

PROJECT TITLE:	
It's Over, Now What?	
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SCHOLARSHIP & RESEARCH

- **Primary Investigative Question(s) – How did displaced person camps, ORT, UNRRA, Kindertransports and the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 help displaced persons of World War II.**

Contextual Essay –

Even before World War II was over leaders of the Allied Nations realized that there would be an enormous problem with how to help the massive numbers of refugees and displaced persons. Dean Acheson, assistant secretary of state for economic affairs said *“It is just as important to be prepared for the emergency that will come when the fighting is over as it is to be prepared for the victorious drives that will end in Berlin and Tokyo, It would be a hollow victory indeed that brought with it famine and disease in large parts of the world, and economic chaos that would inevitably engulf us all.”* (Hitchcock pg 218) In fact it was a question many nations were being forced to answer before the war actually began. Nazi persecution of Jewish people escalated in the mid to late 1930s so much that close to 150,000 Jews had already left Germany by 1938. (USHM Emigration and the Evian Conference) During the war some countries had refugees in their own countries to contend with, for example during the Blitz in London. There were other refugees from the war, Jews trying to escape Nazi controlled areas of Europe during the war and Jewish survivors of the concentration camps after the war. Other groups were trying to escape Soviet controlled areas, such as those that fled Lithuania. “In Czechoslovakia, more than 2.2 million Germans were expelled, and their property was expropriated. At the peak period, in July 1946, 14,400 people a day were being dumped over the frontier.” (Bernard Wasserstein)

Displaced Persons

A displaced person (DP) is someone who has been forced to leave their native country typically due to a war or natural disaster. This is known as forced migration. The term was widely used after World War II and referred to the people who were forced from their native homelands with little expectation of returning. The term displaced person and refugee are sometimes used interchangeably.

At the end of World War II there were estimates of close to 11 million refugees and displaced persons in Europe. (Mark Wyman pg 21) Many of these people were victims of the Holocaust and had been inmates in Nazi concentration camps. There were also a considerable

number of people from Eastern Europe who had fled their homes trying to escape the Soviet Army. These DPs now found themselves stateless, citizens of no country. The question was not so much where should they go but where could they go. Europe had been devastated by World War II and most of the countries were hesitant to take on DPs who were typically in poor health and had nothing to claim as their own. Even the United States who had not suffered the destruction that Europe had during the war was reluctant to offer the DPs a new home.

At the Yalta Conference in the summer of 1945, the Soviet Union insisted that any of the DPs that had fled from the areas now under their control be repatriated. Ironically, Allied officials, while not wanting to accept the DPs themselves were not eager to send them back to Soviet controlled countries. The DPs were not happy about being sent back, many feared they would be considered traitors to the Soviet Union and face prison, torture or execution. Of the DPs that were sent back, many sadly did meet the fates they had feared. (Wyman pg 63) For the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, many refused to be repatriated and set up a movement to migrate to Palestine.

Eventually, the Allied countries did start to take in the DPs. Belgium was the first, allowing over 20,000 DPs in. The United States was surprisingly one of the last countries to set up a program for accepting DPs with the passage of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 and it's Amendment in 1950 allowing 400,000 DPs to enter the US. In 1953 there were still over 250,000 DPs in Europe most of these were absorbed by either Germany or Austria. (Wyman pg 60)

One group of DPs that were not solely Jewish were the Lithuanians. In 1944, when the Soviet Union advanced into Lithuania, many of the citizens there were unwilling to live under Soviet rule. They feared harsh treatment by the Soviets and refused to be repatriated. "During one year, 12,000 Lithuanians, of whom 5,000 were murdered, were put in prison; in several cases 500 people were shot at once, on June 14-21, 1941, 40,000 Lithuanians were deported to Russia. The heads of families were separated from the rest; mothers were torn away from their children. 50% of the deported perished. "This is the reason why the exiled Lithuanians cannot repatriate. They do not and will not return home so long as foreign occupation lasts in their native country." (Passic) The Allied soldiers at first suspected the Lithuanians as Nazi sympathizers, they gradually began to realize that they feared a repeat of what happened in 1941 if they returned home. (Passic)

Displaced Person Camps

Displaced Person Camps or DP Camps were located throughout the world, though mainly in Germany, Austria, Italy, France and Belgium. The camps were where DPs were housed while they waited to begin their new lives. Some of the DP Camps occupied airports, hotels, castles, hospitals, sometimes partly destroyed buildings and after the war even some former concentration camps were used. There were hundreds of DP camps around Europe. During the war the camps were under the authority of the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, who although they realized the urgency of providing for the DPs were still fighting a war and the DPs were not their main concern. After the War was over the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA – pronounced un rah) took over the running of the camps from the military.

UNRRA was formed on November 9, 1943, it's main goals were to '*plan, co-ordinate, administer or arrange for the administration of measures for the relief of victims of war in any area under the control of any of the United Nations through the provision of food, fuel, clothing, shelter and other basic necessities, medical and other essential services*'. (UNRRA Agreement, Articles 1 and 2.)

NOTE: The United Nations was not formed until 1945, the term United Nations referred to the Allied Nations during World War II.

Looking at what UNRRA had to contend with, the organization was successful at what it set out to do, help the DPs of Europe regain dignity and help them to start new lives. Herbert H. Lehman, governor of New York and the man President Roosevelt wanted to lead UNRRA said in a speech “that freedom from want is a basic component of any enduring peace” (Hitchcock pg 218)

UNRRA was created because the Allied Nations realized the mistakes of post WWI and did not wish to repeat these mistakes again. “Dean Anderson, (assistant secretary of state for economic affairs) depicted UNRRA as more than a wartime measure: it was an instrument for winning the peace, something Americans had plainly failed to do after the last world war.” (Hitchcock page 218) Also, the countries knew early on that the amount of refugees and the potential for worldwide pandemics would be far greater at the end of this war. Roosevelt was in hopes that UNRRA would help ensure the displaced person would be come healthy enough to “get back in the fight against Hitler.” (Hitchcock pg 217) UNRRA only existed for five years, being absorbed into various organizations including the International Refugee Organization (IRO), and the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

In 1945 UNRRA made an agreement with the World ORT Union to set up vocational training schools in the camps. Within two years there were more than 10,000 DPs taking advantage of the programs offered by ORT. (dpcamps.ort.org) ORT is a nongovernmental training organization, it was founded in Russia in 1880. While the organization was founded to help Jews, it does offer classes and training to non Jews as well. After WWII many of the DPs in Europe received training that helped them to be accepted in other countries by preparing them for needed jobs. Judy Cohen was born in Debrecen Hungary, she was the youngest of seven children. In 1944 she was deported along with several other members of her family to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Cohen was fortunate to survive the death marches at the end of the war. She recalls her experience with ORT “I quickly realized as I turned seventeen that I have no life skills and needed to learn something that I could earn my living with’ – she remembers. ‘Being in that ORT School was a great experience for me because rehabilitation through training did more than skill training. It restored my self-respect, self-worth and above self reliance.” (personal narrative from <http://dpcamps.ort.org/survivors/judy-cohen/>)

Kindertransports

Kindertransports was the unofficial name of the rescue attempt of Jewish and other Non-Aryan children from Nazi controlled areas. Specially Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Most of the children traveled by train to ports in Holland then took ships to Harwich, England. Some of the children took direct flights from Czechoslovakia. From December 1, 1938 until September 1, 1939 close to 10,000 Jewish and non-Aryan children were rescued during this incredible humanitarian task. As the dates show the Kindertransport happened on the eve of World War II. (Kindertransport.org) One of the saddest stories associated with the Kindertransport would happen on September 1, 1939. A transport carrying 250 Polish children was scheduled to leave Parque that day, it never arrived in England and the children were never heard from again. Nicholas Winton, a stockbroker in London who organized transports that carried close to 1000 children out of Poland stated “ Within hours of the announcement of the invasion, the train disappeared.....We had 250 families waiting at Liverpool Street that day in vain. If the train had been a day earlier, it would have come through. Not a single one of those children was heard of again, which is an awful feeling.”(Byers pg 45,46)

When Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 the Nazi government immediately began its persecution of Jews. As time went on it became harder and harder for Jews to get visas allowing them to leave the country. In July of 1938 the Allied countries met in Evian, France to try and come up with a solution for the Jewish refugees, the conference proved fruitless and about the only thing they seemed to agree on was that there was a problem. (Kindertransport.org) On November 9th

and 10th 1938 the violence of Kristallnacht, Night of Broken Glass, did help put Britain on a path of rescuing at least the children. “the untiring persistence of the refuge advocates, and philosemitic sympathy in some high places – In the words of British Foreign Minister Samuel Hoare “Here is a chance of taking the young generation of a great people, here is a chance of mitigating to some extent the terrible suffering of their parents and their friends” –. (kindertransport.org) The British government would allow an unspecified amount of Jewish and non-Aryan children under the age of 17 to enter with temporary travel visas. The children were to have a fifty-pound bond to make sure the government wouldn’t have to pay for them. The idea was that after things had settled down and the crisis at home was over the children would be reunited with their families. Unfortunately, most of the children that arrived in Britain would never see their parents again.

The children of the transports had widely varied experiences, some were treated well and became members of the families they stayed with, unfortunately there were cases where children were mistreated or simply used as servants. (Byers 60) They were spread out all over the United Kingdom. Those who had sponsors were immediately sent to be with them, the others were in hostels, group homes or farms. The children and the families they became a part of tended to develop strong bonds, most were treated kindly and stayed in contact with the families long after they had grown. After the war was over and it became obvious that many of the parents had been killed during the Holocaust, the families still embraced their young wards, some even adopting them. Kurt Fuchel expressed the feelings of many of the children when he recalled his thoughts before seeing his parents for the first time in 8 years, “*I didn’t want to go....we went to dinner in a restaurant and I remember it was difficult because I didn’t speak German or French and they spoke very little English. I had the Cohens on one side, my parents on the other, I felt caught in the middle.*” (Byers pg 58)

In conclusion, there were many obstacles and challenges for both the DPs and the Allied countries trying to care for them. While there is evidence to show that none of the countries acted in a way that we would hope that we would respond today, the DPs of Europe after WWII were not left to fend for themselves, that the Allied countries can be proud of.

Annotated Bibliography –

- United States Holocaust Museum. “Emigration and the Evian Conference.” Holocaust Encyclopedia. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005520> Accessed on April 5, 2012

This article offers a good background on events leading up to the war as well as the first appearance of displaced persons that would multiply quickly as the war actually began. The article also gives some insight into the fact that while the Allied countries were sympathetic with the plight of the Jews, they were not willing to open their countries to them. The article does offer some reasons for that, but does state that the main cause was anti-Semitic feelings.

- Bernard Wasserstein. “European Refugee Movements After World War Two.” BBC History. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/refugees_01.shtml Accessed on April 5, 2012
Bernard Wasserstein is a professor of history at the University of Chicago. His area of interest is Jewish history. This article is easy to understand and covers many of the different refugees that appeared after WWII. The article also covers the international response. While the article is not long the information is solid and helps focus the reader on related topics of the time.

- Wyman, Mark. *DPs: Europe's displaced persons, 1945-1951*. Ithaca [N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998. Print.

This book was fascinating. Wyman interviewed close to 80 DPs as well as employees of the agencies that were running the DP camps. What resulted was a comprehensive look at what happened to these people. The book does a good job of showing the experiences of the DPs in a way that makes them seem much more real than other accounts.

- The Kindertransport Association, "Kindertransport History"

<http://www.kindertransport.org/history.htm> Accessed on April 7, 2012

This site is sponsored by the Kindertransport Association that was founded by Eddy Berhendt, one of the children that was saved by the Kindertransport. The site gives excellent background on what lead up to the need for the transports and how they came to be.

- Byers, Ann. *Saving children from the Holocaust: the Kindertransport*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2012. Print.

This book was great, the author gives some excellent background information, includes many photographs and several personal narratives that really bring the events alive. The book is written for 6th to 10th graders, but as they are using primary sources it makes the book a quick read and very informative.

- Hoffman, Betty N.. *Liberation: stories of survival from the Holocaust*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2012. Print.

This book was excellent. The background information is plentiful, yet it is a quick read. There are many photographs and several personal narratives that bring the events alive.

- Lithuanian Displaced Persons 1945. "Lithuanians in DP Camps" Frank Passic.

<http://www.dpcamps.org/lithuania.html> Accessed May 15, 2012

This website was very informative. The author of the site, Frank Passic is a historian in Albion, MI. While he has written many books on Albion, he is not an expert on the Holocaust or WWII, however he includes on his website several excerpts from the booklet Hearken Then Judge by Juozas Pasilaitis written in 1947 about Lithuanian DPs in Germany.

- Harris, Mark Jonathan, and Deborah Oppenheimer. *Into the arms of strangers: stories of the Kindertransport*. New York: Bloomsbury Pub. :, 2000. Print.

This book is fascinating, it is based on a film. The book has many personal narratives. It allows the reader to truly see the events through the eyes of those that lived them. There are many different perspectives shown in the book as well, each of the players; the parents, foster parents, children and even the rescuers are a part of the book.

- United States Holocaust Museum. "Displaced Persons: Administration." Holocaust Encyclopedia. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005418>

Accessed on May 5, 2012

This article is about the actual running of the camps and helped the DPs get back on their feet. It is more about how well things ran and what were some of the problems that were encountered.

- Harry S. Truman: "Statement by the President Upon Signing the Displaced Persons Act," June 25, 1948. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12942>.

This is a copy of President Truman's statement after signing the Displaced Persons Act. The Speech was helpful in understanding the problems with the Act.

- Harry S. Truman: "Statement by the President Upon Signing the Bill Amending the Displaced Persons Act., June 16, 1950. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American President Project*. www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13531

This is a copy of President Truman's statement after signing the bill that amended the Displaced Person Act of 1948. The statement helps with understanding the document, it's strengths and weaknesses.

