i>Comité da Comunidade Israelita de Lisboa</i> ¹⁰³	\$23,088
6/21/1943	<i>Comité da Comunidade Israelita de Lisboa</i>	\$136,150
8/19/1943	<i>Comité da Comunidade Israelita de Lisboa</i>	\$114,354
9/01/1943	<i>Comité da Comunidade Israelita de Lisboa</i>	\$686,124
	TOTAL ¹⁰⁴	\$977,716

¹⁰² Ibid., 12.

¹⁰³ Sephardic Jews who migrated to Portugal at the beginning of the 19th century had founded the *Comunidade Israelita de Lisboa*. Originating in Gibraltar and Morocco, some traced their roots back to pre-expulsion Iberia. Mostly merchants, they were educated and attained wealth through their international business contacts. This Portuguese Jewish community played a significant role in refugee relief through the creation of the *Comissão Portuguesa de Assistência aos Judeus Refugiados em Portugal* (COMASSIS), which was directed by Augusto d'Esaguy and partly financed by the JDC.

¹⁰⁴ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 13.

By June 1942, Margolis realized that the best and most efficient campaign for raising funds could never meet the budget of the CFA. At best, they could only stretch the funds raised on JDC credit through the middle or the end of September.

Margolis sought every possible means to cut expenditures. The two hospitals were costing CRB \$50,000 monthly to operate and, according to Margolis, “the staff was of inferior quality, the equipment was poor and physical conditions and sanitation deplorable.”¹⁰⁵ Margolis contacted Dr. Eric Vio, superintendent of hospitals at the public health department of the Shanghai Municipal Council,¹⁰⁶ and made arrangements for the Shanghai General Hospital to take their cases. On July 1, all patients not released were transferred to the General Hospital and the two Committee hospitals closed.¹⁰⁷

Another cost-saving measure that Margolis undertook was to approach the Shanghai Municipal Council to get free rental of the camp properties, which were on municipal land. The previous committee had never taken advantage of the regulation stating that charitable institutions housed in municipal property did not have to pay rent.¹⁰⁸ Thanks to her efficiency and drastic cost-saving measures, Margolis was able to stretch the dwindling funds significantly longer to support the needy refugees.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Prue Torney-Parlicki, *Behind the News: A Biography of Peter Russo* (UWA Publishing, 2005), 84.

¹⁰⁷ Margolis had always been convinced that these hospitals had been an unnecessary and costly part of the Committee’s activities. Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 13.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Margolis and Siegel Interned

Margolis and Siegel showed extraordinary foresight as they considered the likelihood of their own impending arrest. In providing for additional loans for the refugees and establishing checks and balances in the existing committees, they set up the infrastructure that enabled the survival of the German and Austrian refugees in the dire days ahead. With great difficulty, Margolis and Siegel attempted to remain in touch with the committees they had established and provided them with leadership, even in the midst of their own internment.



As Japanese anti-foreign feeling escalated in Shanghai, Margolis, anticipating that she and Manny Siegel would either be repatriated or interned by the fall of 1942, felt it was time for them to step down from the leadership of the refugee program. Ristaino's research showed that most Americans in Shanghai were detained and confined to hotels until the Swiss consulate could arrange for their departure, to be exchanged for an equal number of Japanese stranded in America.¹⁰⁹ But as it turned out, on September 6, 1942, the day they were supposed to sail on a civilian exchange program, Margolis and Siegel's repatriation was canceled. Margolis later learned that the Japanese felt she was too valuable to the refugee program to allow her to depart.¹¹⁰

But not knowing this and expecting to be repatriated within months, Margolis and Siegel officially resigned from the Committee for Assistance in July 1942 and the Committee

¹⁰⁹ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 188.

¹¹⁰ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 17.

was disbanded. In its place, Margolis set up a new JDC Committee, and in spite of her better judgment, she appointed Carl Brahn as chairman. She later reported:

Mr. Brahn was appointed chairman of the JDC committee simply because of his influential contact with the Japanese. He is a very unreliable, frustrated, sadistic person with a strong desire to dominate and show his power over those dependent on him...we had no choice.¹¹¹

Lutz Wachsner, who had been working under Margolis' supervision for six months, was capable and willing to take over the administration of the Committee, and Werner Glückmann, who had been her secretary, became his assistant. Margolis and Siegel agreed to remain in the background to advise Wachsner and Glückmann and to continue to help the local community raise funds.¹¹² J. Bitker, in spite of his previous arrest, was also willing to help, although he would not serve on the committee.¹¹³

On September 1, Margolis and Siegel were suddenly notified that in five days they would be sailing from Shanghai to be repatriated. Aware that without herself and Siegel there would be no centralized responsibility for the refugees, Margolis called a meeting of the new Kitchen Fund's committee and proposed that they take over all responsibility for feeding and the *Jüdische Gemeinde* take over the responsibility for housing, while the JDC committee would raise money on conditional loans and would disburse funds according to need. The *Jüdische Gemeinde*, however, refused to take over any responsibility. According to Margolis:

¹¹¹ Ibid., 15.

¹¹² Ibid., 14.

¹¹³ Ibid., 15.

The leadership of the *Jüdische Gemeinde* has always been weak and although it was the only organization which officially represented the refugee body, it has never really played a major role in the life of the refugees. Dr. Kardegg, the president, is a rather weak and vacillating person, a man who is afraid of everybody.¹¹⁴

The members of the Kitchen Fund then declared that they were ready to take over responsibility for the whole problem, if Margolis would promise that all monies raised through JDC loans would be given to them. Margolis insisted that the standard of work carried out by the Kitchen Fund meet with the approval of the JDC Committee. However, Margolis noted,

From the very beginning we had been fearful of the type of leadership personified in Dr. Berglass, [sic] Mr. Pulvermacher and Dr. Silberstein, but there was no choice. Everyone had been given an opportunity and these were the only people who agreed to take any responsibility.¹¹⁵

But Margolis' supervision of the Kitchen Fund was to be short-lived. On November 5, the American and British communities were surprised to wake up and find that the Japanese were picking up enemy nationals for internment. Expecting to be detained at any moment, Margolis quickly called a meeting with Bitker and Shriro and negotiated for an additional sum of CHF 405,000 to be loaned. They limited the amount that that the Shanghai JDC could borrow to U.S. \$210,000 and signed the necessary paperwork for the loan.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Much to their surprise, they learned later that afternoon that the Gendarmerie had only arrested a selected few enemy nationals¹¹⁶ and that Mr. Shriro had been one of them. The arrest of Shriro meant that he too was now classified as an enemy national, and in accordance with their agreement with the Japanese, JDC could not take money from enemy nationals. They dropped the matter temporarily and gave up hope of ever getting more money from this source.¹¹⁷

However, in January 1943, one of Shriro's brothers approached Margolis, telling her that Shriro still wanted to make the loan. In view of Shriro's arrest, Margolis refused to take the money directly from him—she felt that no amount of money was worth risking the displeasure of the Japanese after they had given their word that they would only negotiate with neutrals. However, she could not just refuse the loan of CHF 405,000, so she found another way around it. The money was transferred to a Russian immigrant named J. Shifrin, and the loan was negotiated with him. This time, though, Margolis refused to accept the rate of CRB \$3.00. She knew it would not be long before she was arrested, so she left the rate negotiation open but gave her word that JDC would not ask for more than CRB \$6.00.

They also agreed not to disclose to the JDC Committee officially nor to the community that this money was available. They were concerned that, with money suddenly available, the local communities would no longer feel the responsibility to support themselves and provide for their own needy. Instead, the funds would be invested and

¹¹⁶ "Japan Seizes 100 Jewish Refugees As Hostages in Shanghai; Many Others Arrested," *JTA*, May 23, 1943.

¹¹⁷ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 17–18.

from time to time the income from the investment would be used as anonymous contributions to the Shanghai JDC.

We felt that the local community had by this time been stimulated to raise money locally, and we did not want them to revert to their former habit of "Let JDC do it." We felt it was much better psychologically for them not to know that we had obtained this loan.¹¹⁸

The politics, rivalries and personality clashes among the committee leaders caused so much conflict within their own ranks that the Japanese, who were aware of these conflicts, took advantage. The Kitchen Fund group refused to take any suggestions from the Shanghai JDC even though they were receiving money from them. Carl Brahn, now chairman of the Shanghai JDC, was reporting the misdemeanors of the Kitchen Fund to the Japanese.

Tsutomu Kubota, Director General of the Japanese Bureau of Stateless Refugee Affairs, decreed that for the present the Kitchen Fund should continue its work of feeding and housing and raising funds locally and that the Shanghai JDC should continue to raise money on credit. The Japanese, however, did not want to work directly with any of the existing committees and organized their own: the Shanghai Ashkenazi Communal Relief Association (SACRA),¹¹⁹ which was subordinate to the Office of Stateless Refugee Affairs.¹²⁰ Dr. Jan Abraham Jacob Cohn, a physician of Turkish background who was educated in Japan and fluent in Japanese, was appointed chairman of SACRA and was a spokesman for the

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁹ Some sources substitute the word "Cooperative" for "Communal" in the organization's name. See Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 198.

¹²⁰ Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 314; see also Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 198.

Russian Jews to the Japanese authorities.¹²¹ He was very pro-Japanese and a close friend of Kubota. The Japanese dealt only with Dr. Cohn at SACRA, and SACRA in turn dealt with the Kitchen Fund and the Shanghai JDC.¹²² But because of Cohn's close relationship with the Japanese, the other members of SACRA did not completely trust him and "would cease their private conversation the minute Dr. Cohn walked in."¹²³

The interpersonal clashes had caused a definite split between SACRA and the Office for Stateless on one side and the Shanghai JDC backed by the Gendarmerie on the other side. Actually the fight was the old traditional one between the Japanese Gendarmerie and the Office for Stateless that was under the Japanese Consulate; but this time the Jewish groups were being used in the deep-seated political quarrel between these two Japanese factions.¹²⁴

The amount of money that was being raised was not enough to supply the needs of the impoverished refugees. H. Wasmer of the International Red Cross, wrote:

The worst distress exists undoubtedly among the German-Jewish immigrants, of whom at least 6,000, are on the point of starvation and about 9,000 more are not far better off. The local Jewish Committee... can

¹²¹ Kranzler, "The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945," 345.

¹²² Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 23; For more on SACRA, see SACRA, "Minutes of the Central Board," 1943, YIVO Archives, Shanghai Collection, RG 243, 14 (1/812).

¹²³ Herman Dicker, *Wanderers and Settlers in the Far East: A Century of Jewish Life in China and Japan* (New York: Twayne, 1962), 136. According to Kranzler, Dicker based this on an interview with a former member of the SACRA board. Quoted in Kranzler, "The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945," 346.

¹²⁴ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 20.

raise local contributions to an amount of maximum CRB \$ 10.– per capita per month¹²⁵ and which is next to nothing when you take into account the high cost of foodstuffs at Shanghai, even a Chinese coolie requiring CRB \$150.– a month to feed himself. For the moment the Jewish Committee have still some of the 3,000 [sic] bags of flour left which were donated last July, but even that will be exhausted [sic] by the end of next month, when the Committee will no longer be able to provide the one slice of bread daily which at present keeps precariously body and soul together of thousands of these poor wretches. It need hardly be mentioned that medical care is practically non-existent...¹²⁶

The rate of mortality, which had increased from 139 in 1940 to 182 in 1941 and 350 in 1942, was continuing to rise.¹²⁷ The Red Cross representative felt that these conditions could not easily be ameliorated in light of the “great deal of corruption [that] prevails amongst certain members of the Jewish Administration,” referring to the Kitchen Fund. Because of this corruption and the divisions within the Jewish community, the Red Cross declined to assist the refugees:¹²⁸

Our delegates would therefore be unable to undertake a systematic distribution unless the entire organization can be altered and the distribution placed completely under the control of the International Committee of the Red Cross, preferably with the cooperation of the Japanese or Municipal Authorities.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ This CRB \$10 provided 9 ounces of bread and a thin vegetable soup per person per day for one month. (International Red Cross, “Cable,” October 24, 1943, 1, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.)

¹²⁶ H. Wasmer, *Note for the Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross*, June 15, 1943, 1, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

¹²⁷ AJDC Lisbon to Herbert Katzki, “General Letter N°540,” November 4, 1943, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

¹²⁸ Wasmer, *Note for the Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross*, 2.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

Wasmer felt it would take approximately CHF \$100,000 per month to provide the necessary aid. As an alternative, he suggested that CHF \$10,000 monthly, spent carefully, could save hundreds of lives. However, according to Paul Baerwald, the Red Cross evidently did not have these funds to make available, and JDC, which could have sent funds, felt their hands were tied by U.S. regulations, once again adding to Bauer's argument. Paul Baerwald, the chairman of JDC, appealed to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of *The New York Times*, to try to sway public opinion on the matter, but there is no record of anything having come through this avenue.¹³⁰

In early January 1943, Britain signed the "Treaty Between His Majesty in Respect of the United Kingdom and India and His Excellency the President of the National Government of the Republic Of China for the Relinquishment of Extra-Territorial Rights in China and the Regulation of Related Matters (With Exchange of Notes and Agreed Minute)" with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Government in Chongqing, ending the extraterritorial privileges of these nations.¹³¹ By extension, British and Americans in Shanghai, including the two JDC staff members, began to be rounded up by the Japanese.

Manny Siegel was interned on January 31, 1943. He was taken to Pootung Camp, the grounds of which were in the bombed out ruins of a Chinese village destroyed in the 1937

¹³⁰ Paul Baerwald to Arthur Hayes Sulzberger, November 7, 1943, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944. A search of *The New York Times* does not show any articles on Jews in Shanghai as a consequence of this effort.

¹³¹ For the text of this treaty, see China and Rand McNally, *Treaty between His Majesty in Respect of the United Kingdom and India and His Excellency the President of the National Government of the Republic of China for the Relinquishment of Extra-Territorial Rights in China, and the Regulation of Related Matters (with Exchange of Notes and Agreed Minute)*, Chungking, January 11, 1943 (London: H.M.S.O., 1943).

fighting, where a condemned warehouse of the British American Tobacco Company served to house the internees.¹³² During his internment, Siegel contracted malaria, dysentery and “chillblains.” He described his time there as “life in an unsanitary, unheated ware-house under a leaky roof, plenty of bugs, 85 men living in a room, where one lined up for everything, from water, to meals, to wash, and even to toilet.”¹³³ Manny Siegel was not released until Japan surrendered in 1945.

Laura Margolis was interned a month after Siegel on February 25, 1943 in a camp outside Shanghai: an old, broken down, shelled Chinese schoolhouse in the country surrounded by barbed wire. There were 1,500 people in that camp: some couples, single men and women, but mostly families with children. Many of the internees were representatives of big business in America, such as Standard Oil and Chase Bank.

Margolis was assigned a room with 40 women, a conglomeration of American missionaries, Shanghai prostitutes, widows of diplomatic corpsmen in Beijing who had been brought to Shanghai after Pearl Harbor, and others. The housing conditions were primitive—the roofs leaked, the floors sagged, and it was “hellishly hot in the summer and ice cold in the winter.”¹³⁴ The Japanese did provide them with a stove, but when they lit it,

¹³² Kaufman, “Interview,” 28; see also Greg Leck, *Captives of Empire: The Japanese Internment of Allied Civilians in China, 1941-1945* ([Bangor, PA]: Shandy Press, 2006), 466.

¹³³ Manuel Siegel, *Siegel to Leavitt, Report*, August 26, 1945, 1, AR 1933/44:464, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

¹³⁴ Kaufman, “Interview,” 28–30.

“there was so much smoke, dirt and soot that we gave up and never used the stove the whole winter.”¹³⁵

Margolis later recalled that the Japanese treated them well since they were civilian, not military prisoners. They had been allowed to bring whatever they wanted—food supplies, comfortable folding beds, linens, clothes, etc. Margolis brought a folding cot, books and cans of food with her.

Both Margolis and Siegel during their internment were able to communicate with the outside world to a very limited extent. They were allowed to receive mail, although it was heavily censored. They had actually worked out a code to bypass the censors and let each other know they were well, and to keep in minimal touch with the refugees outside and provide what leadership they could.¹³⁶

Around the summer of 1943, there was an epidemic of dysentery in Margolis' camp, and those who were sick were allowed, with a doctor's permission, to go to a hospital in Shanghai. Margolis made a conscious decision to get out of the camp. Intentionally, she began to eat less in order to make herself weak, sick and pale, and as she says, “putting on a Sarah Bernhardt act.” She was taken to Shanghai General Hospital in July 1943 for a thorough checkup.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 31; Kuzmack, “Interview,” 11.

The medical director at the hospital was the Italian doctor Eric Vio, whom Margolis had met several times in Shanghai before the War. Vio worked under Japanese supervision while Italy was still an ally of Japan. When he discovered Margolis at the hospital, he immediately understood that she was there to get away from the camp. He winked at her, and said, "I think you are much too sick to be in a ward, so I'll try to get you a semi-private room."¹³⁸

By "coincidence," J. Bitker, the head of JDC committee, happened to be visiting his aunt, who was very ill in the bed next to her. It is possible that Dr. Vio, who was acquainted with the Shanghai refugee situation, knew that Bitker was visiting the hospital regularly and intentionally placed Margolis in a semi-private room with his aunt. Bitker and Margolis signaled each other and she followed him "weakly" into the corridor as he was on his way out. The Japanese were watching them all the time, but they made an appointment to meet on the roof of the building the next day at a certain hour so they could communicate. Through Bitker, she was able to get word out to the Shanghai Jewish leaders that she was in the hospital. However, she was not allowed to have visitors until the German Nazi boyfriend of her new roommate helped her by obtaining permission for her to receive visits. She was then able to see Werner Glückmann and Bitker often enough that she could keep in touch with what was going on.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Kaufman, "Interview," 27.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 28–29; see also Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 20.

In a later report assessing her time in Shanghai, Margolis felt a need to justify some of her decisions and actions at the time:

A detailed chronological recording is also necessary so that no matter who the person might be will tackle the situation in the future, he might be in full possession of all the facts; and will understand why we acted as we did at the time; and why we used the services of certain people who even as we used them, we knew to be undesirables. "Force majeure" [sic] played a great part in our actions and decisions.¹⁴⁰

Force majeure, of course, is a clause included in contracts to remove liability for natural and unavoidable catastrophes that interrupt the expected course of events and restrict participants from fulfilling obligations.¹⁴¹ Margolis had stepped into a situation with pre-existing conflicts and personalities that she could not control, and had to function as best she could in those conditions. According to her report, at no time did she have a real choice when it became necessary to appoint leaders or committees:

The best which Shanghai had to offer (with the exception of three members of the present Shanghai J.D.C., Mr. J. Bitker, Dr. Lang and Mr. Morris Glueckman) were either men who accepted responsibility because they were forced to by the Japanese (Ashkenazi community composed for the most part of stateless Russian Jews at the present time organized into S.A.C.R.A.), Or men or groups with strong power drives, like Mr. C. Brahn, the present chairman of the Shanghai J.D.C., and the Kitchen Fund Committee composed of refugees.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 1.

¹⁴¹ "Force Majeure Definition | Investopedia," accessed August 18, 2013, <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/forcemajeure.asp>.

¹⁴² Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 1.

Margolis felt that the biggest challenge had not been the Japanese or their occupation of Shanghai—that was a reality she had to accept. Her greatest difficulties, she recalled, were local conflicts, apathy, and the lack of proper leadership.

The problems here in the past years have been terrific, changes in currency, dealing with other organizations, dealing with the Japanese authorities and apologizing for and keeping the chairman, Mr. Brahn, in line, have been no easy matter. The unfortunate part of the work of the local Joint committee is that it is so little appreciated by the refugees here. Have already had numerous statements concerning the misappropriation of funds, the inefficiency of the members and disregard of the wishes of the refugees.¹⁴³

In retrospect, as Margolis evaluated her time in Shanghai, she felt that her greatest difficulties and handicaps to serving the refugees had been:

- 1) The situation which had developed prior to Pearl Harbor between the refugees and then existing Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai.
- 2) The complete apathy of all local Jewry to the refugee problem.
- 3) The lack of good leadership both within the refugee group itself and the local Jews.
- 4) The absence of a real Jewish community in the Western sense.¹⁴⁴

She later wrote:

The handicaps [in Shanghai] were numerous and least of all these handicaps were the Japanese themselves. We have in Shanghai, and have always had, a group of Jews who have no social consciousness and no feeling of responsibility towards the community. Shanghai itself is not a community. Added to this, we have a group of refugees who are underfed and undernourished and terribly discouraged. I doubt that fifty percent of this group will be material for rehabilitation if this war lasts another two

¹⁴³ Siegel, *Siegel to Leavitt, Report*.

¹⁴⁴ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 1.

years. And one can never know what the attitude of the Japanese will be towards this defenseless element of the Shanghai population once they start losing the war. Knowing the Japanese, I would venture to say that “anything might happen at any time.” The only hope for these people, as for all peoples, lies in the victory of the United Nations.¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

As the war in the Pacific began, the American representatives of the JDC were cut off from the financial resources so desperately needed by the stateless refugees. This chapter has analyzed Margolis’ attempts to obtain the funding necessary for the refugees’ survival, affirming Yehuda Bauer’s argument and showing that, unlike the unyielding JDC leadership in New York City, Margolis pragmatically evaded the Trading with the Enemy Act and continued her attempts to communicate with headquarters and gain the needed approval to obtain substantial loans on the field. Consistently, Margolis applied the values of representative democracy in her attempt to boost morale and bring the disparate Jewish communities together. Her efforts to lower expenses, even at the risk of “bending” regulations and “borrowing” materials that she was not authorized to use, enabled their meager resources to extend to many more needy refugees. And her foresight and planning helped prepare the Jewish populations of Shanghai to continue without her active leadership as she and Siegel were seized and interned by the Japanese.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 23. President Roosevelt coined the term “United Nations” in 1942 when representatives of 26 countries joined together to fight the Axis powers. (“History of the United Nations,” accessed August 24, 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/history/>.)

CHAPTER FIVE

ANTISEMITISM IN SHANGHAI

This chapter will specifically review the official Japanese attitude toward the Jews as Nazi propaganda increased, arguing that the multicultural milieu in Shanghai lessened the impact of antisemitic tendencies that might have existed within the local populations and were fanned by the Nazis. The chapter will also strengthen the arguments of David Kranzler, Marvin Tokayer, and Marcia Ristaino, all of whom concluded that while the Japanese had not had much contact with Jews before this period and believed the Nazi propaganda of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, they nevertheless chose to remain on good terms with the Jewish refugees in order to use the imagined international influence of the Jews for their own benefit.

Local attitudes toward the Jews

Antisemitism in Shanghai during World War II arose from many different camps, including the White Russians, the Germans, and the Chinese; but the one that most affected Jewish life was the attitude of the Japanese. This chapter will argue that Nazi attempts to influence Japanese policy toward the Jews in Shanghai failed due to the imagined value of the Jews in the Japanese perception.



Marcia Reynders Ristaino has argued that the aid received by the small minority of Russian Jews from the Sephardic Jewish community caused resentment among the non-Jewish White Russians. In the time between their arrival in the 1920s, and the late 1930s,

the White Russian population in Shanghai had grown to over 30,000—6,000 of whom were Jews. While the Jews received assistance from the established Jewish community, the non-Jewish White Russians were left to fend for themselves as they attempted to establish new lives. It was these White Russians who introduced antisemitic invective into Shanghai through their own press and the Russian Fascist party. However, Ristaino argues that in spite of this, the two Russian communities were able to co-exist relatively peacefully.¹ David Kranzler also notes that antisemitism was prevalent among the White Russians, who feared the refugees would economically dispossess them. Sir Victor Sassoon's public remarks in the *North China Daily News* disparaging the White Russians contributed to their hostility toward the Jews.²

While most memoirs written by Jewish refugees about their time in China portray their relationship to their Chinese neighbors as being friendly,³ Kranzler argues that the antisemitic atmosphere prevalent at the time did influence some among the Chinese intelligentsia, although he concedes that it was a small minority. He explains that Chinese attending college in America had picked up some antisemitic attitudes, while others had

¹ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*.

² Kranzler, "Restrictions against German-Jewish Refugee Immigration to Shanghai in 1939," 43, see also footnotes 13, 14.

³ See, for example, Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*; Dan Moalem, *Growing up in Shanghai* (Sydney: Sydney Jewish Museum, 2007); Deborah Strobin, Ilie Wacs, and S. J. Hodges, *An Uncommon Journey: From Vienna to Shanghai to America: A Brother and Sister Escape to Freedom During World War II* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2011); Sam Moshinsky, *Goodbye Shanghai: A Memoir* (Armadale, Vic.: Mind Film and Pub., 2009); Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and I. Betty Grebenshikoff, *Once My Name Was Sara: A Memoir* (Ventnor, N.J.: Original Seven Pub. Co., 1993). These are just a few of the many memoirs, most of which were written by those who spent their childhood in Shanghai.

been influenced by Nazi propaganda due to their positive attitude toward Germany, which had provided China with military and diplomatic assistance.⁴ Ristaino points out that the Chinese did not really distinguish between Jews and foreigners in general. Chinese nationalism and their growing adverse reaction to the Western presence in China was what most influenced their increasingly unfavorable opinion toward the Jews.⁵ Zhou Xun has argued that the Chinese accepted some aspects of Nazi propaganda, but rather than engendering anger, these portrayals caused the Chinese to respect and admire the Jews as being powerful and industrious, and holding strong community values. At the same time, though, the Chinese ruling powers, identifying with Jewish suffering, portrayed them as oppressed by the Japanese, using them to bolster their anti-Japanese propaganda.⁶

Gao Bei, who analyzes both China and Japan's Jewish policies, writes from a Chinese nationalistic perspective. She argues that Japan's policy was rooted deeply in antisemitic prejudices,⁷ while the Chinese, favorable toward the Jews, had developed a plan together with Albert Einstein to allow Jewish refugees to settle in Yunnan Province and Hainan Island.⁸ Actually, neither country historically had known antisemitism. This plan, which never materialized, seems to have been an attempt to curry the goodwill of the United

⁴ Kranzler, "Restrictions against German-Jewish Refugee Immigration to Shanghai in 1939," 44, see especially footnote 16.

⁵ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 4.

⁶ Zhou Xun, *Chinese Perceptions of the "Jews" and Judaism: A History of the Youtai* (Psychology Press, 2001).

⁷ Gao Bei, *China, Japan and the Flight of European Jewish Refugees to Shanghai, 1938-1945*, 2009, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

States and obtain their help against the Japanese in the military conflict. The Chinese, like the Japanese, accepted the Nazi claim that the Jews were internationally powerful and influential, and hoped to use this to their advantage.

The Japanese demeanor toward the Jews during this time was complex and often contradictory, influenced by Nazi propaganda but not necessarily resulting in antisemitic actions. According to David Goodman, Japanese antisemitism during this period was anchored in historical Japanese xenophobia combined with centuries-old ambivalence toward foreigners.⁹ Goodman points out that a production of the *Merchant of Venice* in 1885 was the first Shakespearean play produced in Japan, and it was taught in most Japanese public schools throughout the 20th century. He argues that the play helped to form a Japanese image of Jews as racial aliens and unscrupulous moneylenders.

When Japanese troops fought in Siberia during the Russian Revolution, they had come into first-hand contact with European antisemitism. During his tour of duty in Siberia, Colonel (then Captain) Norihiro Yasue, a linguist with the Imperial Japanese Army, had been stationed with Russian General Gregorii Semenov, a vehement antisemite. Semenov exposed Yasue to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which portrayed an international Jewish conspiracy to control the world, and which Yasue later translated into Japanese.

But whereas much of the world that read the *Protocols* read them as an evil attempt by Jewish conspirators to take over the world, Yasue and those Japanese who followed his lead took the premise at face value, and decided to harness this purported “international

⁹ See David G Goodman and Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

Jewish influence” for the good of Japan.¹⁰ Zhou Xun has argued that this use by both Japanese and Chinese of the *Protocols* and other Nazi propaganda depicting the Jews as powerful—even admiring them as such—shows how cultures can deconstruct and reconstruct almost any image of “otherness” to suit multiple purposes. Zhou argues that the complex imagery of Jews as superior and yet corrupt existed together in the Japanese mentality.¹¹ With this in mind, in the opinion of the Japanese, it was imperative to keep up good relations with the Jewish community in Japanese-occupied Shanghai. They expected that through Japanese hospitality to the Far East Jews, American Jews would in turn influence the United States to lift their boycott on Japanese goods and contribute toward the reconstruction of Manchukuo.¹²

Yasue and Inuzuka, considered experts on the “Jewish problem,” both advocated a favorable disposition toward the Jewish people.¹³ Yasue in a 1938 lecture had asked:

How should we deal with them? Obviously we should not follow the suit of Germany. From our principle of “Universal Goodwill” ... an expulsion policy is impossible. We should protect them and let them enjoy the blessings of our imperial prestige. If, as a matter of fact, the Jewish people have an actual influence over the political, the economic, the press and other fields of the world, I do not see any reason why we should have

¹⁰ See Tokayer, *The Fugu Plan*, 142; see also Pamela Rotner Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees: A World War II Dilemma* (Praeger, 1998), 27; and Kranzler, “Restrictions against German-Jewish Refugee Immigration to Shanghai in 1939,” 49–50.

¹¹ See Zhou, *Chinese Perceptions of the “Jews” and Judaism*.

¹² Norihiro Yasue, “Circular 399-G-VII,” December 27, 1938, 7–8, Israel JDC - AJDC Israel Records, Shanghai 1938-1947; see also the policy formulated at the Conference of Five Ministers in Tokyo on December 6, 1938, per Kranzler, “Restrictions against German-Jewish Refugee Immigration to Shanghai in 1939,” 49–50; see also Levine, *In Search of Sugihara*.

¹³ Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 27.

them for an enemy.... We should build up their community, have them registered and guide them under our control.¹⁴

David Goodman has argued that, although Inuzuka had recommended that Japan's policy toward the Jews be "fair and equitable, comprehensive, and in the spirit of the principle of universal brotherhood under the Emperor,"¹⁵ he was also "an officially recognized antisemite who lectured and published widely on 'The Jewish Menace.'"¹⁶ His positive statements were doubtless a manifestation of his desire to harness Jewish goodwill based on his overestimation of Jewish power.¹⁷ Sakamoto, however, basing her opinion on primary research in the Foreign Ministry archives, argues that the Japanese did not have a "pro-Jewish policy," but rather, the tolerance toward the Jews was a result of the rudimentary state of Japanese immigration policies, the overestimation of the influence of the Jews, and lack of coordination among the various branches of the Japanese government.¹⁸

It was in this complex milieu of imagined Jewishness that the Nazis inaugurated their campaign to influence Asian opinion toward the Jews. As early as 1934, Franz Hasenöhr, the leader of the unofficial Nazi party in China and East Asia, had begun to establish a rapport with many German communities in China, hoping to "Nazify" the German communities. He succeeded in building Nazi party affiliate groups throughout

¹⁴ Yasue, "Circular 399-G-VII," 5–6.

¹⁵ Goodman, *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, 129; see also Ben-Ami Shillony, *The Jews & the Japanese: The Successful Outsiders* (Rutland, Vt.: C.E. Tuttle, 1992), 212–213.

¹⁶ Goodman, *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, 128.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 129–133.

¹⁸ Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 4.

China. The largest and most active of these was in Shanghai, where he resided.

Hasenöhrle was later transferred to Germany to become an official in the Foreign Section of Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry, but by then he had laid the foundation for a Nazi presence in the Far East.¹⁹

Nazi influence in the Far East continued to increase throughout the 1930s. According to Donald McKale, in 1936 and 1937 the Nazi party further expanded its influence over German diplomats in the East. Japan and Germany signed the Anti-Comintern Pact,²⁰ uniting them against the Soviet Union, and immediately afterward, Germany declared the Japanese to be "honorary Aryans." In 1938, the two countries signed an "Agreement for Cultural Cooperation between Japan and Germany."²¹ That same year, the leader of the Nazi party in Shanghai, Alfred Kroeger, succeeded in removing a local Jew from the Agfa Company. By the end of 1938 a number of Jews had lost their positions in German schools in the Far East, including in Japan and Shanghai.²²

¹⁹ Donald M. McKale, "The Nazi Party in the Far East, 1931-45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 2 (April 1, 1977): 293, 296.

²⁰ For more on the Anti-Comintern Pact, see Wolfgang Michalka, "From Anti-Comintern Pact to the Euro-Asiatic Bloc: Ribbentrop's Alternative Concept to Hitler's Foreign Policy Programme," *From Aspects of the Third Reich Edited by HW Koch, London: Macmillan, 1985, 267-84*; and Esmonde Manning Robertson, *Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans, 1933-1939* (Longmans, 1963).

²¹ This agreement was ratified on November 22, 1938, not long after Kristallnacht. For more on Japan-Germany relations, see Robert Cryer and Neil Boister, *Documents on the Tokyo International Military Tribunal: Charter, Indictment, and Judgments* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 216.

²² McKale, "The Nazi Party in the Far East, 1931-45," 300.

Under Nazi influence, antisemitic writings and sentiments increased, yet Nazi antisemitic policies were never carried out violently as they were in Europe. Donald McKale has argued that the Nazi party's work in Japan "had a far more negative than positive impact" on the Japanese opinion of Nazi ideology due to its racial orientation and propaganda. The Japanese could not accept that they themselves were an "inferior race," and found Germany's continual disregard for diplomatic channels objectionable.²³

By 1940, Germany had conquered most of Europe, and Japan saw the advantage of an even closer alliance. At the same time, Germany was counting on the Japanese to aid them in their plans to advance on the Soviet Union. Hitler sent Joachim von Ribbentrop to Japan to negotiate the Tripartite Pact, which was ratified by Japan, Germany and Italy on September 27, 1940, and later joined by other nations to create what became known as the Axis Powers.²⁴

Along with this increase in cooperation with Germany, Nazi infiltration had deepened in Japan and a noticeable anti-foreign feeling on the part of the Japanese began escalating in Shanghai.²⁵ Rumors began to circulate among the Jewish communities that Japan was planning to implement Nazi anti-Jewish measures. In December 1941, the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* reported that Berlin had begun a violent campaign against Shanghai

²³ Ibid., 306.

²⁴ For more on German-Japanese relations during World War II, see Ernst Leopold Presseisen, *Germany and Japan; a Study in Totalitarian Diplomacy, 1933-1941* (Fertig, 1969); Cryer and Boister, *Documents on the Tokyo International Military Tribunal*; Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany; Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-36* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

²⁵ Hugh Byas, "Nazi Infiltration Deepens in Japan," *New York Times*, October 20, 1940, sec. The Week In Review.

Jewish refugees, portraying them as a danger to the Japanese war effort. Joseph Goebbels, the Reich Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany, had sent anti-Jewish films to Japan, “explaining” to the Japanese “the danger of the Jewish menace.” Anti-Jewish demonstrations by students and other pro-Nazi elements occurred in Harbin, in Japanese-occupied Manchukuo near the Russian border.²⁶

Even Captain Inuzuka, who had not demonstrated hostility to the refugees, began to exhibit some animosity. Around 1940, Inuzuka had asked the CFA to cooperate in finding a solution to the refugee problem. At that time, the Jewish population in Hongkew had grown until it was approximately 20% that of the Japanese, and thousands were residing there without the required permits. This had led to an increase in rents and in the cost of living, and resulted in numerous protests from the Japanese living there. In addition, Inuzuka mentioned that there had been street fighting between refugees and White Russians,²⁷ noting that all of these violations of regulations had “greatly impaired the sympathy and the goodwill which the Japanese authorities have held for Jewish people.”²⁸ David Kranzler has suggested that the increased hostility of the Japanese residents of Shanghai toward the Jewish refugees was probably the most significant factor in the immigration restrictions that had been imposed in 1939.

²⁶ “Funds of Jewish Relief Groups in Shanghai Reported Taken over by Japanese,” *JTA*, December 21, 1941.

²⁷ Of the 30,000 Russians who resided in Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s, 6,000 were Jews. For more on the relationship between the White Russian community and the refugees in Shanghai, see Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*.

²⁸ Inuzuka to Herzberg, September 17, 1941, 1.

Adding to the Japanese hostility, Inuzuka was angry that the CFA had not been willing to assume responsibility or cooperate with the Japanese authorities in evicting the “Jewish undesirables who have no permits,” referring to Jews who were moving into Hongkew without specific Japanese permission. The CFA had claimed that they could not assume responsibility and did not have the power to obtain the cooperation of the *Jüdische Gemeinde*, the refugee association, to evict anyone. Inuzuka interpreted this unwillingness to mean that the CFA was intentionally electing to disregard “the important fact that the only solution of the matter lies in the unqualified and active cooperation with the Japanese authorities.” What Inuzuka perceived as the discourteous inaction of the CFA, together with Sir Victor Sassoon’s anti-Japanese statements in the newspapers, created “a very bad impression on the minds of the local Japanese residents,” and neither Inuzuka nor the Japanese authorities could understand why the local influential Jewish organizations and individuals would permit such a situation by taking no action against it.²⁹

Once war with the United States broke out, the Jews lost much of their perceived value in the Japanese imagination as influencers of U.S. policy. Their usefulness as tools to obtain American reconstruction aid was no longer relevant. On March 11, 1942, a decision was made by a top level conference canceling the “friendly” policy toward the Jews that had been in place since the December 1938 Five Ministers’ Conference.³⁰ As a result of this decision, the Japanese leadership in Shanghai began to display mounting hostility toward the Jews.

²⁹ Ibid., 2.

³⁰ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 191.

Increasing Nazi anti-Jewish propaganda, in an atmosphere of uncertainty, sparked wild rumors of impending anti-Jewish actions. As the Jewish community learned of these possible operations, their leaders' first reaction, rather than warning the refugees, was to limit information so as to avoid panic. At the same time, the refugee leadership attempted to influence the Japanese leadership and was able to secure the postponement of the "ghettoization." This section will explore the Japanese motivations for this postponement and examine how the Japanese continued to project their supposed goodwill even as they finally concentrated the Jews into a ghetto-like restricted area, thus limiting their freedom and further impairing their ability to subsist. Margolis' and Siegel's leadership was a key factor that enabled the Jewish communities to begin to cooperate with each other in managing the needs of the ghettoized Jewish refugees once the JDC workers were interned.

Captain Inuzuka left Shanghai in June of 1942 and Captain Saneyoshi, who replaced him, was not as interested in the "Jewish problem." At the same time, new Gendarmerie officers began coming daily from Japan to visit the office at Hongkew. The fact that Margolis and Siegel were enemy nationals had not made much difference to Inuzuka and the previous officials, but Margolis sensed that the new officials were not so comfortable with them.³¹

Nazi influence continued to grow. In early 1942, Christian Zinsser, chief of the Gestapo bureau in Shanghai, began conducting an anti-Jewish campaign in the city,

³¹ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 14.

removing books by Jewish authors from Shanghai libraries³² and accusing the Jews of smuggling weapons to the Chinese.³³ Particularly influential was the commercial attaché of the German Consulate, Adolf von Puttkamer, who had been sent to the Far East to open a German Information Bureau, which appeared on the surface to be a news and information service but was in fact a producer of propaganda broadcasts and leaflets.³⁴ At this time, the Germans were still victorious, Stalingrad was surrounded, and the Japanese were seeing one victory after another in Asia.

This increase in Nazi influence was even noted by the international press. On February 23, 1942, S. I. Dorfson reported in a special cable to the *Jewish Morning Journal*³⁵ that the Japanese had taken another step in following the Nazi pattern, making preparations to induct Jewish refugees in the Far East to do compulsory labor. They reported that the Japanese had ordered the refugees to furnish a list immediately of all engineers, technicians and other artisans among them for compulsory labor.³⁶ This article

³² "Typhus Raging Among Refugees in Shanghai, Gestapo Conducting Anti-Jewish Crusade," *JTA*, May 8, 1942. The JTA misspelled his name as Zissner instead of Zinsser, and American periodicals picked it up this way.

³³ "Japs Give Gestapo Full Control Over 20,000 Jewish Refugees," *The Jewish Criterion of Pittsburgh*, accessed September 27, 2013, http://pjn.library.cmu.edu/books/CALL1/CRI_1942_100_002_05151942/vol0/part0/copy0/ocr/txt/0019.txt.

³⁴ Ristaino, in *Port of Last Resort*, 178; names him as Baron Karl-Jesco von Puttkamer; However, Dicker in *Wanderers and Settlers in the Far East: A Century of Jewish Life in China and Japan*, 114 says this was his son, Adolf instead. It is more likely that Dicker is correct, since Adolf was a journalist stationed in Shanghai and his father, Karl-Jesco, was a naval adjutant to Adolf Hitler.

³⁵ The report was printed in the *Jewish Morning Journal (Der Morgn Zhurnal)* on March 4, 1942.

³⁶ S.I. Dorfson, "Special Cable from Mr. S. I. Dorfson to the Jewish Morning Journal," September 4, 1941, AR 1933/44:462, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China.

reported the truth only partially, as in actuality all foreign nationals—not only the Jews—were required to register by July 20 of that year.³⁷ This was not specifically an antisemitic move as it was portrayed, but in light of Nazi inroads, the Jewish press reported it as such.

In the summer of 1942, rumors began to circulate among the Jewish communities that the Japanese were planning a major action against the refugees. There were whispers that the Japanese were going to load the refugees onto ships, take them out to the ocean, and drown them. The rumors said that Josef Meisinger, the Gestapo representative in Tokyo known as the “Butcher of Warsaw,” met in Shanghai with “representatives of the Japanese Consulate, the military police, and leaders of the Japanese Bureau of Jewish Affairs to discuss the German plan for the final solution in Shanghai.” These rumors spoke of the “Meisinger Plan” which included arresting all the Jews in Shanghai in a surprise attack on the Jewish New Year, and either setting them adrift on old ships to die at sea, working them to death in abandoned salt mines, or setting up a concentration camp where medical experiments could be performed on them and they could be left to die suffering.³⁸ Members of the International Committee urged Margolis to cable America for help. It was a natural reaction for a Jewish community in trouble to reach out to international Jewry, but receiving such aid was physically impossible in light of the War.

³⁷ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 186.

³⁸ Vámos, “‘Home Afar’: The Life of Central European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai during World War II,” 6; Pan, “Shanghai: A Haven for Holocaust Victims”; see also Tokayer, *The Fugu Plan*, 223; and Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 178.

Meanwhile, anti-Jewish actions in Shanghai continued to increase. In November 1942, *The New York Times* reported that according to Berlin radio, Japanese authorities in Shanghai had ordered all Jewish owners of automobiles to display a special marker on the front of their vehicles to indicate that the cars belonged to Jews.³⁹ Two days later, Berlin radio reported that all Jews in Shanghai had been ordered by the Japanese authorities to have their identification papers stamped with the letter “J”.⁴⁰ On February 6, 1943 a typically antisemitic article appeared in the *Shanghai Times*, mentioning the names of Sir Victor Sassoon and many of the wealthy and prominent Shanghai Jews. It spoke of how they had made their money through opium and other disreputable means, using these Jewish men as an example of dangerous “International Jewry.”⁴¹

The establishment of the Shanghai “Ghetto”

As the war progressed and Nazi antisemitic influence increased, the Japanese instituted a policy of segregation toward the Jewish refugees. In 1943, they were required to relocate into a “designated area,” leaving behind their homes and sometimes their livelihoods. In the difficult atmosphere of the ghetto, the refugees were finally able to unite to provide for the most needy among them, and to build a sense of cohesion through the development of cultural, educational and communal structures.

³⁹ “Shanghai Jews Must Mark Autos,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1942; see also “Japan Orders Jews in Shanghai to Display Special Marker on Their Automobiles,” *JTA*, November 8, 1942.

⁴⁰ “Japan Stamps Passports of Shanghai Jews with Letter ‘J,’” *JTA*, November 9, 1942. These many “reports” were unverified.

⁴¹ *Shanghai Times*, February 6, 1943; quoted in N. A. Pelcovits, “European Refugees in Shanghai,” *Far Eastern Survey* 15, no. 21 (October 23, 1946): 323.



Rumors that the Japanese were planning to round up Shanghai Jews into a “designated area” began to circulate. Back in July 1942 the JTA had reported that “an unnamed Japanese newspaper” quoted by a radio station in Rome had stated that interning the Shanghai Jews in a ghetto was necessary “in order to prevent the Chinese being exploited by the Jews.”⁴² In August of 1942, Mitsugu Shibata,⁴³ a Japanese Vice-Consul in Shanghai, confirmed those rumors. He approached Michel Speelman to request a confidential meeting of the Jewish leadership in order to inform them of the intentions of the Japanese authorities with regard to the refugees in Shanghai. The group that gathered in Speelman’s residence to meet with Shibata included two representatives of the Sephardic Jewish community, two representatives of the German Jewish community, Mr. Boris Topas, then chairman of the Russian Jewish community in Shanghai, Michel Speelman and J. Bitker.⁴⁴ Kranzler believes that this was probably an ad-hoc committee that never met again and had no connection to any committees that were later formed.⁴⁵ Shibata, if he was indeed a representative of the Japanese Consulate, would have had occasion to attend

⁴² “Japanese Newspaper Urges Internment of Shanghai Jews in Ghetto,” *JTA*, July 27, 1942.

⁴³ JDC correspondence misspells his name as “Shibota.” The proper spelling is attested in a *Shanghai Times* article of March 7, 1942 as well as Inuzuka’s own list of guests at an event, *Yudaya mondai to Nihon no kosaku*, p. 434. Ristaino comments that her search through Japanese consular posts did not find his name, but “a Japanese source identifies him as an economic consultant affiliated with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Shanghai.” (See footnote 110, p. 311; page 180; and footnote 83, p. 316 in Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*.)

⁴⁴ Bitker, “Memorandum,” 1.

⁴⁵ Kranzler, “The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945,” 311.

periodic meetings of Japanese representatives of the Consulate together with the Municipal Council, Army, Navy, and Air Force. He informed the group of Jewish leaders gathered at Speelman's residence that the Japanese were under heavy pressure from the Gestapo and the German Consulate to isolate Jews.⁴⁶

Shibata informed the Jewish leaders that the Germans had pointed out to the Japanese that Jews, as enemies of Hitler who wanted nothing more than to defeat Germany, could be expected to have similar sympathies with respect to Germany's ally, Japan.⁴⁷ In response, the Japanese authorities were considering the relocation of Jews, particularly refugees, into a "designated area" in Hongkew, a crowded space less than one square mile⁴⁸ located in the northern part of the city where 8,000 of the refugees were already living.⁴⁹ Shibata implied that the Jewish community should begin organizing all available resources to "soften the severity of the conditions which might be imposed in the near future."⁵⁰

When faced with this threat, the Jewish leadership agreed to overcome their differences and pull together to confront it. Those present at the meeting determined to contact the Japanese officials who had made the decision, among them General Takuro

⁴⁶ For more on the influence of the Nazi party on the Japanese, see McKale, "The Nazi Party in the Far East, 1931-45."

⁴⁷ At this point during the War, Bitker claims that German influence with the Japanese was considerable and various ideas were being considered by the Japanese leadership, including sending all Jewish refugees to one of the islands at the mouth of the Yangtze River near Shanghai. (Bitker, "Memorandum," 2.)

⁴⁸ The area was actually about half a mile long and three-quarters of a mile wide, encompassing roughly 40 square blocks. (Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 192.)

⁴⁹ Kranzler, "The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945," 322; for sources of population statistics, see footnote 27.

⁵⁰ Bitker, "Memorandum," 2.

Matsui (1887-1969), the commander of the Japanese 5th Division.⁵¹ Dr. Abraham Kaufmann of the Harbin Jewish community was asked to contact the “high official” in Tokyo, who was possibly Premier Yosuke Matsuoka, who had previously aided the refugees in Kobe, Japan in 1941.⁵² In spite of these and other high-level attempts, the Jewish community was not in a sufficiently powerful position to influence the Japanese to rescind their order.

Hoping to avoid panic and also wanting to protect Shibata, this group of Jewish leaders decided not to disclose what they had learned to the community at large. This was reminiscent of the tactics employed by the persecuted Jewish leadership in Nazi Europe in keeping information from the general Jewish public. However, the information leaked out and the entire community soon learned about the meeting. The Foreign Division of the Japanese Gendarmerie heard of this, and they arrested all who had attended the meeting, taking them to the notorious “Bridge House,” where the Japanese kept prisoners charged with espionage, sabotage and other hostile acts against Japan.⁵³ This jail, infested with typhus, caused the death of a large number of prisoners. The men were separated, questioned for several days, and then released—some sooner than others. Shibata himself

⁵¹ “Biography of Lieutenant-General Takuro Matsui (1887-1969), Japan,” *The Generals of WWII*, accessed July 25, 2014, <http://www.generals.dk/general/Matsui/Takuro/Japan.html>.

⁵² Fritz Kaufmann, “The Experience of the Shanghai Jewish Community under the Japanese in World War II” (Unpublished Manuscript of a speech by Fritz Kaufmann before the Shanghai Tiffin Club, New York, February 12, 1963); quoted in Kranzler, “The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945,” 313, footnote 9.

⁵³ For more on the infamous “Bridge House,” see James Ross, *Escape to Shanghai: A Jewish Community in China* (New York, Toronto: Free Press, Maxwell Macmillan Canada, Maxwell Macmillan International, 1994), 192 ff.

was arrested by the Japanese, stripped of his post with the Consular service, and sent back to Japan, never to be heard from by the Jews of Shanghai again.⁵⁴

The arrest of these leaders precipitated the resignation of Speelman and almost every other member of the Committee for Assistance out of fear of being connected with the refugee problem.⁵⁵ Dr. Cohn, a close friend of Kubota, suggested that in its place be formed the Shanghai United Jewish Committee of Communal Representatives, an organization intended to present a unified front to the Japanese authorities. The committee would consist of representatives of the three major Jewish communities, the Sephardic, Ashkenazic, and German groups. Its aims would be:

1. To act as an authorized representative body of the entire local Jewish population for furthering and facilitating closer cooperation among the various public bodies and with the local Nipponese and Chinese Authorities.
2. To lead and advise the local Jewish Communal Association in their works but without interfering with their inner life where such undertakings do not have any influence on the whole population.
3. To create and develop a feeling of mutual confidence and cooperation among the various language groups of the local Jewish population and to further closer friendships between Jewish and non-Jewish groups, of Shanghai.
4. To endeavor, to clarify and to educate the Jewish population, especially the newcomers, to a better understanding of the customs and peoples of Nippon and China as well as introduce the true status

⁵⁴ Bitker, "Memorandum," 2-3.

⁵⁵ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 15.

of Jewry to the Nipponese and Chinese, thus automatically better understanding will produce better relationship [sic].⁵⁶

From these desired aims one can discern the perceived need to present a unified voice to the Japanese authorities, which presumably did not exist. From the aspiration to avoid interference in the internal matters of each of the Jewish communities, one can see that such interference of the leadership upon each other's communities was an issue that needed to be addressed. The same can be said for the need for mutual cooperation, not only among the Jewish communities, but also in relation to the Japanese and Chinese populations. Kranzler stated that this effort met with little success, basing his conclusion on the fact that the existence of this committee is mentioned only in A. J. Cohn's own memorandum, and never appears in any other source.⁵⁷ This is not surprising in light of the inability of the Shanghai Jewish communities to act together in a unified manner, even in times of such immediate danger.

To quell the panic that resulted from this leak of information about the ghetto, the Japanese assured the Jewish leaders that the rumors were not true, since "the Japanese authorities are always fair and just to everyone."⁵⁸ Kranzler's research revealed that the Japanese Foreign Ministry had approved a form of "strict surveillance" of the refugees as early as January 1942, and that the formation of the ghetto had already been approved by

⁵⁶ Dr. A. J. Cohn, "Memo," September 9, 1942 (YIVO #19). Cited by Kranzler, M.A., pp. 86-87, in Kranzler, "The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945," 316-317, see also footnote 17.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 317.

⁵⁸ Bitker, "Memorandum," 3.

November 1942.⁵⁹ In actuality, the restrictions imposed on refugees were not implemented until the following year, and it is possible that Shibota's leak was the reason for the delay.⁶⁰

In evaluating the statement that Japanese authorities were "always fair and just," Hazel Marcus and Shinobu Kitayama's study of Asian cultures becomes relevant. They argue that "many Asian cultures have distinct conceptions of individuality that insist on the fundamental relatedness of individuals to each other," and demonstrate that in these cultures "the emphasis is on attending to others, fitting in, and harmonious interdependence with them."⁶¹ It is an interesting thought that Japanese self-perception as fair, just, and harmonious was one factor that helped prevent the kind of brutality that the Nazis exhibited toward the Jews.

On February 18,⁶² however, the newspapers and radio officially announced that all "stateless persons" who had come to Shanghai since 1937 would have to move into a "designated area"⁶³ by May 1943.⁶⁴ Kranzler specifically draws attention the intentional

⁵⁹ Kranzler, "The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945," 315, footnote 15.

⁶⁰ Bitker, "Memorandum," 3.

⁶¹ Hazel R Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation," *Psychological Review* 98, no. 2 (1991): 224; See also Steven D. Cousins, "Culture and Self-Perception in Japan and the United States," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56, no. 1 (January 1989): 124-31.

⁶² Margolis later mistakenly recalls the date as February 8.

⁶³ This area was comprised of some 40 blocks, slightly less than one square mile, and was also populated by 100,000 Chinese who were not willing to leave their homes.

⁶⁴ "Internment of Thousands of Jewish Refugees by Japan Reported in Nazi Broadcast," *JTA*, May 25, 1943.

use of the terms “stateless person” instead of “Jew” and “designated area” instead of “ghetto,” noting that even in private, only these euphemisms were permitted.⁶⁵ This decree was clearly meant for the 17,000 Central European immigrants who had fled the Nazis, and did not apply to the established Sephardic, White Russian, or Russian Ashkenazi Jewish communities. This effectively meant that most of the Russian Jews who had arrived in the previous wave of immigration could still move about without restrictions.⁶⁶

Kranzler has argued that it was “Japan’s tenuous and delicate relations with the Soviet Union throughout World War II, and her desire to avoid any unnecessary friction, that prompted her policy towards all ‘stateless’ Russians, including Russian Jews.” He bases his argument partially on a top-secret document of the Japanese Foreign office (February 9, 1943) that specifically excluded Russians (Jews and non-Jews) on the grounds that “there is no danger of causing international complications.”⁶⁷

Tsutomu Kubota was the Japanese official in charge of the organization of this “removal.” Kubota described the “designated area” as “neither a ghetto nor jail, but an area which is full of hope for the refugees and in which they may build a haven for themselves

⁶⁵ Kranzler, “The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945,” 319.

⁶⁶ “Proclamation by Japanese Authorities Establishing the Designated Area,” 1943, YIVO Archives, Shanghai Collection, RG 243, 11 (1/626). This designated area was later known as the “Shanghai Ghetto.”

⁶⁷ Kranzler, “The History of the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945,” 340; see also Arch Carey, *The War Years at Shanghai, 1941-45-48*. (New York: Vantage Press, 1967), 87; and Dicker, *Wanderers and Settlers in the Far East: A Century of Jewish Life in China and Japan*, 118–119.

where they can carry on peacefully and with great advantage to themselves.”⁶⁸

According to Japanese authorities, this was being done “...due to the desire of the Japanese Government to alleviate the position of the refugees and enable them to engage in productive work.”⁶⁹

Although there would be no barbed wire in this area, after August 10, 1943, residents could only leave with a pass issued with special permission of the Japanese authorities, mostly for students or for those who worked outside the ghetto. The infamous Kano Ghoya, a cruel and sadistic petty tyrant who called himself “King of the Jews,” was in charge of issuing these passes, and did so brutally and capriciously.⁷⁰ J. Bitker and others appealed to Kubota, who was in charge of refugee affairs, to replace the “beast of a man by the name of Goya [sic]”, and secured a promise that he would be replaced. Within a month, this was done, and passes became freely available.⁷¹ This followed the traditional Jewish pattern of appealing to the authorities to relieve harsh treatment. It was to the credit of the Japanese that they acquiesced.

The Japanese leadership emphatically advised the established Jewish residents of Shanghai who were not affected by the proclamation to form their own committee to aid

⁶⁸ Cited in Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 199, footnote 56.

⁶⁹ “Japan Confirms Internment of 15,000 Jewish Refugees in Ghetto in Hongkong [sic] Area,” *JTA*, June 20, 1943.

⁷⁰ For more on Ghoya, see Tokayer, *The Fugu Plan*, 250–251; Gruenberger, “The Jewish Refugees in Shanghai,” 342–343; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 199–200. He is also mentioned in many memoirs such as Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*; and Eber, *Voices from Shanghai*.

⁷¹ Bitker, “Memorandum,” 5.

the refugees and their resettlement. This was reminiscent of the Nazi tactic of appointing malleable committees to supervise their constituents. In confidential deliberations, the Jewish leaders of SACRA decided to assist the refugees but to delay the move as long as possible using every means at their disposal, including sabotage, hoping for a turn in the tide of the war. The work on this new committee was thankless, unpopular, and misunderstood by many refugees.⁷² Margolis later observed:

The Shanghai Jews⁷³ were taken by complete surprise. It is interesting that the refugee group itself took this proclamation with considerably more calm than the local Russian and German Jews, who saw this as the first threat to themselves even though they were not immediately affected by it. To the refugees, who had taken one blow after another, this was just another blow. They believed the Allies were close to winning the war, so they simply had to tighten their belts and see this thing through until the day of victory. I must express my admiration for the way in which the majority of these people took a proclamation that really meant the end of their livelihood. It meant that those refugees—and there were thousands—who had established good and comfortable businesses in the French Concession and in the International Settlement would have to liquidate these businesses and move into the segregated area.⁷⁴

The fact that the established Shanghai Jews were completely surprised by the declaration of a ghetto is reminiscent of the way the Jews in Germany and Central Europe refused to recognize the Nazi danger that was approaching. They had never expected that the kind of persecution that was going on in Europe would come to them. Their reaction—displaying a greater fear than did the refugees, also shows their lack of mental or emotional preparation for the discrimination they had been facing. Even though the recent

⁷² Ibid., 3–4.

⁷³ i.e. The long-time residents

⁷⁴ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 19.

declaration had applied only to the refugees, the Jewish leaders now began to see that they could easily be next and were filled with apprehension.

The Shanghai “ghetto” was soon to be established. On the night of February 23, Kubota called a meeting of the Ashkenazi community. He told the several hundred men present that this proclamation had been issued. He claimed it was not because of any antisemitic feeling on the part of the Japanese people, but because the housing and feeding problem in Shanghai had become so acute that some plan had to be developed whereby thousands of stateless persons could be put under some form of control. Whether he said this due to residual Japanese perception of the “international power” of the Jews or whether he hoped to avoid panic cannot be discerned from his statement. However, he appealed to the Jewish people to cooperate with him in making this area a place where people could live. In reality, his appeal was virtually an ultimatum in that he gave this group the choice of cooperating with him and helping him to segregate the stateless people, or having the Japanese take matters into their own hands and do it their own way—clearly a veiled threat.⁷⁵

Many of the refugees were forced to relocate and give up their homes and businesses, as they were confined in the restricted area. They were now truly on their own. The future looked dim. In May 1943 the Jewish refugees who had arrived after 1937 were relocated into the Hongkew area of Shanghai, which became known as the Shanghai Ghetto (see chapter 5). The Red Cross anticipated that by the beginning of August 1943, approximately 20,000 Jewish people would be living in this segregated area. Of this group,

⁷⁵ Ibid.

some 6,000 were already utterly destitute and just managed to exist on the meals provided by the Jewish Communal kitchens. About 9,000 were in only slightly better condition and were likely to become totally destitute in the next few months. Another 2,000 to 3,000 made a modest living as tailors, shoe makers, hairdressers, office employees, etc., but would be in danger of losing their income once they moved into the designated zone. Those who had shops, factories, or professional offices in other parts of the town would have to try to liquidate their present positions and reestablish themselves in the new area.⁷⁶ Their clientele, of course, would be limited to those who lived in the area—but who in the designated area would be able to afford to buy expensive furs, for example? About 3,000 others would have their own means of support.⁷⁷

SACRA's reports differed slightly from those of the Red Cross. They estimated that at least 10,000 people in the "designated area" would be in need of full or supplementary relief, but the funds available would only be enough to provide one meal a day to 3,600, though they hoped to bring this number up to 5,000. In addition to the one meal a day, 2,870 people were living in the five JDC camps and 4,669 were receiving six ounces of bread daily. Just to maintain this minimal status quo, SACRA estimated that it would require a budget of CRB \$1,000,000 per month. SACRA planned to be able to raise a total of CRB \$400,000 per month and expected the rest of the budget to come from the Shanghai

⁷⁶ Only "qualified" people whose livelihoods "served the public" (such as doctors or engineers) could easily obtain renewable permits to leave the designated area (Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 199.)

⁷⁷ Peter Wehrli, *Notes on the Newly Created Area in Shanghai in Which Stateless Refugees Will Reside*, June 24, 1943, 1-2, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

JDC. By August 1943 the Kitchen Fund had succeeded in securing 900

Patenschaften, each of which had been increased from CRB \$50 to CRB \$100 per month.⁷⁸

In September 1943, Kubota ordered that all monies being used for the refugees should go through SACRA's Relief Department, which meant that the disbursements of both the Kitchen Fund and the Shanghai JDC would have to go through SACRA. In addition, the Ashkenazi community had imposed a tax upon its members to be paid to SACRA for the maintenance of the refugees, reminiscent of the Middle Ages, when the entire community was held responsible to tax itself to meet its obligations to the host nation.⁷⁹ An analysis of the income of SACRA from August 8, 1942, when it began function, to June 30, 1943, shows the following:

Kitchen Fund (<i>Patenschaften</i> and one-time contributions).....	17.00%
Income from refugees (token amount paid for food).....	14.75%
Shanghai JDC.....	59.50%
Centraljewcom.....	8.75% ⁸⁰

SACRA found it necessary to raise funds separately from the Ashkenazi community in order to build barracks and repair houses for additional housing facilities for those persons moving into the segregated area. By August 1943, SACRA had raised CRB \$1,500,000. The houses and barracks put up by SACRA initially netted a substantial income,

⁷⁸ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 20–21.

⁷⁹ For more on medieval Jewish community patterns of taxation, see David Biale, *Power & Powerlessness in Jewish History* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010); for medieval community taxation patterns under Muslim rule, see Jane S. Gerber, *Jewish Society in Fez 1450-1700: Studies in Communal and Economic Life*, *Studies in Judaism in Modern Times* 6 (Brill, 1980).

⁸⁰ Margolis, *Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941 to September 1943*, 21.

since at least 90% of those persons who moved into the segregated area could pay rent. However, Margolis notes that as time went on, the income from these properties was bound to decrease due to the gradual impoverishment of the refugees living in that area.⁸¹

Although much of the literature—particularly the memoirs—refers to the “restricted area” as a “ghetto,” in reality it was far from being a ghetto in the Nazi sense. There were no walls around the area, and passes were issued to enter and leave. The Japanese did allow schools to continue, as well as theater performances and other entertainment. These relative freedoms helped significantly to uphold morale in a very difficult situation.

It was the American democratizing influence through Margolis and Siegel that encouraged the refugees to organize and apply themselves to their survival. The *Patenschaft* sponsorship system that Margolis had encouraged continued to provide for the neediest; the kitchen she established was able to feed the poor efficiently; the contacts she made with the Polish ambassador, the Quakers, the International Red Cross and ORT continued to aid the refugees in the ghetto. And the committees she had set up and inspired continued to function (albeit under the Japanese-appointed governing committee). It was largely because of Margolis and Siegel and the support of the JDC and the American Jewish community that they were able to survive.

Thankfully, from January 1944 until the end of the Pacific War in August 1945, life in the restricted area was significantly eased as funds from JDC once more began to arrive.

⁸¹ Ibid., 20.

While general conditions in Shanghai had gone from bad to worse,⁸² with these JDC funds, the local Committee was able to provide the refugees with bread and one hot meal per day. A second meal was given to the aged, undernourished and ill, and some received cash in place of meals. The five camps continued to be managed by the local JDC Committee, which with the additional funds was able to supply soap, baths and reopen a hospital, medical and dental clinics. They were also able to aid patients in isolation, those in mental hospitals, and help to pay for funerals.⁸³

The restoration of JDC funds came about through Margolis' intercession. After her repatriation, Margolis immediately traveled with Moses Leavitt and Joseph Schwartz to Washington and met personally with Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau (1891-1967). Interestingly, Morgenthau's father, Henry Morgenthau, Sr. (1856-1946), had been a partial catalyst to the founding of JDC. While serving as U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, he had sent a cable to American philanthropist Jacob Schiff in August 1914 asking for a \$50,000 contribution to aid the Jews of Palestine, who were cut off from European support by the Turks and were in danger of starvation. Partially in response to Morgenthau Sr.'s cable, representatives from multiple U.S. Jewish organizations met that November to address the problem and founded what later became the JDC.⁸⁴

⁸² Carl Brahn to Laura Margolis, April 3, 1944, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁸³ Joseph Schwartz to Moses Leavitt, May 29, 1944, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁸⁴ The organization was called the "American Jewish Relief Committee for Sufferers from the War." This Committee later merged with the "American Jewish Committee" which had been founded a decade earlier by Reform Jews, and the Orthodox "Central Relief Committee for the Relief of Jews Suffering through the War." Together, the three

Morgenthau (Jr.) was particularly anxious to know if any of the money Margolis had been raising in Shanghai had also gone to the Japanese. She assured him it had not—that it had all gone to the refugees, but admitted that indirectly it could have been considered a help to the Japanese.⁸⁵ She appealed to him to allow funds to be sent to ameliorate the desperate conditions of the refugees.

Upon hearing of Margolis' return, Roy McDonald, Acting Chief of the Economic Intelligence Division of the Office of Economic Warfare in Washington, DC, also requested to contact her to learn what they could about the economic situation in Asia.⁸⁶ Because of Margolis' influence on Morgenthau and McDonald, in December 1943, JDC received permission to re-establish communications with the Committee in Shanghai via the International Red Cross, authorizing them to borrow additional funds during 1944 in order to continue JDC program of aid.⁸⁷ While Margolis was still in the internment hospital, she had worked out a code with J. Bitker: if he received a telegram from her congratulating his daughter on her birthday, that would mean that the authorities had given their approval. Such a telegram arrived at a moment when the refugees were extremely desperate.⁸⁸

organizations formed the "Joint Distribution Committee of Funds for Jewish War Sufferers," later known as the Joint Distribution Committee, or the JDC. ("A Joint Effort: JDC's Beginnings, 1914-1921.")

⁸⁵ Kaufman, "Interview," 37.

⁸⁶ Leavitt to McDonald, "Letter OW-2-3-EMF."

⁸⁷ Jeannette Robbins to Sarah Herbst, April 13, 1944, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944; Henrietta Buchman to Sigmund Helwing, May 17, 1944, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944; Marc Peter to Moses Leavitt, February 1, 1944, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁸⁸ Bitker, "Memorandum," 5.

When the loans became no longer feasible, JDC applied for and received a license from the Treasury Department to remit payments of U.S. \$20,000 per month through Saly Mayer, JDC representative in neutral Switzerland, for transmission to the refugee Committee in Shanghai.⁸⁹ Because the Japanese did not allow funds to come from enemy nations, Meyer worked out a plan whereby the JDC would support the Swiss Jewish community's own refugees and the Swiss Jewish community would in turn send funds to China through the Jewish Refugee Committee in St. Gallen, Switzerland.⁹⁰ It was in large part because of Margolis' efforts that the Treasury Department in January 1944 allowed the renewed transfer of funds to Shanghai and enabled the refugees to survive the remainder of the War.⁹¹

Conclusion

Antisemitism was not endemic to the Chinese and Japanese cultures. Neither had distinguished significantly between Jews and non-Jews in previous contacts with the Western world. However, with the rise of Nazi ideology and the increase of German influence in Asia, anti-Jewish propaganda was introduced into both cultures, and thereby into Shanghai. The Chinese, influenced by nationalism, exhibited an adverse reaction to all

⁸⁹ Moses Leavitt to War Refugee Board, June 15, 1944, AR 1933/44:463, AJDC NY Records, Countries and Regions: China, General, 1942-1944.

⁹⁰ Bitker, "Memorandum," 5; see also Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*.

⁹¹ For a study of American Jewish fundraising during this period, see Rachel Beth Deblinger, "In a World Still Trembling': American Jewish Philanthropy and the Shaping of Holocaust Survivor Narratives in Postwar America (1945 -- 1953)" (Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, 2014), <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/pqdft/docview/1537435837/abstract/2B6ADC730CCC4666PQ/1?accountid=7287>.

things Western, including the Jews residing in Shanghai. However, at the same time, they admired the Jewish culture for its strong family values and industriousness.

The Japanese reaction, based on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* statements that Jews were conspiring to control the world, was far more complex. In the Japanese imagination, the Jews were a valuable asset that could be influenced to accomplish Japanese goals. However, once the Pacific War rendered Jewish usefulness moot, an increase in Nazi propaganda influenced Japan to place restrictions on the Jewish population of Shanghai.

Forced to move into a “designated area,” many Jewish people had to leave homes and businesses and find new ways to survive at the same time that international funds were cut off. This was the most difficult period for the Shanghai Jewish refugees. Many were close to starvation, yet it was during this very time that the refugees began to exhibit unified efforts to build a community within the “ghetto” based on common cultural values. The Ashkenazi Russian community, by means of the structures that had been established by JDC workers before their internment, worked together to provide significant aid to the refugees from outside the designated area.

In examining the complex interactions of the Shanghai Jewish communities before and during World War II, it becomes apparent that the lack of cooperation and trust between different factions of the established Shanghai Jewish communities significantly hindered their ability to meet their challenges. Under any circumstances, ensuring the survival of a massive influx of destitute people with little to no sources of funding would have been onerous, but the inability of the Jewish communities of Shanghai to work

together made a bad situation even worse. Powerful individuals arose who attempted to wrest control for themselves. Animosity deepened between different ethnic groups and social classes. Mutual trust evaporated. The Jewish people of Shanghai, rather than rally together to meet the desperate situation, found themselves hopelessly divided and unable to act.

These communities, sensing their inability to confront the need at hand, reached out to international Jewry for help, and it was the American Jews, through the Joint Distribution Committee, who responded. Social worker Laura Margolis was sent to assuage the hardship of the stranded refugees in Shanghai. While in Shanghai, Margolis handled a tangled set of conflicts. She alleviated tensions that existed between refugees from Germany and Austria and the established communities by facilitating communication between them. She helped to reconcile class divisions as well as economic and religious differences and prejudices among the refugees. Margolis was able to secure desperately needed funds, cut waste, and organize functioning and fair local committees governed by democratic principles. She appealed to the communities' moral sense to provide for each other, and equipped them to survive the "ghetto" experience when they would be completely cut off from outside aid.

Looking back on her service in Shanghai, Margolis mused in a periodical for U.S. audiences:

How different all this was from anything we learned in our social work training about "agency planning"! Perhaps what was fundamentally different was the reality—there was no real agency, no real community, absolutely no real basis for long-range planning. We knew only that each day passed was a day gained in the race against time.⁹²

⁹² Margolis, "Race Against Time in Shanghai," 171.

Nothing seemed to us more important than to help these refugees develop into a self-conscious group who could direct their own fate. Often it would have been easier for us to issue orders than to try to work out our compromises with the various committees; but to us that easiest way was closed by our whole tradition and experience as Americans. And it was like watching a miracle to see the people's response. In the most serious crisis which they had faced in all their long and often perilous immigration, they learned to handle their own problems with intelligence and realism.... And so even under Axis rule, these refugees learned to live in a democratic way, a lesson which we hope will stand them in good stead for their future.⁹³

In many years among refugees, I have worked with persons from every walk of life.... I have encountered lying and stealing among refugees. I have seen many instances of selfishness and cruelty, lack of discipline, aggressiveness. At the same time, I have seen kindness and unselfishness, fine leadership, self-control, generosity, integrity.... As I look back upon the 21,000 refugees [sic] who still sit in Shanghai, and remember what they have suffered and the way they still struggle for life and opportunity, I can only express my deep respect and humility before their strength and courage.⁹⁴

That strength and courage was tested to the utmost with the confinement of the refugees to the designated area popularly known as the "Shanghai ghetto." Crowded into an area less than a square mile, the 17,000 Jewish refugees faced with starvation finally joined together to create a culturally rich community.

In assessing the past three chapters, it must be remembered that the situation facing the Jewish communities of Shanghai was extreme. A settled group of around 7,000 mostly middle-class Jews of different backgrounds and ideologies, with only a wealthy few among them, were asked to absorb 17,000 nearly penniless refugees who came from a different culture, spoke a different language, and had been largely demoralized through a series of

⁹³ Ibid., 190–191.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 191.

psychologically harrowing experiences. Under the circumstances, the mere fact that these 17,000 Jewish refugees were able to survive the War, with the aid of the local communities and the American Jewish people represented by JDC, is something to be commended.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have examined the communal dynamics of the Jews of Cuba and Shanghai during the Holocaust. I have structured the analysis by looking at the community welfare aspect of Jewish life, examining how the existing communities provided for the needs of the refugees, how they reached out internationally to their fellow Jews, and how United States Jewry responded; and the external relations and defense aspect, observing how increasing antisemitism during the Holocaust era impacted the Jews residing in Cuba and Shanghai.

According to Jacob Katz's theory,¹ with the advent of modernity and the dissolution of traditional communal authority, the small Jewish communities of Cuba and Shanghai were structured on a purely voluntary basis and were under no obligation to provide for their fellow Jews—yet both chose to do so. They were soon overwhelmed with the need and reached out to international Jewry for help. Aid came in the form of American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee worker, Laura Margolis, who brought with her the funds and leadership necessary to sustain the refugees throughout their ordeal.

The Jewish communities of both Cuba and Shanghai had no formal government recognition, and no general government support."² Without such a formal binding force, and under the added burden of the Holocaust, any limited communal cohesion that existed rapidly disintegrated. Leaders vied for control for their specific factions and refused to

¹ Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870*.

² *Ibid.*, 120.

work together for the common good. As finances diminished and external, antisemitic pressure increased, the fissures deepened. Rather than forming a representative board to collaborate for the common good, competing Jewish committees emerged that vied for the limited resources available.

The JDC, through Laura Margolis, stepped in to fill the leadership vacuum in these locations and provide those services that would normally be supplied by healthy Jewish communal structures: fund-raising, religious, health and welfare services, and the organization of a representative body for external relations to confront antisemitic threats.³ Margolis made repeated attempts to open channels of communication between the different established Jewish factions and encourage them to take on these obligations, but was unsuccessful in doing so. The local Jewish leaders, due to their inability to unite and achieve communal consensus, failed to administer essential services to the larger refugee group. Margolis then created new representative bodies among the refugees, and these bodies eventually were instrumental in supplying necessities and building sorely needed social, educational, cultural and recreational outlets for the larger refugee community.

As disparate as these two communities were, from this study have emerged several similarities and contrasts.

Neither the Cuban nor the Shanghai established Jewish communities were prepared to handle the overwhelming numbers of Jewish refugees arriving at their doors, nearly destitute and needing food, housing and medical care. Their pre-existing lack of unity only

³ Elazar, "Jewish Communal Structures Around the World," 123.

became more pronounced under the added stress. While the wealthy members of the Shanghai communities contributed significantly to the refugees' need, neither the Shanghai nor the Cuban communities had sufficient resources to cope with the unexpected challenges of such massive refugee immigration. Both attempted to influence political leaders and pressure European Jewish relief agencies to curtail the flow of immigration, thus placing their own needs ahead of those of potential refugees whose lives might have been saved.

In Cuba, the established community of American Jews, which had the wealth to help, remained detached and uninvolved, taking little interest in the plight of the refugees. This is particularly ironic, since the aid that did come to the Cuban communities was ultimately from U.S. donors. The Sephardic Jews, originally from Turkey, were focused inward and also isolated themselves from other Jews. Those leaders who did emerge from the Jewish communities of Havana were sometimes hesitant to identify as Jews in light of rising Cuban antisemitic sentiment. These individuals were embedded in the general Cuban community as businessmen and professionals and had more to lose by being openly identified with the impoverished immigrants. In the end, these leaders proved ineffective in uniting the communities and procuring any significant funding towards the maintenance of the refugees.

In Shanghai, powerful and wealthy leaders from the Sephardic community did contribute significantly toward the refugee need, but in return demanded full control of the funds they gave, refusing to cooperate with Ashkenazi leaders. Once the Pacific War began and those wealthy Sephardic Jews were declared enemy nationals, they no longer had

access to their funds but still sought to influence the relief committees that determined the distribution of resources. The resulting internecine competition deepened the inability of the Shanghai communities to work together to provide effective aid.

A complicating factor was added in Shanghai with the arrival of almost 1,000 Orthodox Polish Jewish refugees, who requested special financial allowances to meet their religious requirements. Because of their particular religious needs—kosher food, books and a place to study, these Orthodox Jews wished to remain separate from the generally more liberal Central European refugees. The fact that this group received additional funding from Orthodox communities in the United States raised resentment among the generally non-religious German and Austrian elements, and within the JDC as well. JDC eventually realized the need and allotted the extra funds to them, but this further fractured the refugee communities due to the perception of the inequality of benefits granted.

It is interesting to contrast the two refugee communities in their attitude toward their temporary havens. In neither location did the refugees attempt to settle and become integrated into the life of the country, as they did in many Latin American countries where they also fled.⁴ The refugees in Cuba and Shanghai never planned to stay permanently. This is understandable for those in Havana especially, as they held U.S. visas and expected their entry to the United States to come through momentarily. Unable to obtain employment due

⁴ Compare the Jews of the Dominican Republic studied by Marion A Kaplan, *Dominican Haven: The Jewish Refugee Settlement in Sosúa, 1940-1945* (New York: Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2008); or the Jewish communities of Argentina as demonstrated by Haim Avni, *Argentina y las migraciones judías: de la Inquisición al holocausto y después* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá: AMIA; Universidad Hebrea de Jerusalem, 2005); and Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America*; an exception would be the Jewish refugees who fled to Bolivia; see Leo Spitzer, *Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge from Nazism*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

to Cuba's restrictive employment laws, most refugees were forced to spend their days in idleness and depended completely on U.S. aid for their sustenance.

In Shanghai, where finances were much more scarce as the War progressed, incoming refugees used any means and skills at their disposal to eke out a living. Although they also viewed their stay as temporary while they waited for the possibility of emigration, they nevertheless were faced with the immediate need to survive and were not restricted by Shanghai labor laws. They creatively utilized a multitude of skills to earn a living. Those who were proficient in masonry, carpentry, and construction rebuilt bombed-out Hongkew and erected a neighborhood that reminded them of home. Others opened bakeries, restaurants, and theaters that became a staple in the area popularly known as "Little Vienna."

In both locations, it was not until U.S. funds began to dissipate that the refugees made any serious endeavor to establish their own community services. In Cuba, following drastic JDC budget cuts, the refugees organized into the *Unión de Refugiados* (Refugees' Union). Originally formed as a protest to budget cuts, this group eventually managed to provide educational, vocational, social and recreational activities for the refugees. The Sephardic social club participated by allowing the use of its space for Americanization classes, and the American rabbi serving the congregation in Havana eventually contributed by starting a school for refugee children. In implementing these services, these previously uninvolved communities supplemented the basic food, housing and medical aid dispensed by the JDC.

In Shanghai, where the length of their stay was indefinite, the refugees organized quickly into the *Jüdische Gemeinde* to provide for their own educational and legal needs. Although the refugees did not plan to settle permanently, Horace Kadoorie of the Sephardic Jewish community in Shanghai did establish Jewish schools for refugee children. Later, in the “ghetto” environment, the German and Austrian Jews managed to overcome some of their deep differences to develop a rich cultural life including operas, concerts and Yiddish theater; they also produced periodicals, literary works and sponsored educational courses. It was perhaps due to the unfamiliarity of their surroundings and the perceived length of their stay that they felt the need to recreate the social institutions they had known at home. These cultural frameworks served as unifiers in a community that had been deeply divided by place of origin, religion, age, and social status.

In both Cuba and Shanghai, rising antisemitism became a serious problem as the War progressed and Nazi agents circulated around the world disseminating their disinformation. In Cuba, antisemitic rhetoric found fertile ground among the ruling Spanish Catholics, who feared economic competition from the Jews and were sympathetic to Franco’s fascist government. Once the Nazi party was legalized in Cuba, they began a virulent anti-Jewish campaign in the newspapers and radio and succeeded in organizing a mass antisemitic rally that drew over 40,000. The anti-Jewish sentiment reached its climax with the closing of Cuba’s doors to further Jewish immigration and the rebuffing of the M.S. St. Louis with its desperate human cargo.

In Shanghai, the situation was far more complex, as the refugees were faced with conflicting sympathies both from the Chinese and Japanese among whom they lived. While

the outlooks of both groups toward Jews were shaped by their general anti-Western tendencies, it was the Japanese Jewish policies that most affected them. These policies underwent significant changes throughout this period. The Japanese, hoping to influence America by their fair treatment of the Jewish refugees in Shanghai, at first were very accommodating in their interactions with the Jews. However, once the Pacific War began and any further offer of American aid was moot, the Jews lost their perceived value, and Nazi propaganda began to be more influential. The Japanese, however, never adopted the violent antisemitism that was urged upon them by Nazi diplomats and propagandists. Instead, they confined the Jews who had arrived after 1937 in a “designated area” in Hongkew in order allegedly to maintain order. Inflation, wartime shortages, and the discontinuing of American funds took a heavy toll in the “Shanghai ghetto.” With many refugees having given up their homes and businesses when forced to move to Hongkew, increasing numbers faced hunger almost to the point of starvation. It was Laura Margolis’ intercession with the U.S. government, once she was freed from Japanese internment, that restored financial aid and literally enabled the Jewish refugees in Shanghai to survive the war.

The refugees in Cuba and Shanghai could not have survived, however, without the help of the American Jewish community through the JDC and specifically Laura Margolis, who came to both locations and administered American funds, bringing order to chaos and caring for the needs of the refugees. Margolis’ skills and training in social welfare, along with her international upbringing and command of relevant languages, ideally suited her to function as the representative of JDC in these areas.

In both locations, Margolis was faced with Jewish populations representing diverse ethnicities, socioeconomic status, age, gender, political views and religious observance. Geographic origins ranged from Polish to Russian to Turkish to German to Austrian to Dutch. Political views spanned the spectrum of Zionists, Socialists, Marxists, Communists and more. The refugees were religiously Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and secular. Respected intellectuals were reduced to begging on the streets. People from all walks of life, physicians, tailors, butchers, playwrights, all found themselves in need of assistance as they left everything behind to flee the Nazi menace. Frictions arose as religious traditionalists refused to live in close quarters with more liberal Jews, demanding preferential treatment and more costly food and accommodations. Refugees of all ages and abilities were present, the older immigrants finding it far more difficult to adjust to a foreign environment and begin anew. All of this took place among people in deep psychological pain who had suddenly left families and friends, having no idea what their fate would be.

Margolis, as director of JDC's works in these disparate regions, represented the Jewish people of America. The authority their funding gave her combined with her strength of personality to influence the existing leaders who refused to cede control. Powerful people did not intimidate her: she interacted as easily with men of immense wealth like Sir Victor Sassoon as she did with the most destitute of refugees. She dined with Mme. Sun Yat-sen and worked directly with Consuls General to ease emigration bottlenecks. She boldly approached enemy Japanese Naval commanders to intercede for the refugees. She was not afraid to confront the refugee leaders and chide them to put aside their differences and

work together to solve their common challenges. While she found success in her interactions with American embassies and Japanese leaders, almost all of her attempts to bring unity to the fragmented Jewish communities ended in failure, as the increasing pressures and stresses of the Holocaust caused further fracturing of already tenuous communal relationships.

As the study concludes, a word must be said about JDC's policies regarding the U.S. government and the deleterious effect they had at times on overseas relief efforts during the War era. Speaking for JDC's executive committee, JDC vice-chairman James N. Rosenberg wrote to the entire organization,

Our course must be to lean over backward to avoid engaging in any relief work that might infringe the country's laws.... We must not and cannot let our desire to help the suffering cause us to lose our moorings. Our rule must be, "When in doubt, ask the State Department."⁵

This tendency of JDC leadership to conform in the closest way with the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917 caused deep and undue hardship, not only to the stranded refugees in Shanghai, but to countless others behind enemy lines in Europe.⁶

Viewed in context, the leadership of the JDC was fearful of furthering antisemitic sentiment by opposing the U.S. government regulations meant to protect the country during wartime. In the 1930s, America was still recovering from the Great Depression and did not look favorably on the economic competition that immigrants could potentially bring. In addition, the U.S. at the time was experiencing an increase in antisemitism. In an

⁵ Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 35.

⁶ See *ibid.*, 187–192 for a discussion of when the JDC leadership learned of the annihilation of the Jews.

April 1938 Gallup Poll, 58% of Americans said the persecution of European Jews was partly or entirely their own fault. In November 1938, in a Gallup Poll following *Kristallnacht*, 77% still opposed the idea of admitting a larger number of Jewish refugees to the U.S.; and in July 1939, 31.9% thought Jews had too much power in the business world.⁷

Not only was antisemitism rampant in America, but distrust of aliens was also on the rise, and this contributed to JDC's cautious stance. Once war broke out, many in the JDC leadership, like most other Americans, felt that the best way they could help the war effort was not to do anything that might hamper it. This included relieving the enemy powers of their responsibility to provide for the refugees that were under their care. In retrospect, of course, this was a harmful policy. Yehuda Bauer put it well when he wrote that,

...the people at the New York office were constitutionally incapable of serious questioning, let alone serious criticism, of an administration that stood between the Jewish community and anti-Semitism or worse.... Their attitude was strengthened by an almost unbelievable naïveté regarding Nazi methods.⁸

However, as the war progressed, the overseas staff of JDC, including Laura Margolis, felt they had no choice but to “change, ignore, or interpret directives” from headquarters.⁹ The field workers did what they had to do in order to survive.

In this untenable situation, it was Saly Mayer, encouraged by JDC European Director Joseph Schwartz, who proposed the solution in 1942 to transfer funds to needy

⁷ Hadley Cantril and Mildred Strunk, *Public Opinion, 1935-1946*; (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), 384; quoted in Saul S. Friedman, “Official United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees, 1938-1945” (Ph.D., The Ohio State University, 1969), 40. Historical Gallup Polls may be found at brain.gallup.com.

⁸ Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 52, 98–99.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

communities through Switzerland. The JDC would donate to their Swiss Jewish outreach, and the Swiss community in turn would send contributions where they saw fit. This way, JDC leadership could honestly say to the U.S. government that they were sending funds to a neutral country, and they had no specific knowledge what the Swiss did with their own funds.¹⁰ Unfortunately, due to JDC's unwillingness to communicate behind enemy lines, Shanghai did not benefit from this policy until Laura Margolis returned to the States in a prisoner exchange with the Japanese and forcefully interceded with government officials on their behalf.

Both the local Jewish communities in Cuba and Shanghai as well as the incoming refugees were under tremendous stress during the Holocaust period. The refugees had lost everything, and the established communities were stretched beyond their means to provide. Both feared for their futures. It is not remarkable that existing differences became even more conspicuous under these circumstances, particularly as individuals lost trust in their fellow human beings and were forced to look out for themselves. In light of these outward and inward pressures, it is indeed surprising that, at the time of greatest stress when Western funding was nearly exhausted, the communities were able to pull together and build a thriving cultural life.

Would the survival of the Cuba and Shanghai refugee communities have been possible without the help of the JDC? Such a question is ahistorical and cannot be answered. But this study has shown that throughout the World War II era and beyond, the JDC was an organization that provided, not just money, but also contributed leadership,

¹⁰ Ibid., 222.

education, and cultural support to Jewish communities. Steven Schwager, former Executive Vice President and CEO of the JDC, often reminded constituents of their “shared commitment to the idea of *kol yisrael areivim zeh b’zeh* —all Jews are responsible one for another.”¹¹ This has always been the calling and burden of the JDC. This study of the foremost American Jewish philanthropic organization during a time of catastrophe has only begun to explore the work done by these organizations in *tzedakah*, the aid of their Jewish brethren, to Jewish communities large and small, in Europe as well as in the periphery.

¹¹ Steven Schwager, “Assuring Jewish Responsibility in a Changing World,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 81, no. 1/2 (Fall/Winter //Fall/Winter2005 2005): 29.

APPENDICES

A1 - The Career of Laura Margolis¹

September 1927 to September 1928	Case worker with the Associated Charities, Cleveland, OH
September 1928 to September 1929	Case worker with Jewish Social Service Bureau, Cleveland, OH
September 1929 to February 1930	Case worker with Jewish Social Service Association, New York, NY
February 1930 to March 1934	Executive Secretary with Jewish Big Sister Association, Cleveland, OH
March 1934 to February 1939	Executive Secretary with Jewish Welfare Society, Buffalo, NY
February 1939 to August 1939	Director with JRC, Havana, Cuba
August 1939 to February 1940	Migration Department Supervisor with NRS, New York, NY
February 1940 to April 1941	Director with JDC, Havana, Cuba
May 1941 to September 1943	Director with JDC in Shanghai, China
September 1943 to March 1944	With JDC, New York, NY
March 1944 to December 1944	Field Representative with JDC in Portugal, Spain and Sweden
January 1945 to June 1946	Director of JDC in Holland, Luxembourg and Belgium
June 1946 to June 1953	Director of JDC in France
June 1953 to June 1955	Local staff with Malben (JDC) in Israel
June 1955 to September 1957	Director of Day Care programs with Jewish Agency in Israel
September 1957 to September 1974	Special Projects with Malben in Israel
September 1974 to September 9, 1997	Retirement in Teaneck, NJ

¹ Leavitt to McDonald, "Letter OW-2-3-EMF"; Zimet to Schoeneman, Esq., "RE: Laura Margolis."

A2 - JDC Representatives in Cuba, 1938-1941²

May 1938 – December 1938	Jack Brandon
January – July 1939	Laura Margolis
August 1939 – January 1940	Milton Goldsmith
January 1940 – March 1941	Laura Margolis
April 1941 – October 1941	Manuel Siegel

A3 - Organizations Affiliated with the National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees

American Christian Committee for German Refugees
 American Friends Service Committee
 American Jewish Committee
 American Jewish Congress
 American Joint Distribution Committee
 Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced German Scholars
 German Jewish Children's Aid
 Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
 National Council of Jewish Women.

² JDC Countries: Cuba Index, 194.

A4 - JDC Expenditures per Person, 1938-1944

Cuba ³	6,000	\$142.75
Shanghai ⁴	17,000	\$96.83
France ⁵	350,000	\$18.26

A5 - JDC Expenditures in Central and South America, 1939-1940⁶

	1939	Jan-March 1940	April-June 1940
Argentina	\$10,875	\$375	\$2,875
Bolivia	\$137,500	\$40,500	\$31,500
Brazil	\$57,000	\$11,000	\$15,000
Chile	\$13,000	\$27,000	\$20,000
Costa Rica	\$1,300		
Cuba	\$160,000	\$50,052	\$65,400
Dominican Republic	\$2,775	\$1,125	\$1,125
Haiti	\$700	\$1,565	\$2,000
Honduras			\$1,000
Mexico	\$1,885	\$100	\$2,000
Panama	\$9,940	\$2,074	\$7,700
Paraguay	\$150	\$75	\$75
Peru	\$11,500		
Philippines	\$35,041	\$163	
Trinidad	\$3,570	\$160	\$800
Uruguay	\$12,800	\$3,300	\$3,300
Unallocated	\$31,367		\$14,860
TOTAL	\$489,403	\$137,489	\$167,635

³ Joint Distribution Committee, "Index, Countries, Cuba," n.d., 192a, AJDC NY Records.

⁴ Joint Distribution Committee, "Index, Countries, China," n.d., 174, AJDC NY Records.

⁵ Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 159, 244.

⁶ JDC, "Meeting of Subcommittee on Refugee Aid in Central and South America," March 15, 1940, 2, 1933/44:113, AJDC NY Records, Executive and Central America.

A6 - JDC Expenditures, 1938-1944

	1938	1939	1940	1941	
Cuba	\$16,200	\$189,653	\$195,223	\$38,170	
Shanghai	\$60,000	\$190,000	\$241,026	\$355,166	
Poland ⁷	\$1,245,300	\$8,138,160	\$6,308,342	\$6,078,769	
France		\$698,760	\$620,661	\$793,384	
Spain				\$33,592	
Portugal				\$221,276	
Belgium					
Holland ⁸	\$128,248	\$439,000			
Yugoslavia				\$109,700	
Italy				\$99,725	
	1942	1943	1944	Total	Percent
Cuba ⁹	\$192,581	\$115,990	\$108,687	\$856,504	2.68%
Shanghai ¹⁰	\$361,807	\$98,192	\$340,000	\$1,646,191	5.15%
Poland ¹¹				\$20,525,271	64.22%
France ¹²	\$872,682	\$1,748,500	\$1,657,223	\$6,391,210	20.00%
Spain ¹³	\$481,722			\$515,314	1.61%
Portugal ¹⁴	\$324,119			\$545,395	1.71%
Belgium ¹⁵		\$140,818	\$540,000	\$680,818	2.13%
Holland		\$36,140		\$36,140	0.11%
Yugoslavia	\$63,000	\$40,000	\$1,745	\$214,445	0.67%
Italy ¹⁶	\$60,000	\$41,000	\$347,534	\$548,259	1.72%
TOTAL				\$31,959,547	100.00%

⁷ 1938 figures from Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper: A History of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1929-1939*, 190.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁹ Joint Distribution Committee, "Index, Countries, Cuba," 192a.

¹⁰ Joint Distribution Committee, "Index, Countries, China," 174.

¹¹ Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 73.

¹² *Ibid.*, 159, 244.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁶ Holland, Yugoslavia and Italy, *ibid.*

**A7 - Flow of Refugees to Joint Relief Committee in Cuba
from United States for Change of Status**

January 1937 to October 1940¹⁷

Month	1937	1938	1939	1940
Jan	0	34	11	3
Feb	1	39	13	5
Mar	3	53	25	5
Apr	36	31	13	1
May	7	15	25	1
Jun	22	76	9	1
Jul	28	68	12	7
Aug	23	95	7	2
Sep	15	59	9	0
Oct	19	85	2	0
Nov	25	37	8	0
Dec	38	22	19	0
TOTAL	217	614	153	25

¹⁷ Siegel, Veissid, and Margolis, *Study of Change in Status Cases from January 1937 to October 1940*, 9.

A8 - Refugees in Shanghai, 1939

February	2,500
March	4,000
April	7,000
May	9,000
August	>17,000

A9 - Migrants from Shanghai, 1946-1952¹⁸

1946	1,400
1947	6,700
1948	3,300
1949	3,000
1950	750
1951	640
1952	<u>235</u>
TOTAL*	16,025

*By 1959, only 250 Jews remained alive in all of China.¹⁹

¹⁸ JDC Countries: China Index, 185.

¹⁹ Ibid.

**A10 - Emigration and Repatriation from Shanghai
March 1946-August 31, 1948²⁰**

Emigrated to	Germans	Austrians	Poles	Czechoslovaks	Others	Total
USA	4,361	554	611	70	305	5,901
Australia	201	466	139	21	48	875
New Zealand	3	8	2			13
Africa	19	14	3		4	40
Latin America	361	154	74	16	74	679
Canada	18	12	89	2	12	133
Europe	90	107	28	4	24	253
Asia	27	8	2		9	46
Palestine	49	30	4		24	107
Repatriated to						
Austria		972				972
Germany	529				1	530
Poland			8			8
Italy					5	5
Yugoslavia					2	2
Hungary					5	5
GRAND TOTAL	5,658	2,325	960	113	513	9,569

²⁰ *American Jewish Yearbook 1948-49* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1948), 710.

A11 - Distribution of Jewish Refugees
Estimate as of Dec. 31, 1939²¹

Europe		Central & South America	
France	38,000	Argentina	25,000
Netherlands	30,000	Bolivia	9,000
Belgium	30,000	Brazil	15,000
Switzerland	8,000	Chile	10,000
England & other countries	48,000	Cuba	2,900
TOTAL	154,000	Paraguay	1,000
		Peru	2,000
United States	90,000	Uruguay	3,500
Palestine	60,000	Other	14,600
Shanghai	15,000	TOTAL	83,000
		Other countries	44,000
		GRAND TOTAL	446,000

²¹ *American Jewish Yearbook 1940-41* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1940), 600.

A12 - Jewish Emigration by Area, 1933-1939 (Estimated)²²

Safe Areas	Total	Areas later German-occupied	Total
United States	85,000	Belgium	15,000
Latin America	85,000	France	30,000
Palestine	80,000	Holland	27,000
Shanghai	18,000	Other	38,000
Australia & Africa	7,000	TOTAL	110,000
Britain	42,000		
Switzerland	12,000		
TOTAL	329,000	GRAND TOTAL	439,000

²² Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 29.

A13 - Jewish Emigration from Central Europe, 1933-1939²³

Year	Germany	Austria	Bohemia/Moravia
1933	37,000		
1934	23,000		
1935	21,000		
1936	25,000		
1937	23,000		
1938	47,400	62,958	
1939	68,000	54,451	43,000
TOTAL	244,400	117,409	43,000

²³ Ibid., 26.

A14 - American Jewish Yearbook's Summary of Jewish Immigration²⁴

Year	US	Cuba	Brazil	Uruguay	Argentina	Palestine
1929	12,479	476	5,610	2,000	5,986	5,249
1930	11,526	1,374	3,558	1,600	7,805	4,944
1931	5,692	208	1,940	1,250	3,553	4,075
1932	2,755	165	2,049	765	1,801	9,553
1933	2,372	197	3,317	500	1,982	30,327
1934	4,134	612	4,010	1,205	2,215	42,359
1935	4,837	403	1,759	560	3,169	61,854
1936	6,252	338	3,450	1,262	4,261	29,727
1937	11,352	200	2,004	1,100	5,178	10,536
1938*	19,736		530	3,115	1,050	12,868
1939*	43,450		4,600	2,200	4,300	16,405
1940*	36,945		2,416	373	1,850	4,547
1941	23,737	800	1,500	639	1,464	3,647
1942*	10,608		108	138	192	2,194
1943*	4,705		11	17	524	8,507
1944*					384	20,848
1945*			50		728	13,156
1946*			450	100	295	17,761

* The *American Jewish Yearbook* gathered its statistics from HIAS and HICEM, which did not report immigration numbers for the missing years.

²⁴ *American Jewish Yearbook 1947-48* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1947), 751.

**A15 - Distribution of Jewish Population in Europe Prior to and Following
Territorial Changes Resulting from German,
Russian & Hungarian Expansion²⁵**

Country	Prior to changes	Emi- grated	Under German Rule	Under Soviet Rule	Under Hungarian Rule	Unchanged
Austria	181,778	117,000	56,000			
Belgium	60,000		82,000*			
Czechoslovakia	356,830	20,000	160,045		186,720	
Danzig, Memel & Saar	16,565	13,000	9,255			
Denmark	5,690		5,690			
Estonia	4,566			4,566		
France	240,000		278,000*			
Germany	522,799	281,900	202,400			
Hungary	444,567				444,567	
Latvia	93,479			93,479		
Lithuania	165,000			245,000		
Luxemburg	3,144		3,144			
Netherlands	156,817		86,817*			
Norway	1,359		1,359			
Poland	3,325,000		2,200,000	1,045,000		
Romania	758,226			320,000		438,226
USSR	3,020,000			3,020,000		
Other countries	632,906					680,906
TOTAL**	10,345,457	431,900	3,179,020	4,728,045	631,287	1,109,242

* Including refugees

** The difference between the total prior to territorial changes, 10,345,257 and the total after these changes, 9,918,194, is 427,063. This difference represents overseas emigration and reduction of population from natural causes.

²⁵ *American Jewish Yearbook 1940-41*, 600.

A16 - Estimated Losses in the Most Important Communities in Europe²⁶

Country	Number of Jews at end of 1939	Number of Jews Perished	Percentage of loss
Austria	60,000	40,000	66
Belgium	100,000	40,000	40
Czechoslovakia	360,000	300,000	83
France	300,000	130,000	38
Germany	240,000	200,000	80
Greece	75,000	60,000	80
Holland	150,000	120,000	80
Hungary	403,000	200,000	50
Latvia	95,000	85,000	90
Lithuania	155,000	135,000	90
Poland	3,250,000	2,900,000	88
Rumania	850,000	420,000	50
Soviet Union	3,020,000	1,000,000	33
Yugoslavia	75,000	65,000	86

²⁶ *American Jewish Yearbook 1948-49*, 697.

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