

HOSTING SCHOLARLY LECTURES AND EXPERT TALKS

Libraries may want to engage an expert speaker or host a panel of scholars on one of the specific topics covered in the *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibition. This suggests possible topics types of speakers.

THE *AMERICANS AND THE HOLOCAUST* EXHIBITION ADDRESSES THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE 1930s AND 1940s:

- What did Americans know?
- Did Americans Help Jewish Refugees?
- Why Did Americans Go to War?
- How Did Americans Respond to the Holocaust?

KEY CONCEPTS PRESENTED FOR PROGRAMMING IDEAS:

- 1) Americans Had Information.** Americans could read, see, and hear news about Nazi persecution and murder of European Jews in their newspapers and magazines, on the radio, and in newsreels, as well as information about events of World War II as events were unfolding.
 - Consider hosting a small panel conversation that includes a journalism or communications professor and a local reporter to talk about the media landscape in the 1930s and 1940s. This program could showcase local coverage of Nazism, available through the [History Unfolded Database](#) or historical newspapers available at your library.
 - Consider hosting a local reporter who has covered more recent mass atrocities, whether as a field reporter or while covering international news. This could include a discussion around the impact of social media news sharing, the 24 hour news cycle, and the challenges of covering crises abroad.
 - Consider inviting a media studies professor to discuss the landscape of popular culture during the 1930s and 1940s and how the ways in which Americans got their news impacted what they understood about Nazi persecution and murder of European Jews.
- 2) Americans Faced Many Competing Priorities.** Despite this information, public opinion polls show that most Americans did not want to accept more Jewish refugees into the country. Racism and antisemitism at home, war weariness from World War I, conditions during the Great Depression, fears of communism and spies, and eventually World War II all competed with the plight of endangered Jews for Americans' attention. Also, even though Americans learned about atrocities, many were skeptical of the reports.
 - Consider hosting a panel including a historian of immigration and refugee studies and a professor of immigration law (or immigration lawyer) in order to discuss the historical context and legal ramifications of US immigration policy during the 1930s.
 - Consider hosting a panel including a historian who studies communism, a military historian, or a historian who focuses on ethnic studies to discuss the various pressures and prejudices present in the American public in the 1930s and 1940s.

- Consider hosting a panel with a historian who studies the presidency and a political scientist to discuss the ways in which politicians are often influenced by public opinion—or seek to influence it—using examples from the exhibition.

3) **Americans Debated.** Americans debated their country's role in the world. They argued over immigration policy, over whether the United States should remain isolated or intervene in World War II, and over whether the United States should make a concerted effort to rescue Jews, or simply try to win the war as soon as possible.

- Consider hosting a panel including a historian of World War II, refugee and immigration policy, and/or American Jewish history in order to discuss how the persecution and murder of Europe's Jews was understood in the 1930s and 1940s and the context of American reaction to events in Europe.
- Consider hosting a panel with a historian who studies the 1930s and 1940s and a local art historian or artist to discuss how Americans expressed themselves and their beliefs then and today, and the ways in which art has historically been used to convey an individual or community's political, cultural, and social beliefs.

4) **Americans Responded.** Some Americans reacted when they learned about the Nazi threat to European Jews. They took action as individuals, members of institutions, or government officials. These efforts were shaped by the time period and the resources they had available.

- Consider inviting a representative from a local humanitarian aid organization, preferably one that sends aid overseas (like the American Red Cross, or Doctors Without Borders), along with a historian of the 1930s and 1940s, to discuss what factors influence Americans' interest and willingness to address overseas crises.
- Consider inviting experts on immigration policy to discuss the role that United States immigration policy played in the refugee crisis affecting European Jews in the 1930s and 1940s and the challenges that remain for victims fleeing genocide today.

5) **Americans Focused On Winning the War.** The United States and other Allied forces prioritized military victory over humanitarian aid during World War II. Although the United States could have done more to aid the victims of Nazi Germany and its collaborators, large-scale rescue was impossible by the time the United States entered the war.

- Consider inviting a US military historian to provide context about the Allied military possibilities and limitations in the 1940s.