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**The U.S. and the Holocaust – I**

**Lead: During the horrific 12 years of the Third Reich, millions of Jews were murdered. Could the United States have done more to stop it?**

**Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: It is hard to reject the judgment of Winston Churchill that the Holocaust “was probably the greatest and most terrible crime ever committed in the whole history of the world.” Faced with such gratuitous, monumental evil, one is tempted to**

**wonder if the forces of moral decency could not have done more to prevent this genocidal slaughter.**

**It is important to recognize that very few observers or participants could have anticipated what was about to consume the Jews and other minorities of Europe. German Jews were a part of fabric of their nation, they had experienced anti-Semitic pogroms in previous generations and survived, but they had fought for Germany in World War I and were an integral part of German intellectual, social, artistic and literary life. Surely, many thought, this Nazi high priest and his thuggish followers could not survive long enough to threaten their very existence. When, in 1933, leading**

**American rabbi Stephen Wise organized rallies to protest the treatment of the Jews of Germany, he was asked by leading German rabbis to cease and desist.**

**Louis de Jong, an eminent Dutch historian and Holocaust survivor speaking in 1989, explained the naiveté of Europeans facing the coming onslaught of death. “[There is] an aspect of the Holocaust which is of cardinal importance and which never can be sufficiently underlined: that the Holocaust, when it took place, was beyond the belief and the comprehension of almost all people living at the time, Jews included. Everyone knew that human history had been scarred by endless cruelties.**

**But that thousands, nay millions, of human beings – men, women and children, the old and the young, the healthy and the infirm --- would be killed, finished off, mechanically, industrially, so to speak, would be exterminated like vermin – that was a notion so alien to the human mind, an event so gruesome, so new, that the instinctive, indeed the natural, reaction of most people was: it can't be true.”**

**One person who had no illusions about the evil and hazard of Hitler was Franklin Roosevelt. Yet, he led a nation that was deeply mired in economic depression and whose isolationist citizens had little patience for addressing events beyond their**

shores. There was deep opposition to immigration which was strictly prescribed by a Congress filled with conservatives and administered by a State Department chocked full of anti-Semites. Even after *Kristallnacht* in 1938, when Nazi violence and hostile intentions became all too clear, and Jews, whose greatest fears were now being realized, looked to get away, the President had to work overtime and engage in subterfuge to circumvent anti-Semites in Congress and the bureaucracy so as to provide places of refuge in the U.S. and in allied countries. Next time: the solution? Defeat Germany.

# **At the University of Richmond's School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.**

## **Resources**

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**Lang, Berel. *Post-Holocaust: Interpretation, Misinterpretation, and the Claims of History*.  
Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2005.**

**vanden Heuvel, William J., "America and the Holocaust,"  
*American Heritage* (July-August, 1999): 34-54.**

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