**Immigration Across the Disciplines**

**Week 5 Notes**

**Questions**

Was there any attempt by the US to guide foreign governments in creating programs to help refugees? It seems, to me at least, that this would have alleviated some of the stress of having to move such people to the US and reduce the arguments at home.

**Americans at the Gate: US & Refugees During the Cold War (Carl J. Bon Tempo)**

During the first half of the 20th century, the US ignored the issue of refugees, not even taking temporary measures to assist them.

A large part of this resulted from the quotas and other legal restrictions on immigration.

The rise of Nazism & its barbaric practices discredited scientific racism (eugenics), and victory during WWII made the US want to appear as a leader in the new world order.

All of this made it more friendly toward refugee immigration, resulting in the Displaced Persons Act (1948).

**US & Refugees: Pre-WWII**

The 1930s, when Hitler came to power, saw the US indifferent or resistant to refugees, a result of the previous decade’s battles over immigration restriction.

The League of Nations defined a refugee (in 1926) as someone of Russian or Armenian origin that had lost the protection of his/her government and had yet to acquire a new nationality 🡪note the political skew to this definition.

The US definition was similar, limiting the definition to race and a vague description of persecution.

Pressure put on FDR in the late 1930s resulted in some help toward refugees fleeing Nazism, but he was, for the most part, indifferent to the plight (slightly sympathetic).

Resistance to Jewish refugees from Germany was twofold: it would change US relations with Germany, and the enforcers of even the liberal laws were anti-Semitic.

**WWII**

Again, changes in admission procedure were driven by politics; some Chinese could enter (US & China were allies), German intellectuals that had fled to France could gain admittance after France fell (though the process was biased and the committee likely arbitrarily chose who they wished to admit).

During the war years, the fear that enemy countries had sent spies to the US escalated.

This was especially applied toward any immigrants/refugees that supported communism or any form of government besides democracy.

**Postwar Europe, Refugees/Displaced Persons, & Early Cold War**

Harry Truman helped with the Displaced Person Act (1948) in an attempt to alleviate refugee conditions in Europe.

One main support for this was that it would strengthen US relations with Europe and help to subvert the Soviet Union.

Cultural pluralism grew in strength during these years (the idea that inviting people of different cultures would result in them bringing their own unique strengths to the nation and improving the quality of the US).

Despite the number of refugees admitted under the act (400 000), millions were still in Europe, a number that grew as more Europeans defected from the eastern side of the Iron Curtain.

**Restrictionist Triumph: 1952 McCarran-Walter Act**

After 1948, when US-Soviet relations tanked, concerns about subversives (spies) peaked.

National origins policy (quotas) remained strong, but Asian allies in WWII resulted in a lift of the almost total ban on Asian immigration and giving them their own quotas.

The act was originally vetoed by Truman, who saw it as grossly discriminatory and cited the bravery of those that struggled against Soviet Communism in eastern Europe (Greeks, Pols, etc.). 🡪Congress overrode the veto.

McCarthyism took hold & Republicans gained greater political power & momentum.

***Maus: My Father Bleeds History* by Art Spiegelman**

Opening quote by Hitler: “The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human.”

Personal rant: how is it that foreign policy did not rebel at this callous disregard for human life and decency, regardless of political relations with the country? This statement is so anti-American that it literally makes me ill. I cannot conceive of any viable excuse that would have allowed us as a nation to stand by and watch this madman go about his daily goals.

This definitely reads much more like a story, but conveys many historical facts under the guise of a personal story.

**The Path to Nazi Genocide (Video)**

WWI toppled governments and dissolved empires, leaving chaos in its wake, a “crippled, broken world.” 🡪Churchill

Germany was humiliated by its defeat and the outcomes of that defeat (Treaty of Versailles)

13% loss of territory, reparations in response to having started the war, and reduced army.

Hitler and other veterans and citizens demanded vengeance.

Massive inflation (money used as fuel), followed by Great Depression.

National Socialist German Workers Society (NAZIS) ruled by Hitler since 1921.

Hitler became a charismatic campaigner and used modern technology to spread his message.

Just as Nazis started to lose votes, Hitler was invited to serve as Chancellor.

Arson in the parliament building led to declaring emergency rule, abolishing civil rights and constitutional protections.

When Hindenberg died (1934), Hitler abolished the office of president with the support of the army.

The Nazis quickly boosted the recovery of the economy.

Racial laws were introduced, with support, in 1935.

Propaganda campaigns sought to demonize Jews and label them as outsiders.

Upon taking control of Austria, Germany quickly made circumstances similar there.

Jews could only leave concentration camps if they agreed to emigrate, but other countries restricted Jewish immigration too severely.

Knowing Britain and other world and European powers would be reluctant to intervene, Hitler directed Germany’s rapid territorial expansion.

The Final Solution was authorized by Hitler’s second-in-command…the final solution to the Jewish problem🡪mass murder.

Soldiers that liberated concentration camps could not believe what they saw.

**Film Trailers**

***Shoah***

Very somber mood, definitely reflecting on the intense, emotional effects of the Holocaust.

***Schindler’s List***

Another powerful use of imagery. It seems like this may actually show some of the perspectives of German’s that were not Jews, but were still horrified by the events taking place.

***Au Revoir Les Enfants***

This film seems a little more triumphant, more about overcoming adversity and making friends.

***Life is Beautiful***

Having seen this movie myself, I can speak to how powerful it is. Despite overwhelming circumstances, the father’s only thought is to help his son survive the ordeal with as little trauma as possible. Again, a powerful use of imagery.

***The Pianist***

This film seems to be about how passion can be a driving force to get an individual through even the most trying of circumstances.

**The United States & the Holocaust**

The US was not focused on rescuing Jews and other ethnic groups targeted by Nazis.

Visa applications were outright denied or greatly delayed, under the ruse of national security.

It was three months after having received word of the “Final Solution” that the US chose to make the reports public.

In general American press downplayed the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany.

**United States Policy & Its Impact on European Jews**

Economic hardships of the Great Depression exacerbated the resistance to immigration, even of Jews fleeing Germany.

Prior to 1944 and the establishment of the War Refugee Board, the US was concerned only with winning the war and took no action to rescue Jews and other targeted ethnic groups.

Much debate continues regarding the decision of the US and Allies not to bomb rail lines leading to concentration camps or the gas chambers used to kill Jews.

After the war, when the US and other Allies became guardians of millions of displaced persons, they were largely insensitive to the psychological damage done to these people.

Army personnel in Bavaria protested the treatment of Jews, leading to improved conditions for them.

**The Aftermath of the Holocaust**

Many organizations and NGOs worked to assist Jews and other displaced persons in Europe.

Many governments denied Jews entrance to their countries and territories, sometimes forcibly.

**Displaced Persons**

With DP camps, Orthodox Judaism began to grow in importance, and every holiday was viewed as worthy of the most robust celebration possible.

On May 14th, 1948, both the US and the Soviet Union recognized the Jewish state of Israel.