

17 July 2003

Based on the somewhat condensed presentation at the International Symposium, "Austria and National Socialism: Implications for Scientific and Humanistic Scholarship," June 5-6, 2003, University of Vienna.

**"What Happened to the Austrian Refugee Children in America?
A Report from Research Project 'Second Wave'"**

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Our task on this unique occasion is to report what happened to Austrian children whom Austria suddenly no longer wanted, and drove away as refugees. To this end, we shall present a preliminary report of results of our ongoing research at Harvard University. We have been studying the experience, fate, and contributions of a large group of people who came to the United States of America in the 1930s and 1940s as *young* refugees from Central Europe, chiefly Germany and Austria. They were fleeing the persecution by the National Socialist government and fellow citizens in their homelands. Relatively considered, these youngsters were the lucky ones, being part of the 100,000 children who escaped the fate of the 1,500,000 racially or politically targeted children who died in the Holocaust. Whereas the scope of our project is limited to the young refugees who came to the United States, we recognize, of course, that other countries, among them Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Palestine/Israel, and many others, also provided a safe haven for young refugees (and for refugees in general) (see Laqueur 2001).

We chose the title "Project Second Wave" for our study to distinguish it from the more usual emphasis on those refugees, many of them highly

distinguished, who came as *adults*, already trained for their careers. On that First Wave, there exists already excellent and useful research, such as that by Professor Stadler and his colleagues, including their books on the "*Vertriebene Vernunft*." But until we started our project, little had been done to study systematically, with a large database, what happened to the *children and adolescents* of this immigration movement: those members of that group who had been brought up, during their impressionable years, in the cultural milieu of Central Europe, but were forced to leave at ages up to about 18. Upon whatever early European foundations they brought with them, they had to build an American structure, despite the traumata of arriving in the U.S.A. after sometimes dangerous and complex escapes, many severed from parents and friends whom they would never see again. Typically they arrived without a command of the English language, without financial means, separated from their culture and emotional support network, and burdened with harrowing memories of what they had witnessed. And they came to the New World which still suffered from the economic depression, as well as, in certain circles, from xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Government authorities were also less than welcoming to refugees, and kept the numbers of admitted immigrants from Central Europe below the set quota (Wyman 1968).¹ In a striking contrast with the great humanitarian endeavor of Britain's "Kindertransport," which saved

¹ The immigration quota for persons born in Germany or Austria was completely used up only in one year, 1939, and was almost exhausted only in 1940 (95.3%) (Davie 1947:29). It is primarily then Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long who is blamed for creating bureaucratic "red tape" to slow down the refugees' immigration.

10,000 children, a similar American plan--the Wagner-Rogers Bill,² which in 1939 proposed to admit a maximum of 20,000 refugee children to the United States outside the quota restrictions--failed already at the committee stage (Davie 1947:209).

In view of their inauspicious early circumstances, one could plausibly have expected that this group of young refugees on the whole might spiral into anomie and despair. But, to preview a central finding of our study, that was not at all the case. On the contrary, we found that most, though not all, continued their education in the United States, obtained their credentials, and eventually embarked on remarkably successful careers. This young cohort from Germany and Austria includes many individuals who eventually became highly productive in a great variety of fields – in science, scholarship, administration, the arts, as industrialists, and as public figures. It includes several who achieved science Nobel Prizes, such as Eric Kandel, Walter Kohn, and Arno Penzias, as well as a host of other distinguished persons, such as Alfred Bader, Lotte Bailyn (neè Lazarsfeld), Carl Djerassi, Lukas Foss, Peter Gay, Stanley Hoffmann, Herbert Kelman, Felix Rohatyn, Henry Rosovsky, Fritz Stern, and many, many others.

To be sure, there exist valuable memoirs and biographies on some *individual* members in our cohort. But our project intends to provide the most representative, quantitative “big picture” of the *Vertreibungsschicksale*, in addition to probing narratively into the details of individual experiences.

² The bill's sponsors were Senator Robert Wagner from New York and Representative Edith Nourse Rogers from Massachusetts. Interestingly, one of the chief arguments against the bill was that the admittance of refugee children without their parents was against the laws of God and would therefore be an opening wedge for a later request to admit the children's parents also (Tartakower & Grossmann 1944:90).

As a combination of sociological, intellectual, and historical research, our project examines important aspects of our cohort's early formation in Europe, in school, through their immediate families, through their early life experiences, and then focuses on their later life course and careers as adults in America, on their disappointments and accomplishments.

Two of our major research questions are these:

1. How did these people form their personal and national identities in America against the background of the sharp discontinuities they experienced in their early lives?
2. To what extent did their early cultural and intellectual formation in Europe leave a significant residue that shaped or colored their specific contributions in America? A major hypothesis we are testing in our study is that their achievements in many cases benefited from a sort of alchemical reaction within them, between the European heritage they had brought with them and the American styles and modes of thought and opportunities they encountered.

About 90% of the Central European youngsters who fled to America were Jewish, but one must not forget that about 10% were Christians (half of them Protestant, half Catholic), many of whom had been driven out with their families for political reasons. According to data from the U.S. Census of 1970, about 26,000 German and Austrian children and adolescents had reached the U.S.A. between about 1933 to late 1941, with a trickle to 1944. Of those 26,000, about 6,000 had been born in Austria, the country of whose population 65,500 Jews, young and old, were deported and perished as victims of the National Socialists, in addition to about 35,300 other such victims (for reasons such as being stigmatized for their strong Catholic conservatism). We should point out again that the Central Europeans on whom our study focuses are only part of a larger

group of people persecuted by the National Socialist government. The main sources for our study are the several thousand detailed questionnaires we distributed, about 100 lengthy, face-to-face interviews with members of this Second Wave cohort, as well as several existing, representative data sets, such as those of the U.S. Census.³

We can now report some major findings at this point of our survey for the *Austrian sub-group* of the larger population of Central Europeans whom we are studying. The results are based on the approximately 300 responses received so far from former Austrians who have already replied to our confidential questionnaire with its 80 questions, or had been interviewed in various cities in the United States.

The sample we thus obtained for this study contains former Austrian refugees of all walks of life, although it tends to be weighted somewhat toward high-achieving members of the immigrant cohort. That is the main reason for our performing also an analysis of U.S. Census data, which provide the most representative picture of the fates of the immigrant groups as a whole. Moreover, our U.S. Census data analysis has allowed us to compare the results from our study sample with data from the general population of native-born Americans of the same age group with whom our ex-Austrian newcomers had to compete. As you will see shortly, that comparison produced results that may surprise you.

³ To locate and study our participants, we used such databases as the *Biographische Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933*, the membership of the Kindertransport Association (KTA), synagogues, the association of "One Thousand Children" and similar groups, the books *American Men and Women of Science*, *Who's Who*, and *Who's Who in American Jewry*, and the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS, 1970). We also found referrals from former refugees we already knew, using what is called the "snowball effect."

To appreciate the data, it is essential to remember at least briefly the circumstances and context prompting the necessary flight of our young cohort. Most members of the Austrian refugee group in our study had of course considered themselves regular and fully loyal young Austrians. They had been brought up treasuring what all other children liked. They had sung the same folk songs while hiking in their Lederhosen or Dirndl through their beloved meadows and mountains, they enjoyed the same good food, often in the circle of their extended families, they went to the same schools with their rather demanding curricula, and they cheered the same favorite sports teams. Indeed, before the so-called Anschluss, these children were looking forward to becoming productive and useful citizens in Austria, just as their parents were.

But unlike their parents, many of whom had begun to realize the dangerous change of atmosphere even before the Austro-Fascist regimes of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg, these children by and large were only rarely aware of the tide that was to engulf them. Practically from one day to the next, in March 1938, an incomprehensible rupture occurred in their lives and identity. They, their families, and many of their friends were suddenly considered outlaws, thrown into dreadful turmoil—the persecution, assaults, expulsion from their schools--while their parents, with some most honorable exceptions, were made to experience much worse. As Gerhart Saenger and others have noted, the National Socialist regime and a hostile population in Austria learned in days what had taken years in Germany.

This ghastly discontinuity in the life of our young group was responsible for much of the psychological costs of the experience for those children. We shall return later to this important point. But here we must make a brief remark based on some comments still current in Austria. What these former children reported to us, and what is also documented elsewhere, is one of the best *disproofs* of the

convenient *Opfertheorie*, which holds that Austria was "the first victim of Nazism." On the contrary: from the first days of the Anschluss, when a large part of the population, as is well documented, enthusiastically welcomed the German troops and Hitler, until at least the start of the war, Austria was the prime exemplar of what National Socialism really could mean, and be, and do, not least condemning a huge number of innocents to become *Opfer*.

However, since those days more than half a century has passed. Our ex-Austrian former youngsters are now "senior citizens." We wanted to know what happened to them in the decades after their arrival in the United States. As a first step, *quantitative* research was needed to determine more precisely the parameters of this group's collective fate.

Socio-economic status

We compared the former Austrian refugees, who typically had had to start from zero on arrival, with two control groups of American-born persons, using their status as of 1970 with respect to three major socio-economic indicators: (1) educational attainment, (2) income, and (3) occupational prestige. Our main control group consists of Americans of the same age, as identified in the U.S. Census of 1970 (Long Form 1). We shall discuss this comparison first. We shall also present the comparisons with a group of American-born Jews of the same age, using the National Jewish Population Survey of 1970.

(1) Educational Attainment

Let us start with the first control group, American-born persons regardless of religion. Of those, by 1970, about 15% of the men had 4 years of college education (that is, beyond high school), and among these, about 8% had gone on

to advanced education beyond college. In contrast, of the former Austrian men who had arrived in the U.S. as youths during the 1930s and early 1940s, some 51% had 4 years of college; that is more than three times their American-born comparison group. Moreover, about 36% had received education beyond college—more than four times more than their American-born counterparts.

For the women, the comparison is also striking. Of course, in absolute numbers, there was then a very large gender gap with respect to getting education. By 1970, American-born women, in only 8% of the cases, had at least four years of college, and almost 3% went on to higher degrees. But again, the equivalent numbers for former immigrant girls from Austria are 30% and 13%, which means respectively about four times more than American-born women in the general population. The magnitude of these collective educational achievements are remarkable.

(2) Income

Here again, by 1970, the former Central Europeans eventually did very well in terms of annual income in the U.S.A.—a difference related to an important degree, on average, to the differences between the respective educational levels of achievement just mentioned. According to the Census, the annual income of the Central Europeans who had arrived as children and adolescents between 1935 and 1944 substantially exceeded, by 1970, the average income of the corresponding American-born population at that time. In fact, in 1970, the average income of the former Austrian males was almost twice as high as that of the American-born men of the same ages (about 190% in relation to the 100% of the American-born average).

We also looked at other immigrant groups. The former young refugees from Germany had by 1970 a very similar average number as the former

Austrians (192%), and the male immigrants from Eastern Europe on average earned a bit over 136%. As to the former Austrian young females of the 1935-1944 immigration cohort, on average they earned by 1970 about one-and-a-half times (151%) the income of American-born women. And this was also true for former German women (149%). For the former Eastern European young women, the number was about 117%.

Among the incentives to make these higher levels of earning of the immigrant groups, one may count a need, felt far more likely among the immigrants than among the native-born Americans, to contribute in many cases to the livelihood of their parents who, as noted, generally had to settle for depressed circumstances after arrival.

When we compare our study cohort to Central Europeans of the same age who immigrated to the United States at different times, we find that our study cohort was by 1970 the one with the highest income for both men and women. The immigrant groups that followed them showed considerable differences in financial attainment. The numbers dropped much more precipitously for the German group than for the Austrian group, both among the men and the women. For lack of time we can't speculate here about the reasons for it.

(3) Occupational Prestige

In a nutshell, the former Austrian children came also to be highly represented in the top two broad occupational categories, namely professionals and managers, as defined in the U.S. Census. Again, some gender differences were evident. By 1970, almost three-quarters of ex-Austrian men in our cohort (73%) were in the top two categories (that is to say, professionals [50%], and managers [23%]). Of the ex-Austrian women, 42% were in those two top categories (professionals [36%] and managers [6%]). For comparison, we looked

at the American-born contemporaries, and found that about 28% of the men and 18% of the women were in the two top categories, thus comprising less than half of the percentages for the ex-Austrians.

The 1970 Census data also allowed us to identify in more detail the general fields of employment of our former Austrians. Of the men, 23% were in *science and engineering* (about the same as for American-born men), but so were 12.5% of the women (compared to less than 5% of American-born women). In such professions as physicians and lawyers, the data are also interesting: over 14% for ex-Austrian men, which is almost double (8%) that for American-born men, and 25% for ex-Austrian women, a bit more than their American-born counterparts (22.5%). In the *arts and humanities* category, ex-Austrian men were represented at slightly over 14%, almost three times as often as American-born men (5%). Former Austrian women also did relatively better (8.3% versus 5.6%).

In short, the children from Austria ended up, in most cases, being percentage-wise substantially more represented than the American-born citizens in the sciences and humanities—the very headings important to this Conference.

Central European immigrants and American-born Jews

It will be remembered that in the comparisons so far we could use the official U.S. Census data of 1970 (Long Form 1) to compare the immigrants from Austria and Germany with the general population of American-born

contemporaries.⁴ But the Census did not ask for religion. Therefore we turned to the (unofficial) National Jewish Population Survey of 1970⁵ for a second comparison, although the relatively small number of Central European immigrants in that survey limited the possibilities of a statistical analysis such as that of the U.S. Census data. In our cohort's age range (birth years 1918 through 1935), the 1970 NJPS contained a total of 5,154 respondents, among whom 84 were born in Central Europe and immigrated to the United States between 1933 and 1944. Because the relatively small numbers precluded us from examining the Austrian group separately, we performed the comparisons with the American-born by combining the former Austrians and Germans (Central Europeans).

It is well known that the Jewish ethnic group in America has on average been successful in terms of educational and socio-economic achievements. But even when comparing the immigrants in the NJPS with American-born Jews, the collective *educational achievements* of the Central European immigrants were found to be greater, although the gap was narrower than the previously reported

⁴ Because the American-born minority groups of the cohort in question suffered severe race-based inequities, they obviously could not do as well as their white contemporaries did, on average. Hence, the differences between the immigrant group and the American-born population as a whole might in part be attributed to the inclusion of minorities in the American-born population. To see if this was indeed a substantial effect, we did an analogous set of statistics using the "white" American-born population, as defined by the U.S. Census. It had very similar results (with the differences being only slightly smaller).

⁵ The 1970 NJPS data were made available by the Mandell L. Berman Institute-North American Jewish Data Bank. Neither the original source or collectors of the data nor the North American Jewish Data Bank bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here. In addition to the 1970 NJPS, we explored the data of the 1990 survey of New York City Jews, also made available by the Mandell L. Berman Institute-North American Jewish Data Bank. However, because the survey contained only 43 members of the cohort on which we focus primarily (immigrants from Central Europe who were born between 1918 and 1935, and entered the United States between 1933 and 1944), no results are reported from that 1990 survey.

one between immigrants and the American-born population at large.⁶ In terms of *occupation*, the differences found between former Central European Jews and American-born Jews in the NJPS again replicated, at a less pronounced scale, the differences found in our earlier comparisons.⁷ These results confirm the strong tendency among the Central European immigrants on average away from narrowly economic pursuits, and toward other careers within the two top occupational categories. In terms of *income*, however, for the NJPS cohorts no significant difference was found between these established Americans and the newcomers.⁸

Growing up Austrian

Many of our participants thought that their early life origins were instrumental in achieving the good outcomes. To be sure, some of the participants do not wish to remind themselves of their childhood life in Europe at all. Some wrote, "I tried very hard to forget"; or similarly. The majority,

⁶ According to the 1970 National Jewish Population Survey, 67.4% of those former Central Europeans had at least four years of higher education, as compared to 54.4% of the American-born men. Higher education beyond four years was obtained by 55.8% of the male former Central Europeans, as compared to 35.5% of those born in the United States – a more substantial difference. With respect to having at least four years of higher education, the women of that immigrant cohort from Central Europe also did better than their American-born counterparts, but only slightly so (35.1% vs. 31.8%). If we look only at those with post-college education, however, the difference is more pronounced (Central European women: 29.7%; American-born women: 16.1%).

⁷ At the time of the 1970 NJPS, a strikingly large proportion of the Central European 1933-1944 immigrant cohort--both men (59.1%) and women (61.1%)--worked in the top category ("professionals") of the broad occupational classification, as defined by the U.S. Census. Their American-born Jewish contemporaries did so in much smaller percentages (men: 33.6%, women: 33.4%). Conversely, however, a relatively higher number of American-born respondents worked in the second category ("managers").

⁸ When the NJPS was conducted in 1970, the average family income of the former Central European 1933-1944 immigrants was slightly lower than that of the US-born Jews (\$24,900 vs. \$26,100); but this 5% difference is far from being statistically significant.

however, does think back. For them, the early period of their lives is still a part of their current thoughts, for better or worse.

From many questionnaires shone memories of what once had been a "normal" childhood in Central Europe, in many cases a very comfortable one. (More than 70% of the participants reported that they came from an upper middle class [or upper class] background.) Our survey afforded some insight into the tastes, activities and hobbies, when they were still children, and these were, as we hinted, much in line with the general culture that surrounded them in their home country. For instance, the favorite early childhood books mentioned were those that most Austrian (and German) children could be expected to know—books such as *Struwelpeter*, *Max und Moritz*, *Emil und die Detektive*. Older children had liked books ranging from Jules Verne to Greek, Roman, and German classics, and also some exciting books such as Ernst Haeckel's *Welträtsel*. But one participant simply wrote, "all books by Karl May," the author of popular "Wild West" fiction who was in fact the most frequently cited one by the male participants. Among the girls, it was the *Nesthäkchen* book series.

An astonishingly large number of our participants mentioned that when still in Austria they had liked to listen to classical music and opera, even at an early age. Mozart and Schubert had become lifelong friends early. Many had also liked the lighter fare of waltzes, operettas, *Schlager*, and, as noted, *Wanderlieder*.

The reason for mentioning these early preferences is the following. Scholarly studies in the 1940s and 1950s expected immigrant children to become completely Americanized in a short period of time, under the influence of the so-called melting-pot ideal. But the reality among our group turned out to be different. Many of the participants, when asked to compare their habitual tastes

and behavior with that of born Americans of their generation, reported preferences and attitudes that stemmed from their Central European origins, as acquired in the 1920s and '30s. Frequently mentioned were being relatively more neat, orderly, and punctual—deep cultural values of Central Europe, and also quite likely in part a residue of the discipline enforced in the schools of those days. Many admitted to being somewhat formal by American standards (for example, "I will not use a person's first name unless we are long standing acquaintances or the person is considerably younger than I"). Frequently, our participants emphasized the importance of good manners. Even handling knife and fork was often mentioned as still being according to the old habit. In the taste for literature, music, art and architecture, remarkably many think of themselves as "Eurocentric."

And of course culinary remnants of European tastes appeared in the questionnaires. As one said, "I'd walk a mile for a Wiener Schnitzel." Conversely, many noted a persistent strong dislike for some common features of their new surroundings in America, such as chewing gum, soft drinks, and fast food. When our questionnaire asked the ex-Austrians to rate the extent to which they possessed each of 39 listed traits in comparison with what they considered the average American of their age, the trait that received the highest average rating was "interest in learning," followed by "listening to classical music" and "liking to read." By contrast, the lowest-scoring trait was "interested in celebrities," second lowest came "listening to popular music," and third was "following [American] sports events."

Being a child after the Anschluss

The Anschluss changed life swiftly, completely, and irretrievably for Jewish children as well as their parents. Since we are speaking of the experience

of Austrian children, it is appropriate that we should try harder, at this point, to put ourselves in their place, and to imagine or remember what the accumulation of traumatizations really meant. For this purpose, we recommend that you read at least the autobiography of Eric Kandel, published in the book *Les Prix Nobel 2000*. And for accounts of the experiences of one group of young students in the 1938–39 period, we refer you to a carefully researched book, published in Vienna by Magister Martin Krist, instructor at the *Bundesgymnasium XIX (BG 19)*, published in cooperation with his students. The title of the book is *Vertreibungsschicksale: Jüdische Schüler eines Wiener Gymnasiums 1938 und ihre Lebenswege*. As a concrete case, the book vividly illustrates and reinforces what we know from our own questionnaires, interviews and other sources of data. Because of the constraints on time, we will point only to a few episodes described in the book, to stand for what many, perhaps most, Austrian children of the "unwanted" kind experienced.

BG 19, on the *Gymnasiumstrasse*, was in a good *Bezirk*, but had a whole socioeconomic spectrum of students. A relatively small fraction of the students were, at least by the Nürenberg racial laws, Jewish, but most were Catholics, and a few were Protestants or "confessionslos." Between March 11, 1938 and September 1939, over 250 official orders were issued by the governmental authorities concerning various limitations placed on the life of Jews, which strongly impacted on these students: the firing of "undesirable" teachers, from March 1938 on; orders to parents to cease their economic activities; prohibition of using playgrounds, cinemas, theaters. Any so-called non-"Aryan" was exposed day and night to the possibility of any assault, freely chosen by mobs and uniformed men; and of course worst of all, the sudden "Arisierung" of properties, the euphemism for a legal theft and robbery, ranging from the takeover of the

children's apartments, the parents' offices, shops, and any other property, including forests and land. More on that later.

Starting March 22, 1938, the teachers at BG 19, having had to swear loyalty to their new *Reichskanzler*, came in wearing NSDAP insignia if they had been previously illegal members, as many were. Two came in the uniform of the SA, one of the SS. One of the most beloved teachers, Dr. Arthur Hruby, was pensioned off, having been prominent in the previous administration.

For a few weeks, lessons continued at that school, although in a vastly changed atmosphere. For example, in some classes, the Jewish students were moved to the back of the room, on seats called the "Donkey benches," and this was also done even to the Protestants. But on the 26 of April 1938, the official newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, had an article under the heading: "How Can We Get Rid of the Jews?" One result was that on 28 April 1938 all children at this Gymnasium who were considered Jewish, 90 of them from all classes at BG 19, were asked to assemble and told they were now forbidden to remain in this school.

The same happened throughout Vienna, where almost all of our Austrian refugee children came from, and probably also in the rest of Austria. Eventually all these unwanted students were transferred to special schools, run by Jewish teachers, although with a *Numerus Clausus*, limiting them to 2% of the total high school population in Vienna (as had been done from 24 April 1938 at the University). By 9 May 1938 all schools, from primary grades up, were thus ghettoized. Fathers who had been prominent in the previous regime were likely to be arrested. For example, pupil Paul Ehrlich's father was taken on 1 April 1938 to Dachau, where he was killed on 17 May. The SS could arrest anyone without charge, and did so by the busload, including persons standing in those

long lines, such as those outside the American Embassy, trying to gain entrance to the offices for exit permits and visas.

But all this was just a dress rehearsal compared to the main events to come. On November 9 and 10, 1938, there occurred the horrid, meticulously planned and executed Pogrom throughout the NS-occupied lands, to which the authorities gave the perfumed name "*Reichskristallnacht*." Up to that point, some parents of the pupils in that *Gymnasium* in Vienna, and elsewhere, could deceive themselves that the horror could not last. The father of one BG 19 student, Friedrich Schwab, was quoted as follows: "I am a decorated soldier of the Austro-Hungarian Army, and have paid all my taxes, nothing can happen to me." Soon he would find out differently, not least by having, as all did on trying to emigrate, to pay a large sum to the authorities, called a "*Reichsfluchtsteuer*," on top of the huge "fine" assessed to the Jewish community to repair damages done to their own business premises by the mob.

During the Pogrom of November 9-10, 1938, the gathering frenzy of much of the Austrian population boiled over. We do not need to remind you here of the variety of crimes, often carried out in bacchanalian enthusiasm.⁹ One account stands for at least the less lethal ones. During that night, an additional large number of the apartments in which Jewish students lived in Vienna were "*arisiert*." That is, ordinary civilians, for example neighbors, could come in and demand that the family living there get out at once, down into the street. Student Georg Auer of BG 19 recalls that they simply came in to his family's flat on 10 November, and "*haben uns rausgehaut*." And, sadly too, among those pushing the family out was one of his former classmates from that *Gymnasium*. The transfer of property through "*Arisierung*" and other devices, which has never

⁹ For one description that led to the *Kindertransport*, see Noel-Baker (1938).

been seriously rectified, has only recently begun to be calculated and runs into many billions of *Reichsmark*. It is of course to this day part of Austria's wealth.¹⁰

More of the fathers of the former BG 19 students were arrested that night, some even made to take part in the destruction of the Synagogues. One of these, father of Bertrand Knoll, was so beaten that he died on November 19. The true nightmare began to descend on all undesirables, punctuated by rare but heroic interventions by individuals on behalf of the victims.

Of course it all got much worse. But enough of this reminder. You know the rest.

Different paths to safety

The whole refugee movement had started soon after Hitler took power in Germany, and lasted even through the war. The participants in our survey managed to come to the U.S. in many different ways. For some, the journey to the U.S. was fairly straightforward, but many others had very protracted migrations, through several other countries before they finally arrived in the United States. The rescue during the short period of 9 months, starting in December 1938, of about 10,000 unaccompanied children, most from Germany and Austria, to go to Britain, is now well known by its name Kindertransport. About 2000 of those children eventually went on to the United States. The story deserves more attention. Let us only mention at this point that it is a shining example of some of the starlight moments in that dark night.

Of course, it took the largely volunteer work of numerous organizations to help most of the children to escape from Central Europe and to settle in the U.S. Among those gratefully acknowledged in our questionnaires and interviews

¹⁰ See Jabloner (2003) and *Kurzinformation* (2003), in the list of selected literature.

were America's Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the Quakers (both in England and the United States), and the National Council of Jewish Women¹¹. Because for the non-Jewish refugee children funds were not forthcoming in adequate amounts, in 1939 the United Jewish Appeal gave \$125,000 to the Federal Council of the Church of Christ for work with Protestant refugees, and the same amount to Bishop Bernard J. Sheil for the Catholic refugees. There were also a number of striking efforts by individuals and local groups.

Settling in

We also wanted to know in what circumstances the Austrian refugee children lived after they arrived in the United States. Close to half (47%) lived with their migrating family. Of the other half, most lost their parents and their other relatives in the Holocaust. Learning English was a task that the children, as a group, completed rapidly and easily. 71% said it took them less than one year to achieve age-appropriate proficiency in English, 21% said it took between one and two years. Only very few said it took them longer. 42% said they speak English today without a foreign accent. Some 70% of our cohort now speak and read German rarely or never. On the other hand, an enduring influence of the European "milieu" may lie in the fact that a remarkable number of our cohort reported to have married other young refugees.

Politics

¹¹ On the children who were in homes run by OSE (*Oeuvre de Secour aux Enfants*) in France and from there were brought to the United States—see Papanek (1975) and a personal account by Kanner & Kugler (1997).

Because of their early experiences under a tyranny, and because of their gratitude for being provided a safe haven, our respondents report in large numbers to have developed a deep appreciation of the American constitutional system that in principle allows for much freedom and opportunity. But because they do not take democracy for granted, and still recall how easily it can be subverted, many remarked that they must make the most of that privilege, and be active politically, which usually means writing letters to their representatives, and doing volunteer work.

Some participants generalized the historical experience of the 1930s and 1940s into a fundamental conclusion—that any attempt at appeasing aggressors is disastrous. This may lead to a "hawkish" stance on security matters. In terms of party affiliation, the most common political designation in our group of former Austrians in the U.S. was "Democrat" (30%), followed by "liberal" (25%). Only 3% chose "Republican," and the same low percentage chose "conservative."

Who do our participants think they are now? We gave them various options of identity labels, from which they could choose the one they considered most appropriate for themselves. "American" was chosen by 58%, followed by "Jewish-American" (17%). None of the other categories we offered, such as "Austrian" or "Austrian-American," attracted a considerable number of respondents.

Causes of success

We can also begin to see reasons for the relative successes. These were of course multiple and varied. There were broad factors that benefited U. S. society at large, including our group. One was the "G.I. Bill," providing a college education to all who had served on war duty from December 1941, including

those in our cohort. Another one was the general economic upswing in America, following the war.

More specifically, numerous participants mentioned that the superior academic training they had received at Austrian schools and *Gymnasien* allowed them to thrive in American institutions of education. By and large, the participants also hold that the invisible cultural "baggage," in a more general sense, that they had brought from pre-Nazi Europe was an important factor in the success they eventually enjoyed. For instance, they cherish a more cosmopolitan outlook and "cultural lifestyle." A large majority (90%) agreed with the statements that this immigrant group on the whole, and they themselves in particular, had blended European and American characteristics in a way that was conducive to success. Another interesting but perhaps not surprising fact following from our study was that many refugees found initial intellectual sponsors from among members of the earlier, First Wave, immigrants.

The originally upper-middle class status of most of our participants' parents is also likely to have played a role in the Second Wave's socio-economic success. In fact, the group we are studying is a strategic research site to explore the question to what extent an elevated socio-economic status can be transmitted from one generation to the next, even though the material substrate of this class position had been lost—that is, even though the parents had in some cases perished, or frequently experienced catastrophic downward mobility in the wake of the migration. Whereas, in the normal case, higher-status parents provide their offspring a host of material advantages, along with values, norms, and ambitions, to maximize their chances in life, here we encounter the isolated effect of non-material factors.

Another major factor was the psychological dynamics that often sprung from the young refugees' situation. Many described to us what they considered

positive effects of their early experiences on their attitude: It made them perform mature, responsible, self-reliant, and tenacious. "It matured me at a very young age," one wrote; and another, "Success is the best revenge." A distinguished participant said simply: "I had a portable home." And another wrote: "To sum it up: There is a darkness in my view of life, which has its roots in Europe, and then there is that 'lightness of being' which in America has been elevated to a cult. I try to draw from both."

For many young refugees from Austria, childhood had suddenly been replaced by a hard sort of adulthood. This was most clear when the parents, who typically had been substantial citizens, were suddenly considered in Austria to be enemies, and were thrown out of their places of work, with fathers often unable to earn a living, being arrested, or going into hiding. For an adult to be found on the streets of Vienna after March 1938 without a swastika on the lapel was an invitation to sudden disaster. The carefully staged terrorization caused many of the adults there to collapse. This is when their children, even from age 12 up, became the essential links, such as going in somewhat greater safety from one office to another in the seemingly endless search for the many different permits needed by the many-headed bureaucracy for supplying at last the hoped-for visa and exit. As one participant summarized for many: While still in Austria, "I became the parent. They became the children."

And this phenomenon frequently did not stop on arrival of the family in the U.S.A. Whereas the children and young adults found their feet more steadily on this new soil, the parents—especially if the father had been a lawyer or physician, and now was completely cut off from that life, connections, and earning power—these parents often became further depressed and had to settle for a demeaned life. So again, in the U.S. too, children had to leave behind what was left of childhood. For many, being responsible for themselves after coming

to the U.S. made them resolve early to continue their education fiercely, to make a living and pursue a profession. One wrote typically: "At age 13, I was alone in a strange country. I had to become an adult."

But there was often a cost to their success, a cost that caught up, sometimes only in later life. As is known from clinical studies under other but similar conditions, the terrifying experiences in their homeland and the forced separation from it, as well as, in many cases, the early necessity to help in the family's dire situation—all that might have induced in many what is termed a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Many questionnaires speak of the continuation to this day of anxiety and panic attacks, fear of abandonment, and suspicion of all authority. One wrote: "I still love the city of my childhood, but not its people. The sadism I encountered from them has left a scar that will last forever." Particularly for those who came to the U.S. alone and had lost their parents, the psychological toll was often very heavy. Continual nightmares are frequently mentioned. As one wrote: "To this day I dream of being persecuted, imprisoned by Nazis." And "Feelings of lack of stability and serenity have become part of my personality." In the course of our research, we have also learned of suicides and other tragedies that might be attributed to early psychological traumatization.

A few participants described having the sentiment of survivor's guilt (such as: "Feel guilty for my good luck when so many others and more worthwhile people perished"). This sometimes became transformed into a sense of moral responsibility to support the Jewish community and humankind generally.

Conclusion

In line with popular stories about individuals, our scientifically based research is showing so far (and is likely to figure in the more wide-ranging book we intend to have ready by 2005) that the young Austrian immigrants to the U.S. collectively made substantial contributions—not because their path was clear of obstacles, but because enormous challenges were met and in most cases overcome, in the face of a whole spectrum of losses. We thus find evidence for the sociological juxtaposition of "privatized costs" and "socialized benefits."

This ends our preliminary report of our on-going Project Second Wave, based on the largest database available, and concentrating on the children whom Austria did not want. It is an account of cataclysm, traumata, resolve, adaptation, resilience, and productive lives, in America, and for America.

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