

# AMERICANS

## AND THE HOLOCAUST

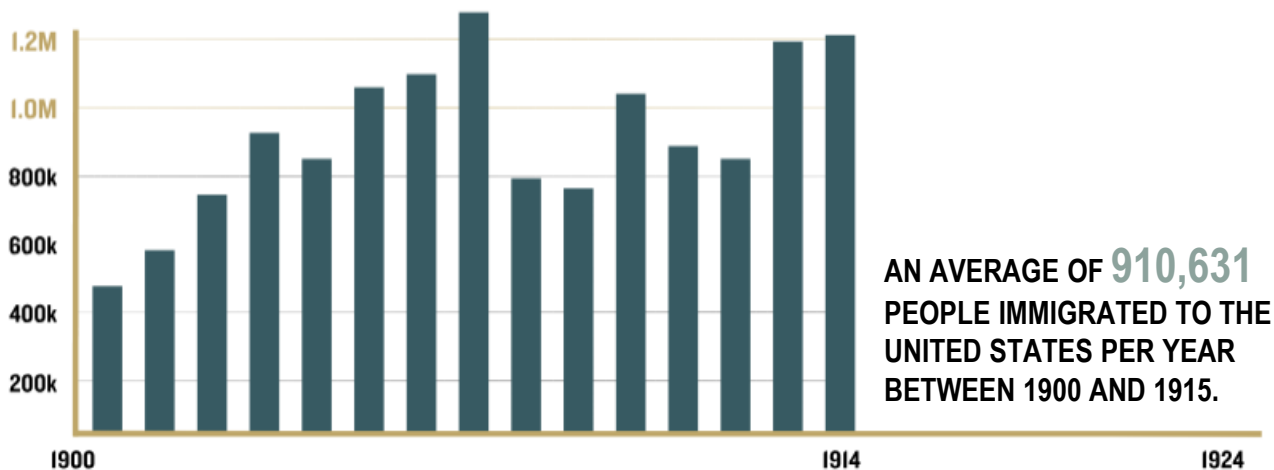
IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEES  
A CASE STUDY ON  
THE WAGNER-ROGERS BILL

How did Americans interpret their role when  
facing a catastrophic refugee crisis in 1939?

# US Immigration, 1900–1915

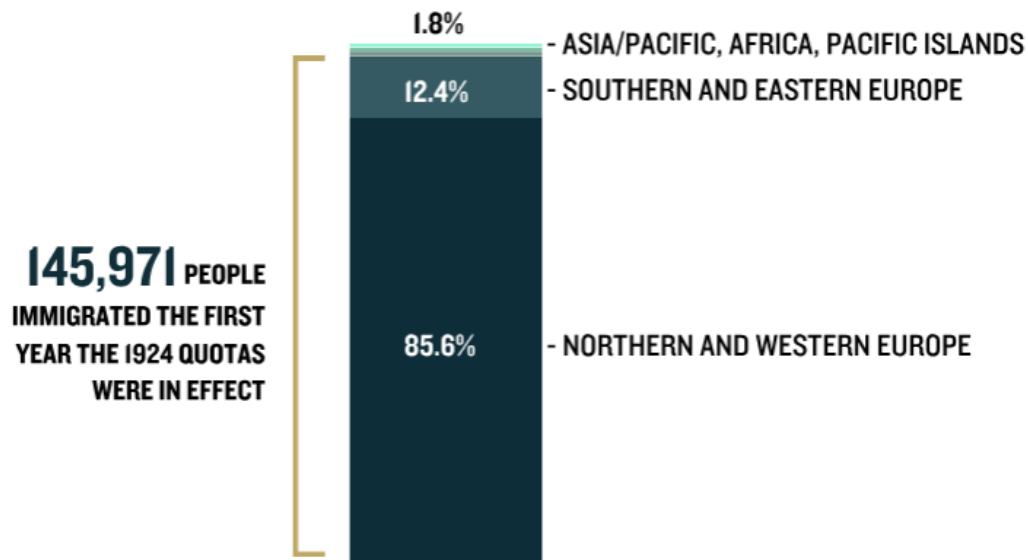
Before World War I, **millions of Europeans** immigrated to the United States.

The US government placed no overall limits on the number of immigrants who could enter the country.



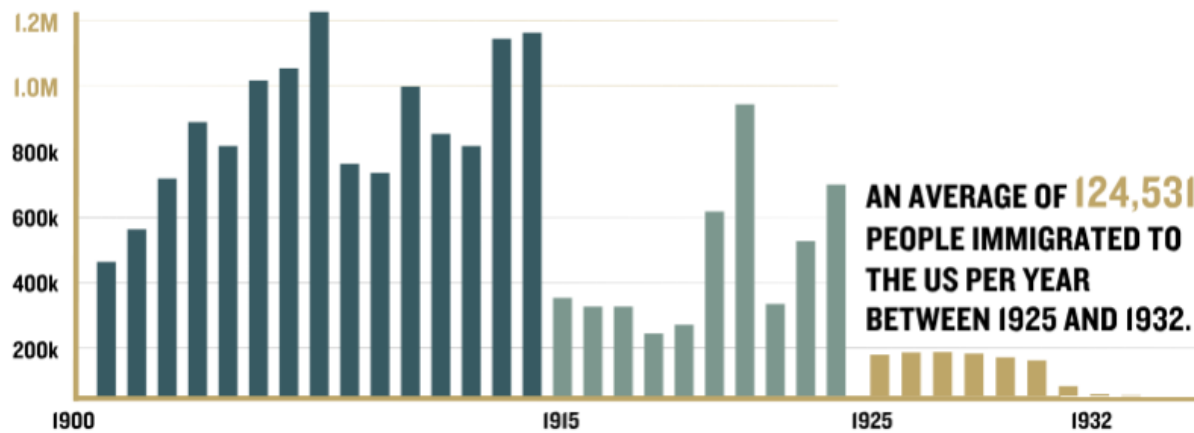
# The Immigration Act of 1924

In 1924, Congress passed a law to **set immigration quotas** by country and **limit total immigration** to about **164,000** people per year. The quotas were designed to “protect” America’s “racial stock” by severely limiting “undesirable” immigrants, including Jews, Asians, and Africans. There were no quotas for immigrants from North or South America.



# US Immigration, 1925–1932

Immigration fell significantly after the 1924 law went into effect. In 1929, **the Great Depression** began. President Herbert Hoover ordered the State Department to make sure immigrants would not become economic burdens to the United States. **Immigration plummeted even further.**



# Immigration from Germany to the United States, 1933–1937

## 1933

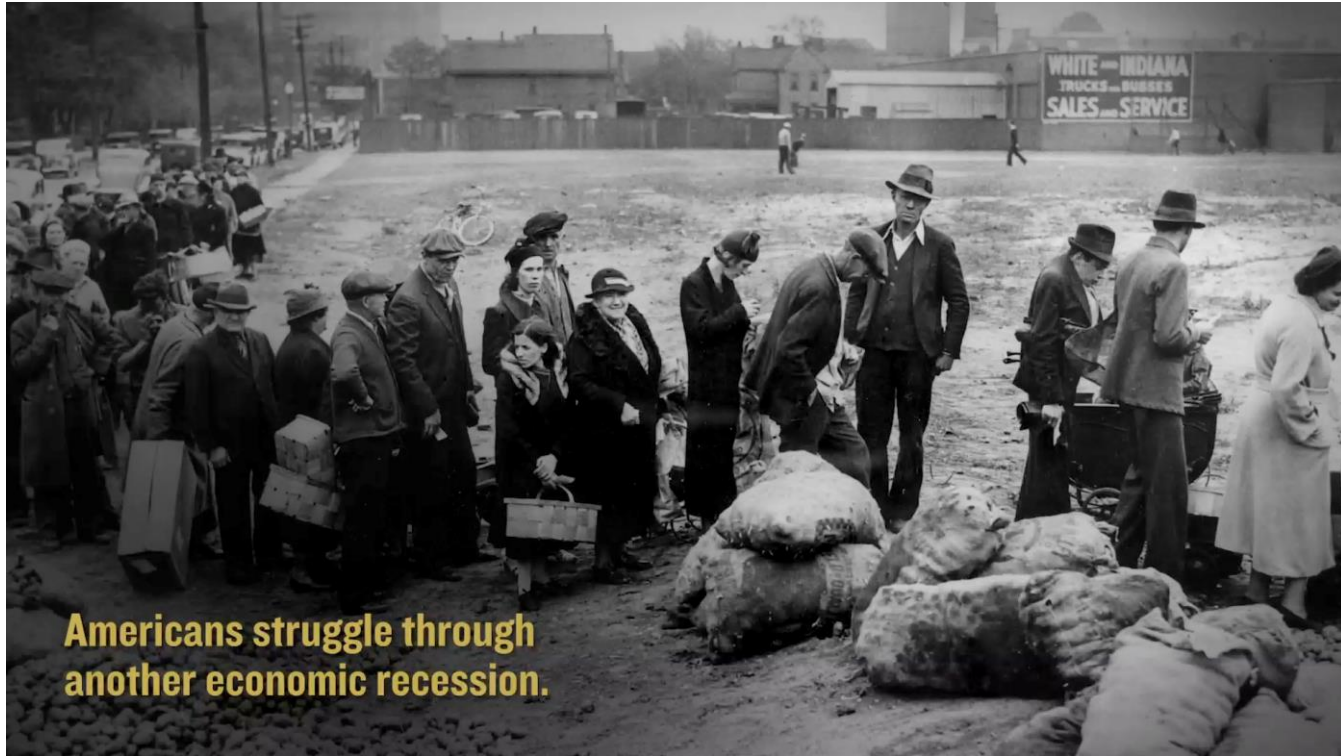
**Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany. The Nazi regime immediately started discriminating against German Jews, and thousands sought to leave.**

The 1924 US quota law set a yearly limit of **25,957** immigration visas for people born in Germany. In 1933, the State Department issued visas to only 1,241 Germans. Although **82,787** people were on the German waiting list for a US visa, most did not have enough money to qualify for immigration.

## 1934–1937

From 1934 through 1937, there were between **80,000 and 100,000** Germans on the waiting list for a US immigration visa. Most were **Jewish**. Although the State Department **slowly began to issue more visas**, the German quota went unfilled.

It Is 1938...

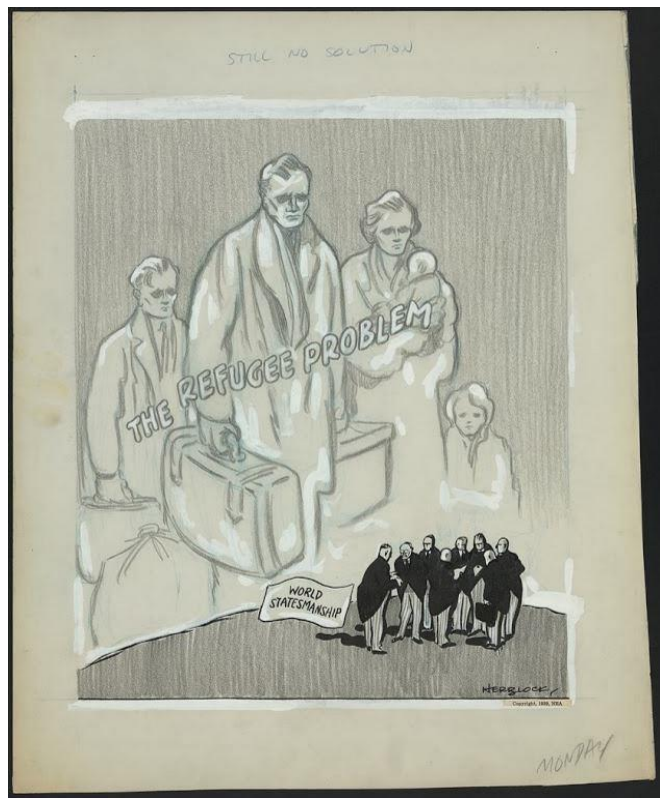


**Americans struggle through another economic recession.**

# Nazi Persecution Sparked a Refugee Crisis







Source: National Archives and Records Administration

“It is a fantastic commentary on the inhumanity of our times that for thousands and thousands of people a piece of paper with a stamp on it is the difference between life and death.”

—Dorothy Thompson, *Refugees: Anarchy or Organization*, NY: Random House, 1938, p. 28

# November 1938: Kristallnacht ("The Night of Broken Glass")



Source: National Archives and Records Administration

# November 15, 1938: President Roosevelt Extended Visas for Refugees in the US

## ***Roosevelt to Aid Refugees Here; 12,000 to Stay After Visas Expire***

***Permits to Be Extended Six Months—Hull  
Stresses Need of Finding Homes for Many  
Thousands—Taylor to Go to London***

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

WASHINGTON, Nov. 18.—President Roosevelt has taken steps to insure that between 12,000 and 15,000 political refugees from Germany who are now in this country as visitors shall not be forced to return to their own country at the expiration of their visas, he said today.

tergovernmental Committee, was awaiting an opportunity to discuss the problems involved with the German authorities.

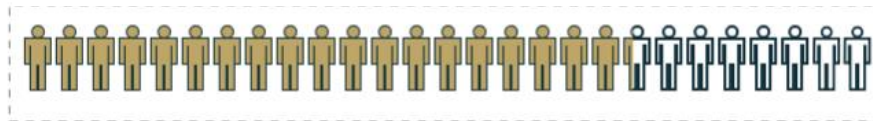
"The developments of the last few days in Germany," Secretary Hull said in a statement, "have redoubled the urgency of finding new homes for hundreds of thousands of persons. This government is al-

In the aftermath of Kristallnacht, President Franklin D. Roosevelt extended temporary visas allowing some 12,000 German Jews already in the United States to stay in the country indefinitely.

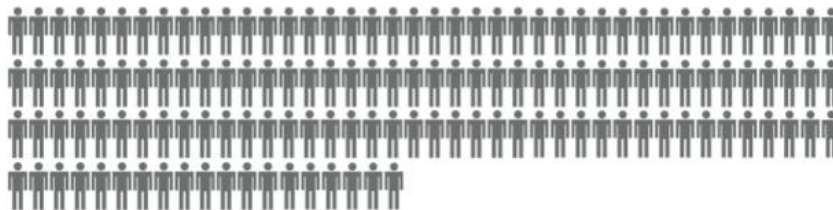
# Immigration from Germany to the United States, 1938

After Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, President Roosevelt combined the German and Austrian quotas making 27,370 visas available each year for people born in these countries, who now were considered “German.” As antisemitic persecution increased and Germany began to expand its territorial holdings in Europe, **the waiting list grew.**

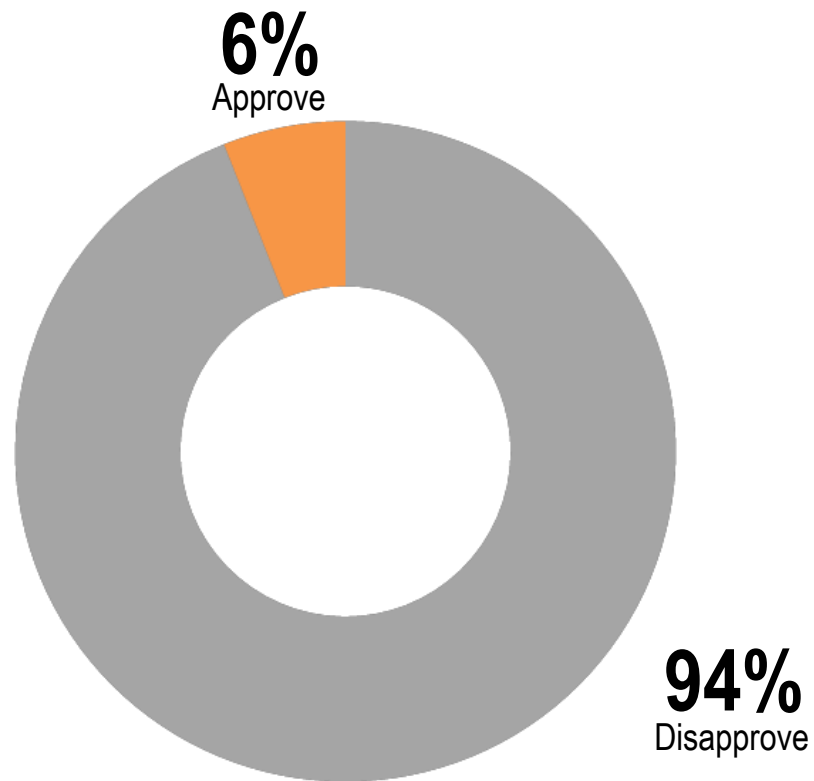
**19,552** GERMANS RECEIVED VISAS; **7,818** VISAS WENT UNISSUED



**139,163** GERMANS WERE ON THE WAITING LIST



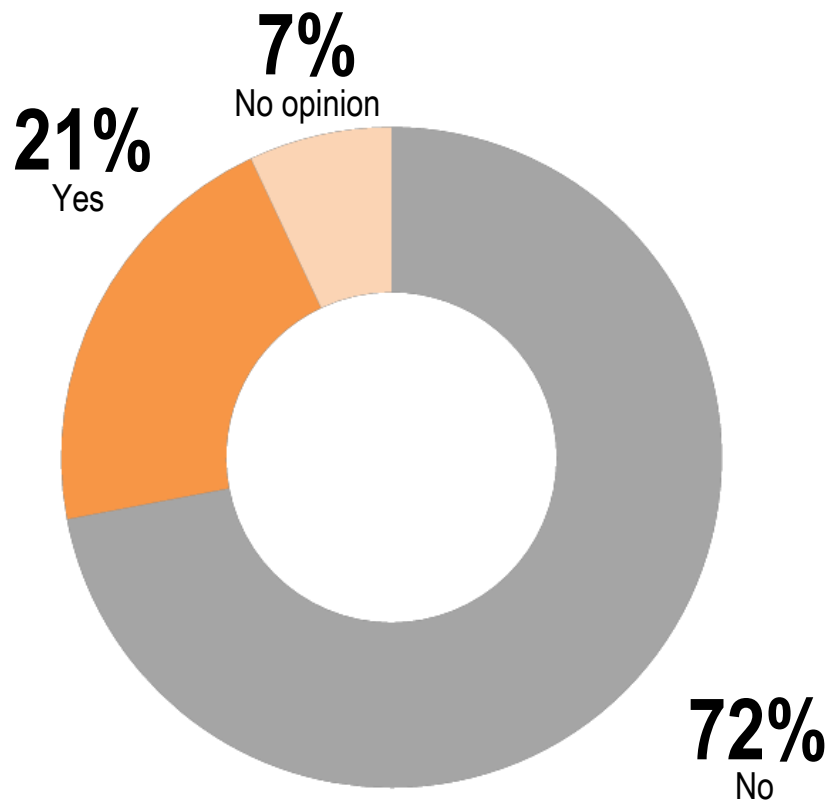
# US Public Opinion and the Refugee Crisis, November 1938



“Do you approve or disapprove of the Nazi treatment of Jews in Germany?”

Source: Gallup Opinion Poll November 1938

# US Public Opinion and the Refugee Crisis, November 1938



“Should we allow a larger number of Jewish exiles from Germany to come to the United States to live?”

Source: Gallup Opinion Poll November 1938

# February 9, 1939: Wagner-Rogers Bill Introduced

76TH CONGRESS  
1st Session

## S. J. RES. 64

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 9, 1939

Mr. WAGNER introduced the following joint resolution; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Immigration

### JOINT RESOLUTION

To authorize the admission into the United States of a limited number of German refugee children.

Whereas there is now in progress a world-wide effort to facilitate the emigration from Germany of men, women, and children of every race and creed suffering from conditions which compel them to seek refuge in other lands; and

Whereas the most pitiful and helpless sufferers are children of tender years; and

Whereas the admission into the United States of a limited number of these children can be accomplished without any danger of their becoming public charges, or dislocating American industry or displacing American labor; and

Whereas such action by the United States would constitute the most immediate and practical contribution by our liberty-loving people to the cause of human freedom, to which we

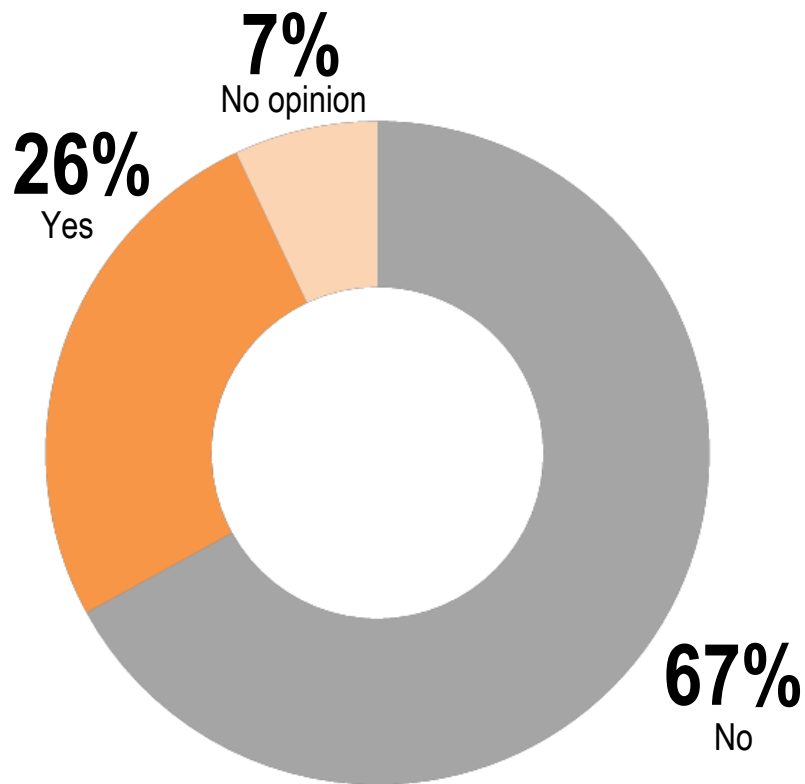
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are inseverably bound by our institutions, our history, and our profoundest sentiments: Now, therefore, be it

1     *Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives*  
2     *of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*  
3     That not more than ten thousand immigration visas may be  
4     issued during each of the calendar years 1939 and 1940,  
5     in addition to those authorized by existing law and not-  
6     withstanding any provisions of law regarding priorities or  
7     preferences, for the admission into the United States of  
8     children fourteen years of age or under, who reside, or at  
9     any time since January 1, 1933, have resided, in any ter-  
10    ritory now incorporated in Germany, and who are other-  
11    wise eligible: *Provided,* That satisfactory assurances are  
12    given that such children will be supported and properly  
13    cared for through the voluntary action of responsible citi-  
14    zens or responsible private organizations of the United States  
15    and consequently will not become public charges.

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# US Public Opinion and the Wagner-Rogers Bill, January 1939



“It has been proposed that the government permit 10,000 refugee children be brought into this country and taken into American homes. Do you approve of this plan?”

Gallup Opinion Poll January 1939



- **Learn about your individual or group by reading the relevant biography.**
- **Review the documents in your packet. They include:**
  - A copy of the Wagner-Rogers Bill
  - A document that illustrates your individual's or group's position on the bill
  - If your document is lengthy, a printed excerpt is attached. It is not necessary to read the long-form documents.
- **Summarize your position. Prepare to present your argument.**

- What group or individual did you read about?
- What was this person's or group's stance on the Wagner-Rogers Bill?
- How does your individual justify his or her stance?

# The Wagner-Rogers Bill is Withdrawn, July 1939

## BILL TO SHUT OUT ALIENS IS REPORTED

Senate Measure Would Stop  
Quotas for 5 Years but Admit  
20,000 Reich Young

IF SUPPORT IS GUARANTEED

Requires Registration of All  
Aliens Here—Another Chil-  
dren's Bill Also Reported

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.  
WASHINGTON, June 30.—A dras-  
tic Immigration Restriction Bill  
was reported today by the Senate  
Committee on Immigration.

## Senators Put Quota Limits On Child Exiles

Refugee Bill Sponsors  
Won't Accept Change,  
Propose Substitute

A smashing blow was struck at the Wagner-Rogers bill for refugee children yesterday as the Senate Immigration Committee reported out the measure with an amendment which sponsors of the proposal said they would not accept.

At the same time, the committee favorably reported two other bills designed to put a stop to practically all immigration into the United States for the next five years and requiring the fingerprinting of all aliens now resident in this country. The Wagner-Rogers bill, which would admit 10,000 German and Czecho-Slovakian refugee children this year and next, outside quota restrictions, was altered so the children could be admitted only under the quota, but with preferential status.

Source: *New York Times*, July 1, 1939 (left); *Washington Post*, July 1, 1939 (right)

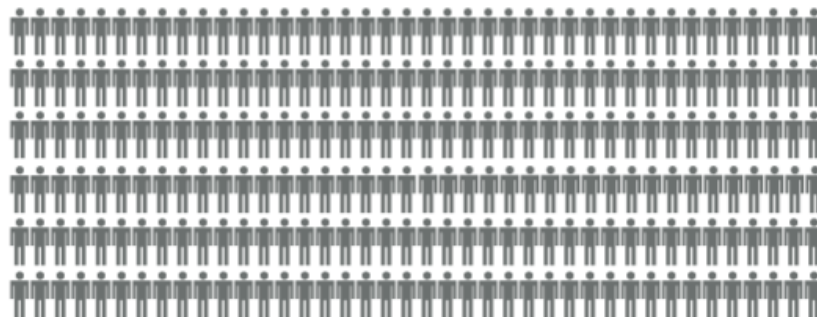
# German Immigration to the United States, 1939

In 1939, the State Department issued the **maximum number** of visas available to Germans for the first time. Yet nearly ten times that number remained on the waiting list.

**27,370** GERMANS RECEIVED VISAS; **NO** VISAS WENT UNISSUED

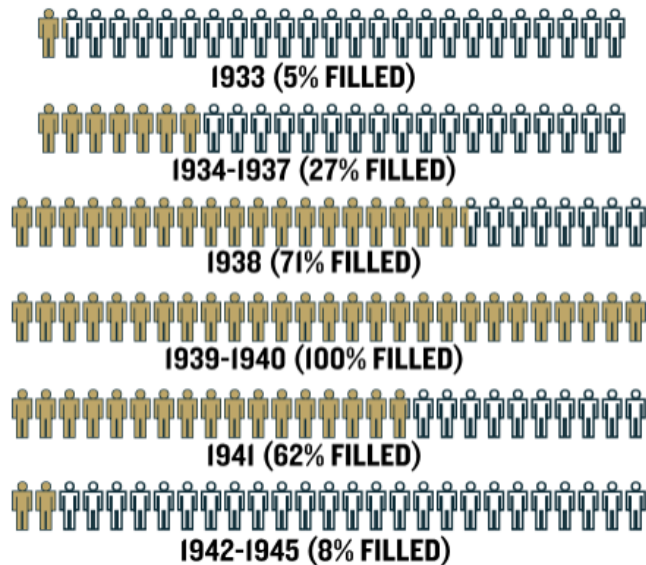


**240,748** GERMANS WERE ON THE WAITING LIST



# German Immigration to the United States, 1933–1945

Many more people could have reached the United States had the State Department filled the German quota beginning in 1933, or had Congress changed immigration laws to address the refugee crisis. Approximately 125,000 Germans, most of them Jewish, immigrated to the United States between 1933 and 1945.



# Concluding Discussion

1. How would you characterize American public opinion regarding refugees from 1938–1941?
2. What factors influenced American attitudes and opinions on these issues?
3. Were there particular arguments that you found convincing? Why? Was there additional information you would need to accurately assess the validity of these arguments?
4. Why do you think the Wagner-Rogers Bill failed?
5. What is the role of informed public debate about policy decisions in a democracy?
6. What questions does this case study raise about America's role in the world?

**The Museum wishes to acknowledge and thank the following donors  
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