

American Citizen's Aid of European Jews

White Rose 2023-24 Lower Division Essay Winner

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With Nazis terrorizing Europe, Jewish refugees simply wanted to survive the Holocaust, and their best hope was to flee to America. Out of fear, antisemitic beliefs, and desires to avoid foreign conflict, the United States went to great lengths to prevent the immigration of refugees. Franz Goldberger, a Jew living in Austria, encountered many roadblocks against immigration to the US put in place by the State Department, and even with Helen Roseland and the American Friends Service Committee's help, Franz and many others perished.

Dr. Franz Goldberger was a professor from Vienna, Austria, until the Nazis took teaching away from him, leaving him with no job and no income ("Franz Goldberger"). He understood it was paramount to escape to the United States. Franz sought connection and support abroad, knowing no one in America who could help him acquire a visa. Desperate, he wrote letters to people found in phone books to request an American financial sponsor for help in getting the required paperwork for immigration ("Franz Goldberger"). He wrote in one such letter, "Without exaggeration, I dare say I am nearly ruined . . . and as a Jew have no possibility whatever to earn my living in this country, in which I have lived since childhood" ("Franz Goldberger"). Ordinarily, the letters amounted to nothing, but one letter reached Hazel Hostetter. As a teacher in Des Moines, Iowa, she was unable to provide financial assistance, but she did pass the letter to a friend, Helen Roseland ("Franz Goldberger").

As an assistant postmaster in Eagle Grove, Iowa, Roseland did not have the finances to

help much, but she had the determination. She was unmarried with 160 acres of land to her name and knew she could find a way to help or even save Goldberger (“Franz Goldberger”). Scattergood hostel in West Branch, Iowa, was where Roseland went for assistance (“Franz Goldberger”). This hostel was part of the AFSC, a Quaker organization dedicated to assisting refugees escape from persecution by Nazis (“The American Friends”). This was the largest organization of non-Jews attempting to help with this issue.

The AFSC dates back to 1917, when it started aiding humanitarian efforts in Europe during WWI (“The American Friends”). Then, after Kristallnacht, it started a new division named the Refugee Division to assist European refugees targeted by the Nazi regime. Their main efforts focused on succoring Jews or people considered to be Jews racially, (according to the Nazis), by helping to get them visas and safe passage out of Europe and to America (“The American Friends”). In Franz’s case, the Scattergood hostel advised Helen on how to get and send the documents that Franz required for proper documentation.

Despite initial hope, refugees like Franz then encountered a very substantial list of what immigrants needed to get a visa for travel to the United States. For one, they had to be on the extensive waiting list that had quotas on the number of immigrants permitted from each country (“What Did Refugees”). These totals were not altered based on events in Europe with much larger numbers attempting to emigrate, so it became increasingly harder to get on one of these lists. Various official documents were needed, including a birth certificate, tax documents showing paid taxes, a medical clearance assuring that the person did not have a serious medical condition, and a certificate from police showing a lack of criminal record (“What Did Refugees”). Many financial documents were necessary. An affidavit from a financial sponsor showing that one would not become a burden on American society was

especially important (“What Did Refugees”). In Franz's case, this was what he particularly needed, and what Helen Roseland was attempting to provide.

These restrictions came from the State Department, which was in charge of immigration. It has been shown that these roadblocks in obtaining a visa were deliberately put in place to limit Jewish immigration to the United States (Dubois, Josiah, and Pehle 6). The “Acquiescence” Memo states that the State Department used the “machinery of this Government to actually prevent the rescue of Jews” (6). This memo went on to explain the treachery rife in the State Department preventing the immigration of refugees, largely Jewish refugees throughout the Holocaust. Another memo confirming this was the State Department memo on “Temporarily Halting Immigration”. It states that it was important to stop immigration from specific countries and that the department could place “administrative obstacles” to accomplish the stoppage (Long 2).

For Franz and Helen, these hurdles and requirements were succeeding in making immigration very difficult. All of the documents were sent to Franz, but he needed a second copy of the financial affidavit, so he had to request one from Helen (“Franz Goldberger”). During this lengthened process, in May 1940, Franz was arrested and sent to a Nazi forced-labor camp before acquiring the document (“Franz Goldberger”). His release was in January 1941, but by that time, visa requirements had been altered (“Franz Goldberger”). He had to ask Helen for an updated affidavit of her finances (“Franz Goldberger”). He was very apologetic in his letter requesting this: “I beg your pardon for troubling you so much ... This affidavit is really my only hope for a new future and I am only sustained by this chance of being allowed into the United States one day” (“Franz Goldberger”).

After Roseland sent the new documents, she proceeded to get the money required to

book Franz's passage on a ship from Vienna to America. The money came from her own savings, a man in New York, and a woman in Los Angeles ("Franz Goldberger"). They raised an amount equivalent to \$9,000 today for the ticket. Sadly, Goldberger was not able to board the ship. The United States Consulate in Vienna closed in July of 1941, and Franz was never able to leave Nazi territory ("Franz Goldberger"). Franz was deported to the Majdanek concentration camp one year later, in May 1942, where he died with many others on August 20, 1942 ("Franz Goldberger"). Devastatingly, Helen was not aware of his deportation or death ("Franz Goldberger"). She lived out the rest of her life not knowing what had become of the Jewish man she had never met but had so desperately wanted to save from the clutches of Nazi Germany.

Now, America needs to learn from the heartbreaking stories of Franz and other Jews and reconcile with its history. It is our responsibility to protect future human rights through improved law and order and to engage more people and groups in relief efforts.

Governments need to improve refugee policies to create change. More refugees could and should be allowed in, particularly when there is a crisis in their home country. The IRC wants to change government policies along with their rescue efforts to "[demand] that all nations honor their humanitarian commitments to asylum seekers and refugees" (Strategy100). There were many American policies during the Holocaust that hurt refugee rescue efforts. On top of the already difficult requirements to get proper documentation, the State Department added many ways to deny immigrants based on security (Dubois, Josiah, and John Pehle 7). The "Memorandum of Conference on Curbing Immigration" from 1940 said that American security was of the utmost importance and that even if large numbers of immigrants suffered from those security restrictions, it was not as important as the safety of the country (Long,

Breckinridge et al 2). Those ideas for the basis of a policy are exactly what the IRC would like to change.

This applies not only to the government, but also to American citizens. Refugees look to America as a possibility for a brighter future, so Americans need to work on making that real for as many people as possible. The International Rescue Committee has many goals for improving refugee aid efforts. It wants to deal with every crisis situation differently because each situation has distinct problems requiring separate solutions (Strategy100). If the government had cared enough to realize that the Holocaust was a much worse issue than anything before while it was happening, it could have dealt with it better and saved many lives. Expansion is another important goal for the IRC. There are many more refugees in need throughout the world than ever before, so rescue efforts need to increase accordingly (Strategy100).

If more citizens learn about and are engaged in efforts to save refugees, we could improve assistance rates dramatically, so Welcome.US is trying to accomplish that goal. Citizens drive the organization's rescue efforts. The group understands how the government has and still does fail to always help refugees in need, so it brings communities together from across America to provide assistance to refugees ("Our 2023 Impact"). With government efforts alone, America accepted 11,400 refugees, but Welcome.US improved that number to almost 500,000 refugees in only two years ("Our 2023 Impact"). Helen was an astounding example of what American citizens can do to help refugees, especially when even more join together. If Helen was almost able to save Franz essentially by herself, America could do so much more for refugees with added civilian support. Additional help for refugees would mean the world to them, and Americans should try their best to fulfill those wishes. Governmental

agencies do not have the capacity to help all refugees seeking assistance, but this quote from Welcome.US portrays why civilian aid works so well: “This new vision for addressing displacement crises at scale would not be possible without the compassion, generosity, and ingenuity of our nation’s private and civic sectors.”

During the Holocaust, the American government attempted to halt the immigration of many Jewish refugees like Franz Goldberger. The AFSC and Helen Roseland tried to help him, but they could not overcome State Department barriers. If Americans learn and care more about the situation of refugees, they can help millions of people and not repeat what happened to Jews during the Holocaust.

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