US AND THE HOLOCAUST

During [World War II](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005137), [rescue](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005185) of Jews and others targeted by Nazi Germany was not a priority for the United States government. Nor was it always clear to Allied policymakers how they could pursue large-scale rescue actions in Europe.

**IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES IN THE ERA OF THE HOLOCAUST**   US State Department policies made it very difficult for [refugees](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005139) to [obtain entry visas](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007456). Despite the ongoing persecution of Jews in Germany, the State Department's attitude was influenced by the economic hardships of the Depression, which intensified grassroots antisemitism, isolationism, and xenophobia. The number of entry visas was further limited by the Department's inflexible application of a restrictive Immigration Law passed by the US Congress in 1924. Beginning in 1940, the United States further limited immigration by ordering American consuls abroad to delay visa approvals on national security grounds.

Nevertheless in 1939 and 1940, slightly more than half of all immigrants to the United States were Jewish, most of them refugees from Europe. In 1941, 45% of all immigrants to the United States were Jewish. After the United States entered the war in December 1941, the trickle of immigration virtually dried up, just at the time that the Nazi regime began systematically to [murder the Jews of Europe](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005151). Despite many obstacles, however, more than 200,000 Jews found refuge in the United States from 1933 to 1945, most of them before the end of 1941.

**US STATE DEPARTMENT RESPONSE TO NEWS OF THE “FINAL SOLUTION”**   In August 1942, the State Department received a report sent by Gerhart Riegner, the Geneva-based representative of the World Jewish Congress (WJC). The report revealed that the Germans were implementing a policy to physically annihilate the Jews of Europe. Department officials declined to pass on the report to its intended recipient, American Jewish leader [Stephen Wise](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007309), who was President of the World Jewish Congress.

Despite the State Department's delay in publicizing the mass murder, that same month Wise received the report via British channels. He sought permission from the State Department to make its contents public. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles asked Wise not to publicize the information until the State Department confirmed it. Wise agreed and after three months the State Department notified him that its sources had confirmation. On November 24, 1942, Wise held a press conference to announce that Nazi Germany was implementing a policy to annihilate the European Jews. A few weeks later, on December 17, the United States, Great Britain, and ten other Allied governments issued a declaration denouncing Nazi Germany's intention to murder the Jews of Europe. The declaration warned Nazi Germany that it would be held responsible for these crimes.

**US PRESS COVERAGE OF THE “FINAL SOLUTION”**   During the era of the Holocaust, the American press did not always publicize reports of Nazi atrocities in full or with prominent placement. For example, the *New York Times*, the nation's leading newspaper, generally deemphasized the murder of the Jews in its news coverage. The US press had reported on Nazi violence against Jews in Germany as early as 1933. It covered extensively the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 and the expanded German [antisemitic legislation](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007459) of 1938 and 1939. The nationwide state-sponsored violence of November 9-10, 1938, known as [*Kristallnacht*](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005201)(Night of Crystal), made front page news in dailies across the US as did Hitler's infamous prediction, expressed to the *Reichstag* (German parliament) on January 30, 1939, that a new world war would mean the annihilation of the Jewish “race.”

As the magnitude of anti-Jewish violence increased in 1939-1941, many American newspapers ran descriptions of German shooting operations, first in Poland and later after the invasion of the Soviet Union. The ethnic identity of the victims was not always made clear. Some reports described German mass murder operations with the word "extermination." As early as July 2, 1942, the *New York Times* reported on the operations of the killing center in [Chelmno](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005194), based on sources from the Polish underground. The article, however, appeared on page six of the newspaper. Although the *New York Times* covered the December 1942 statement of the Allies condemning the mass murder of European Jews on its front page, it placed coverage of the more specific information released by Wise on page ten, significantly minimizing its importance.

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