

Bat-Ami Zucker, *In Search of Refuge: Jews and U.S. Consuls in Nazi Germany 1933–1941* (Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2001), 229 pp.

From the 1960s through the 1980s, the American response to the plight of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany was one of the most intensely debated subjects in Holocaust studies. Attempting to explain the failure of U.S. refugee policy as well as of the country's subsequent response to genocide, scholars examined relevant aspects of American politics, government, and society. They debated whether the Roosevelt administration should, or could, have done more. They examined the pivotal role of the State Department and the recalcitrance of a Congress reflecting the xenophobic and isolationist sentiments of depression-era Americans. These studies brought to light an enormous amount of documentation that significantly enhanced our understanding of these issues. Yet some of the most contentious elements of these interpretations were not the basic facts of what was or was not done, but rather the motives of those affecting, making, or implementing crucial policies. Within this debate over motivation, few interpretive issues caused as much disagreement, and occasionally animosity, as the influence of anti-Semitism in the formation and implementation of policy. For most of the past decade, however, these facets of the American response to the Holocaust have been overshadowed by the ongoing discussion regarding the failure to bomb the rail lines and gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In her recent study of U.S. Consuls in Nazi Germany, Bat-Ami Zucker not only shifts the focus back to the earlier refugee controversy but she once again places anti-Semitism in the forefront.

Earlier studies of refugee policies, particularly those related to the State Department, have long acknowledged the importance of consuls in determining the fate of Jewish refugees. Indeed, suspicions and charges of anti-Semitism among consuls date back to the refugee crisis of the 1930s itself. But before Zucker, no scholar specifically studied this crucial group who exercised sole authority to issue visas to the United States. They were the gate-keepers who, she repeatedly reminds us, determined initially the difference between freedom and oppression for some and, in the long run, even life or death for others. Zucker readily concedes that, ultimately, other forces, institutions and individuals actually created the restrictive immigration policies, which

the consuls were legally (and perhaps also in terms of their careers) obligated to obey. Nonetheless, she argues persuasively that within the confines of law, policy, and even instructions from the State Department in Washington, consuls still constituted a critical component in the general process of obstructing Jewish attempts to find refuge in the U.S.

Consuls exercised considerable discretion in interpreting and administering general policies as well as specific clauses in the law. Inherently antagonistic to Jewish refugees, often making arbitrary decisions regarding their status, these consuls bear major responsibility for ensuring that even legally allotted immigration quotas remained unfilled while tens of thousands of German Jews desperately sought refuge.

Zucker's extensive archival research covers the U.S. consuls in Berlin, Hamburg, Stuttgart, and post-Anschluss Vienna, though she occasionally also refers to the attitudes and decisions of consuls in Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. Within the Third Reich, only consuls in these four cities could issue immigration visas, and these consular districts also contained the largest concentration of German and Austrian Jews. But the book ultimately provides far less on the actual actions and motives of these consuls than one would expect of such a study. Zucker devotes a substantial part of the work to the specifics of immigration law and policy as well as to the societal, political, and institutional contexts in which the consuls functioned. The first third of the book covers the very familiar territory of Nazi persecution of Jews, anti-Semitism in America, passage of the 1920s restrictionist immigration laws, and the refugee crisis of the 1930s. Interwoven throughout these early chapters are virtually all the major points Zucker argues about consuls, the law, and refugees throughout the rest of the book.

In the next third, Zucker provides more detailed explanations of the various legal categories into which refugees might fall, distinguishing between non-immigrant aliens, non-quota immigrants, and quota immigrants. Here, too, much of Zucker's information directs attention away from the consuls and toward the laws themselves, policy decisions in Washington, or the response of persistent, though frustrated, Jewish and liberal organizations to refugee policies and interpretations of the law by consuls. However, where Zucker does provide examples of consular attitudes and

activities there is strong evidence supporting her contention of consuls' obstructionism, occasionally beyond that even promoted by their State Department superiors. For example, the categories of nonimmigrant aliens (especially temporary visitors) and non-quota immigrants (ministers, professors, students, etc.) offered avenues of potential escape outside the strict immigration quotas imposed by law. Yet, vacillating between arbitrariness and inflexibility, consuls proved as relentless in interpreting these classifications to the disadvantage of Jews, and in making unreasonable documentation demands on them, as they were when deciding on visas for quota immigrants. And the most effective instrument at the disposal of consuls processing quota immigrants was the vague, elastic clause in immigration law regarding anyone "likely to become a public charge" (LPC) intended to keep immigrants from becoming an economic burden to America. While throughout most of this period the LPC provision remained the main obstacle for most visa seekers, it was augmented, in some respects surpassed, in 1940 by concerns over potential immigrant threats to national security in a wartime crisis. Thus, as a greater need arose for refuge for more Jews from Nazi Germany restrictions became even tighter.

Although toward the end of the book, Zucker focuses more on the actions of consuls themselves, we still do not learn much about them other than they were callous. By this point the book also becomes exceedingly redundant. Nevertheless, here Zucker does furnish convincing examples to demonstrate that much more could have been done to save refugees, if only consuls had different attitudes toward them. She shows that individual consuls and vice-consuls did, in fact, exhibit a more humane approach and overlook technicalities to facilitate the issuance of visas in various categories. She also argues that circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that the callous resistance to Jewish refugees manifested by most consuls was rooted in anti-Semitism. Even those consuls who displayed sympathy for the plight of Jews regarded them, in one form or another, as a danger from which these diplomatic gate-keepers must protect America.

Although adding more details on immigration laws and policies as well as more examples of consular activities, most of what Zucker presents is not fundamentally new. Still, the evidence underlying her challenge to those historians who underestimate or discount anti-

Semitic motivations among consuls is probably much stronger than she cautiously indicates. Further research into consuls in other parts of Europe, especially during the 1920s when they blatantly expressed their anti-Semitism, should strengthen her case even more.

Joseph W. Bendersky is Professor and Chair of the Department of History at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond. He is author of The "Jewish Threat": Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); and A History of Nazi Germany (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield, 2002).