



WORKSHEET: UNITED STATES

You are the representatives of the United States at the Evian Conference. Prepare and deliver a speech with the help of the following information. Consider which of the following points can be made public in the speech, and which should better be kept hidden.



USA on the globe
wikipedia, cc by-sa 3.0



Flag of the USA, 1912-1959
wikipedia

Background Information

- Population in 1938: about 130 million people, including approx. 4.7 million Jews (3,6%).
- In the 1930s the United States of America had established itself as a global superpower.



- The US has been a country built on immigration. For example, between 1900 and 1915 more than 15 Million immigrants came from Europe to the US.
- Many American citizens feared that the Anglo-Saxon and Protestant culture in America is at risk because of immigration.
- In the 1920s anti-immigration sentiment led to legal restrictions on immigration, such as immigration quotas (limited to the number of immigrants who can come every year from a certain country).
- The American president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, initiated the Evian conference in 1938.



Myron C. Taylor (1874 - 1959), Head of the United States delegation in Evian, July 1938.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park

Major points by the delegate of the United States at the Evian Conference

- Raises empathy for German and Austrian Jews and the need to help them
- Calls to establish an international institution (under American guidance) for further cooperation and negotiations with Germany, since it is important not to alienate it



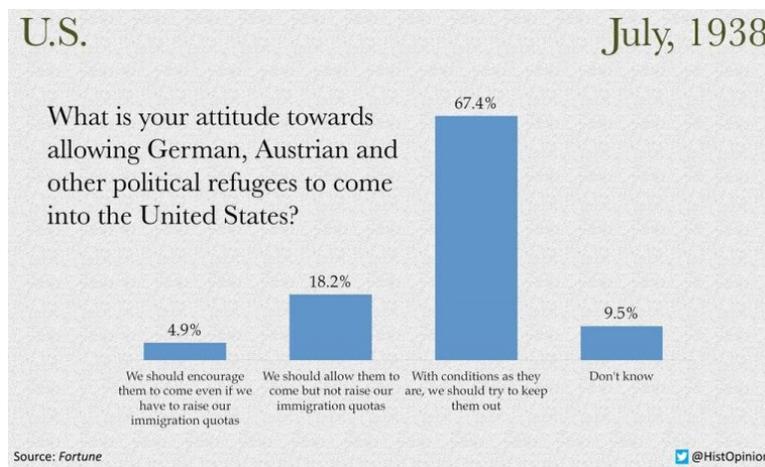
- *“The problem of political refugees is so vast and so complex that we probably can do no more at the initial intergovernmental meeting than put in motion the machinery, and correlate it with existing machinery, that will, in the long run, contribute to a practicable amelioration of the condition of the unfortunate human beings with whom we are concerned.”*
- *“Some millions of people...are, actually or potentially, without a country. The number is increasing daily. This increase is taking place, moreover, at a time when there is serious unemployment in many countries, when there is a shrinkage of subsistence bases and when the population of the world is at a peak.”*
- *“Mindful of the harrowing urgency of [the refugees] situation, President Roosevelt took the initiative of calling this meeting at Evian.”*
- *“The American Government prides itself upon the liberality of its existing laws and practices, both as regards the number of immigrants whom the United States receives each year for assimilation with its population and the treatment of those people when they have arrived... [T]he American Government has taken steps to consolidate both the German and the former Austrian quota, so that now a total of 27,370 immigrants may enter the United States on the German quota in one year.”*
- *“[D]iscrimination and pressure against minority groups and the disregard of elementary human rights are contrary to the principles of what we have come to regard as the accepted standards of civilisation.”*

Factors that influenced public and political opinion about immigration in the 1930s

- The USA holds a political attitude of Isolationism, which is a tendency to lock oneself from the outer world and international obligations, and the idea that it would be best for America to focus instead on its own interests and needs. Some think that the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany is a domestic German issue, and America should not intervene in this matter.
- Some raise security concerns in allowing refugees to come from Nazi Germany, such as Nazi spies that may come together with the immigrants.
- Some believe Bolshevism is the greatest threat in the world. Overlooking the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany is a price that must be paid, in order to support Germany in its struggle against Bolshevism.
- There is some Antisemitism among parts of the American society and government advisors.



- Some argue that the United States initiated the conference and already has a pretty generous immigration quota in comparison to other countries. Therefore, it should not be pressed even further to accept refugees.
- There are economic concerns: that the refugees will compete with American citizens over resources (such as jobs, money, food, living space etc.). The economic situation is bad, especially following the “Great Depression”, and there are currently 10-14 million unemployed citizens in the United States.
- Let us take a look at American public opinion at the time of the Evian Conference:



Poll regarding attitudes towards admitting refugees from Germany and Austria into the US, Fortune Magazine, July 1938
 Twitter, @HistOpinion

- With regard to the Evian conference, it was important for the American delegation that help must be limited to German and Austrian people who are persecuted as Jews in order to avoid another wave of Jewish mass-migration. The conference must make sure it would not send a wrong message to other countries that have anti-Semitic policies (e.g. in Romania, Hungary and Poland). Such countries may think that expulsion and pauperization of their Jewish citizens is legitimate, because other countries would be willing to accept them.
- In practice, until 1937 immigration visas were given only to people who could prove that they possess at least \$1000, and the immigration quotas were not even reached. In 1937, following the pressure to allow more Jewish refugees to enter the U.S., an instruction was given to fill the immigration quotas.

Sources





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