

## Roosevelt, Franklin Delano

(1882 – 1945), President of the United States from 1933 – 1945. Roosevelt was the only president to have served four terms. Although he probably could have done more than any other leader during World War II to help save the Jews of Europe, many historians believe that he did not try hard enough.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt came into office, the most pressing problem in America was the terrible poverty and hopelessness produced by the Great Depression. In his "New Deal" program, Roosevelt created welfare programs to help desperately poor Americans. This won the support of many American Jews, who agreed with Roosevelt's social-democratic tendencies. By the election of 1940, Roosevelt's third, nine out of ten Jews were voting for him. Many American Jews stayed loyal to Roosevelt throughout his presidency despite his inactivity concerning the Jewish situation in Europe.

In fact, Roosevelt did instruct American consuls in Europe to try and help Jewish refugees who were seeking visas to the United States. He also recalled his ambassador to Germany in a gesture of objection after the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 9--10, 1938. In addition, he allowed Jews who were in the United States on visitor's visas to extend their stay. However, he would not significantly change the country's strict immigration laws to allow more refugees. He may have succumbed to the pressure of anti-immigrationists who feared that new immigrants would take away jobs from "real" Americans. Roosevelt also allowed consular officials to refuse visas to anyone who might, at a later time, need public assistance. This excuse was often used to keep Jewish refugees out of the United States. This type of inaction slipped down a slippery slope that continued into the next stage of the Holocaust: mass murder of Europe's Jews. As time went on, suggestions made about helping the Jews in Europe were routinely rejected by various government agencies.

After Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, Roosevelt made a weak attempt to deal with the growing Jewish refugee problem by calling the Evian Conference. Thirty-two countries were invited to meet in France in July to discuss possible solutions. However, one by one, each country's

representative announced that his country was filled to the brim with refugees and could not admit any more. In all, the conference failed when the US refused to set a humanitarian example.

Two agencies were created as a result of the Evian Conference —the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR), and the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees (PAC). However, these committees were essentially for show; like the conference, they were intended to keep rescue activists quiet, rather than actually help any Jews.

When the "Final Solution" was at its most horrifying in 1943, and the rest of the world was aware of it, Roosevelt convened a second refugee conference in Bermuda along with the British, called the Bermuda Conference. This, too, accomplished nothing. Only as the result of a special entreaty made by Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau (who informed the president that the State Department had been systematically sabotaging the rescue effort) did Roosevelt create the War Refugee Board in 1944. However, by the time of its creation most of European Jewry had already been murdered.

Some believe that Roosevelt simply did not want to help Europe's Jews. However, it is more likely that he was distracted by the war and his health problems, and just did not comprehend the extent of the Holocaust's horrors.