Experimenting with Rescue:
Understanding the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s Approach to the Jewish Refugee Crisis from 1938 to 1940

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Abstract

Efforts to solve the Jewish refugee crisis created by the expansion of the Nazi empire have largely been examined with the hindsight that those efforts failed to rescue the millions of Jews who perished during the Holocaust. Historical literature has focused on explaining why governments and organizations did not do more—especially those of the United States. These social and political narratives, however, have largely ignored the considerations that govern the relocation of millions of people. Beginning with the premise that resettlement is inherently complicated, this investigation seeks to highlight the understanding of and approach to solving the refugee crisis by those directly facilitating rescue. Given that the burden of humanitarian efforts in the early 19th century fell on nongovernmental organizations, the approach taken by Jewish organizations has been underexamined. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s predominance among other Jewish organizations makes them ideal for exploring the considerations behind rescue efforts. Analyzing their approach to solving the refugee crisis reveals how the avenues of rescue chosen to rescue Jews changed as the situation progressed. Exploring the experience of an organization directly engaged in resettlement illustrates both that efforts were conducted with highly nuanced understandings of the situation and that impediments to rescue were just as complex. The importance of understanding the multitude of limitations that existed is that refugee resettlement was not simply a matter of will, but a matter of means. With limited avenues for rescue available to the JDC, even their best efforts could not solve the refugee crisis.
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INTRODUCTION

From 1938 to 1941, the intensifying persecution of Jews in Germany and its occupied territories forced the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Jews and the need to do so by even more. Jewish emigration occurred through various channels, but with millions of Jews facing economic and violent persecution, the only solution would have been the resettlement of the Jewish population in German-controlled areas. Given that most individuals financially able to emigrate did so earlier during Nazi persecution, most Jews left for emigration in German-controlled areas at the end of the 1930s were not in a financial position to pay for their resettlement or acquire visas to other countries. Although individual migration was dictated by the immigration policy of recipient nations and individual emigrant resources, the resettlement of groups of refugees depended on the ability to negotiate, fund, and implement resettlement plans. Facilitating the settlement of millions of destitute refugees meant securing visas, land, and capital.

While some nations were willing to consider individual or even group resettlement in their borders or colonies, no nation was willing to provide the funds for either. Therefore, the financial burden of resettlement fell on non-governmental organizations whose services included resettlement. The largest of these organizations was the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the JDC or the Joint, which provided most of the money for relief, rescue, and resettlement efforts. From 1933 to July 1938, the JDC spent close to $4.8 million on German and Austrian refugees, including $2.2 million in Germany.1 However, the demand on their resources from the latter half of 1938 onward increased dramatically without much increase to their

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resources. The combination of a worsening refugee crisis and the JDC’s limited resources meant they had to choose between rescue efforts. Examining the rescue efforts which the JDC pursued as the best solutions to the refugee crisis reveals the everchanging situation which made rescue difficult, if not impossible.

Literature of the Field

Historical literature on the rescue efforts for Jewish refugees from 1933 to 1941 focuses either on the general apathy of rescue efforts or on the broad international political conditions that prevented rescue. Some historical narratives condemn the United States for its inaction during Nazi persecution of the Jews. The United States is singled out because it was not immediately involved in the war and because it had a history of immigration and the capacity to absorb refugees; but it did not relax the immigration quotas which had been imposed in 1924. Moral narratives serve to question whether efforts to save Jewish refugees had any intention of genuinely increasing the possibilities for rescue. However, these narratives are problematic when they portray most, if not all, of the negotiations and plans for rescue efforts as only political grandstanding. Portrayals of farcical efforts are explained as the Roosevelt administration’s attempt to gain favor among American Jews and humanitarians while avoiding criticism from Americans who were against increased immigration. This approach to analyzing rescue has failed to deal with the political and financial complexities of resettlement. Narratives focusing on international conditions weigh the role of political and economic limitations of resettlement more heavily and provide a more nuanced understanding of the practical impediments to saving refugees. Historians focused on international politics maintain that more could have been done, but accept that avenues for rescue were slim. Unfortunately, these political analyses have
portrayed non-governmental organizations as merely operating submissively under these political conditions rather than as actually shaping the approaches to the refugee crisis.

*The Abandonment of the Jews* by David Wyman and Arthur D. Morse’s *While Six Million Died* are critical of the United States government’s apathetic efforts to aid Jewish refugees. However, these historical narratives narrow the understanding of rescue efforts by retroactively portraying those engaged in rescue as ignorant of or apathetic to the realities of Nazi persecution.

Wyman’s *The Abandonment of the Jews* focuses on the conditions which made the American public, and therefore the American government, hostile to admitting refugees. Wyman posits that the United States’ inaction stemmed from “three important aspects of American society in the 1930s: unemployment, nativistic restrictionism, and anti-Semitism.” Identifying these concerns as influential in limiting the ability to save Jewish refugees is necessary for understanding the Roosevelt administration’s failure to do more. However, explaining the failure to rescue more Jews as the consequence of popular sentiment fails to account for the practical realities which made rescue complicated and prohibitively expensive. Unilaterally taking on the refugee crisis would have meant funding the movement, settlement, and survival of millions of destitute refugees.

Arthur Morse’s *While Six Million Died* expresses the same indignation at the failure of the United States government to do more for Jewish refugees. In chapter 11, he claims that “the events of 1938, which foreshadowed mass murder,” were ignored by the United States. In the same chapter, he sardonically states that “no doubt the weather would be lovely” in Evian for the

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July 1938 conference called together by Roosevelt to deal with the refugee crisis. Indignation hinders his analysis of negotiations for resettlement because he treats the participation in the Evian Conference by thirty-two emigrant-receiving nations as a method of shaking off guilt without committing to any real effort. Morse approaches the Schacht-Rublee plan as a viable plan other than the reluctance of other nations to receive the refugees that Germany would have released—for a price. The Schacht-Rublee plan was negotiated to allow Jews to emigrate while keeping a percentage of their capital, as opposed to being virtually penniless. Morse admits the negotiations had potential, but blames the United States for not securing a viable settlement to receive these ransomed Jews. This treatment ignores the complexity of negotiating for capital transfer and securing areas for settlements.

Henry Feingold’s *Politics of Rescue* follows a similarly indignant narrative as other histories about rescue efforts, but he also seeks to understand rescue efforts as business interactions. His chapter “Negotiations with the Reich” explores the Schacht plan’s aim to keep Jewish wealth in Germany while facilitating Jewish emigration. Feingold presents the Reich’s stake in these negotiations as its desperate need for foreign currency given its trade deficit at the time. Germany’s limitation of Jewish emigration, despite the Reich’s desire to see a Germany free of Jews, seems oxymoronic, but it points towards a fundamental issue with mass migration: moving groups of people takes a lot of resources. Although financial limitations are addressed in each of the works mentioned, Feingold’s analysis places the ability to fund the movement of

4. Ibid., 207.
5. Ibid., 244–45.
Jewish refugees as the linchpin in rescue efforts. This moves the characterization of impediments to resettling Jewish refugees from apathy and indifferent to practical.

Yehuda Bauer’s *Jews for Sale?: Nazi Jewish Negotiations, 1933-1945* problematizes and expands on the narrative of money as the linchpin to rescuing persecuted Jews. By looking at Germany’s economic priorities and recovery, Bauer posits that increasing exports, acquiring foreign currency, and breaking the Jewish boycott, which tried to pressure Germany into ceasing persecution of its Jewish population, “had little if any objective importance” in negotiations for the release of Jewish capital.\(^7\) Bauer reveals that Germany was not feigning interest in these negotiations, but had motives that are unclear when analyzing them from a moral high ground decades later. Bauer also delves into the role of the JDC which made it possible for negotiations to be considered as a possible solution. Bauer also claims that the “JDC, rightly, saw [resettlement ventures] as a waste of money.”\(^8\) Considering that the JDC was the largest facilitator of most rescue and relocation efforts, this claim requires further examination but Bauer does not provide it. In fact, Bauer dismisses the JDC’s attempt at resettlement in the Dominican Republic as a “pathetic attempt to settle several hundred Jews on government land on the island.”\(^9\) These two arguments are difficult to reconcile because the JDC was either foolish enough to fund a useless venture or skeptical of resettlement ventures because they required massive amounts of time and money. It is unlikely that with limited resources and a worsening refugee situation, the JDC would have haphazardly shifted their stance on costly resettlement.


\(^8\) Ibid., 41.

\(^9\) Ibid., 31.
Tropical Zion contextualizes the Joint’s Dominican Republic settlement in the international pressure placed on the JDC and the motivations of the political parties pushing for to establish the Sosua settlement. Allen Wells addresses Yehuda Bauer’s focus on blame as important, but posits that this “obscures as much as it reveals about the principals’ motivations and responses” to the refugee problem. Instead, Wells focuses on the motivations of Trujillo, the Roosevelt administration, and the JDC to illustrate the complex politics behind establishing the Sosua colony. Wells hints at the financial dilemma the JDC had in considering resettlement as they “wrestled with the stark implications of subsidizing ever larger numbers of refugees.”

But Wells’ analysis is dominated by Trujillo’s desire to increase his bargaining capabilities and by the JDC’s obsession with agricultural settlement. He portrays Dr. Rosenberg, the head of the Sosua project, as obsessed with agriculture due to his “faith in nature’s transformative effects.” The analysis tends towards criticizing the idealistic notions of agricultural resettlement and political maneuvering as opposed to the practical necessity of a settlement. Perhaps Rosenberg’s desire to establish the Sosua settlement did stem from a desire to return city-Jews to nature; however, the increasingly dire situation and the growing strain on the JDC’s requires deeper analysis of how the JDC understood the available avenues for rescue.

The secondary literature on the rescue of Jewish refugees prior to and during WWII is relatively comprehensive when it comes to analyses of broad sentiments and limiting political realities. But little has been done to analyze the mentality of those who directly resettled refugees. People facilitating rescue had to make literal life-and-death decisions and the existing


11. Ibid., 31.

12. Ibid., 53.
historical literature has yet to investigate what informed those decisions. Instead of beginning with the result of rescue efforts, this investigation begins by looking at the motives behind the efforts. Through the Joint’s navigation of the refugee crisis, the limited possibilities for rescue become evident.

Primary Sources

The documents for this investigation come from the collections of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in their New York City archive. Since this historical investigation is about the conceptualization of and approach to the refugee crisis, the primary source materials consist entirely of textual materials concerning rescue efforts. The source materials include internal and external correspondence, memoranda, reports, meeting minutes, and a diary. The JDC was established in 1914 as a response to the need to distribute aid to impoverished and persecuted European Jews. An American organization, the JDC distributed aid, facilitated emigration, and established settlements around the world. As the largest Jewish aid organization, the JDC helped plan, negotiate, and fund many of the relief efforts during Nazi persecution. Subsequently, the Joint’s collections contain materials relating to a wide range of humanitarian efforts, including individual emigration and basic support. These archives have been used by many of the scholars addressed in this investigation, but none, as far as is discernible in their bibliographic notes, conducted an in-depth, longitudinal study of the documents.

From these collections, I have selected documents relating to three separate, but heavily interconnected events which represent the JDC’s nuanced understanding and approach to rescue. The first group of documents relates to the Intergovernmental Conference on Refugees at Evian

in July of 1938. The second group consists of materials on the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, the Coordinating Foundation, and negotiations with the German government from 1938 to 1939. Finally, the last set of primary sources are for the Sosua settlement in the Dominican Republic which was proposed at Evian in 1938 and established in 1940.

Before detailing the types of and strengths of the documents in each set, it is necessary to acknowledge the issues with exclusively using the JDC’s collections. As only one of many Jewish organizations—others include the United Palestine Appeal, the Council for German Jewry, and the World Jewish Congress—engaged in resettlement efforts, the Joint’s conceptualization of the refugee problem is only one of many understandings and approaches to the crisis. Furthermore, reconstructing their mentality from the documents available risks missing nuances not present in the available documents or understanding it only as JDC members documented it. Without another collection to explore or more time to delve deeper into their archive, the first problem will be solved by establishing recurring concerns and attitudes throughout the events. The latter problem of self-benefiting documentation is mitigated by the vast field of Holocaust literature that is critical of efforts by Jewish organizations.

Documents relating to the Intergovernmental Conference at Evian include preparatory meeting minutes, memoranda submitted to the Conference, communication between JDC attendees and the JDC office, and summary reports. These documents extend from the original conceptualization of the Conference early in 1938 to the conclusions drawn in August of 1938. The correspondence and meeting minutes provide the JDC’s internal concerns while developing a statement that outlined their position on the solution to the refugee crisis. The memorandum submitted to the Conference outlines the channels which the Joint thought should be pursued. The summary reports sent to the main office and the meeting minutes regarding the situation
during and after the Conference illustrate the attitude following the Conference. The main weakness of these sources is that they specifically claim that the important conversations, in which officials were more cooperative, occurred informally and off-the-record. Since records of these conversations do not exist, the only evidence for their willingness to help is the JDC’s positive feeling about these interactions.

Documents on negotiations with the Reich, the Coordinating Foundation, and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees include the same types of documents but at a higher volume. The strength of these sources is that there is no lack of substance upon which to base the analysis. However, the connected details in these documents make it difficult to separate misunderstandings regarding the events from accounts of the events. To avoid confusion, the sources addressing detractors of the JDC’s actions have been treated separately from the actions themselves. Furthermore, the backlash concerning negotiations with the Reich means that a large portion of these documents contain the JDC’s defense of their position. Although invaluable to illustrating their motives for cooperating with the IGCR and establishing the Coordinating Foundation, their defensive position may have led to an over-rationalization of their stance. However, their internal correspondence confirms that their reasons were not fabricated defenses.

Documents concerning the Sosua settlement range from as early as its proposal in July of 1938 to its progress a year after its establishment in 1941. Among the correspondence, proposals, and reports of the negotiations, there exists the diary of the negotiations by Dr. James N. Rosenberg, President of the Dominican Republic Settlement Association. The correspondence and reports on the Sosua settlement provide a valuable longitudinal trajectory on the conceptualization of and interest in the project. Though historians remain critical of Generalissimo Trujillo’s proposal, Dr. Rosenberg’s diary provides a stark alternative to the
skeptical narratives. The diary itself was originally dictated, and later transcribed, by Rosenberg over his month-long visit to the Dominican Republic to negotiate the settlement. The dictation reveals that Rosenberg gave these accounts in the presence of other members of the JDC and with their occasional input. Furthermore, his candor in regard to his thoughts and feelings about things, from the settlement negotiations to his bodyguard’s lovers, in the presence of his colleagues suggests an honest account of the events. That being said, Rosenberg praises the Dominican Republic and Trujillo at many instances and caution must be used with regards to statements possibly made from over-appreciation.

*An Unequivocal Burden*

Histories of the Holocaust and Jewish refugees have focused on explaining why the efforts to rescue Jews from Nazi persecution failed. These narratives approach the question of rescuing Jewish refugees with the assumption that more could have been done but those engaged in rescue were ignorant of the severity of the situation or did not care enough. These narratives highlight the shortcomings of governments, organizations, and individuals in their approaches to solving the crisis—and there are many. But the retroactive condemnation of rescue efforts has obscured the reality that there were organizations and individuals who dedicated all their energy and resources to saving Jewish refugees and still failed.

Whereas most histories of rescue efforts have dealt with the international political climate that limited rescue, this historical investigation revolves around the Joint’s navigation of those limited options. Necessary to this approach is the understanding that, as a humanitarian organization, the JDC’s primary goal was the rescue of their coreligionists. This approach is not meant to be an excuse for the shortcomings of the JDC, or any other group for that matter, but is meant to allow room for an analysis of the development of the Joint’s approach to rescue. By
understanding their approach to the refugee crisis, the historical narrative can be expanded to include the navigation of narrow avenues for rescue, not just their creation.

Ultimately, the members of the JDC approached rescue methodically and with the goal of maximizing the impact of their limited resources. The tendency to presume ignorance or negligence in the face of impending genocide underestimates their commitment to saving their coreligionists. Despite their best efforts, however, the international conditions rapidly worsened and eliminated their already slim chances of saving a significant number of Jews before Germany pursued genocide.
BACKGROUND

*Humanitarian Organizations and Refugees*

Before WWI, humanitarian organizations dealt with “civilizing war” and providing immediate aid to fallen soldiers. 14 During and after WWI, humanitarian efforts became more entwined with the rhetoric of human rights and the growing sense that the international community was responsible for the well-being of people everywhere. As a result, humanitarian organizations during WWI began to contend with the new, long term question of how to help refugees. Not only were refugees fleeing war torn homes, some found themselves stateless after having their citizenship revoked by their nation states who found their “political allegiances, social class, ethnicity, or religion” undesirable. 15 With hundreds of thousands of people displaced from their homes, the refugee question became one of resettlement. Humanitarian organizations in the 1920s had three avenues for resettlement: “a repatriation policy, as in the case of Russian and Armenian refugees; a policy of forcible transfer, as in the case of Greece and Turkey in 1923; a policy of settling refugees in a territory designated for them—hence the [International Labour Organization]’s particular interest in Latin America and in the exploratory committees it sent there.” 16 Population transfer or mass migration, which all three solutions involved, required the settlement of large numbers of refugees in territories that were often not socially or economically prepared to accept them. 17 International acceptance meant nations made at least

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16. Ibid., 185.

17. Ibid., 178.
some concessions for refugees, even if only in the way of allowing other organizations to conduct work within their borders. In the case of the Jews displaced along the warfront in Russia during WWI, local organizations were largely responsible for helping refugees, but with “the attention of generals, ministers, civil servants, courtiers, and Russia’s educated public.” The population exchange following the Greco-Turkish War, which traded Greek Christians in Turkey for Turkish Muslims in Greece, was part of the Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923. Although these governments helped facilitate resettlement, there was no requirement for a government to do so unless it benefitted them or they were forced to cooperate.

Furthermore, the ability of humanitarian organizations to solve international refugee problems depended heavily on the cooperation of sovereign nations. The founding of the High Commission for Refugees (HCR) by the League of Nations signaled the international community’s willingness to solve the refugee problem. But the HCR had to maintain the “fragile balance put in place by the peace treaties of 1919-20” which meant that “respecting the sovereignty of individual states” heavily impeded the approach to WWI refugees. National governments also limited non-governmental organizations by limiting their abilities to act within and across national borders. Although international organizations had dealt with the consequences of war, ethnic cleansing, and genocide before Nazi persecution began, the primacy of sovereign nations, which continues today, dictated the avenues available for rescue.

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18. Peter Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 47.


Climate in the United States

While humanitarianism was on the rise in the 1920s and 1930s, the ability to provide relief was limited because most nations were turning inward because of war and economic instability. During and after WWI, nations began restricting immigration to keep out immigrants whom they feared would threaten social and economic stability. European countries and the United States limited immigration and instituted immigrant identification during the 1910s due to “war-inspired xenophobia.” Economic crisis further influenced the United States’ move to limit immigration in 1924 because Americans feared that continued immigration would inhibit the nation’s economy by flooding the labor market. President Hoover’s September 1930 executive order on public charges required immigrants to prove that they would never become a drain on the system; this was judged by immigration officers who were often unsympathetic to European Jews. America’s restrictive immigration policies would especially impede Jewish refugees from entering the country once Nazi persecution began. In 1933, immigration officers dismissed cases on the basis that family members who vouched to care for immigrants did not have any real responsibility to do so. In this political climate, Roosevelt was reluctant to take any action which signaled the United States’ involvement in what was seen as a European problem.

Following the invasion of Austria, Roosevelt expressed sympathy and vowed that quotas for Austria and Germany would be filled completely, but the sudden rise of unemployment in 1937, which peaked in 1938 during the worsening of the refugee crisis, made Americans hostile to

22. Ibid., 167.


24. Morse, 138.

25 Ibid., 140-44.
increased immigration.26 Most Americans outright denounced Nazi Germany’s actions in Austria.27 But the United States government was unwilling to increase aid efforts to European Jews because it would be seen as a failure to protect American interests at home.28 Roosevelt was against the Neutrality Act of 1935, which limited weapons sales to belligerent nations, but he refused to veto it because of the backlash he would receive from “isolationists and pacifists.”29 The presence of anti-Semitism in American society should not be overlooked given the existence of anti-Semitic groups like the German-American Bund and the Silver Shirts, along with the often-cited following of Father Coughlin’s anti-Semitic Christian radio show and weekly paper.30 Although these extreme examples of anti-Semitism did not reflect a general American attitude, there was a general, passive apathy towards Jews and Eastern Europeans. The reluctance to relax immigration laws by the American government and its citizens was largely due to an indifference to the plight of Europe’s troubles in the face of internal problems.

*Nazi Persecution of European Jews*

Henry Feingold claims that the “attack on German Jewry began in earnest in September 1935 when the Nazi regime systematically began to force that well-assimilated group out of the national entity through the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws.”31 However, Feingold’s assertion underplays both the anti-Semitic violence and the economic legislation that had begun earlier,


27. Friedman, 42.

28. Ibid., 50.

29. Morse, 201.


31. Feingold, 4.
after Hitler’s election as Chancellor on March 23, 1933.\textsuperscript{32} Despite claims that violence following the election was a passing wave, acts of violence continued against German Jews and were at the very least implicitly sanctioned, albeit seemingly chaotic. Accounts of violence spanned the 1930s and include reports of men “ordered to flog each other”\textsuperscript{33} at gunpoint in 1933 and an attack on Jews by 200 Nazis in the shops around Kurfustendamm, a famous boulevard in west Berlin, on July 15, 1935.\textsuperscript{34} Despite the terror brought about by such anti-Semitic violence in the 1930s, it was persecution through economic legislation that affected the most Jews and caused the refugee crisis because it created both the desire for and limitations to emigration.

On April 7, 1933, just two weeks after Hitler’s election as Chancellor, the “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service” instituted ancestral histories as a requirement for determining the non-Aryan individuals who would be expelled from government employment.\textsuperscript{35} What followed in 1933 and for the rest of the 1930s was “a series of decrees…cutting Jews off from medical practice associated with the public health service, from the press, theater, radio, and cultural pursuits generally.”\textsuperscript{36} Another method of economic persecution came in the form of emigration taxes. The amount of capital a Jewish person could emigrate with was repeatedly reduced so that by October of 1934, the most a Jew could emigrate with was 10 Reichsmarks, the equivalent of US$4.\textsuperscript{37} These economic sanctions meant that the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, although they officially revoked the citizenship of all German Jews, simply finalized an already marginal

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{32} Morse, 104.
\bibitem{33} Ibid., 108.
\bibitem{34} Ibid., 176.
\bibitem{35} Ibid., 113.
\bibitem{36} Wyman, \textit{Paper Walls}, 28.
\bibitem{37} Morse, 145.
\end{thebibliography}
social and economic existence for German Jews. Without capital, Jews could not support themselves within Germany nor could they acquire visas and settle elsewhere. Oscar Handlin put it simply: “To move was expensive, and even the individuals with money could not readily turn it into convertible currency.”

The dual challenge facing relief organizations, then, was providing day-to-day subsistence to impoverished Jews and paying for their resettlement. With Austria’s occupation on March 12 of 1938, the Sudetenland in September of 1938, and Poland at the start of the war on September 1, 1939, the number of Jews under Nazi rule was increased by around 3.5 million. For the hundreds of thousands of Jews in Czechoslovakia and Austria, the sanctions that German-Jews faced soon applied to them as well. And while marginal living conditions existed for many of the 3.3 million Polish Jews even before they were brought under Nazi rule, their collective standing was reduced even more after the invasion. The addition of Polish Jews to the refugee crisis meant adding millions of emigrants for which most, if not all, of the money would need to be provided because they had virtually nothing.

Zionism and Resettlement

The diverging and shared beliefs of Zionists and non-Zionists partially informed the rescue efforts by Jewish organizations. The fundamental principle of Zionism, as stated in the Basel Program in August of 1897, was the understanding of Judaism as a national identity and a religion, and the commitment to establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Attached to this was the belief that agricultural settlements, or Halutziut, would help restore the spirit of Judaism.

40. Ibid., 31.
This agricultural interest “did not necessarily mean Palestine,” but a general ideal of the return to agriculture after life in the shtetl, which were poor small Jewish trading towns in areas where Jews were excluded from land ownership.\textsuperscript{42} The non-Zionist position, closely associated with Reform Judaism’s belief that Judaism constituted a religion and not a national identity, was that Palestine was only one of many possible settlements for Jewish refugees.\textsuperscript{43} American non-Zionists were typically Jews who had successfully assimilated into American society and were cautious about politicizing their Jewishness by claiming another national identity.\textsuperscript{44} Holocaust scholars typically present the relationship between these two groups as oppositional and thus one which prevented the rescue of more Jews. However, Menahem Kaufman highlights the interconnectedness of Zionist and non-Zionist Jewish organizations in the United States. Zionist organizations depended on non-Zionist organizations, especially on the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, whose middle-class members funded their resettlement activities in Palestine.\textsuperscript{45} Since non-Zionists fundamentally agreed that the only solution for Jewish refugees was for them to resettle elsewhere, they saw no problem in funding Palestine as one of many settlements. However, Zionists were critical of non-Zionists’ spending on other settlement ventures, as when the Joint spent $15 million on Crimean settlements in 1927; the Zionist congress felt they were “giving Palestinian projects a lower priority.”\textsuperscript{46} Although this illustrates some tension between the organizations, it is hardly indicative of a widespread animosity that

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 38-39.


\textsuperscript{44} Cohen, 12.

\textsuperscript{45} Kaufman, 24-26.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 26.
seriously inhibited the rescue efforts by either side. In the scope of a refugee problem that required exorbitant amounts of money to solve, the few million dollars fought over was nothing.

*American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee*

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, originally named the Joint Distribution Committee of American Funds for the Relief of Jewish War Sufferers, was established on November 17th, 1914—four months after the start of World War I. The need for an organization like the Joint stemmed from the preexisting marginal living conditions for Jews in Eastern Europe which were exacerbated by the onset of WWI.47 The efforts of the various charitable Jewish organizations that were created to aid European Jews during the war were held together because the JDC “acted as a central disbursing agency.”48 In the interwar period, the wartime relief agencies disbanded and “the responsibility [of relief] was there, however; no one else could bear it and for want of an alternative it fell to the Joint.”49 Before the rise of Nazi persecution the Joint was largely responsible for the survival of Polish Jews, a third of which “had incomes below the subsistence levels.”50 By the late 1930s, they were supporting multiple Jewish diasporas while funding organizations like the Coordinating Foundation and the President’s Advisory Committee on Political Refugees.51 It was under the strain of these tasks that the JDC undertook resettlement ventures for German-Jewish refugees as the refugee crisis deteriorated in 1938.

49. Ibid., 38.
50. Ibid., 65.
THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE ON REFUGEES AT EVIAN

On March 23rd 1938, two weeks after Germany’s invasion of Austria, President Roosevelt gauged the interest of refugee-receiving nations in developing an intergovernmental agency which would organize the emigration of German and Austrian political refugees.\(^\text{52}\) Roosevelt then invited interested nations and nongovernmental organizations to meet in Evian, France—after Switzerland declined to hold it in Geneva, the headquarters of the League of Nations—on July 6\(^\text{th}\) to make proposals on how to solve the refugee crisis. Histories of the Holocaust regard the Conference as a failure because most governments expressed sympathy but refused to relax their immigration restrictions despite increasing persecution against Jews. Historians attribute the Conference’s purpose to Roosevelt’s placating the calls for action by the United States without committing to any real effort.\(^\text{53}\) However, the role that nongovernmental organizations who made proposals to the Conference played in shaping the resulting efforts has been left out of historical narratives. The attending Jewish organizations, including the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish Colonization Association, the Council for German Jewry, and the JDC, presented similar solutions to the refugee crisis. Therefore, the Joint’s conceptualization of the solution to the refugee crisis would have shaped subsequent rescue efforts.

Prior to the Conference

The Joint’s attitude upon learning of the proposed Conference revolved around their fear that they would be asked to fund any efforts resulting from the Conference. On March 28\(^\text{th}\), Joseph C. Hyman, a JDC executive director, wrote to the Jewish National Welfare Fund that a


Conference meant that the JDC and other NGOs would “likely [be] asked to prepare to supply funds required for increased immigration, reception and placement of new immigrants.”\textsuperscript{54} Two days later in a letter to a Miss Stanford (on whom no additional information has been found) he explained that the refugee crisis required NGOs to prepare “in terms not of a few million dollars, but in terms of tens of millions of dollars.”\textsuperscript{55} On April 1\textsuperscript{st}, JDC officials met at the home of Joseph Chamberlain, chairman for the Joint’s National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees, to discuss the implications of the Conference. Their main concern was the “general feeling in Governmental circles… that there would not be the slightest difficulty in meeting the financial obligations” by NGOs.\textsuperscript{56} The JDC members at the April 1\textsuperscript{st} meeting had to consider that governments expected their funding and that the success of any plans resulting from the Conference depended on their “practical ability to meet this obligation.”\textsuperscript{57} On the surface these concerns seem indicative that the Joint was reticent to fund settlement, but the JDC was in fact already funding relief and emigration, and reaching their financial limit. The JDC understood its role as a major source of funds for resettlement projects and was hyper-aware of what it meant financially to participate in a conference seeking to solve the refugee problem. Their concern was due to their awareness that the refugee crisis required a lot of resources and that any solution would hinge on their ability to produce those resources.

Roosevelt soon confirmed that nongovernmental organizations were expected to fund any ventures resulting from the Conference. On April 13\textsuperscript{th} at a conference between White House staff


\textsuperscript{56} “Meeting at Professor P. Chamberlain’s Home – Friday Evening – April 1, 1938,” Folder 255, Joint 1933-1944 Series 28, 1.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 3.
and leaders of American philanthropic organizations, including Joseph Chamberlain, the
President explained that funding would have to come from private sources since “he did not
seem to be very successful in getting congressional action.”58 The official invitation sent to Paul
Baerwald, the JDC’s chairman, confirmed that “the cost of the work of relief must be borne
through contributions obtained from non-governmental sources.”59

Under these conditions, the Joint approached the Evian Conference with the knowledge
that they, and to a lesser extent the other NGOs, would bear the costs of any proposed solutions.
In his letter to Dr. Bernhard Kahn, the executive of the JDC’s refugee department, Baerwald
summarized his thoughts on being invited to Evian. Along with the typical concern of being
asked for funds, Baerwald raised the topics of immigration to South America and mass
resettlement. In regards to immigration to South America, Baerwald stated that they, presumably
JDC officials, had “hopes in that direction” despite the President’s rule that the Conference
would not ask for changes to immigration laws.60 In response to receiving “a great deal of
correspondence…about [resettlement] schemes,” Baerwald wrote: “I am only expressing my
own view and I believe it is shared by many others, that the question of mass immigration is
quite out of the question at the moment, and if it were possible it certainly cannot be discussed
openly. It is likely that investigations on the question of mass immigration can, nevertheless, not
be prevented.”61 Baerwald’s skeptical view of mass migration, which would have meant moving
hundreds of thousands of refugees in the matter of weeks, was coupled with doubt over whether

58. “Memorandum on White House Conference on Refugees,” April 13, 1938, Folder 255, Joint 1933-1944
Series 28, 2.


61. Ibid., 2.
it was even “desirable to have the J.D.C. represented at the Conference.” Instead of seeking mass resettlement, Baerwald placed his hope in the possible increase of regular immigration to South America. Given his concern with the funds required by the Conference, the JDC avoided ventures which diverted funds from individual emigration. Individual emigration to South America was a manageable task for the JDC; helping individual refugees emigrate to other countries was more financially manageable than moving large groups in a short period of time.

A June 2nd memorandum from the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugee Work included capital transfer as one of the solutions to be discussed at Evian. The memorandum established that the Conference sought “the transfer of commodities similar to the Haavarah arrangement between Germany and Palestine.” The basics of the Haavara trade agreement were that the property of German-Jewish emigrants was treated as exports to be bought from Germany with foreign currency after Jews emigrated. Negotiating a transfer agreement would have allowed for larger resettlement ventures because the settlers would have been able to bring their property and tools to the settlements. At a meeting on June 3rd, the JDC discussed the failure of previous attempts to “influence the German Government to relax its stringent regulations.” A relaxation of the economic sanctions on German-Jews would have eased the financial burden of supporting impoverished Jews and allowed NGOs to focus on emigration. Since the refugee crisis involved supporting and emigrating persecuted Jews, the solution would need to address both burdens. However, the JDC members believed the United States was in no position to

62. Ibid.
negotiate with Germany and that “a unit of several governments or the Conference itself, might make the approach.” Weeks before, Baerwald had expressed his uncertainty as to “the possible dealings of [the] Government with the Government of the Reich.” Without assurance persecution would be mitigated, the JDC approached the conference assuming refugees would emigrate without capital. Therefore, the JDC championed individual emigration and intervention as the viable solutions.

The desperateness of the situation is reflected in three telegrams sent to the JDC’s main office in New York. On June 5th Alfred Jaretzki, JDC vice-Chairman, wrote that those waiting for the Conference to begin were “realizing the situation [was] beyond private relief.” Eight days later Dr. Nathan Katz updated that Jewish organizations were considering submitting a joint memorandum “emphasizing [the] impossibility of solution through emigration.” On June 14th, Jaretzki telegrammed that he believed the Conference might encourage “German tactics” in Eastern Europe and that it should be stressed that any proposals were “not possibly applicable [to] eastern countries [on] account of their large numbers.” Furthermore, including Eastern European Jews meant providing all of the funds for them because, while German-Austrian Jews had capital to recuperate, Polish Jews had almost nothing. Although the JDC welcomed any openings for emigration, undertaking the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of refugees, or

65. Ibid.
millions if they included Eastern Europe, was beyond their capabilities. At the same time, they realized that prolonging the existing situation would eventually exhaust their resources.

During the Conference

Under these pretenses, the Joint and a few other organizations proposed intervention or negotiation with the Reich and not simply resettlement and relief. The nongovernmental organizations at Evian stipulated that the success of any solution, including mass resettlement, required concessions from Germany. Although NGOs agreed on the need for these concessions, they diverged on which method of emigration was the best solution to the refugee problem. To avoid being associated with the aims of other organizations, the JDC opted to submit a “brief message of greeting and a pledge of cooperation” instead of signing the joint proposal submitted by a council of Jewish organizations.  

The joint memorandum submitted by “Certain Organizations Concerned with the Refugees from Germany and Austria” stressed that intervention was the only solution. After introducing the scope of the problem in Germany, Austria, and Eastern Europe, the fifth section was on “the impossibility of mass emigration.” The proposal claimed that it would be impossible to find the land and money to resettle only the 2.5 million Jews under 40 years of age. Instead, the signatories agreed that “the primary remedy must be found within each country where the mass of the Jews live by a radical readjustment of their economic life…; emigration can only be a secondary solution.” This conclusion stems from the calculations in the latter half

70. “To the Officers and Members of the Executive Committee of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc,” July 5, 1938, Folder 256, Joint 1933-1944 Series 28, 1.


72. Ibid., 5.
of their proposal: the estimated cost of emigrating only the German Jews was £40,000,000, or US$200,000,000. Despite their stance on mass migration, they acknowledged the “urgent need of facilitating the immigration of an increased number, particularly from Greater Germany, for whom existence [had] become impossible.”\textsuperscript{73} They concluded that without negotiating “some measure of co-operation from Germany, it [did] not appear possible that planned emigration [could] be carried out.”\textsuperscript{74} Their proposal illustrates that by summer 1938, the signatories of this memorandum understood the problem as one of both scale and means.

The Council for German Jewry, a British NGO that signed the joint memorandum, had drafted a letter to the British government in July 1938 claiming the only solution was “to remove from Germany half a million people during the next few weeks, if their lives [were] to be saved.”\textsuperscript{75} Even if they were exaggerating the severity of the situation to move the British government to action, this reveals the urgency felt by Jewish organizations—albeit naivety in thinking that 500,000 people could be resettled in a matter of weeks. Their dichotomous stance on emigration seems puzzling, but the underlying principle is the immediacy of both proposals—either persecuted Jews were immediately rescued or their situation was improved. Knowing emigration required time and money that they did not have, the first step was to intervene for the amelioration of living conditions inside of Germany.

In the same vein, the World Jewish Congress implored the nations at Evian to intervene and end the persecution in Germany. They appealed that it was not simply an ethical plea but that it would be “practically impossible to provide shelter...if [Jews were] driven out of Germany in

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 8.
a state of complete destitution.” 76 The WJC also recognized that without concessions from Germany, there could be no “large-scale emigration of the Jews from Germany, however eager and self-sacrificing the cooperation of the private organisations.” 77 The WJC framed the problem as the emigration of at least “2 or 300,000 Jews from Germany and Austria within the next few years.” 78 It believed that emigration should be to large agricultural settlements—specifically Palestine. Their desire for negotiations with Germany stemmed from their belief that mass resettlement was the solution and that it required capital that they could not produce. Similar to the joint memorandum, the WJC understood intervention as a method of reducing the difficulty of emigration from Germany.

The JDC’s memorandum to the Conference shared many of the same conclusions that the joint memorandum and the WJC’s memorandum contained. The JDC also raised the issue of capital transfer, but they approached it differently than the others. The memorandum cites the existing Haavara transfer agreement as “[encouraging] the belief that the German Government may be willing to cooperate in the furtherance of Jewish emigration by permitting the emigrants to take out a really useful proportion of their capital.” 79 This approach reveals that the JDC may have understood Germany’s willingness to negotiate as a sign that the situation, while dire, had more time to be resolved. This understanding corresponds with Germany’s continued interest in emigration until 1941. Although it can be argued that the Nazis had no real interest in


77. Ibid., 3.

78. Ibid., 3.

resettlement, even the appearance of cooperation for emigration would have given the JDC the impression that there was more time to pursue resettlement. Retroactively, negotiating with the Reich seems to have been destined to fail. But without the cooperation of the home government, resettling Jewish refugees was a unilateral effort which the JDC understood to be insoluble.

Although the Joint was against mass settlements, they too voiced their “interest in agricultural and group settlement projects.” However, they pointed out that these settlements “could not be of more than secondary help” because “they [could not] be suddenly made available for large masses, and [could] never take the place of free individual immigration.” To the JDC, any resettlement that did not entail “permanent residence” and self-sufficient refugees meant money “lost for the essential task of emigrating Jews from Germany.” To the JDC, the solution was emigration that ended the refugees’ dependency on their resources. Mass settlement would have allocated money to a venture that may not have been possible while there was still the possibility to fund individual emigration. However, this did not mean that the JDC disregarded resettlement altogether, it simply was not their primary solution to the refugee crisis.

After the Conference

Contrary to typical historical narratives, reports of the Conference reveal a generally positive attitude as to the accomplishments at Evian. In a report on the Conference, an unknown writer noted that while the speeches made by government delegates were discouraging, “private conversations” revealed that they were “for ‘home consumption’ as well as with an eye to public

80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., 4-5.
82. Ibid., 3.
opinion abroad.”83 In private, attending nations were “prepared to act more generously in regard to the reception and settlement of the immigrants.”84 The report summarizes that mass settlement was seen as unlikely and that “in almost every case emphasis was laid on the necessity of Germany co-operating in any schemes.”85 Similarly, in a letter to Baerwald, Nathan Katz recounted a conversation with the French Senator Berenger, in which the senator told him “it [would] be necessary in the end to give some sort of quid pro quo to the Germans if [they were] to get anything out of them.”86 From this, it was established that negotiations with Germany were the priority of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees created by the Conference.

Traditionally Evian is seen as a failure, but the desired solution, intervention, had been granted. With the permanent committee in place and plans to negotiate with the Reich, the JDC was still under pressure, but had reason to believe that there would be more time and money to solve the refugee problem. However, this came with the understanding that Germany would be difficult to appease and that the JDC would still be called upon to help facilitate any efforts.

84. Ibid.
85. Ibid., 4.
THE IGCR, THE COORDINATING FOUNDATION, AND NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE REICH

The Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees was established to facilitate emigration from Germany and its occupied territories and to negotiate with Germany. George Rublee, an American lawyer with experience as an attaché to various United States foreign policy projects, was chosen to head the committee. Rublee was tasked with finding places for immigration and negotiating with Germany for an increase in the amount of capital Jewish emigrants could take with them. The result of these negotiations was the Rublee plan—also called the Schacht or Wohlthat plan, after the German negotiators Hjalmar Schacht and Helmut Wohlthat—which outlined the transfer of capital for Jewish emigrants. In *Jews for Sale?*, Yehuda Bauer claims the JDC only provided the “administrative and financial backup” for negotiating the plan. David S. Wyman claims the plan failed because Jewish organizations wasted time fighting over the potentially dangerous implications of the plan. Although Wyman and Bauer disagree on why negotiations failed, their narratives portray the Joint as simply going along with a rescue effort developed by the United States and the IGCR. Contrary to these narratives, the JDC was asked to advise the IGCR in its approach to the crisis and the negotiations. Therefore, the Joint’s understanding of the refugee crisis and its solution is crucial in understanding the importance of the negotiations with the Reich that ended with the outbreak of war in September of 1939. The JDC’s support of the negotiations illustrates their conviction that the best chance of rescuing Jews was with Germany’s cooperation.

87. “Refugees 1938-1940,” Folder 45a, DORSA Reports.
Advising the IGCR

Bauer and Wyman retroactively deem the negotiations as a failure and therefore a misguided endeavor because they were conducted with limited time, but these were not the conditions at the time. On the premise that negotiations and subsequent concessions would make the refugee crisis soluble, the JDC was prepared to support the IGCR. On August 9th, Baerwald summarized the situation at the beginning of the IGCR’s work in a letter to JDC vice-chairman Alfred Jaretzki. A striking comment in the letter is that Rublee, although reluctant but willing to be Director of the IGCR, also “[regretted] his handicap of knowing so little about the situation.”90 In this regard, the IGCR was ill-prepared, but unfamiliarity was easier to overcome than funding emigration without Germany’s cooperation. Because of Rublee’s unfamiliarity, the IGCR members were interested in having members of the JDC, specifically Bernhard Kahn and Nathan Katz, remain in London “at the disposal of the committee.”91 The need for the JDC’s advice by an intergovernmental body illustrates that the Joint’s expertise with refugee resettlement was highly-regarded. And although Baerwald was certain the JDC would help the IGCR solve the crisis, he understood that the JDC could not lead an effort of that magnitude.

Baerwald acknowledged that they “[had] a London Committee” and could afford to “[delay] things or moves for a reasonable time” so that they would be “very much in a better position for the future” when called on to help.92 His attitude stemmed from the understanding that the negotiations with Germany signaled the beginning of a manageable rescue effort that only needed time. Baerwald wrote: “I said the scene has shifted. Mr. Taylor said that under

90. Paul Baerwald to Alfred Jaretzki, August 9, 1938, Folder 255, Joint 1933-1944 Series 28, 1.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid., 2.
ordinary circumstances…. it would take sixteen years to resolve the question which he hoped, through a main effort could be reduced to five or six years. That alone shows to the world and to the poor people concerned in Germany, that patience is needed [sic].”\textsuperscript{93} As far as Baerwald and the Joint were concerned, the IGCR was the key to solving the refugee crisis—all that was needed was time to work out the details. Along this line, Baerwald advocated for “thinking of permanent organizations, rather than temporary ones.”\textsuperscript{94} However, the JDC did not pretend that the negotiations would be simple or absolve them of their responsibility. In another August letter to Jaretzki, Baerwald agreed “somebody must take the lead and [they] should not be averse to doing that, but the English and the American organizations[,] before they [took] a public step in that connection, [had to] be assured of the support from many other quarters.”\textsuperscript{95} Still cautious about being seen as capable of funding any venture, Baerwald maintained the need for other organizations and nations to step forward.

The memorandum of a conversation between Dr. Bernhard Kahn and George Rublee, also attended by the IGCR assistants and Alfred Jaretzki, reveal what the negotiations were meant to accomplish. The beginning of the memorandum compares the efforts and spending by the JDC to other organizations between 1933 and 1938. Illustrative of the JDC’s importance; the Central British Fund and the Jewish Colonization Association, two leading Jewish organizations, spent a combined total of $1.56 million in Germany, while the JDC spent $2.64 million.\textsuperscript{96} Another section outlines the emigration conditions in Germany and Austria—while some

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 2-3.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 1-2.
German Jews had capital to emigrate with, “it [was] quite different with the Austrian refugees who nearly all [came] out penniless.” Emphasis was also placed on the cost of supporting Austrian refugees in transit countries. The last four pages of the 16-page memorandum discussed the existing schemes for capital transfer from Germany. They focused on the Haavara transfer system which allowed Jews to emigrate to Palestine with £1,000 of capital provided that they purchased German exports for their settlement. Rublee and Kahn came to three conclusions for “an orderly conducted emigration, which according to the statement of Mr. Taylor should be so accelerated that it would take five years to emigrate…all those fit for emigration.” Those fit for emigration meant refugees who could establish themselves and provide for refugees who could not. The first conclusion was that the Jews waiting for emigration in Germany “[could not] be allowed to demoralize by being receivers of relief…if this [was] allowed, these people would be unfit for emigration.” Their worry about refugees becoming unfit for emigration is inherently linked the JDC’s financial concerns; any refugee who was not prepared to work meant another person to support. Ultimately, the JDC’s work could never be purely charity because providing money without considering its net gain meant losing it for other possible solutions. The second conclusion was that capital transfer should be approached with previous schemes as references but not as ideals. The recommendation was that:

The best solution would be that every Jew who wants to emigrate could take a large part of his property along and get foreign currency for it, so that a rich man could emigrate with quite a substantial amount of money and establish himself in a foreign country, and at the same time take all the people whom he needs to establish an industry. If this is not possible, an arrangement should be made…so

97. Ibid., 6.
98. Ibid.,12.
99. Ibid., 12.
that nobody gets less than 25% of his capital and the people of small means get at least 50% of their capital.\textsuperscript{100}

These expectations reveal what the JDC saw as necessary for the facilitation of emigration and what they believed the IGCR would be able to negotiate. And far from naively believing that this would be easily negotiated, the memo acknowledges that “there [would] be difficulties for the German Government, or it [would] maintain that there [were] difficulties in providing foreign currency.”\textsuperscript{101} The Joint ended the discussion with: “We are willing to cooperate in the working out of such schemes as appear to the [IGCR] worthwhile trying.”\textsuperscript{102} After this, the JDC essentially fell out of the main process of the negotiations until early in 1939 when the Rublee plan was developed and it came time to participate. Although Bauer and Wyman interpret this as the JDC being excluded, however the JDC understood the IGCR to be the organization prepared to deal with the crisis; the burden was not supposed to be on them.

\textit{Negotiations and the Coordinating Foundation}

Bauer and Wyman have limited explanations of the Joint’s support of the Rublee Plan to pressure from Roosevelt or the IGCR. The failure of the plan is attributed to the negative reception by Jews and the subsequent infighting between organizations. These are attributed to the reluctance of Jewish organizations to cooperate in the plan because it involved capital transfer that benefitted the German economy. Although there was disagreement among Jewish organizations, the plan failed largely because it required a financial contribution from Jewish organizations in the form of creating a corporation external to Germany and because war broke out in September of 1939. There are three aspects of the plan that require analysis to understand

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
the JDC’s participation in the Rublee Plan. The first is details of the plan itself and how it would have facilitated the emigration of German-Jews. The second is the role of the Coordinating Foundation in the Rublee plan and the difficulties of establishing it. And the final aspect of the negotiations are the conversations in which the JDC justified their support of the plan to leaders of dissenting Jewish organizations. The rationale for discussing the difficulties of establishing the Coordinating Foundation separately from its reception among Jewish organizations is that detractors often conflated the Foundation with the Rublee plan.

On December 15, 1938, Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, President of the Reichsbank, “without introductory formality, orally presented a plan” to George Rublee in London.\textsuperscript{103} The fundamental scheme was that an internal and external fund would be established to aid the emigration of German Jews. The internal fund would hold the emigrants’ capital in Germany and the external fund would provide them with an equivalent loan in foreign currency. The money in the internal fund would be used to purchase German goods to help the emigrants settle elsewhere. The external fund required the international community, specifically Jews, to raise US$600,000,000 to match the internal fund. Though it is unlikely that this amount could have ever been raised, it is important that it was not immediately asked for to complete negotiations. Schacht also claimed that “persecution of Jews would cease” when the plan was accepted.\textsuperscript{104} However, Schacht’s “plan was generally considered as asking the world to pay ransom for the release of hostages in Germany and barter human misery for increased exports.”\textsuperscript{105} And although the IGCR knew that “Germany would be making no concrete contribution,” the Committee did not to reject the plan.

\textsuperscript{103} “Refugees 1938-1940,” Folder 45a, DORSA Reports, 70.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 72.
outright for fear of Germany ending the negotiations. However, Rublee understood Schacht’s plan as an opportunity for organized emigration and “the possibility of using the fund…to develop settlement projects or equip emigrants for infiltration.” Although the plan did not allow capital to move out of Germany, it meant that emigrants would not be completely destitute. Even these limited concessions would have organized emigration and relieved the strain of the JDC’s limited resources. Under this original proposal, Rublee began negotiating for a more favorable plan with the Germans.

After the first three meetings in early January of 1939, Schacht was replaced by Herr Helmuth Wohlthat, who was appointed specifically for the negotiations. At the conclusion of the negotiations in February, the Wohlthat-Rublee plan was presented to the IGCR for consideration. The internal and external funds would remain, as would the export of German goods, but there would need to be an external body “to coordinate various parts of the Scheme,” which included the movement of refugees, funds, and goods. Establishing the corporation fell to American and British Jewish organizations, which meant the JDC’s involvement.

To the JDC, the Rublee Plan represented the temporary dominance of the moderates in Germany who wanted emigration as opposed to turning Jews into the Reich’s serfs. The fine line between success and failure meant that they were ready to cooperate, but were wary of

106. Ibid., 72.
107. Ibid., 73.
108. Ibid., 78.
committing all of their resources to the success of the Rublee plan. While considering the establishment of the corporation, JDC members maintained a cautious attitude toward the plan. On February 28th, Joseph Hyman informed Isidor Coons, the JDC’s fundraising director, that since the JDC was “in no official sense tied” to the IGCR, no public statement should make it seem otherwise.\textsuperscript{111} Furthermore, Hyman stressed that it was “inadvisable to create the impression” that the transfer plan was the JDC’s responsibility or that it came “within the purview of its budget and activities.”\textsuperscript{112} The Joint’s everlasting concern with their limited resources made them avoid being overly-connected to the plan because the plan required hundreds of millions of dollars. To the JDC, the Rublee plan was the product of cooperation between governments; which the Joint believed to be the only way the refugee crisis would be solved. Two weeks later, Hyman explained to Clarence Pickett, the Executive Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, that the “lukewarm attitude” toward the plan might “discourage our State Department and Administration” and risk “any further intergovernmental attempts.”\textsuperscript{113} Furthermore, the Rublee Plan had a time limit; it had to be accepted within six months of its proposal in February.\textsuperscript{114} At a March 28\textsuperscript{th} meeting, Myron C. Taylor, an IGCR committee member, had stressed that the goal was not to “‘talk of a large sum of money’” or a “‘large corporation’” but enough action to “indicate that [they] were ready to proceed.”\textsuperscript{115} Setting aside the prohibitive amount needed for the external fund, the JDC provided the smaller amount

\textsuperscript{111} Joseph Hyman to Isidor Coons, February 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1939, Folder 255, Joint 1933-1944 Series 28.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{113} Joseph C. Hyman to Clarence E. Pickett, March 17, 1939, Folder 255, Joint 1933-1944 Series 28.

\textsuperscript{114} “Memorandum Re: Conversations Concerning Proposals of Mr. Myron Taylor,” April 4, 1939, Folder 255, Joint 1933-1944 Series 28, 3.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 4.
needed for the Foundation in hope of ensuring even the chance at an external fund. However slim the chances for the plan’s success, it remained the best solution to the refugee crisis.

The major impediment to establishing the Coordinating Foundation was the conflict between British Jewry’s desire for the corporation to invest directly in settlement schemes and the American stance that the Foundation be responsible only for administration. The Americans wanted the Foundation to “serve virtually as a clearing-house, as an investigative vehicle and as a means primarily to implement the transfer of funds accumulated in the trust in Germany.”

The JDC’s stance on not being responsible for funding informed the American position that the Foundation should not raise money for settlements since “the primary responsibility for such funds would have to be that of Governments.” Wyman’s reduction of the differing opinions on the purpose of the Foundation to moral infighting ignores the practical differences in their approach to saving refugees. British Jewry may have expected the plan to fail and wanted to prepare for mass resettlement before the fact. Regardless, the JDC maintained that the crisis was beyond private efforts and moved only to facilitate the governments’ efforts. There was confusion, however, as to whether Wohlthat would be satisfied with “a gesture corporation,” and or if he required “to be really shown that substantial amounts of money [were] on hand or definitely committed.” Mr. Taylor stipulated that there had been no definite demand for large sums and “saw no reason why the group…should be obliged to flaunt hundreds of millions of


117. Ibid.

118. Ibid., 2.
dollars before Mr. Wohlthat.”  

Therefore, the simple administrative corporation envisioned by the Americans could satisfy the needs of the Rublee Plan without requiring a lot of money.

Nevertheless, the British refused to fund the Foundation “purely for the purposes set forth between the exchange of letters between Rublee and Wohlthat.”  

The British withdrawal did not mean a rejection of the Rublee plan, but a refusal to spend money on an administrative corporation. On June 9th, Jim, presumably executive chairman James Rosenberg, assured Baerwald not to “be disheartened if others [failed to] do their part” since the “burden [could not] be placed on private resources.”  

He urged Baerwald “consider whether [he was] willing [to] start even without other funds” given the “importance [of] showing Taylor et al [their] unconditional readiness.”  

Though the JDC would not commit to funding mass settlements, they would fund the corporation if it meant ultimately relieving their burden by securing concessions from Germany. Subsequently, at an executive meeting on June 16th, the JDC unanimously resolved to completely underwrite the initial costs of the Foundation.  

Despite their conviction that the establishment of the Foundation was necessary, the JDC still sought the support of other American Jewish organizations. The extent of their efforts could not stop at funding parts of the Rublee plan, the Joint needed to cultivate support for the effort they believed to be the solution.

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119. Ibid., 2.

120. “Meeting in the Felix M. Warburg Memorial Room,” June 17, 1939, Joint 1933-1944 Coordinating Foundation, 2.

121. Jim to Paul Baerwald, June 9, 1939, Joint 1933-1944 Coordinating Foundation.

122. Ibid.

Defending the Plan

The day after resolving to underwrite the costs of the Coordinating Foundation, the JDC met with leaders of other Jewish organizations. Joseph Tenenbaum, a Zionist leader and chairman of the Joint Boycott Council, presented the strongest opposition to the Joint funding the Foundation. Both Tenenbaum’s accusations and the defense mounted against his accusations reveal the existence of diverging understandings of the refugee situation and its solution. Even those in support of funding the Foundation were skeptical of the Rublee plan’s chances of success. James Rosenberg’s statement at the meeting presents the nuanced, almost paradoxical, understanding of the refugee crisis and the Rublee Plan that led the JDC to fund the Foundation:

I have no faith whatever that the foundation will... accomplish anything and I say that because it cannot do anything because the governments of emigration and immigration make it impossible. However, by supporting the action of the J.D.C., this meeting will enable the Steering Committee...to make it clear to those who are in authority...that we have not failed them. Hence, while I adhere to the position of the fundamental unsoundness of this whole thing...I say that...a commitment has been made...to support this move and to authorize this underwriting...124

Having come to the conclusion that private efforts were not enough, that Germany would not cooperate without benefit, and that any ordered emigration was better than the existing chaos, the JDC had no choice but to pursue the plan regardless of the slim chances for success. Furthermore, “Governments of settlement” had told George Rublee that they “might receive involuntary immigrants with property where they would not even discuss the migration of destitute persons.”125 Tenebaum, however, understood the plan as a sign of Germany’s desperation for foreign currency and felt “that anything [they] could do in Germany to ameliorate


the Jews [they could] do through boycott.\textsuperscript{126} However, Tenenbaum had an erroneous understanding of the plan’s relation to the German economy since the exports would be paid from the \textit{internal} fund, which would be comprised of Reichsmarks. Max Warburg, a Jewish banker who had lived in Hamburg until 1938, responded:

I do not know whether you have any idea of the misfortune of the German Jews as to their remaining property. It is a trifle. It is nothing. I had to control the Jews’ fortune in a certain way. There is no Jewish fortune left…This plan has nothing to do with export… the question is simply today whether the Jews will take the responsibility of the last chance of an organized emigration which is possible or having all these cruelties that we have today continue. I am not…one of those who believe that Dr. Wohlthat will now do what he can in favor of the Jews, but he is one of those who prefer to have organized immigration as it would be even better for Germany…and after all that has been said here already, can a Jew take the responsibility not to take advantage of the very, very last chance which has been given to us by the Schacht-Rublee plan and by your President?\textsuperscript{127}

Warburg’s position is retroactively confirmed by Yehuda Bauer’s work on the German economy and transfer schemes during the pre-WWII years. Bauer states that the “boycott never posed a threat to the Nazi regime” because exports, and thus transfer schemes, “had little if any objective importance” in their economy.\textsuperscript{128} However, Bauer stops short of attributing this knowledge of the situation to the JDC. But knowing that Germany was not desperate for exports, but was instead providing a chance for emigration, led the JDC to support the plan. Tenenbaum also claimed that Germany had never prevented emigration and that the real issue was the lack of countries for settlement. This is partially true given that Germany had no restrictions on emigration, but he ignored that there were no countries for settlement because Germany was not letting emigrants take money; and that was what the plan was fixing. His position assumed that the plan condoned

\textsuperscript{126} “Meeting in the Felix M. Warburg Memorial Room,” June 17, 1939, Joint 1933-1944 Coordinating Foundation, 13 & 21.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 21-22.

confiscation of Jewish property, when the reality was that Germany was confiscating Jewish capital, regardless of their cooperation. The JDC’s need to defend the plan, however, should not be conflated as the reason for its failure given that the JDC had already done what was asked of them. For Warburg and Rosenberg, the reality was that no other options were left for emigration and their best chance to save more Jews was by negotiating a transfer agreement, even if it meant being accused of colluding with Germany.
THE SOSUA SETTLEMENT

The Joint’s refugee settlement in the Dominican Republic in 1940 has been treated as a misguided attempt by an organization infatuated with agricultural settlement. Most historical treatments of Jewish refugees between 1938 and 1941 devote little more analysis to the Sosua settlement than it having been the only settlement to materialize from the Evian Conference and its failure to meet expectations. Although Allen Wells’ *Tropical Zion* focuses on understanding the Joint’s establishment of the settlement, his analysis is biased by the hindsight that it failed. Wells’ treatment of the political tensions between Trujillo, the Dominican Republic’s military dictator, and the United States as well as contemporaneous ideas about settlement accurately reveals the complexity surrounding the negotiations. However, his understanding of Sosua as a failure leads to an analysis that while not “fixing the blame” on the JDC, concludes that their “wealth and political clout…was used to conciliate and accommodate” the political whims of government officials. The tendency to attribute the Joint’s actions to naivety and a malleable demeanor in the face of larger political realities undermines the methodical approach that the Joint used in its rescue efforts. Explaining the JDC’s pursuit of the Sosua settlement requires more than political and social context; it requires tracing the evolution of the JDC’s practical understanding of the avenues available for rescue.

*Considering Settlements*

The Joint’s pursuit of the Sosua settlement appears misguided because of its limited success and because it began months after World War II started. Wells’ claims are valid, the Joint had an interest in agricultural settlement and in proving the ability of Jews to prosper in the tropics. However, placing the impetus for the Sosua settlement on pressure from Trujillo and

129. Wells, xxix.
Roosevelt or an interest in agricultural experiments ignores the JDC’s continued practical approach to rescue. Tracing their interest in settlement ventures from the Evian Conference to the winter of 1939 when they established the Dominican Republic Settlement Association (DORSA) illustrates how Sosua was a rational response to changing conditions.

Wells’ argument that the JDC’s infatuation with returning city Jews to agricultural settlements informed its pursuit of Sosua oversimplifies their motives for a settlement. The Joint’s $17 million resettlement of 150,000 Jews in Crimea from 1924 to 1938 was a clear example that they were both willing to and capable of undertaking mass resettlement. The Crimean venture is cited as an indication of the JDC’s obsession with returning city and shtetl Jews to agriculture. Wells cynically claims that “philanthropy also gave these patricians the opportunity to engage in social engineering as they imposed their vision of progress on recent emigres.”

This claim can be made because of the experimental nature of settlement projects, but the JDC’s experimental approach had to do with testing a settlement before committing more funds. Although agricultural settlement was one of Zionists’ and non-Zionists’ interests, and the JDC, there were practical considerations that made agricultural settlements favorable. One motivation for settling persecuted Jews in rural areas was that they would be removed from crowded cities where they were seen as commercial competition. At Evian, one of the goals outlined for resettlement in the United States was “removing immigrants from over congested metropolitan areas to other sections of the country that [were more] likely to be able to absorb them.”

The Joint had to weigh the negative effects a sudden influx of impoverished refugees

130. Ibid., 51.

could have following the Great Depression and rising anti-Semitism. Furthermore, agricultural settlements were envisioned as self-sufficient Jewish enclaves which would reduce the long-term costs of supporting refugees. Despite the time and money needed upfront to prepare agricultural settlements, establishing settlements would relieve the strain of spending “huge sums for mere relief purposes without any constructive results, [which would be lost] for the essential task of emigrating Jews from Germany.”

The Joint’s interest in agricultural settlements partially explained their pursuit of Sosua, but this does not negate the practical benefits of placing refugees in an isolated, self-sufficient settlement.

The JDC’s support of Sosua instead of Palestine despite their political influence in the United States is attributed to their unwillingness to jeopardize their status in American society by becoming political. And although the JDC maintained an apolitical stance, this charge presumes the self-serving “tendency of the American Jewish community to concentrate on strengthening its own position within American society.”

The JDC’s members were affluent and assimilated, but this should not be conflated with a self-serving prevention of settlement in Palestine. In fact, the JDC’s avoidance of become political was an attempt to maintain their influence, and therefore their ability to help their coreligionists. In August of 1937 at a conference concerning Palestine, Felix Warburg, the JDC’s first chairman until his death the next month, “threatened a non-Zionist walkout should the Zionists worry only about attaining a state and abandon their obligations to their Arab neighbors.” Warburg morally rejected the Peel Commission’s “recommendation that the Arab population of the proposed Jewish state be transferred to


neighboring Arab countries, even against their will.”\textsuperscript{135} Warburg’s position illustrates that to non-Zionists, forcing a Jewish state in Palestine had practical and ethical drawbacks. In anticipation of the Zionists pushing for Palestine as the only solution at Evian, Baerwald advised Kahn to inform the Conference that “figures of immigration [did] not justify that statement, and that immigration into other places was much larger.”\textsuperscript{136} However, if he had a capricious, self-serving issue with settlement in Palestine, he would not have concluded that “the more Palestine can absorb the better for all.”\textsuperscript{137} The JDC’s funding of emigration to Palestine illustrates a willingness to fund settlement anywhere insofar as it was practical.

The Joint’s focus on South America resulted from their understanding that potential countries of refuge were dwindling as conditions worsened. At a JDC meeting prior to the Evian Conference, the assumption was that any push for increased immigration to Europe would be countered with the “well-known reasons of density of population, unemployment, etc., and the argument [would] be used that the best possibilities undoubtedly [existed] in overseas countries.”\textsuperscript{138} They also acknowledged that the United States had “more of the German refugee emigrants than any other country” and that it could use the same counterarguments.\textsuperscript{139} Their accurate prediction of the governments’ stance on immigration at Evian meant that they had shifted their focus from Europe and the United States to other receiving nations, namely in South America.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 37.

\textsuperscript{136} Paul Baerwald to Bernhard Kahn, June 14, 1938, Folder 255, Joint 1933-1944 Series 28, 1.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{138} “Informal Notes of Meeting Held June 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1938, at the Harmonie Club, 4 East 60\textsuperscript{th} Street,” Folder 255, Joint 1933-1944 Series 28, 2.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
Paradoxically, the Joint, among other organizations, had argued at Evian that mass resettlement would take too long and cost too much to be a viable option. After Evian, the JDC moved toward mass settlements because the IGCR would be securing concessions from Germany that gave them time and resources to pursue larger settlements. Along with the IGCR and other nongovernmental organizations, the Joint had sought out and begun efforts with regards to various settlement schemes. In the summer of 1939, at the same time Sosua was under consideration, the JDC was also interested in settling British Guiana despite the “small scale of [the] experiment.”\textsuperscript{140} Before the abandonment of the project by the British in October of 1939, the Joint had allocated at least $150,000 but a maximum of $250,000 for British Guiana.\textsuperscript{141} The Joint also set aside $200,000 for the settlement of 200 families in Mexico while waiting on “full details regarding the project.”\textsuperscript{142} Far from being infatuated or duped into one particular settlement, the JDC pursued various settlements alongside individual immigration with the understanding that negotiations would provide the time and money needed for both.

*Resettlement at the JDC Conference and After the War*

The emphasis placed on the time it would take to make an agricultural settlement viable for refugees raises questions as to why the JDC began negotiations for Sosua three months after the invasion of Poland and the failure of negotiations with Germany. The Joint’s pursuit of Sosua must be understood in the context of what the war changed about the refugee crisis and what

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\textsuperscript{140} Strauss telegram to Harold Linder, June 26, 1939, Folder 220, Joint 1933-1944 Coordinating Foundation.

\textsuperscript{141} “Summary of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Distribution Committee for Agro-Joint,” October 6, 1939, Folder 1, DORSA General, 1.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
rescue options were left. The JDC Conference in late August of 1939 reveals Joint’s readiness to continue their work despite the threat of war.

Morris Troper, the executive chairman of the JDC’s European branch, addressed the threat of war directly in the Conference’s opening statement; “if the war will come, it will come, and if it doesn’t so much the better…And I think that we, in our work, must adopt an attitude as if nothing were going on except our own primary interest in the work.” Troper’s attitude accepts that all they could do was to continue their rescue efforts, but it was not because they were oblivious to the situation. Later the same day, Joseph Hyman stressed the need to do what work they could despite being “in the throes of international currents of a kind that no private organizations [could] influence.” The conviction that private organizations were incapable of solving an international problem had persisted since Evian. As if in direct conversation with the historians who would condemn them for not doing more, Hyman told the JDC Conference attendees that it was only “lightly said that the Jewish communities of the United States [did] not understand the Jewish problem.” The director of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), Dr. Bernstein said the worsening situation justified “using any means short of robbery or anything else to get out people away from the hell they [were] in.” Bernstein’s stance, while troubling since illegal immigration meant refugees who could not work, and without funds to


support them, would likely end in death, his position confirms that the decision to continue their work was not a product of naivety. With war threatening to further limit the avenues for rescue even more, the Joint had no other options.

The JDC’s understanding of the wartime situation was that the Reich remained “desirous that emigration of the Jews [should] continue.”\textsuperscript{147} Not to be conflated with naivety in the face of increased danger, Dr. Kahn also stressed that “if a regular flow of emigration [was] not continued, the worst [was] to be feared for the Jews in Germany.”\textsuperscript{148} Additionally, the JDC was concerned about making the situation worse for German Jews by continuing “any dealings, direct or indirect, with an Intergovernmental committee in which there [were] members of belligerent countries.”\textsuperscript{149} Despite emigration being allowed, the possibilities for immigrating to another country were greatly reduced. Without the chance of securing concessions from Germany, the JDC was back to funding settlement in its entirety. The JDC was not oblivious to this fact, but without other options for resettlement, they had to pursue larger settlements. The continued pursuit of settlement projects despite the war was the result of losing regular immigration as a possibility and the increasing costs of supporting temporary resettlement after the war.

\textit{Negotiating for Sosua}

The criticism, or outright disregard, in historical narratives of the Joint’s establishment of the Sosua colony as a rescue effort portrays the JDC as capricious, desperate, or simply naive. However, as the attitudes at the JDC Conference illustrate, the war had not changed the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{147} “Memorandum,” Dr. Bernhard Kahn to Paul Baerwald, October 13, 1939, Folder 255, Joint 1933-1944 Series 28, 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{148} “Comments by Dr. B Kahn,” October 23, 1939, Folder 255, Joint 1933-1944 Series 28, 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{149} “A meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee in New York,” September 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1939, Folder 255, Joint 1933-1944 Series 28, 1.
\end{itemize}
organization’s methodical approach to rescue. The lengthy considerations of what accepting Trujillo’s offer entailed and their site assessments reveal that the JDC continued to take care with their resources. Condemnation based on their failure to establish a settlement sooner likewise dismisses the Joint’s understanding because it ignores the fact that negotiations with Germany had suggested more time was had. Sosua may not have largely successful, but the DORSA’s decision to fund the settlement made sense in the context of limited options.

Some criticism focus on the JDC’s failure to realize that Trujillo was a savvy dictator who was never interested in anything more than improving his relationship with the United States for his own benefit. Given that the Joint had supported trade negotiations with Germany, it is misleading to claim desperation made the JDC overlook the Trujillo’s real motives. Furthermore, acknowledging that Trujillo had ulterior motives does not preclude the JDC’s practical approach to the settlement. In August of 1939, the Joint met to discuss settlement in the Dominican Republic and it was reported that “General Trujillo was interested in favorable press in the United States, as this might help him out in working out a new trade agreement” and to “wipe out memories of the Haitian incident some years ago.” The JDC knew Trujillo’s political motives, but they also believed that he was “genuinely interested in the development of Santo Domingo and [wanted] to increase the white population of the country.” Despite a strictly humanitarian motivation, this assessment illustrates that Trujillo’s motives were

150. The Haitian incident refers to the Parsley Massacre. In October of 1937, Dominican troops massacred between 9,000 and 20,000 Haitians as part of Trujillo’s attempt to ethnically cleanse the Dominican Republic of blacks. After the massacre, the Roosevelt Administration distanced itself from Trujillo and pressured him to pay reparations for the massacre.

151. “Meeting on Santo Domingo Held at the Home of Mr. Arthur Lamport,” August 15, 1939, Folder 1, DORSA General, 1.

152. Ibid.
conducive to the settlement. Alfred Houston, a lawyer who conducted settlement research for organizations, reported in January of 1939 that “the country [was] under a complete military dictatorship with General Trujillo at the head of it” even though there was also a puppet president.\textsuperscript{153} This did not impede the establishment of a settlement in the Dominican Republic. In fact, Dr. Rosenberg’s assessment that “his word [was] law” was beneficial because any laws that stood in the way of the settlement were revoked.\textsuperscript{154} Trujillo’s involvement has also led to the claim that Sosua, one of Trujillo’s properties, was donated to gain control over the JDC.

These criticisms share the assumption that because of their obsession with tropical settlement or because of Trujillo’s desire to have them under their tutelage, the JDC chose a site unfit for settlement. However, as early as October of 1938, colonization experts informed the JDC that “the climate, the soil, and the agricultural and industrial possibilities afforded an opportunity for successful settlement.”\textsuperscript{155} Every report given before negotiations began were favorable to the possibility of settlement in the Dominican Republic. Although approval of settlement in the Dominican Republic does not mean approval of Sosua, Dr. Rosenberg’s diary of the negotiations in January of 1940 reveals that Dr. Rosen specifically chose Sosua. Simply put, “Sosua [was] his first choice” because it had “good land and there [were] many excellent buildings on the property.”\textsuperscript{156} Wells’ retroactive assessment of the site claims that the buildings were in disrepair and the land would never have supported a settlement.\textsuperscript{157} The site assessment in

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\textsuperscript{153} Alfred Houston to Refugee Economic Corporation, January 6, 1939, Folder 1, DORSA General, 1.
\textsuperscript{154} Rosenberg Diary Copy 1, Folder 9, Rosenberg Diary Copy 1, JDC Archives, New York, Records of the Dominican Republic Settlement Association, 1939-1970 (hereafter cited as DORSA Diary), 39.
\textsuperscript{155} “Memorandum of Meeting Held on October 19, 1938,” Folder 1, DORSA General, 1.
\textsuperscript{156} Rosenberg Diary Copy 1, Folder 9, DORSA Diary, 9.
\textsuperscript{157} Wells, 79-80.
\end{flushleft}
January of 1940, however, indicates that the houses, while small, had running water, electricity, and phone connections.\textsuperscript{158} Much attention was also given to the possibility for expansion after preliminary success and the proximity of a trading port at Puerto Plata for exporting goods the settlers might produce. Choosing an ill-prepared site would have meant furthering the amount of money needed to support settlers, as was typical for the JDC, they considered every possibility before moving forward.

Wells claims that Trujillo had “ensnared potential allies” by offering them Sosua the day after Rosenberg and Rosen visited the land.\textsuperscript{159} However, Rosen had already identified it as the best site and informed Trujillo of his interest. Though Trujillo likely wanted to keep them close by using his land, this does not retroactively change Rosen’s assessment of the site. Even if Wells is correct in seeing the donation as a precapitalistic form of creating “clientelistic ties [which] Trujillo forged with subordinates throughout his tenure in power,” then the JDC was not blind-sided by it.\textsuperscript{160} When Rosenberg informed Trujillo that they did not want charity and would convert the gifted land into DORSA stock, Trujillo “expressed his full agreement and said he would be satisfied to do it this way.”\textsuperscript{161} The JDC knew that the General wanted political help in return, they were not suddenly brought under the dictator’s control because he offered them land. Wells calls Rosenberg a great publicist, who was jumping to aid Trujillo after the negotiations were complete.\textsuperscript{162} Rosenberg was willing to help when Trujillo, but he also set limits.

\textsuperscript{158} Rosenberg Diary Copy 1, Folder 9, DORSA Diary, 9.
\textsuperscript{159} Wells, 87.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 81-82.
\textsuperscript{161} Rosenberg Diary Copy 1, Folder 9, DORSA Diary, 92.
\textsuperscript{162} Wells, Tropical Zion, 77 & 91.
Rosenberg’s diary reveals that he was cautious about linking the settlement to politics and refused to directly help Trujillo, but instead would “advise Mr. Rickards [Trujillo’s legal adviser] as to various possible law firms.”¹⁶³ As a lawyer, Rosenberg was aware of the implications of involving an American corporation in negotiating benefits for another country’s trade agreement with the United States; his portrayal by Wells as Trujillo’s over eager stooge is, to be frank, insulting.

Ultimately, the failure of the Sosua settlement to take in more refugees was not because Trujillo had made a self-serving offer or because Rosenberg had haphazardly chosen a bad tract of land. The failure of the Sosua colony can be attributed to the same reason negotiations with the Reich failed: timing. At a June 12th meeting between JDC members and the minister of the Dominican Republic, Rosenberg stated that the their “greatest difficulty [at the time, was getting] enough settlers to the Dominican Republic.”¹⁶⁴ The war meant that refugees waiting to be transferred to the settlement could not sail from Europe. In the final pages of his diary on the negotiations, Rosenberg wrote: “I do not want to be rude and say it is not enough, but it is not enough, because none of us ever give enough. This is a war of extermination on the Jews of the world, and we must give much more than we give.”¹⁶⁵ Though this may not have meant he expected genocide, an IGCR meeting in September 1939 acknowledged that slowing emigration may have meant the use of “plans [the Germans] already had in the World War during the occupation of Poland and Lithuania, namely, to evacuate as many Jews as possible from the

¹⁶³. Rosenberg Diary Copy 1, Folder 9, DORSA Diary, 208.

¹⁶⁴. “Concerning Refugee Settlement in the Dominican Republic,” June 12, 1940, Folder 1, DORSA General, 5.

¹⁶⁵. Rosenberg Diary Copy 1, Folder 1, DORSA General, 227.
occupied countries, irrespective of what [happened] to such Jews.”

Even if the plan was only to dump refugees out of occupied lands, failing to rescue them would have meant their deaths. Although narratives of the Sosua settlement portray an ignorant or obsessive or capricious undertaking, neither Rosenberg, nor Rosen, nor the JDC took lightly the fact that Sosua was one of the only remaining chances of survival for European Jews.

CONCLUSION

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s approach to the refugee crisis from 1938 to 1940 not only reveals their understanding of their role in solving the refugee crisis, but the complexity of the situation at large. As an organization dedicated to rescuing as many Jews as possible, their allocation of funds reveals how they understood the refugee crisis was most likely to be solved. The first step in using the JDC’s allocation of their limited funds as a marker for the changing situation is illustrating that their pursuit of certain ventures had a rationale in the crisis itself. Therefore, this thesis is in direct conversation with critics of the JDC, and other Jewish organizations, because their analyses typically delegitimize the Joint’s rescue efforts. Not intending to dismiss other explanations of the JDC’s rescue efforts, the position adopted by this investigation is that the organization’s mission to save Jewish refugees subsumed any other motives. As the avenues available for rescue changed from 1938 to 1941, the JDC cautiously allocated their resources to fit what they understood to be the best solution. Although an obvious fact to point out, the JDC’s persistent concern over their limited funds illustrates that the main impediment to solving the refugee crises was the enormous cost of supporting and resettling millions of persecuted Jews. However, the importance of their financial concern is not that it proves resettlement was expensive, but that it reveals that they had to choose rescue efforts based on how many people they could save for the least amount of money.

The JDC’s stance at the Evian Conference revealed their deep-seated conviction that without the cooperation of national governments, the refugee crisis could not be solved. Their desire for intervention in Germany for the amelioration of the economic condition of German-Jews and the ordering of emigration was based on their understanding that the continued and intensifying persecution prevented any effective attempt at emigration. The attitude of the
governments attending the Conference also reflect this position because they would not open their borders if the potential immigrants continued being driven out almost completely penniless. To the JDC, mass resettlement was impossible early in 1938 because there was not enough time to establish viable settlements while Germany was forcing Jews out. Forced emigration not only meant finding permanent or temporary homes for refugees, it meant supporting large numbers of Jews who could not provide for themselves. For the Joint, chaos meant an unmanageable refugee problem that could only result in Jewish deaths. Far from being ignorant of the consequences of not doing enough for their coreligionists, the JDC steered the Intergovernmental Conference towards intervention and cooperation with Germany because that is what they believed the solution to be.

The establishment of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees signaled the beginning of an ordered emigration that included a definitive time frame and provisions for emigrants being able to retain their capital. One of the key motivators for the JDC supporting negotiations with the Reich was that they understood the situation to be beyond the relief provided by private organizations and wanted governments to step forward. The implicit understanding between the IGCR and refugee-receiving nations was that refugees with capital would be accepted through regular immigration. The dual benefits of negotiating with the Reich were that it relieved the JDC’s strained resources and provided the time needed to develop settlements for the Jewish refugees. Their willingness to partake in Germany’s proposal, despite the fact that Germany retained 75% of an emigrant’s capital, was not conceding to extortion, but an awareness that the Rublee plan was not allowing Germany to take Jewish property, but taking advantage of what might have been the last opportunity to solve the crisis. Along with their participation, however, was the belief that Germany would most likely fail to follow through
with Rublee plan and that the burden of saving millions of persecuted Jews would fall entirely on nongovernmental organizations, meaning largely on the Joint.

The Joint’s establishment of the Sosua colony after negotiations had failed and after the war had started, if taken at face value, appears to run counter to the JDC’s cautious approach to their rescue efforts. However, the Joint’s decision was rational when the effects that the war and the failed negotiations had on the avenues for rescue are considered. The outbreak of war meant that any delay in facilitating emigration from Germany would give the Nazis motive to pursue other options in dealing with their Jewish population. However, the embroilment of receiving nations in the war also meant that options for regular immigration and colonization projects were further restricted. Furthermore, the war effectively ended Germany’s willingness to cooperate in a capital transfer plan because they were not prepared to conceded even the smallest percentage of Jewish capital to emigrating Jews during a war. Furthermore, the end of negotiations meant that regular immigration to nations not involved in the war would not be possible because the Jews emigrating from Germany and its occupied territories would be worse off financially than ever before. The deteriorating international situation further strained the JDC’s resources because they had to spend more than ever just to keep Jews alive. What was needed was a large, self-sufficient settlement that was outside the purview of regular immigration, that had few upfront costs, and that could allow immediate settlement. The Sosua colony, to a certain extent, provided all three of these. Regardless of Trujillo’s objectionable character, the disappearance of other avenues for rescue meant the JDC had to take any available chances for rescue.

The trajectory of the Joint’s belief in what constituted the best solution to the refugee crisis illustrates an ongoing response to the international conditions that informed the refugee crisis. Their constant obsession with money illustrates a simple but important aspect of rescuing
Jewish refugees; resettling millions of people required a lot of money. But more than that, it required people who understood how that money needed to be applied to save the most Jews. Failing to rescue more refugees was not a matter of not caring enough or having been oblivious to the impending genocide, it had to do with the *practical* ability to resettle refugees. The JDC had to consider the political ramifications of asking for too much from the United States, the social repercussions of flooding cities with destitute Jews, and the limitations of their resources. Ultimately, choices had to be made about which plans had the best chance of success with the least amount of complications. This meant negotiating with the same government that created the crisis and working with a dictator. The complexity of the Jewish refugee crisis meant that the JDC had to decide how many resources they dedicated to keeping Jews alive where they were and how much they spent resettling them. A miscalculation on the JDC’s part meant losing crucial funds meant to rescue as many Jews as possible.

The international situation, as understood by the Joint, suggests that there was no simple solution to the refugee crisis. The exorbitant amount of money needed to support and resettle the millions of persecuted Jews was beyond what any government was willing to provide for a foreign population and far beyond what any humanitarian organization could produce. Although the scale of the crisis was partially the cause of its insolubility, it was the limited avenues for rescue that prevented the JDC’s, and anyone else’s, efforts from solving the refugee crisis. Some groups are more responsible than others for the narrowing of these channels, but the solution was not simply for one group to try harder than they did. Solving the refugee crisis required the cooperation of governments and organizations; including those responsible for creating the crisis in the first place. The primacy of nation-states combined with the existing international economic and political conditions made the potential of rescuing more Jews unlikely, if not impossible.
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