

# Syrians escaping war find resistance to living in U.S., as WWII Jews did

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In this June 17, 1939, photo, German Jewish refugees sail to Antwerp, Belgium, aboard the St. Louis after they had been denied entrance to the United States. Photo: AP/File. BOTTOM: Sol Messinger holds a book written about his voyage on the St. Louis at his home in Buffalo, New York, Nov. 20, 2015. Photo: AP/Carolyn Thompson

Sol Messinger was just 7 when he stood at the railing of the ship St. Louis. It was almost 80 years ago, but he still remembers the lights of Miami, Florida, as the ship passed by.

In 1939, Messinger and more than 900 Jewish refugees boarded the ship. They were trying to flee Germany right before World War II. Cuba and the United States did not let the ship land. It was forced to sail back to Europe. Although Messinger's family eventually came to the U.S., about 1 in 4 of the Jews from the St. Louis died. During World War II, Germany tried to destroy the Jewish people. It killed and imprisoned millions of Jews.

Messinger is now 83 years old and a doctor in New York. "The Jews did not pose any threat to the U.S.," said Messinger. He added that it was terrible that the U.S. turned them away.

## **History Is Repeating Itself**

Now, once again people are talking about whether to let in refugees or turn them away.

On Nov. 13, the Islamic State group killed 130 people in Paris, France. It is a violent group that wants to start its own country under its type of Islamic law. Its fighters have taken over parts of Syria and Iraq. Millions of people have fled the area, causing a huge refugee crisis. President Barack Obama wants to let 10,000 Syrian refugees into the U.S. over the next year.

There are differences between what the Jews faced then and what Syrian and Iraqis face now. Some things are similar, scholars say.

During World War II, the U.S. put limits on the numbers of refugees who could enter the country. One of the reasons was that some officials did not like Jews. Also, people feared the Germans would sneak spies into the country, said Allan Lichtman. He is a professor of history at American University in Washington, D.C.

## **Same Arguments Used To Keep Out Different Refugees**

People make the same arguments against the Syrian refugees today, he said. Most of the Syrians are Muslim.

Lichtman is not the only one who thinks this way.

Peter Shulman is a professor at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. On Monday, he posted results from a survey of what Americans thought in 1938. Before World War II, most Americans did not want to let in Jews from Germany and Austria. They did not even want to let in Jewish children.

A tweet about the survey has been shared 4,600 times.

Congressman Luis Gutierrez of Illinois said the U.S. later regretted sending Jews back to Germany. He said the U.S. will also regret not letting in the Syrians.

## **Jews Were Not Attacking U.S., Writer Says**

Ian Tuttle does not agree. He writes for the magazine National Review. He said there are major differences between German Jews in the 1930s and the Syrians now. The biggest difference is that the Jews were not trying to carry out terror attacks, unlike the group Islamic State, he said.

Since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in New York, the U.S. has taken in 784,000 refugees. Of them, just three have been arrested on charges related to terrorism, says the Migration Policy Institute. It studies the movement of people around the world.

Messinger said the Jews and Syrians share some experiences. Not everything is the same though, he said.

Jews fled Europe because they were treated badly because of their religion, he said.

The Syrians are escaping because their country is at war, he said.

### **Suffering People Need Help, Project Leader Says**

Robert Krakow is in charge of the SS St. Louis Legacy Project. The group studies the history of the voyage. It also got the U.S. government to apologize for turning the ship away. He said he sees more similarities than differences between the Jewish and Muslim refugees.

"It's grounded in human need and suffering, and here's a case where we can do something," he said.