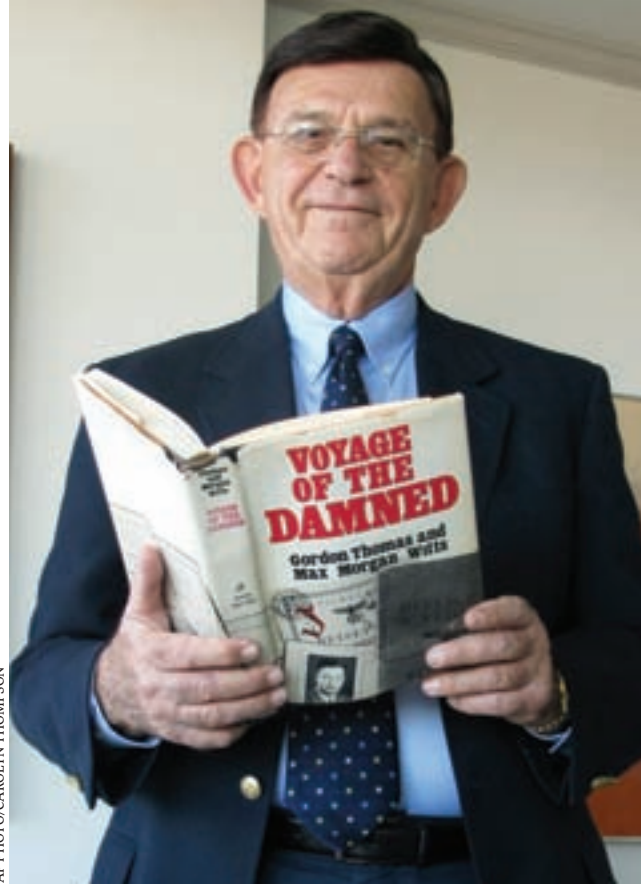


Refugee Refusal Today Compared, Contrasted to That of WWII

Historians, policymakers call parallels 'chilling'



AP PHOTO/CAROLYN THOMPSON

Sol Messenger holds a book written about his voyage on the St. Louis, a ship carrying more than 900 German Jewish refugees that was turned away from Florida in 1939, at his home in Buffalo, N.Y., on Friday, Nov. 20, 2015. Messenger was just 7 when he stood with his father at the rail of the ocean liner and stared into the gathering darkness. But eight decades later, Messenger clearly recalls the lights of Miami, glittering off the bow, so near to him and his fellow Jewish refugees aboard, yet beyond their reach.

By **ADAM GELLER**
AP National Writer

Sol Messenger was just seven when he stood with his father at the rail of the ocean liner St. Louis and stared into the gathering darkness. But nearly eight decades later, Messenger still recalls the lights of Miami glittering off the bow, so near to him and more than 900 fellow Jewish refugees aboard, yet beyond their reach.

Today, "I look out into the ocean and I get this queasy feeling," says Messenger, whose family escaped Europe for the U.S. three years after American officials turned away the vessel in 1939. Now 83, he is a pathologist in Buffalo, New York. "The Jews did not pose any threat to the U.S... It's really unforgivable."

Now, fresh angst about whether to admit refugees or turn them away has put the spotlight back on the shunning of the St. Louis and other decisions, now widely regretted, by U.S. officials before and during World War II.

“When we sent Jews back to Germany and when we sent Japanese to internment camps, we regretted it and we will regret this as well

—Rep. Luis Gutierrez, D-Illinois

A week after the Islamic State terrorist group killed 130 people in Paris, a backlash against the U.S. admitting Syrian refugees — most of them Muslims — has fueled a bitter debate, with politicians, pundits and others drawing lines between present and past.

There are differences between now and then. But disturbing similarities between the rhetoric of today and the attitudes of the U.S. public and officials during World War II make that history worth recalling, scholars say, as the country confronts new fears of terrorism.

"No historical parallel is perfect, obviously," says Allan Lichtman, co-author of *FDR and the Jews* and a professor of history at American University.

But U.S. limits on refugees during World War II, influenced by anti-Semitism, were fed by fears the Nazis "would plant agents, spies and saboteurs among

the Jewish refugees and that they would pressure the Jews, particularly those whose families were still in Germany, to act as agents on behalf of the Third Reich," Lichtman said.

"Those arguments are chillingly similar to the arguments being made against the admission of the Syrian refugees."

Lichtman isn't alone in making the comparison.

On Monday, an Ohio professor, Peter Shulman of Case Western Reserve University, used Twitter to post results from a 1938 public opinion poll showing Americans overwhelmingly rejected admission of German Jews in the years leading up to the outbreak of war.

The reaction "was instantaneous and totally overwhelming. It was like nothing I've ever experienced before," said Shulman, who was been posting historical tidbits for about two years. One of his tweets of the decades-old polling data has been relayed 4,600 times, cited by commentators in *The Washington Post*, *Time* and other publications.

"When we sent Jews back to Germany and when we sent Japanese to internment camps, we regretted it and we will regret this as well," Rep. Luis Gutierrez, D-Illinois, said before 47 House Democrats and 242 Republicans voted this week for a bill to put new se-

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