



WORKSHEET: GROUP 4

Instruction

Read the excerpts from the memoir of Gustav Schröder, who was the captain of the St. Louis. How did he describe the atmosphere on the St. Louis? How did he deal with the situation? Can you say something about his feelings / thoughts / state of mind?



Portrait of Gustav Schröder, captain of the St. Louis.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Herbert & Vera Karliner



Book-cover of Gustav Schröder's memoirs "Heimatlos auf hoher See"
(Without a Homeland/ Homeless on the High Seas)



Excerpts from the memoir of Captain Gustav Schröder

“There is a sense of anxiety among the passengers. However, all of them are convinced they will not see Germany again. There were emotional farewells. It seems that many of the passengers felt relieved when they left their homes. Others found it difficult to accept that. But the beautiful weather, the clean ocean air, the excellent food and the kind service on board will soon lead to the relaxed atmosphere of a long sail. The difficult experiences that the passengers had on land will soon be gone, and will seem like a dream.”

A representative of the “Joint Committee” ensured that, in spite of the difficulties, they’ll do all that is humanly possible to prevent these people’s return to Germany. The term “return to Germany” should have never been used. It was a psychological mistake! The concern among the passengers grew. This led to quite a few suicide attempts. A lawyer, Dr. Max Loewe, cut his artery and threw himself into the water.

I was depressed myself. Never before have I experienced such a melancholic mood. The women were especially anxious because there was no information regarding the destination. “Captain, where are you taking us?” And for the first time in my life I could not answer this question. Commissioned by the Hamburg-America Line to do anything for the passengers well-being, I left nothing undone to help these unfortunate people find a home, supported by the board-committee.

Meanwhile a feeling of homelessness took over me. I felt like the entire “St. Louis” was expelled from the world and ought to escape this inhospitable planet; the crew of the ship could not expect recognition from the government for their pro-Semitic attitude. But it was exactly this feeling which gave me the full understanding of the bleak situation of my passengers...

However, all assistance would hardly have been of any use if the passengers themselves had not been so approachable themselves. Their thankful goodbye before the arrival in Antwerp was moving, touched me deeply and was unforgettable. Therefore, I felt all the more grief for the poor (passengers), that believed to have found safety in France, the Netherlands and Belgium, only to be caught by the villains later. The thought that there were people who first were in the concentration camp, then as passengers on the “St. Louis”, who then were displaced again only to end up miserably in a concentration camp again is very depressing.

Only of a few emigrants of the “St. Louise”, that were brought to the mainland, I know that they are still alive.



I've been asked how the whole thing was even possible and who enacted the landing ban in Havana by many different people, especially by Arthur Maschowsky and Leo Haas. I have not been able to find out the answers, and I have long since abandoned the search. I'm not into clarifying questions of guilt. Maybe the people who were picked by fortune to play an important role are already dead. It makes me think of an old teacher who always preached tolerance to us students. He never said anything bad about a fellow man, not even about his opponent. "Never be resentful to each other", he said, "a truly educated man doesn't behave like that. Who ever does something wrong punishes himself more than anyone else could punish him."

Therefore, with respect, I let the question of guilt rest. How much nicer it is to talk about gratitude. Gratitude for everything good that we learn from others. That is why I have to thank countless people that helped me make the life of our passengers on the "St. Louis" as pleasant as possible. Although, never forget the reminder, what the tragic fate of the passengers of the "emigrant ship" means for all mankind, so that cruelty and inhumanity, wherever they can be, can never again spread.

*Source: translated to English from the memoir **Heimatlos auf hoher See** (English: Without a homeland/ Homeless on the high seas) by Gustav Schröder, Berlin: Beckerdruck, 1949*