

The Role of Oscar Cox in The Creation of the War Refugee Board, 1943–1944

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President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order on January 22, 1944, that established the War Refugee Board (WRB). Roosevelt decided to create the WRB after discussing the matter with Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., on January 16, 1944, as political pressure was building for U.S. relief for European refugees. The new board consisted of Morgenthau, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and Secretary of War Henry Stimson. The preamble of the order mentioned that it was “the policy of [the United States] government to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death.”¹ Historians differ on the successes of the WRB. Historian David S. Wyman argued that the WRB “played a crucial role in saving approximately 200,000 Jews.”²



Oscar Cox was a prime mover in the push for the creation of the War Refugee Board.

Several scholars who have examined United States responses to the Holocaust have argued that U.S. refugee policy shifted with the formation of the WRB. At that point, a policy of indifference and outright obstruction changed to one of

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¹ The executive order has been reprinted in David S. Wyman and Rafael Medoff, *A Race Against Death: Peter Bergson, America and the Holocaust* (New York: New Press, 2002), 217–19.

² David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 285; William D. Rubinstein claimed that the War Refugee Board only saved 20,000 Jews in William D. Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews from the Nazis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 196.

commitment to the rescue of refugees from Hitler's wrath. While citing failed State Department policy, journalist Arthur D. Morse declared that with the emergence of the WRB, "United States policy called for the rescue of the innocent."³ Historian Henry L. Feingold claimed that the creation of the WRB "set an entirely new tone to rescue pronouncements."⁴ Wyman argued that with the formation of the WRB, "the American government stood at last on the threshold of a genuine commitment to rescue."⁵ Aristide R. Zolberg has said that the emergence of the WRB "constituted a definite shift in the American stance."⁶ Through the establishment of the WRB, Roosevelt decided to have a new agency actively pursue rescue projects.

While historians have acknowledged Morgenthau's decisive role in the formation of the WRB, the involvement of a lesser-known figure, Lend-Lease Administration general counsel Oscar Cox, has been downplayed in the existing literature. His persistence in pressing for administrative action on the refugee issue and bringing it before Morgenthau as well as Under Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius were crucial elements in the bureaucratic process that resulted in the emergence of the board. Wyman has claimed that Cox's "impact was minor," and although Ariel Hurwitz, as well as Richard D. Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, have alluded to his role, neither has discussed Cox's role fully.⁷ Cox was Jewish and had a keen awareness of the State Department's ineffectiveness in the handling of Jewish matters during the early war years—clearly significant motivating factors. Utilizing overlooked material in Cox's personal papers, this article documents Cox's active and central role, and argues that his concern over the Gillette-Rogers resolutions then before Congress played a key role in his discussions with Stettinius and Morgenthau. Cox thought the resolutions, which would originate refugee relief in Congress and thus weaken the administration, would pass, and that fear caused him to intensify his push for the creation of a refugee committee in the executive branch. Finally, I will contend that Cox's persistence and outright advocacy were crucial factors in events that culminated in the formation of the WRB. A closer look at Cox's role

³ Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Random House, 1968), 98.

⁴ Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938–1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 244.

⁵ Wyman, *Abandonment*, 204.

⁶ Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 290.

⁷ Richard D. Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 229, 235, 237; Ariel Hurwitz, *Jews Without Power: American Jewry During the Holocaust* (New Rochelle, NY: Multi Educator, 2011), 231, 235; Wyman, *Abandonment*, 313.

provides us with a more complete picture of administration concerns and inter-agency tensions that led to the creation of the WRB.

Background

Born in Portland, Maine, and educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Yale University, where he received a degree in Law, Oscar Sidney Cox played a decisive role in the emergence of the War Refugee Board. He began his tenure with the U.S. government in 1938 as an assistant to Treasury Department general counsel Herman Oliphant. Cox also served in the Office of Production Management and then served simultaneously as general counsel at Lend-Lease and as the assistant solicitor general of the United States. He finished his career in government as general counsel with the Foreign Economic Administration (FEA). Harry Hopkins, an adviser to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, often turned to Cox for legal advice. According to historian George McJimsey, Cox “not only invented ingenious ways to unsnarl legal tangles but also anticipated problems and fine-tuned policies and procedure” for Hopkins.⁸ On January 2, 1941, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., asked Cox and colleague Edward Foley to draft legislation that became the Lend-Lease Act. Cox was also charged with pushing Lend-Lease through the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee as well as the full Senate, a task he performed admirably.⁹ Known for his liberal ideas and persuasive voice, Cox was a frequent guest at informal White House dinners.¹⁰ Cox worked behind the scenes, pushing for changes in refugee policy from mid-1943 thru the establishment of the WRB on January 22, 1944.

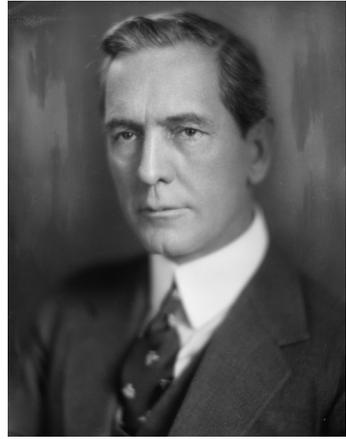
Prior to the formation of the WRB, United States policy towards European refugees was undefined, hesitant, and limited in scope. Thousands of Jews wished to leave Germany following Adolf Hitler’s ascent to power in 1933, due to increased persecution. The U.S. quota system limited immigration into the United States during the 1930s and 1940s, and Congress and the American public opposed increasing set quotas. Moreover, the State Department argued that changes in the existing system were not necessary, as quotas for Germans were not being filled, although they were filled in 1939. In the first eight years of the Roosevelt presidency (1933–1940), 211,895 quota places

⁸ George McJimsey, *Harry Hopkins: Ally of the Poor and Defender of Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 152.

⁹ Warren F. Kimball, *The Most Unsettling Act: Lend-Lease, 1939–1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 132–33, 218.

¹⁰ *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1966, 47; *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1945, 12.

were available for German immigrants with only 100,987 of those spaces filled.¹¹ Most of those immigrants were Jewish. Reluctant to spend precious political capital on behalf of Jewish refugees, Roosevelt sought with little success to find locations outside of the United States that would support Jewish resettlement. Roosevelt made a concession following the *Anschluss* when he combined the German and Austrian quotas. He also allowed Germans in the United States on six-month visitors visas to renew them indefinitely following *Kristallnacht*. Eastern European Jews wishing to immigrate encountered additional difficulty, as quotas were smaller and many lacked family connections in the United States; Poland had a quota of 6,524.



Breckinridge Long oversaw refugee policy from 1940 until the formation of the War Refugee Board.

Immigration policy tightened with the appointment of Breckinridge Long as assistant secretary of state in charge of emergency war matters, which became the War Problems Division in January 1940. His diary reveals, according to Breitman and Alan Kraut, that he “perceived himself as the ‘policy making officer and executive agent of the Government’ on the subject of refugees.”¹² Long took several steps to tighten immigration policy during 1940 and 1941 due to the threat of spies infiltrating the United States posing as refugees. He advised consuls abroad against granting visas if a consul had even the remotest suspicion of the applicant’s loyalty. Long also ordered consuls to deny visas to applicants with close relatives living in Germany or territory occupied by the Nazis. Furthermore, the State Department strove to make the application process as cumbersome as possible. Taken with the blessing of Roosevelt, Long’s actions reduced the number of immigrants from Europe, particularly Jews. Historian David S. Wyman has argued that the quotas were half-filled from mid-1940 to mid-1941.¹³ Several of Long’s contemporaries and subsequent scholars have accused him of being hostile towards Jewish refu-

¹¹ David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938–1941* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), 14–22; Charles H. Stember, *Jews in the Mind of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 120–24.

¹² Richard D. Breitman and Alan Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 128.

¹³ Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 211.

gees—even anti-Semitic.¹⁴ Aristide R. Zolberg offered a different view, attributing Long’s behavior to “an overzealous concern for security.”¹⁵

Leaving continental Europe was difficult during those years due to the war. Roger Daniels claims that a total of 16,083 European immigrants arrived in the United States during 1942 and 1943.¹⁶ The American public, however, became increasingly sympathetic towards Jewish refugees during 1943, largely due to the improved position of the Allies, as well as continued reporting of Nazi atrocities in the press. During March 1943, groups such as Rabbi Stephen S. Wise’s American Jewish Congress (AJC) and Peter Bergson’s Committee for a Jewish Army held mass meetings in major U.S. cities centering on the plight of European Jewry. The AJC rally drew approximately 75,000 attendees in and around Madison Square Garden in New York City, while the Bergson rallies typically drew tens of thousands.¹⁷

In response to public pressure, the United States and Britain held a conference to address the refugee problem in Europe. Convened in Bermuda on April 19, 1943, the parley achieved meager results, the most notable being the proposed revitalization of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR). The Bermuda Conference did not require the United States to alter its policies towards European refugees; consequently, the State Department continued to do little to advance proposals that it received.¹⁸ By the end of 1943, members of Henry Morgenthau’s staff discovered that State had obstructed proposed rescue expeditions and suppressed information about the extermination of the Jews. The results of the Treasury investigation were a factor in Morgenthau’s decision to meet with Roosevelt and recommend the formation of the WRB.

Morgenthau’s role in the formation of the WRB is not a subject of debate amongst historians. The Treasury Department had approved a foreign funds transfer license for a proposed World Jewish Congress project to rescue refu-

¹⁴ Rafael Medoff, *Blowing the Whistle on Genocide: Josiah E. DuBois, Jr., and the Struggle for a U.S. Response to the Holocaust* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2009), 22–23; Henry Morgenthau, Jr., “The Morgenthau Diaries: The Refugee Run Around,” *Collier’s* (Nov. 1, 1947): 65; Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 179; Wyman, *Abandonment*, 190–91.

¹⁵ Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 287.

¹⁶ Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 82.

¹⁷ Monty N. Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 105; Wyman, *Abandonment*, 88.

¹⁸ Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue*, 167–207; Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 139–43; Wyman, *Abandonment*, 104–23; Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable*, 98–121.

gees from Romania and France. The State Department did not issue the license promptly; in fact, there was a delay of several months, prompting an investigation by Treasury. Following extensive discussions within the Treasury Department, Morgenthau; Josiah DuBois, an assistant to the Treasury Department general counsel; and John Pehle, head of the Treasury Foreign Funds Control Division, met with Roosevelt on January 16, 1944, and informed the president of State Department obstructionism of proposed rescue projects. Treasury also accused State of suppressing information relating to the Final Solution. Morgenthau proposed the formation of the WRB, in large part, as a solution to the problem created by the State Department, and Roosevelt agreed.¹⁹

There has been considerable scholarly debate concerning identical, nonbinding congressional resolutions introduced on November 9, 1943, recommending the formation of an agency charged with the rescue of European refugees. Introduced by Senator Guy Gillette of Iowa and Representative Will Rogers, Jr., of California, the resolutions were commonly referred to as Gillette-Rogers.²⁰ David Wyman has argued that the resolutions had considerable influence on Roosevelt's decision to establish the WRB. He also claimed that Gillette-Rogers had widespread support in Congress, particularly in the Senate, while arguing there was "congressional indifference towards the European Jews."²¹

Historian Ariel Hurwitz has challenged Wyman's view of Gillette Rogers. Hurwitz agreed with Wyman's assertion concerning "congressional indifference," but then argued that an "indifferent" Congress would not advocate government-sponsored "rescue action."²² Therefore, he felt that there was little chance of Congress voting in favor of Gillette-Rogers. He also contended that Gillette-Rogers did not influence Roosevelt's decision to create the WRB. Moreover, Hurwitz argued that Gillette-Rogers would not have compelled Roosevelt to create the

¹⁹ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 232–37; Herbert Levy, *Henry Morgenthau, Jr.: The Remarkable Life of FDR's Secretary of the Treasury* (New York: Skyhorse, 2010), 355–65; Henry Morgenthau III, *Mostly Morgenthau's: A Family History* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1991), 323–28; Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 182–90; Wyman, *Abandonment*, 178–92; Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable*, 139–42; Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue*, 239–44; Morse, *While Six Million Died*, 72–97; John Morton Blum, *From the Morgenthau Diaries: Years of War, 1941–1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), 211–23.

²⁰ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 231–32; Morgenthau III, *Mostly Morgenthau's*, 326–27; Wyman, *Abandonment*, 193–206; Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable*, 137–39; Sarah E. Peck, "The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust," *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 2 (1980): 381–85.

²¹ Wyman, *Abandonment*, 201, 317.

²² Ariel Hurwitz, "The Struggle over the Creation of the War Refugee Board (WRB)," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 6, no. 1 (1991): 26; Hurwitz, *Jews Without Power*, 242–43.

WRB.²³ Hurwitz's mentor Yehuda Bauer and Rafael Medoff of the David S. Wyman Institute of Holocaust Studies debated Gillette-Rogers further. Bauer argued that the resolutions had little impact on events that brought the WRB into existence. Medoff disagreed and sided with Wyman, claiming that Gillette-Rogers was an integral part of the process.²⁴

Laws governing immigration were strictly interpreted during much of the Roosevelt administration. Available quotas were not normally filled, and beginning in 1940, the State Department took steps to reduce the number of refugees granted visas for admission into the United States. A 1943 Treasury Department investigation concluded that the State Department had obstructed several proposals that could have aided refugees.²⁵ It was while the Treasury investigation was in progress that Senator Gillette and Representative Rogers introduced the Gillette-Rogers resolutions. Morgenthau consulted Cox while Congress discussed the resolutions and ultimately adopted his proposal as a response to the manner in which the State Department had conducted refugee policy.

Cox's Approach to Morgenthau on the Refugee Problem

In late spring 1943, Cox received a telephone call from House Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Sol Bloom, a Jewish Democrat from New York and a U.S. delegate at the Bermuda Conference, inquiring if Lend-Lease funds could be used for food and the migration of refugees who had found refuge in neutral countries and sought permanent homes. Cox replied that in many instances it could, but that he had another option in mind. He proposed a three-man committee comprised of "a prominent Catholic, a Jew and a Protestant." Presumably, Cox wanted to insure that one particular group was not favored over another in the composition of the committee. Cox sought out Morgenthau, as the planned committee had the authority to accept contributions from private citizens and organizations

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Yehuda Bauer, "Holocaust Rescue Revisited," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 7, no. 3 (2013): 134; Yehuda Bauer, "How to Misinterpret History: on 'The Holocaust, America and American Jewry' Revisited," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 6, no. 3 (2012): 67; Yehuda Bauer, "The Holocaust, America and American Jewry," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 6, no.1 (2012): 147–48; Rafael Medoff, "What Did They Know and What Could They Have Done? More on the Allies' Response to the Holocaust," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 7, no. 1 (2013): 117–19; Rafael Medoff, "The Holocaust, America and American Jewry Revisited," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 6, no. 2 (2012): 130.

²⁵ State obstructed an American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee rescue and relief effort during 1943. A proposal made by Nahum Goldmann of the World Jewish Congress to provide food and medicine to Jews was not supported by the State Department. Wyman, *Abandonment*, 193–94; Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 186.

under the Second War Powers Act. As the Secretary of the Treasury, Morgenthau was authorized to accept those contributions, which would have been the primary source of funding for the proposed committee. Cox may also have been seeking the support of an individual with direct access to Roosevelt. He also thought that Bloom and Senator Scott Lucas, a Democrat from Illinois and also a delegate at the Bermuda Conference, would discuss the proposal with Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles and that they had an interest in having Morgenthau participate.²⁶

Cox contacted Morgenthau to discuss the refugee problem on June 16, 1943. He suggested that Roosevelt establish a committee “to advise . . . on all aspects of the war refugee problem which are not the direct responsibility of the State Department.” Under the proposition, the secretary of the treasury would be allowed to accept voluntary contributions for “the relief and resettlement of all war refugees.” A fund would be created with the money raised. “One of the responsibilities of the Committee would [be] to encourage the making of contributions to [the] fund through proper publicity, public campaigns and similar methods.” Cox also recommended that the committee work with the State Department and private organizations to utilize machinery established at the Bermuda Conference, namely the recently revitalized IGCR. Aside from Morgenthau, the proposal reached the State Department and Bloom,²⁷ presumably to gain broader support. He may also have believed the proposed committee could not be implemented without their cooperation.

Morgenthau sought advice on the plan from former Treasury Department attorney Charles Kades. Kades suggested that if the proposed committee was created, Treasury should not participate. Kades claimed that the Second War Powers Act did not authorize Treasury to accept funds on behalf of the proposed committee for the resettlement of refugees. He disagreed with appointing such a committee, as the refugee problem was one “of such great delicacy that a promotional committee and public advertisements might do more harm than good.”²⁸ While Morgenthau heeded Kades’s advice and declined to get involved in discussions on refugees, Cox continued to speak with Bloom about a possible committee.²⁹ The Cox/

²⁶ Notes on a telephone conversation between Cox and Capt. Charles Kades, June 18, 1943, box 144, Oscar Cox Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL), Hyde Park, NY (The Cox Papers, hereinafter CPFDR)

²⁷ Oscar Cox to Henry Morgenthau, June 16, 1943, Morgenthau Diaries (hereinafter MD) 642:211–13, FDRL; and Milton Handler to Cox, June 18, 1943, Refugee folder, box 101; Handler to Cox, Aug. 7, 1943, Milton Hander folder, box 62, both in CPFDR.

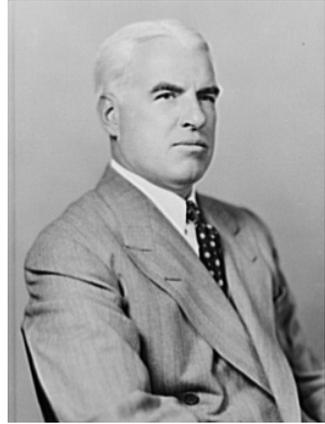
²⁸ Charles Kades to Morgenthau, June 21, 1943, MD 643:278–80.

²⁹ Notes on a conversation between Cox and Solomon Bloom, July 2, 1943, and Aug. 5, 1943, box 144, CPFDR.

Morgenthau/Kades correspondence is significant as an attempt to gain support for the creation of a separate agency that would facilitate the rescue of refugees. Kades's recommendation, however, effectively curtailed Morgenthau's participation in the matter for the time being.

Cox Discusses Refugees with Under Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius

Cox spoke with newly selected Under Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., about the refugee question shortly after the latter's appointment on October 4, 1943. The two had worked together in the Lend-Lease Administration, where Stettinius was the administrator and Cox served as an attorney. Cox now had a trusted colleague as under secretary and may have seen a golden opportunity to make meaningful progress on the refugee front. He immediately sent Stettinius a detailed proposal on refugees.



Edward Stettinius served as under secretary of state from September 1943 until he was appointed secretary of state in November 1944.

In his reworked memorandum to Stettinius, Cox argued further for the establishment of a refugee committee with three purposes. The first and foremost objective was to rescue victims from Axis territory. Secondary goals included the establishment of safe havens and the raising of funds. Cox believed the committee should not wait to raise funds prior to formulating plans. According to the memorandum, all rescue activities would be centralized within the committee, and all relevant federal departments and agencies would cooperate with the new agency. The committee would coordinate with State and the Foreign Economic Administration (FEA) as well as utilize existing government machinery for planning and relief of activities. Cox believed that the new committee should be authorized to attack the entire problem and should make specific suggestions to State and the president. The recommendations would play a role in solving problems confronting refugees in Europe and elsewhere.³⁰

Stettinius consulted on the Cox memorandum with lower-level officials in the State Department, primarily R. Borden Reams of the Division of European Affairs,

³⁰ Cox to Edward R. Stettinius, Oct. 13, 1943, Stettinius Folder, box 104, CPFDR. Assisting nations liberated from Axis control to recover economically was the primary function of the Foreign Economic Administration. See Stuart L. Weiss, *The President's Man: Leo Crowley and Franklin Roosevelt in Peace and War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 162–218.

who had already been working on refugee matters. According to Reams, the IGCR had “practically unlimited scope of action on behalf of refugees both actual and potential.” The existence of the President’s Advisory Committee on Political Refugees (PAC) and Myron Taylor’s Coordinating Foundation were also mentioned. Advisors told Stettinius that the aims mentioned by Cox were provided for by existing agencies and that a new agency would duplicate those efforts and “create serious difficulties.”³¹

Stettinius’s subordinates at State described the portion of Cox’s proposition that would have given primary responsibility for refugee matters to a new agency as “inadmissible.” They claimed that State Department involvement was vital. While Cox contended that the people and organizations responsible for refugee policy had failed, Stettinius was told that such a statement was “both unfair and untrue.”³²

Stettinius and Cox held frequent discussions and exchanges of memoranda relating to the refugee problem starting on October 26, 1943. Cox suggested that Stettinius speak with individuals at State who were sympathetic towards the refugees, such as Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle.³³ Stettinius also sent Cox a digest of a memorandum on the refugee situation that was prepared by members of his staff. According to the digest, little could have been done for the refugees after the war began. The summary stressed the importance of the Bermuda Conference and revitalization of the IGCR. It also stated that little had been done for the refugees since Bermuda. According to Cox, “the digest on the refugee situation is the strongest argument there is for the establishment of the proposed committee. [The digest] is permeated with a defeatist attitude . . . [T]here is a big job cut out and it ought to be handled boldly and with imagination.”³⁴

In Cox’s telephone conversation with Stettinius on November 3, 1943, Stettinius said he had undertaken a lot of work on the issue, including a long talk with Myron

³¹ Memorandum for Stettinius, Oct. 18, 1943, Decimal File 840.48 Refugees/5129, *Records of the Department of State Relating to the Problems of Relief and Refugees in Europe Arising from World War II and Its Aftermath, 1938–1949* (National Archives Microfilm Publication 1284), roll 38, Records of the Department of State, Record Group (RG) 59.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Cox to Stettinius, Oct. 26, 1943. Cox to Stettinius, Oct. 27, 1943, Stettinius folder, box 104, CPF-DRL.

³⁴ Digest of a memorandum to Edward R. Stettinius on the refugee problem, Oct. 16, 1943, Refugee folder, box 727, Papers of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., Small Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va. (hereinafter SPUVL); Cox to Stettinius, Nov. 2, 1943, and Memorandum dated Nov. 5, 1943, Stettinius folder, box 104, CPF-DRL.

Taylor, who also served on the IGCR. According to Taylor, “the situation [was] in hand and everything that [could] be done [was] being done.” Stettinius concluded his brief discussion with Cox on refugees by saying that he would soon be speaking with the PAC chairman and former League of Nations High Commissioner on Refugees James G. McDonald in the near future.³⁵

New congressional resolutions introduced in the Senate and House of Representatives on November 9, 1943, furthered Cox’s belief that the refugee issue was politically charged. The identical, non-binding resolutions, known as Gillette-Rogers, recommended the establishment of an intergovernmental agency to deal solely with the plight of the European Jews. Cox believed that congressional discussion of the refugee situation could create political difficulties for Roosevelt by airing in public the administration’s management of the problem. Interestingly, many of Roosevelt’s foes supported the resolutions. They backed Gillette-Rogers for political reasons, likely preferring a public debate on the question and the chance to embarrass Roosevelt in the process.³⁶

Stettinius spoke with Cox about the refugee matter on November 19, reporting that he had made “a good headway” with Roosevelt on the refugee question. He said that Roosevelt had agreed in principle to setting “up refugee camps in neutral countries.”³⁷ Cox then told Roosevelt’s adviser Benjamin V. Cohen that progress was being made on the refugee situation, stating that “apparently it cleared with the top fellow and he [was] all for it.”³⁸

Bloom decided to hold hearings on Gillette-Rogers in the House Foreign Affairs Committee, which received attention in the press. In a memorandum dated November 20, Cox pushed Stettinius to take action on the refugee question. He expressed concern for the potential political consequences, commenting:

I think it is important, not only on the merits, but politically as well, to move quickly on this matter. Otherwise, the Government may have to proceed along the lines that Congress directs. This might not be the best

³⁵ Notes on a Cox and Stettinius telephone conversation, Nov. 3, 1943, box 144, CPFDR.

³⁶ Stettinius told individuals at the State Department that Roosevelt wanted to do more for the Jews. He also told Cox that he discussed Gillette-Rogers with Roosevelt on November 10, 1943. See: Breiman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 231; Wyman, *Abandonment*, 156; Notes on a Cox and Stettinius telephone conversation Nov. 3, 1943, box 144, CPFDR.

³⁷ Notes on a Cox and Stettinius telephone conversation, Nov. 19, 1943, box 144, CPFDR.

³⁸ Notes on a Cox and Benjamin V. Cohen telephone conversation, Nov. 19, 1943, box 144, CPFDR.

and most workable way to proceed. Furthermore, [Senator Guy] Gillette, [Wendell] Wilkie, etc., will get credit for doing something that the Government should have done a long time ago.³⁹

With building political pressure, Stettinius suggested to Secretary Hull that “in view of the renewed pressure from various Jewish organizations and the current discussions on the Hill, Hull should make a statement on the refugee matter.”⁴⁰ The proposed announcement was not what Cox would have expected, as it was limited in scope. According to a draft of the statement, the IGCR would open offices in “countries bordering on Axis controlled territory.” Refugees who managed to leave Nazi territory would be assisted in refugee centers.⁴¹ Hull, however, did not issue the statement, possibly due to the influence of Bloom or Long. Furthermore, Cox must have been disappointed at the fact that Stettinius did not push for the establishment of a refugee committee.

Stettinius and Cox discussed the refugee question again on November 26. Cox mentioned the idea of drafting of an executive order setting up a refugee committee. Stettinius noted that the “McDonald Committee” (PAC) already existed, and “why duplicate that.” According to Cox, Hull and Long told Stettinius that the proposed three-man group would upset existing committees.⁴² Cox believed that Stettinius and Foreign Economic Administrator Leo Crowley should “talk with the existing mechanism [likely McDonald].”⁴³

Cox sent Stettinius additional memoranda relating to the refugee matter on November 27. They consisted of a proposed memorandum from Stettinius to Hull and a press release issued by Roosevelt that were nearly identical. Cox proposed that machinery established within the State Department and FEA would be sufficient to facilitate the rescue of, and securing of safe havens, for refugees. He also suggested that Crowley operate the program and that the FEA finance it, as far as possible. Crowley would have to seek approval from the State Department on matters relating to foreign policy. According to the proposal, one high-ranking official at State should be charged with the responsibility. Consultation would also take place with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the IGCR.⁴⁴

³⁹ Cox to Stettinius, Nov. 20, 1943, and Cox to Stettinius, Nov. 24, 1943, both in box 727, SPUVL.

⁴⁰ Stettinius to Cordell Hull, Nov. 26, 1943, box 727, SPUVL.

⁴¹ Draft of a proposed statement for Hull, box 727, SPUVL.

⁴² Minutes of a meeting between Morgenthau and his staff, Jan. 15, 1944, MD 694: 93.

⁴³ Notes on a Cox and Stettinius telephone conversation, Nov. 26, 1943, box 144, CPFDR.

⁴⁴ Memorandum from Cox to Stettinius, Nov. 27, 1943, Stettinius folder, box 104, CPFDR.

Cox and Stettinius seldom discussed the refugee question after the submission of the memoranda summarized above. Clearly, their discussions may have assisted Cox as he refined his proposal. Perhaps the last scheme was too much like the committee that Stettinius opposed. Alternatively, individuals at State who did little to push rescue proposals forward, subordinates such as Long and Reams, may have influenced Stettinius. In any event, Cox no longer asked Stettinius to support the refugee committee that he proposed and thought he could achieve better results via Morgenthau and Treasury.

Cox, Morgenthau, and the Refugees

By mid-December 1943, three Treasury Department attorneys had arrived at the conclusion that officials at State had deliberately derailed proposed projects that could have rescued a significant number of refugees. The three—Josiah DuBois, John Pehle, and Treasury General Consul Randolph Paul—were investigating delays surrounding the issuance of a foreign funds transfer license. The U.S. government required the document for the transfer of foreign currency within any area controlled by the enemy. In this instance, the license provided funding for a World Jewish Congress (WJC)–sponsored plan proposing the rescue of up to 70,000 Romanian Jews. Historians generally refer to the proposition as the “Riegner Plan” after Gerhart Riegner, the WJC representative in Geneva who initiated it. They discovered that the postponements resulted directly from the failure of Long and mid-level officers at State to issue the license despite being instructed to do so by Secretary Hull as early as August 1943.

At that point, Paul realized that “a very bitter fight [was] going on in the State Department regarding the whole refugee question.” He believed that the “Foreign Service Officer group” was obstructing proposals that would benefit the refugees. He expressed his suspicions to Secretary Morgenthau. While Long, Reams, and Long’s Executive Assistant George L. Brandt were clearly hostile, Paul did not mention names.⁴⁵

The Treasury group presented its findings to Morgenthau in a series of private meetings that took place in December 1943 and January 1944. Morgenthau requested the presence of Cox at several of the meetings in an advisory capacity. During a December 19, 1943, Treasury group meeting, Cox stated that the main issue involved people who managed to escape from Nazi-occupied Europe being turned away when attempting to enter the bordering neutral countries. He proposed that neutral

⁴⁵ Randolph Paul to Morgenthau, Aug. 12, 1943, MD 688I: 15–18.

nations could care for the refugees in temporary asylum camps and that the United States would provide the personnel and financial resources for the operation of the camps. Therefore, the host countries would not be concerned with financial or health issues. As U.S. embassies and legations were not staffed to handle problems of this nature, qualified individuals would be assigned to operate the camps. Cox believed that transportation for the refugees could be arranged from the camps to Mexico, North Africa, Brazil, and possibly Palestine. Roosevelt and Stettinius had discussed a similar scheme one month prior. Cox said the quotas for Western European immigrants were not being filled due, in part, to strict interpretation of the “close relatives rule,” and he suggested a liberalized approach. However, neither Congress nor Roosevelt wanted large numbers of refugees admitted into the United States.⁴⁶



President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr.

Cox concluded that the only way progress could be made on the refugee problem was to create a new executive branch committee. The committee would be directly responsible to the president and not utilize any existing State Department machinery. Such a maneuver would prevent Long, Reams, and others at State from participating in the new committee. As Cox told Morgenthau, “you can [get] them out . . . if you really want to do it.” Cox also told Morgenthau that the Gillette-Rogers

⁴⁶ Transcript of a Treasury Department meeting on Jewish Evacuation, Dec. 19, 1943, MD 688II: 116–118.

resolution was turning into a “domestic political problem,” with the possibility that the refugee issue would be debated publically in Congress, to the detriment of the Roosevelt administration. Morgenthau found the Cox proposal promising.⁴⁷

Morgenthau met with Hull on December 20 concerning British opposition to the Riegler Plan. The primary British objection concerned the feasibility of relocating a large number of Jews from enemy-occupied territory. He sent a cable to John Winant, U.S. ambassador to Great Britain, explaining how the British stance on the WJC’s rescue proposal ran counter to U.S. policy. Winant told Hull he would talk to Foreign Minister Anthony Eden about the matter. Following Morgenthau’s review of the Hull conference with members of his staff, Cox suggested proceeding with the drafting of documents required to create a refugee committee. Morgenthau agreed and thought Hull should have a place on the committee.⁴⁸

Later on December 20, Cox sent Morgenthau draft copies of a press release and executive order relating to the proposed refugee committee. Cox raised concerns about Gillette-Rogers; he thought his proposal would “forestall some of the action on the Hill.” The proposition was similar to the program that Cox discussed with Stettinius a month earlier.⁴⁹

The mission of the proposed agency was threefold. First and foremost, it would rescue victims and find safe havens for them. The committee would also be authorized to raise funds through “popular subscription” in order to supplement any federal funds that were granted. The FEA was “to execute the plans and programs so developed.” Cox proposed that the committee report to Roosevelt “at least once every three months concerning the plans and programs formulated by it.”⁵⁰ Cox asked about the status of his proposal the following week, and Morgenthau told him that the issue was being studied “very carefully.”⁵¹

After the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously approved Gillette-Rogers on December 20, 1943, Cox knew that the full Senate could debate the

⁴⁷ Transcript of a Treasury Department meeting on Jewish Evacuation, Dec. 19, 1943, MD 688II: 119–120.

⁴⁸ John Winant to Hull, Dec. 15, 1943, MD 688II: 95–96; Hull to Winant, Dec. 18, 1943, MD 688II: 97; Winant to Hull, Dec. 19, 1943, MD 688II: 133; Morgenthau to Hull [undated], MD 688II: 145–47; Transcript of a Treasury Department meeting on Jewish Evacuation, Dec. 20, 1943, MD 688II: 148–69.

⁴⁹ Cox to Morgenthau, Dec. 20, 1943, MD 688II: 191–94.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Cox to Morgenthau, Dec. 27, 1943; Morgenthau to Cox, Dec. 31, 1943, MD 688II: 250–51.

resolution within weeks. He thought that “the Administration [would] be put behind the eight-ball if something [was not] done quickly.”⁵² Cox told Morgenthau and his staff that an executive order was the best plan of attack. He told Bloom about a proposed press release and executive order that the president could issue in place of the resolution.⁵³ Bloom expressed concern about the possibility of a debate in Congress on the refugee question. Cox’s proposal would have prevented a public discussion of the administration’s handling of the refugee question. Cox told Stettinius that the only way to get something done on the refugee problem was to get Roosevelt to act.⁵⁴

Appalled when he heard the results of the Treasury Department investigation, Morgenthau knew the situation required him to be proactive. At the conclusion of a January 12, 1944, meeting on the refugee problem, Morgenthau asked his staff to come to a consensus regarding possible options. Two alternatives were open for consideration. First, Morgenthau should ask for a meeting with Roosevelt and request that Long and the State Department be relieved of their duties concerning refugees. Second, Treasury would do what it could to assist State in refugee projects.⁵⁵

Morgenthau held another meeting with his staff on January 13. Staff members presented Morgenthau with a detailed report on State and the refugee problem written by DuBois. In summary, DuBois informed Morgenthau of State’s failure to utilize government machinery to rescue Jews. State also refused to cooperate with private organizations in their efforts to rescue Jews, and it failed to gather information relating to the extermination of the Jews. DuBois also stated that State attempted to “cover up their guilt.” The aforementioned document went on to develop each point at some length.⁵⁶

Morgenthau asked for advice on how to move forward if Roosevelt was unhappy with the issues raised. Pehle suggested presenting the president with a proposed executive order creating a separate agency to address refugee matters; Morgenthau then requested that an order be drafted.⁵⁷ As the meeting adjourned, Morgenthau suggested the presence of Roosevelt adviser Samuel Rosenman, Cohen, and Cox at a January 15, meeting. Morgenthau wanted to inform Rosenman of his intentions

⁵² Notes on a Cox and Stettinius telephone conversation, Jan. 1, 1944, box 144, CPFDR.

⁵³ Notes on a Cox and Bloom telephone conversation, Dec. 28, 1943, box 144, CPFDR.

⁵⁴ Notes on a Cox and Stettinius telephone conversation, Jan. 1, 1944, box 144, CPFDR.

⁵⁵ Transcript of a meeting between Morgenthau and his staff, Jan. 12, 1944, MD 693: 88.

⁵⁶ Memorandum for Morgenthau, Jan. 13, 1944, MD 693: 212–29.

⁵⁷ Transcript of a meeting between Morgenthau and his staff, Jan. 13, 1944, MD 693: 195–97.

and gain his support. The invitation to Cox came with the understanding that issues to be discussed were between the Treasury and Roosevelt.⁵⁸

To that end, Cox, with the assistance of Lend-Lease colleague Milton Handler and Cohen, prepared an additional draft of the executive order for Morgenthau on January 14. They also wrote letters for Roosevelt that would be sent to Hull and the director of the budget detailing his decision to establish a WRB.⁵⁹ All of these documents were formulated in anticipation of presidential approval of the impending proposal.

At a January 15 meeting, Morgenthau requested information on pending congressional activity on the refugee question. The participants, Cox in particular, claimed that two things would likely happen if the full House and Senate debated Gillette-Rogers. First, the legislation would probably pass. Second, Long's role and the manner in which the State Department administered refugee policy would comprise a great deal of the discussion. Cox also expressed concern about Bloom, who believed that passage of Gillette-Rogers would be "a direct attack" on Roosevelt for failing to act. Bloom was reportedly going to see Hull and urge him to take "imaginative action such as appointing a high-level government committee to take hold of this thing and do something about it."⁶⁰

Deciding how to raise the issue with Roosevelt became the focal point of the discussion. Morgenthau rejected the idea of forwarding a document detailing State Department handling of refugee policy for fear that the president would share the material with Hull. That approach would have provided an opportunity for Hull to respond and confuse the president, especially since there was apprehension that Roosevelt would ask Morgenthau to discuss the matter with Hull. The meeting's attendees, including Cox, expressed concern about the influence Long had over Hull, and favored a plan of attack that would allow Morgenthau to present his case to Roosevelt ahead of the secretary of state. Therefore, Morgenthau decided on visiting the president personally to discuss the situation and get his advice, after which, the secretary of the treasury would have given Roosevelt "all the dirt."⁶¹ Clearly, Morgenthau attempted to put himself in a position to influence the president and the development of

⁵⁸ Transcript of a telephone conversation between Morgenthau and Cox, Jan. 13, 1944, MD 693: 202.

⁵⁹ Handler to Cox, January 14, 1944, Refugee folder, box 101, CPFDR.

⁶⁰ Transcript of a meeting between Morgenthau and his staff, Jan. 15, 1944, MD 694: 88–90.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 88–94.

refugee policy. Concerns expressed in the meeting illustrate the infighting that was taking place between State and Treasury.⁶²

On January 16, Morgenthau, Pehle, and Paul met with Roosevelt. Morgenthau presented the results of the Treasury investigation of the State Department's handling of refugee matters, but the president declined to read the prepared memorandum and insisted on a verbal summary.⁶³ Morgenthau suggested that positive action could be taken to help the European Jews. Roosevelt agreed and thought the possibility of moving Jews "through Rumania into Bulgaria and out through Turkey" was worth exploring.⁶⁴ He also believed it was possible to get refugees into Switzerland and Spain. Pehle reviewed the results of the Treasury Department inquiry and was especially critical of Breckinridge Long, accusing him of attempting to obstruct rescue activity. He mentioned that Stettinius acted "shocked" but not "surprised" when informed of the allegations. According to Roosevelt, Long had approved a long list of names for entry into the country, many of whom turned out to be "undesirable." When Roosevelt used the term "undesirable" he was referring to individuals who were suspected agents for the Axis.⁶⁵ Against this backdrop, the president did not believe the allegations, but felt that Long had merely "soured" on the issue.⁶⁶ They did not discuss Gillette-Rogers with Roosevelt despite the attention given to the issue in Treasury preparation meetings.⁶⁷

The executive order was the brainchild of Cox, and it recommended creating a committee comprised of Hull, Morgenthau, and Crowley. The president chose to replace Crowley with Secretary of War Henry Stimson, due to the former's difficulty running the FEA. Roosevelt asked if Stettinius had been consulted, making mention of the fact that he (Stettinius) had recently reorganized the State Department. According to the organizational chart, there was not a section in State with jurisdiction over refugee matters. Morgenthau said he had been working with Hull on the issue, but Roosevelt insisted on the involvement of Stettinius. The

⁶² Bat-Ami Zucker, *In Search of Refuge: Jews and US Consuls in Nazi Germany* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2001), 109–10; Morgenthau, "Refugee Run-Around," 22–23.

⁶³ Memorandum by Pehle, Jan. 20, 1944, MD 694: 193.

⁶⁴ Memorandum by Pehle, Jan 16, 1944, MD 694: 190–92.

⁶⁵ Richard D. Breitman, "Roosevelt and the Holocaust," in Newton, Verne W., ed., *FDR and the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 110–11; Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 121.

⁶⁶ Memorandum by Pehle, Jan. 16, 1944, MD 694: 190–92.

⁶⁷ Breitman and Lichtman mistakenly claimed that Morgenthau mentioned the congressional issue to Roosevelt during their January 16, 1944, meeting. See: Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 235. Memorandum by Pehle, Jan. 16, 1944, MD 694: 190–92.

president also suggested that Rosenman should be involved in the process of creating the WRB. Roosevelt did not make any commitment on the matter, preferring to wait for the outcome of the discussions he had recommended.⁶⁸ According to Morgenthau there was

no unfavorable reaction in [Roosevelt's] mind about myself which is encouraging. I was very serious when I saw him . . . and he didn't seem to like it too much. However, it left no bad after-effects in his mind as far as I am personally concerned. Therefore, I hope he will see the thing through.⁶⁹

Rosenman discussed the proposed executive order with Hull, who aside from concerns about the relationship of the new agency to the IGCR, agreed with the proposition. Treasury operatives inserted a sentence on cooperation with existing agencies into the executive order to appease Hull. In the meantime, Stettinius talked about the WRB with Roosevelt over lunch, stating that he strongly supported the idea. Rosenman also spoke with Stimson who agreed to go along with the proposal. After receiving Hull's and Stettinius's approval, the president told Morgenthau that he would issue an executive order in a matter of days.⁷⁰

Aside from merely reacting to Morgenthau's comments and suggestions, one could speculate as to Roosevelt's motives for approving the proposed executive order establishing the WRB. The president was aware of the resolutions relating to the rescue of European Jewry under consideration in Congress. Discussion of the matter on the floor of the House of Representatives and Senate would likely have raised many awkward questions regarding the administration's limited refugee policy. Passage of Gillette-Rogers would, in all probability have forced Roosevelt to create an agency such as the WRB. By acting prior to congressional debate on the matter, the president gave the impression that public or congressional pressure did not play a role in the formation of the WRB.⁷¹ Political considerations for the upcoming 1944 elections may have influenced him. Therefore, taking action on the refugee question was a wise political decision.

⁶⁸ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 235; Levy, *Henry Morgenthau, Jr.*, 360–62; Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 190; Wyman, *Abandonment*, 203–04; Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable*, 141–42; Morse, *While Six Million Died*, 90–93; Blum, *From the Morgenthau Diaries*, 220–21.

⁶⁹ Morgenthau diary entry, Jan. 17, 1944, Presidential Diary of Henry Morgenthau, Jr., FDRL.

⁷⁰ Transcript of a Morgenthau/Rosenman telephone conversation, Jan. 18, 1944, MD 695: 31–37; Notes on a Morgenthau/Rosenman telephone conversation, Jan. 19, 1944, MD 695: 106; Transcript of a meeting on Jewish Evacuation, Jan. 19, 1944, MD 695: 192.

⁷¹ Transcript of a meeting between Morgenthau and his staff, Mar. 8, 1944, MD 707:220–21; Transcript of a meeting between Morgenthau and his staff, Mar. 16, 1944, MD 710: 194.

Some have claimed that Roosevelt had decided to create the WRB prior to his conversation with Morgenthau. While Yehuda Bauer did not cite a source for his assertion, it is likely based on comments made by Cox, who claimed that Roosevelt favored the formation of a three-man refugee committee as early as November 1943.⁷² Cox, however, did not say whom the president talked to. Furthermore, no evidence has been found to suggest that the president asked Stettinius or Cox to take the steps necessary to form the proposed committee. Moreover, as far as can be determined, Stettinius did not inform Hull and Long of Roosevelt's supposed views on the refugee committee. Furthermore, if Roosevelt was in favor of the proposed committee, why did he wait more than two months for Morgenthau to discuss the issue with him? The fact is that Morgenthau was able to have Roosevelt's attention when he was receptive to the presentation of, and the proposed solution to, the problem at hand.

The president may have been influenced by other factors as well. By early 1944, all indications pointed to an Allied victory. Rescue may have been now more attractive from both a political and practical standpoint. Postwar planning concerns may have come into play as well. Work being conducted by the WRB would have complemented initiatives concerning refugees being undertaken by the UNRRA.



Members of the War Refugee Board: (left to right) Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and Secretary of War Henry Stimson.

⁷² Transcript of a meeting between Morgenthau and his staff, Dec. 19, 1943, MD 688II: 120. Bauer, "How to Misinterpret History," 148.

Scholars have asked why the United States did not do more for the refugees, particularly during periods when rescue was possible. Aristide Zolberg has argued that “anti-Semitism within the State Department, within Congress, and in the country at large all played a part.”⁷³ Carl J. Bon Tempo claimed that “scientific racism . . . underlay[ed] much of [the] restrictionist thinking” of the 1930s and 1940s. He also mentioned that Nazism discredited that mode of thinking as World War Two caused the United States to take a greater role in international affairs.⁷⁴

Despite the shortcomings, a shift in U.S. refugee policy occurred with the formation of the WRB. WRB diplomatic maneuvers and psychological warfare played a role in the movement of 48,000 Transnistrian Jews into “safe areas in R[o]mania.”⁷⁵ The relocation of approximately 1,000 Jewish survivors to a rescue shelter in Oswego, New York, occurred under the auspices of the WRB.⁷⁶ The government of the United States, and the WRB in particular, engaged in negotiations with Hungarian Regent Miklos Horthy and persuaded him not to turn over the remaining Hungarian Jews to Germany.⁷⁷ The WRB typically did not engage in large-scale rescue projects. Nevertheless, their efforts served as a reversal of the earlier policy of restriction and obstruction.

Conclusion

Cox’s role in the emergence of the WRB consisted of several crucial elements. Cox was intensely and persistently involved in the drive to form the WRB. He was committed to a proposal that would relieve the state department of its jurisdiction over refugee matters. The executive order that Roosevelt issued had its origins with Cox, the first government official to propose a three-man refugee committee. Morgenthau received the initial version in June 1943, and the concept evolved further when Cox sent revisions to Stettinius in the fall of 1943. When he began meeting with Morgenthau’s group on the refugee question, Cox thought the matter could be settled through an executive order; Morgenthau agreed, and Cox continued to refine his earlier proposal.

⁷³ Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 291.

⁷⁴ Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees During the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 21.

⁷⁵ Wyman, *Abandonment*, 285; Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 290. Transnistria has an eastern border with Bessarabia, the Ukraine is to the west, and the northern border is shared with occupied Poland.

⁷⁶ Wyman, *Abandonment*, 268–76; Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 290.

⁷⁷ Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 276–94; Wyman *Abandonment*, 235–54; Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 290.

Cox sought a solution that would insulate the administration from the potential impact of the Gillette-Rogers resolutions. In his opinion, the resolutions posed dire political consequences, and he urged Stettinius to take action on the refugee issue shortly after their introduction in Congress. He echoed similar sentiments in meetings with Morgenthau and company. Cox thought the administration would face serious political difficulties if Congress were to act on the resolutions, as the public would probably view U.S. refugee policies negatively. He therefore urged Stettinius, and then Morgenthau, to act quickly.

Morgenthau and Roosevelt did not discuss Gillette-Rogers, at least according to available accounts. Furthermore, Morgenthau had greater concern with the State Department's abhorrent record on the refugee question than the political issues raised by Cox. Roosevelt was aware of the resolutions the day after their introduction in Congress. Therefore, his knowledge of the resolutions may have contributed to his quick acceptance of Morgenthau's proposal. However, if he had immediate concerns about any negative political consequences, why did he wait for Morgenthau to approach him more than two months later? Clearly, Cox's activism and full involvement place him as a pivotal force in the events that led to the formation of the WRB.

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