In 1934, as part of the New Deal art programs, the Treasury Department created the Section of Painting and Sculpture (the Section) to secure "art of the best quality available" for new federal buildings. Section officials often awarded commissions on the basis of anonymous competitions. The Section upheld specific stylistic and thematic standards by which they judged the entries: the executed murals were to be narrative, realistic, and celebratory and depict subject matter related to the local community. In the spring of 1939 the Section invited artists from throughout the nation to anonymously submit proposals comprised of nine mural studies to decorate the St. Louis Post Office. The American artist Ben Shahn (1898-1969), by that time already an established muralist, painter and photographer, submitted designs. He grouped the nine required studies into three themes of his own choosing: the First Amendment's four freedoms guaranteeing freedom of speech, religion, peaceful assembly, and citizens' right to petition the government; the arrival of immigrants in the United States to begin new lives of opportunity and freedom; and Missouri history, with scenes of river traffic, wagon trains, and frontier life. The jury did not select his designs. However, the following year, 1940, on the basis of his St. Louis proposal, officials invited Shahn to submit designs for a New York City project. Shahn compressed his St. Louis studies into one single canvas representing America's constitutional rights, and in 1941 Shahn installed The Four Freedoms in the Woodhaven Branch Post Office, Queens, New York, where it remains on view (fig. 1).

The general theme of The Four Freedoms and the subtheme of immigration unite the St. Louis and Queens projects, themes of personal relevance to Shahn, who was an immigrant and was active in the antifascist American Artists' Congress and the Popular Front. By discussing the federal policies concerning immigration during the 1930s leading up to 1941, which marks the end of the refugee phase of the Holocaust, the events which inspired Shahn's murals are highlighted. Resituating Shahn's work within the context of these events, best exemplified by the tragedy of the SS St. Louis, explains the artist's message and its urgency. More than a passive reflection of his social environment, Shahn's murals were the artist's attempt to address and rectify social policy.

It is important to describe the community in which Shahn worked, one vastly different from St. Louis and where the issue of immigration was of universal concern. Shahn created his proposal for the St. Louis Post Office while living in the Jersey Homesteads, New Jersey, a workers' cooperative established by Eastern European Jews from the garment factories and supported by German-Jewish refugee Albert Einstein. Shahn had recently completed a mural for the town's community center, paid for with federal funds, chronicling the history of immigration, labor reforms, and progressive New
Deal programs. The fresco includes what is believed to be the only image of a Nazi figure in a New Deal mural—shown carrying German signs reading "Germans beware: don't buy from Jews"—and such prominent refugees as Einstein arriving in the United States (fig. 2). Along with others in his community, Shahn was worried about the fate of the Jews in Europe; many Homestead residents or their relatives, including Shahn's father, had been persecuted under the tsar and as a result saw parallels between the past and the present crises. In November 1938, in response to Kristallnacht and with great faith in President Roosevelt, town residents passed the following resolution:

Be it resolved that the Council of the Borough of Jersey Homesteads express its profound horror at the bestial attacks upon the helpless minorities of Germany and requests the President of the United States declare his condemnation of these barbaric acts in the spirit in which late President Theodore Roosevelt acted on behalf of our government the notorious Kishinev pogroms in 1904.(4)

[Figure 2 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Clearly, Shahn's thoughts were never far from the crisis in Europe even when his focus should have been on Missouri history. The contemporary debates over immigration policies and the rise of fascist powers in Europe informed his conception and presentation of murals for St. Louis.

Immigration: Fighting Restrictive Quotas

During the 1910s the United States began to dismantle its liberal immigration policies which had enabled thousands, including a young Ben Shahn and his family, to enter the country.(5) Throughout the 1910s popular sentiment changed course, and with the United States' entrance into World War I and the passage of the Espionage Act (1917) and the Sedition Act (1918), the government tightened once-liberal immigration laws (fig. 3).(6) During what Arthur A. Goren describes as the ensuing "frenzied nativism of the 1920s," anti-Jewish agitation intensified.(7) The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 effectively ended mass immigration.(8)

[Figure 3 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

In the course of the 1930s the global economic crisis, coupled with the rise of fascism, put new demands on the United States to open its borders. However, nativist factions cited high domestic unemployment to justify the Johnson-Reed Act. In 1930 President Herbert Hoover instructed the State Department to adhere strictly to the "public charge" provision of the 1917 Immigration Act, which sought to exclude unemployable immigrants from entering the country.(9) As a result, total immigration figures for both Jews and non-Jews dropped dramatically from 242,000 in 1931 to 35,000 in 1932. In 1932 FDR won by a landslide in an election where 85 to 90 percent of Jews voted Democrat.(10) The question has been asked: was the devotion of Jews, including Shahn, to FDR misguided in light of what many now see as his administration's refusal to lift the immigration quotas and welcome refugees?(11)

After the Nazi Party forced the emigration of Jews and other "undesirables" from Germany, the U.S. immigration quotas and policies became cruel and exclusionary in light of the dire need for safe haven. Moreover, due to obstructions imposed by the American government, the actual immigration figures lagged behind these inadequate quotas. As Richard Breitman has commented,

the German immigration quotas during the Depression were unfulfilled...
was deliberate. Many tried to get out and go to the United States in 1933-1934 but were denied entry. ... The immigration policy did serve a filtering mechanism. By manipulating administrative devices during the 1930s (without changing the law), the FDR administration could cause refugee flow to fluctuate, depending on which way it was manipulate.

Between 1933 and 1941 the American Jewish Committee, the Coordinating Foundation, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Jewish Labor Committee along with non-Jewish organizations fought hard to bring 157,000 German Jews into the United States, a total almost equal to the entrance figure for 1906 alone, the year Shahn arrived.

Breckinridge Long, head of the Special Problems Division of the State Department, was "determined to stop the flow of immigrants." Long, an early admirer of Hitler and Mussolini, was paranoid that Germany had planted agents among the Jewish refugees. Turning paranoia into policy, Long instructed the consuls to underissue entrance visas to keep the refugees out.

Labor actively resisted federal immigration policies and denounced the rationalization that high domestic unemployment necessitated the quotas. In 1934 the socialist activist Charney Vladeck--whom Shahn would later consider as an advisor on his Jersey Homesteads mural--addressed the American Federation of Labor's convention to ask members to fight the international rise of fascism. He urged the workers to think in inclusive terms of class and labor rather than in divisive terms of parochial ethnicity. Historically, the isolation of Jews, according to Vladeck, was a precursor to class oppression. As Vladeck warned the AFL workers, "whenever and wherever a government begins to persecute the Jews, it inevitably follows with persecuting the workers ... the first blast against the Jews is only the forerunner of a dark storm against labor." In his murals and through his involvement with labor organizations, Shahn shared Vladeck's belief that Jews should emphasize class, rather than ethnic, affiliation.

In 1935, the Nazis instituted the Nuremberg Laws. As the decade progressed it would become hard not to think in nationalist and ethnic terms when addressing the refugee problem.

In the late 1930s, American antisemitism increased; anti-Jewish, antirefugee, and antiforeign factions applied further pressure to maintain the already inadequate Johnson-Reed quotas. Three major factors encouraged American resistance to immigration: unemployment, nativist nationalism, and antisemitism. If European refugees came to these shores, many Americans argued, they would rob citizens of much-needed jobs. In a July 1938 Fortune poll, 64.7 percent of respondents objected to liberalizing immigration policies on the basis of the weak economy. That same year, dubbed the Roosevelt Recession, unemployment dramatically increased, and resistance to loosening immigration quotas did too. But fear of job competition does not adequately explain such staunch resistance since six out of ten Americans also opposed special quotas for children who were not employable.

In 1938 in New York City, the primary destination of most refugees and immigrants, opponents of open immigration found support from Father Charles Coughlin. At a rally to picket radio station WMCA, which had refused to air Coughlin's broadcasts, they carried signs with such slogans as "Refugees Get Jobs in This Country! Why Don't 100% Americans?" The Brooklyn Tablet, the reactionary newspaper of the Brooklyn Catholic archdiocese, fueled antirefugee sentiments by publishing false accusations that Jewish businesses intended to hire refugees and take jobs away from American citizens. Shahn, who was active in the American labor movement, ridiculed Coughlin in several satirical caricatures. Proponents of open immigration such as the New Republic's editor Bruce Bliven countered Coughlin's claims and those of his supporters:
With 10 or 12 million people out of work, it is argued, we should be foolish to add to our burden by bringing in hundreds of thousands more. No one with any understanding of economics would ever make such a statement. Whether you have unemployment or not does not depend on the size of population but upon your economic system, the use you make of your resources. (21)

In fact, United States Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins supported open immigration and asked the president to lift quotas and other restrictions that blocked access to safety for thousands. (22) But FDR chose not to. (23)

While FDR commanded a leadership role by calling for the Evian Conference (1938), under his stewardship American policy did not assist the refugees. Between 1938 and 1941 Germany continued to allow Jews to leave the country, but they had nowhere to go. European states maintained they were already overpopulated and so turned to the United States to take action. (24) As historian Karen J. Greenberg writes, most European nations tightened their borders and England prevented immigration to Palestine through its 1939 White Paper. (25)

The Tragedy of the SS St. Louis

In 1939, against this tide of international indifference and hostility, New York Senator Robert E. Wagner spoke on behalf of the refugees and argued for the need to remove barriers to immigration. Previously Shahn had paid homage to Wagner and his progressive labor legislation by including a portrait of the Senator in his Jersey Homesteads mural (fig. 5). On February 9, 1939, Wagner introduced a bill on the Senate floor to facilitate the entry of 20,000 children into America. The troubled history of the Wagner-Rogers Bill, which was voted down, proves that at each level of the American government reaction to the refugee crisis was one of indifference and inaction.

[Figure 5 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Wagner strategically selected specific numbers and spoke in guarded terms when addressing the refugee situation. His use of "German" instead of "Jewish" children was less likely to provoke antisemitic opposition among the American public and its elected officials. (26) Historian Henry L. Feingold points out about the Wagner-Rogers Bill establishes the limits to which Roosevelt was willing to go to assist the refugees. Furthermore, the bill's rejection "also serves as a paradigm of the role of Jewish leadership and organizations. They were divided, uncertain, and fearful of domestic antisemitism. The brunt of support for the measure was borne by non-Jewish agencies." (27) However, workingclass Jews did unite and speak out en masse even when their leaders would not. (28) The ILGWU and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America both supported the Wagner-Rogers Bill, the rank and file donated a day's pay--this during the depths of the Depression--to help the refugees, and both the AFL and the CIO endorsed the bill.

When Congress voted down the measure, Wagner, in a final attempt to build popular support, went on the radio and pointed to the desperate plight of the refugees on the SS St. Louis as proof that America needed to change its policies. (29) In mid-May 1939 the ill-fated SS St. Louis had left Germany for Havana carrying refugees bearing passports stamped with a red J to clearly mark that they were Jews. All 907 passengers held landing permits signed by the Cuban Director of Immigration, Colonel Manuel Benites, which the Hamburg-American line had bought wholesale and resold to the refugees for $150 each. However, the week before the ship departed from Germany, Cuban President Frederico Laredo Bru invalidated all landing certificates. Cuban officials advised the Hamburg-American line in advance
that the passengers held invalid permits. Nevertheless, the company let the ship proceed on its trans-Atlantic trip knowing that the voyage might prove futile.(30) On May 27, 1939, while the St. Louis Post Office was still accepting mural proposals, the St. Louis docked in Havana. When the ship's passengers attempted to disembark, Cuban officials denied them permission to do so.(31)

Cuba was to have been only a temporary stop for the refugees en route to safety in the United States. They had fulfilled U.S. immigration requirements and held quota numbers that would ultimately allow them safe entry, but their entrance dates varied from three months to three years after their arrival in Cuba. Still, since they held papers, they believed that the United States would waive the delay.(32) But the United States government, including Roosevelt, the consuls, and Congress, chose not to. As the weeks dragged on and the refugees were suspended in diplomatic limbo, Shahn read newspaper reports of passengers' suicide attempts, the testimony of relatives waiting on shore and impassioned letters such as this one from a refugee mother to her children:

> It is strange how near, and yet how cut off we really are. Because boats come close to us throughout the day bringing greetings from r and friends, many millions of rumors are gossiped on the boat. The is that two-thirds of the passengers are absolutely panicky. I am n of them.(33) (fig. 6)

Jewish relief agencies gathered these reports in hope of persuading the United States to immediately validate the quota numbers. But their efforts were unsuccessful. Governmental inaction and indifference forced the ship to turn back to Europe, where the crew distributed the passengers among various countries.(34) Nazi propaganda fully exploited the U.S.'s refusal of the SS St. Louis, wryly writing in the August 1939 issue of Der Weltkampf, "We are saying openly that we do not want the Jews while the democracies keep on claiming that they are willing to receive them--and then leave the guests out in the cold! Aren't we savages better men after all?"(35)

A Mural for Missouri

Shahn would have had this shameful series of events in mind while he prepared his designs for the St. Louis Post Office competition. In order to guide the entrants, Section officials provided each with a thick bibliography on St. Louis facts, history and legends.(36) The sponsors suggested that the history of the U.S. mail in Missouri was the most appropriate theme for the post office and explained why in the detailed call for submissions:

> The transportation of the mails in the area of St. Louis from its e beginning to the present day is a subject of great interest involvi of the history of St. Louis. It has been suggested that a continuou based on the colorful history of the mail in and around St. Louis w offer fascinating subject matter for frescoes.(37)

Ben Shahn thought not. He was not interested in glorifying the heyday of the Pony Express in Missouri. Instead, for his nine required studies Shahn created six focusing on national ideals and constitutional rights and devoted only three to Missouri. Moreover, within the panels celebrating Missouri Shahn composed his designs so as to express support for New Deal initiatives and the rights of labor. For example, in Missouri State Seal Shahn illustrated his belief in government-financed social welfare programs by placing the state emblem and motto at center, and bracketing it at either side with
vignettes showing pediatric health care, playgrounds, cooperative learning programs, the construction of steel bridges, and the elderly enjoying a life of quality. In the foreground of River Traffic (fig. 7), Shahn painted workers hauling cargo, and relegated the Mississippi River and steamships to mere backdrops. Opening of the Frontiers is the one image that follows the Section's thematic suggestion. Here Shahn painted stock images of the laying of railroad track, the founding of small midwestern towns, the tilling of fields, and the arrival of wagon-train pioneers.

[Figure 7 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

But most expressive of Shahn's outrage at the refugee crisis and debates over immigration are two studies, both titled Immigration, which in no way relate to the Section's guidelines. His lack of adherence to the guidelines was not due to naivete; Shahn had pursued mural commissions since 1933 and was familiar with the demands of patrons. By depicting the history of American immigration and the approaching threat of war Shahn chose to make a strong partisan statement rather than surrender to the complacency of New Deal mural standards.

A sense of urgency charges the first Immigration panel, a montage subdivided into three parts (fig. 8). At the left an immigrant family burdened with babies and bundles seeks to begin a new life. Shahn contrasts this scene drawn from his own immigrant experience with that of a barbed-wire prison or concentration camp restraining a half-dozen still, silent men. Shahn establishes neither the prison's time period nor location, which the art historian Ziva Amishai-Maisels has identified as the prototype for his oil painting Concentration Camp, 1944 (fig. 9). (38) The study ends with a gas-masked soldier reaching back with his left hand and drawing taut the barbed wire of the prison camp. With this sharp gesture Shahn establishes a strong contrast between the safety of immigration and approaching war.

(39) Today, when resituated within the context of the 1930s refugee crisis, this striking image insists that we acknowledge the passengers on the St. Louis and others who were denied safety in America.

[Figures 8 and 9 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Scenes of raging war open the second Immigration panel (fig. 10) as helmeted soldiers advance on a bombed-out building. At center, seen from a dizzying overhead perspective, people flee and scurry about chaotically. (40) Here Shahn pictures Eastern Europe and its pogroms from the turn of the century, not Missouri in the 1930s. The panel concludes with an image of a European immigrant with modest suitcase and papers in hand who stands in front of Castle Garden--the port of entry before Ellis Island--and the Statue of Liberty. Shahn would repeat the image of the Statue of Liberty several times throughout his mural career, and in later images as well, to broadcast the ideal of liberty.

[Figure 10 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

The Artist Celebrates Liberty and Freedom

The Statue of Liberty made a powerful and lasting impression on new arrivals to America, and during the 1930s, many artists and writers, including Shahn referenced the Statue in their work. (41) For example, in Henry Roth's classic novel of Jewish immigrant life, Call it Sleep, David, the young protagonist who is approximately the same age Shahn was when he arrived in 1906, sees the statue for the first time:

And before them, rising on her high pedestal from the scaling swarm brilliance of sunlit water to the west, Liberty. The spinning disk late afternoon sun slanted behind her, and to those on board who ga

features were charred with shadow, her depths exhausted, her masses to one single plane. Against the luminous sky the rays of her halo spikes of darkness roweling the air; shadow flattened the torch she a black cross against flawless light—the blackened hilt of a broke Liberty. The child and his mother stared at the massive figure in wonder. (42)

Although the young Shahn did not record his impressions from when he first saw the Statue, they must have been quite similar to those of the fictional David, and as an adult, this experience would be important to Shahn's conception of America and of freedom. In the lexicon of American images, the "Lady" has become synonymous with opportunity, freedom, and liberty; Shahn would employ her image several times in his career, including in the Jersey Homesteads mural, his St. Louis proposal, and the Queens mural. Unmistakably, in his second Immigration panel Shahn has turned back to the golden age of immigration, the years between 1880 and 1924. Many Jews, including Shahn's family, sought a new life in America, welcoming the freedoms that their new country promised but did not always deliver.

The Statue of Liberty's uplifted torch dominates the center of the panel Freedom of Religion (fig. 11), which Shahn intended to open his submission to the St. Louis competition. Shahn rendered the statue as if a design on a stained-glass church window, surrounding it with symbols and structures of America's dominant faiths to express pluralistic freedom of religion. By contrast, only Christianity is portrayed within the winning designs of Edward Millman and Mitchell Siporin, which depict a group of early settlers kneeling in communal prayer to symbolize the coming of the church to Missouri. (43)

[Figure 11 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Shahn's final panels for the St. Louis competition included Freedom of Speech, a montage of speeches ranging from the impromptu to those broadcast over the airwaves, and Freedom of the Press, which represents the free distribution of the telegraph and print newsmedia. In the final panel, Vox Pop, citizens actively participate in American politics through voting, rallying, and delivering petitions to lawmakers. Motivated by the current debates over immigration, refugees and entrance quotas, Shahn chose to emphasize freedom and liberty, which Americans saw as defining their country, rather than pay tribute to the St. Louis mail service.

In his St. Louis proposal Shahn neither directly answered the rhetoric of the Nazis, confronted American inaction, nor explicitly narrated the events of the refugee crisis and the St. Louis. Yet, as art historian Matthew Baigell has written about Raphael Soyer and William Gropper, Jewish artists commonly did not develop subject matter beyond generalized images to confront the refugee situation, nor did they address the issue often in their work. (44) Instead, Shahn, like other Jewish artists, emphasized the values of liberty and freedom and the opportunities made possible because of past immigration policies, contrasting them with the horrors of war, pogroms, and concentration camps. In doing so, Shahn strayed too far from the focus on Missouri. The jurors chose Millman and Siporin's designs, which celebrated famous Missourians—Mark Twain, Daniel Boone, Senator Thomas Hart Benton, Joseph Pulitzer, and George Caleb Bingham—along with scenes from Missouri history. (45) The jury of artists never recorded their reaction to Shahn's anonymous proposal nor qualified its rejection, yet official correspondence makes reference to the work's problematic "political distractions." (46)

A Mural for New York: Breaking the Rules for Pure Art
Shahn soon had the opportunity to distill his St. Louis designs into a one-panel mural. In early 1940 Section officials invited Shahn to submit designs for the Woodhaven Branch Post Office in Queens, New York (fig. 1).(47) No longer obligated to celebrate Missouri history, he could pursue his interrelated themes of American freedoms and immigration. To symbolize these themes Shahn placed the Statue of Liberty's oxidized green hand and uplifted torch prominently at the composition's center, calling to mind his 1930 Haggadah, where he represented the "mighty hand" and "outstretched arm" of God to symbolize divine liberation.(48) Whereas a Haggadah retells the story of the Exodus, Shahn's Woodhaven Branch mural retells that of immigration to America. In his proposal for the Jersey Homesteads mural Shahn drew a parallel between the ancient and the recent exodus, and the relationship of both to the feast of Passover, writing,

Passover symbolizes the departure of the Jews from Egypt, the land bondage. So, with the feast of the Passover, and out of the backgro
the Ghettos and pogroms comes a stream of immigrants to America wit
in their faces. Above them hovers the dream of America--a land of f
flowers, big cities with streets paved with gold, the Statue of
Liberty--symbol of a new life to the immigrant.(49)

In a letter to officials Shahn explained the narrative function of each element within the Queens mural, images and ideas which he drew from his earlier St. Louis works. Within this one panel mural, Shahn celebrated American freedoms and the Bill of Rights.(50) To underscore the centrality of the Bill of Rights in his work, and its importance to viewers of the mural, beneath the torch of the Statue of Liberty, rendered at center, Shahn lettered the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." Before Shahn could begin the commission he quibbled with Section officials over issues of perspective, scale, and placement of the figures. But their greatest objection was to the "printed label" accompanying Shahn's image, which they deemed unnecessary. (51) In his thorough and emotionally charged response, Shahn defended his inclusion of the First Amendment and expressed his perceptions of the contemporary social climate:

The thing that I have tried to put into this mural, I feel very str
feel that it has profound significance for every American, more
significance every day because of increasing threats to our rights
liberties. I feel that if I, as an artist, can bring home to the pe
see this work any added realization of how these basic rights proje
their lives and activities, then I've done as good a piece of work
want to, and don't much mind breaking the rules for pure art.(52)

Shahn's deliberate choice of words in both his mural and correspondence confirm his intention to use his art work not merely for aesthetic enjoyment but rather to cultivate public awareness about pressing social issues.

Conclusion: The Artist as Moral Guide

On January 6, 1941 the president presented his annual congressional address. The nation, according to FDR, was at an "unprecedented" moment in its history because of the serious threat to American security from outside its borders. Toward the conclusion of his speech, FDR spoke of a "world founded upon four essential human freedoms":

The first is freedom of speech and expression--everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way--everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want--which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants--everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear--which, translated into world terms, means world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of aggression again--anywhere in the world. (53)

Shahn installed the Queens mural in 1941 as the national and international climates were becoming even more insecure and the opportunity to assist the refugees had passed. In light of FDR's inaction with respect to the SS St. Louis and his decision to maintain immigration quotas, it is obvious that his administration, the State Department, and Congress did little to extend these liberties and the Four Freedoms to refugees and immigrants. Instead of merely echoing the concerns and policies of a president he admired, Shahn offers a moral and legislative direction in his murals that America, in fact, chose not to follow.

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(4.) Minutes of Borough Meetings, 15 November 1938, Roosevelt, New Jersey, Collection, Rutgers University Library, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

(5.) St. Louis's history is also pertinent to these debates on war and immigration. On 7 April 1917, the day after the United States Congress declared war on Germany, the Socialist Party met in St. Louis, where Morris Hillquit (1869-1933) presented the St. Louis Proclamation, reaffirming his party's condemnation of the war "as a crime against the people of the United States and against the nations of the world" and rejecting the concept of the war as a defensive measure. Hillquit was a prominent civil-rights and labor lawyer and the leading attorney and negotiator for the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU). See Morris Hillquit, Loose Leaves from a Busy Life (New York, 1934),
and Norma Fain Pratt, Morris Hillquit: A Political History of an American Jewish Socialist (Greenwich, Conn., 1979), 125-7.


(9.) Richard Breitman notes that the Labor Department had wanted to bypass this strict interpretation of the State Department's "public charge" clause by making it possible to approve visas for those who had relatives who would promise financial support. However, having succeeded with this change, the Labor Department bowed to the political climate and backed off. In a compromise, the Labor Department kept its distance, while the State Department instructed consuls to be more lenient with applicants. See Newton, FDR and the Holocaust, 7.


(11.) In his essay "Courage First and Intelligence Second': The American Jewish Secular Elite, Roosevelt, and the Failure to Rescue," in Newton, ed., FDR and the Holocaust, 55-6, Henry L. Feingold writes, "but from a political point of view, that loyalty [the Jewish vote], the certain knowledge that the Jewish vote was his [FDR's], diminished the leverage of Jewish leaders, who could not threaten removal of the Jewish vote. He did not have to transact business with the Jews. The Jewish 'love affair' with Roosevelt was from the outset fated to be unrequited."

(12.) In Newton, ed., FDR and the Holocaust, 6.

(13.) Goren, The American Jews, 87-8, and Naomi Cohen, Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906-1966 (Philadelphia, 1972), 186-88. For further information on Jewish Americans during the refugee crisis, see Feingold, Bearing Witness. Feingold writes that during this crucial period American Jewry was disunited, in large part because of the processes of secularization, modernization and acculturation. See also his "Courage First."

(14.) Feingold, Bearing Witness, 78. Feingold writes that Long's diaries reveal that he was not a "strident antisemite" but rather that the issues were those of class, gentility, and breeding (172).

(15.) Quoted in Bruce Bliven, The Jewish Refugee Problem (New York, 1939), 4. Bliven dedicates his booklet to Vladeck. Bliven, 25, reminds us that in 1936 Jews represented only 3.5 percent of the total population.


(17.) Wyman, Paper Walls, 47.
(18.) Wyman, Paper Walls, 5. In 1938-9 between 8 and 10 million Americans remained unemployed.

(19.) Charles Stember, Jews in the Mind of America (New York, 1966), 9. Opposition to increased immigration continued into the 1940s--between 1938 and 1943 approximately eight out of ten Americans opposed relaxing quotas even for political refugees from Nazi-ruled countries (Stember, Jews, 10). Feingold, The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945 (New Brunswick, N.J., 1970), 8, notes that 42.3 percent of Americans believed that hostility toward Jews stemmed from unfavorable Jewish characteristics.

(20.) The Brooklyn Tablet presented Coughlin as the victim of oppressive forces and the true guardian of American liberties, freedom of speech, and religion. For examples see "Thousands Oppose Move to Suppress Father Coughlin: Freedom Is Threatened," The Brooklyn Tablet, 3 December 1938, 1; "Thousands Picket a Radio Station," The Brooklyn Tablet, 10 December 1938, 1, 26; and "Father Coughlin Again Pleas for United People," The Brooklyn Tablet, 17 December 1938, 1, 14. An example of journals that denounced such rhetoric is The Nation. See, for example, William C. Kernan, "Coughlin, the Jews, and Communism," The Nation 147, no. 25 (17 December 1938), 655-8.

(21.) Bliven, The Jewish Refugee Problem, 23.

(22.) Herbert Druks, The Failure to Rescue (New York, 1977), 5. "Refugees and the Economy," The Nation 147, no. 24 (10 December 1938), 609-10, proposed that the United States cut off trade with Germany, tax the bank balances and property of nonresident aliens of states indulging in persecution, and liberalize immigration laws.


(24.) Druks, The Failure to Rescue, 1-3.


(27.) Feingold, "Courage First," 58.


(29.) Wagner spoke on 7 June 1939, six days after Cuba had ordered the St. Louis out of Havana harbor.

(30.) Wyman, Paper Walls, 38.


(35.) "907 Refugees," 299-300.

(36.) Ben Shahn Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. For example, the guidelines suggested the following books: F. A. Culmer, A New History of Missouri (Mexico, Mo., 1938); Walter B. Stevens, Centennial History of Missouri (St. Louis and Chicago, 1921); and Walter Williams and Floyd Calvin Shoemaker, Missouri, Mother of the West (Chicago and New York, 1930).

(37.) Ben Shahn Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.


(39.) While Shahn was creating his St. Louis proposal American newspapers were beginning to report on the existence of concentration camps. In April 1939 Time magazine reported, "too many alumni have emerged from concentration camps with the same story to leave any further doubt that sadism and brutality are part and parcel of the concentration camp routine." See Deborah Lipstadt, Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945 (New York, 1986), 143.


(42.) Henry Roth, Call It Sleep (New York, 1934), 14.

(43.) See "Civil War and Post War Scenes in Postoffice Mural," St. Louis Post Dispatch, 10 October 1939, 5, and untitled clipping, St. Louis Post Dispatch, 1 October 1939, n.p., in Clippings, Missouri Historical Society.


(45.) This is not to imply that Millman and Siporin were either apolitical or unconcerned about the refugee situation, rather that their views did not factor into their St. Louis designs. In fact, Siporin painted Refugees, 1939, the Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., which is reproduced in Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams, eds., Artists against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Artists’ Congress (New Brunswick, N.J., 1986), 270-1. Both Millman and Siporin signed the 1936 call for the
American Artists' Congress.

(46.) Forbes Watson to Edward B. Rowan, 22 September 1939, Record Group 121, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

(47.) Edward B. Rowan to Ben Shahn, 6 January 1940, Record Group 121, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


(49.) Ben Shahn Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

(50.) Ben Shahn to Inslee Hopper, 19 February 1940, Record Group 121, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

(51.) Edward B. Rowan to Ben Shahn, 11 June 1940, Ben Shahn Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

(52.) Ben Shahn to Edward B. Rowan, 18 June 1940, Ben Shahn Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

(53.) Samuel Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt (New York, 1941), 672.

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