

You Have Been Kind Enough to Assist Me: Herman Stern and the Jewish Refugee Crisis



A Teachers Guide – Using
Personal Stories to
Understand the Holocaust

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You Have Been Kind Enough to Assist Me is the compelling story of a North Dakota clothier who rescued more than 100 German Jews from the impending Holocaust in Europe. Herman Stern's efforts to save his relatives and friends eventually expanded into a plan to rescue many more Jewish refugees, by purchasing land on which entire families could settle on the Dakota prairies. But this plan became impossible with the beginning in World War II.

Stern, himself an immigrant to the United States, made use of his friendship with a United States senator to help refugees obtain permission to come to America and make new lives for themselves.

Teachers can use the story of Stern's efforts, and the stories of the people he helped, to show students how the persecution of Jews began in Germany in the 1930s, how the American government's immigration regulations made it difficult for refugees to flee Germany and come to the United States, and how one man's determined efforts succeeded in saving over 100 lives. But he was unable to help two of his brothers, who died in the Holocaust along with dozens of other relatives of those that Stern was able to sponsor.

How did a refugee get permission to come to America?



Once the Nazis gained power in Germany in 1933, they persecuted the Jewish population by closing Jewish-owned businesses, by forbidding Jews to attend schools and public places (photo) and by beating Jews in the streets. Jewish thinkers and educators were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Any Jew who wished to flee Germany had to surrender most of their property and accept a passport marked with a "J." Only a few countries in the world were willing to accept Jewish immigrants.

The American immigration laws of the 1930s were very restrictive, due to fears that immigrants would compete for very scarce jobs in this decade of the Great Depression. German Jews who wanted to flee from Nazi

persecutions had to jump three very big hurdles in order to get to live in the United States:

1. Go to the American embassy in Berlin or an American consulate in one of the large cities and fill out an application for a *visa*. A visa was a legal document that allowed an immigrant to live in America as a resident alien.
2. Write a friend or relative in America and ask them to provide an *affidavit*. An affidavit was a legal document, signed by the friend/relative who promised that if the immigrant could not find a job, then he (or she) would take care of them.
3. Once an affidavit was obtained and an visa was granted, the refugee had to wait to enter the U.S. on a *quota system*. Since the immigration law allowed only a certain number of people to immigrate each year from each foreign country, the quota created a “waiting period” before anyone could enter the U.S.

“Our future had come to depend on three new guideposts: “the quota” -- the total number of German refugees permitted to enter the United States under the immigration laws; “the affidavit” -- the document from an umpteenth cousin guaranteeing that he would support us if we became destitute; and “the visa” -- which would be our stamped admission ticket into the promised land.” – A Jewish refugee, recalling his families immigration.

<p>UNITED STATES OF AMERICA State of North Dakota: City of Valley City : ss County of Barnes :</p>	<p>APPLICATION FOR A VISA of Siegfried Goldschmidt residing at Niedertiefenbach, Germany. TO Honorable Samuel W. Honaker, American Consul General Stuttgart, Germany.</p>
<p>HERRMAN STERN, being first duly sworn on oath deposes and says:</p>	
<p>That he is a naturalized citizen of the United States of America, having received his certificate No. 178108, on January 10, 1911, in the City of Fargo, District Court, County of Cass and State of North Dakota, and that he is now a resident of the City of Valley City, in the County of Barnes, and State of North Dakota.</p>	
<p>That for many years last past he has been and is now the Manager of STRAUS GLOWING COMPANY, located at Valley City, in the County of Barnes and State of North Dakota, which firm is valued at more than \$50,000.00 of which he is a half owner.</p>	
<p>That he is insured with Mutual Benefit of Newark, N. J.; North-Western Mutual, Milwaukee, Wisc.; and New York Life, of New York, N. Y.; totaling \$80,000.00.</p>	
<p>That he owns real estate and other property amounting to about \$25,000.00 consisting of a one-half interest of STRAUS GLOWING COMPANY, a home in Valley City, North Dakota; and a one-half interest in a 320 acre well improved farm in Barnes County, North Dakota.</p>	
<p>That he is and always has been a law-abiding inhabitant and that he has not at any time been charged with or arrested for any crime or misdemeanor.</p>	
<p>That he is a second cousin of Siegfried Goldschmidt, residing at Niedertiefenbach, Germany, and who desires to come to the United States to join him.</p>	
<p>That he does hereby promise, agree and guarantee that he will properly receive and take care of him, and that he will at no time become a public charge upon any community or municipality, and he does hereby further promise and agree that he will give him such schooling as may be suited to him.</p>	
<p>That this petition and affidavit is made by him individually in order that the American Representative abroad will visa the passport of said Siegfried Goldschmidt.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Herrman Stern.</p>	
<p>Subscribed and sworn to before me this day of 1937.</p>	

A project for students:

Have half the students in class take on the roles of ‘refugees’ and write letters to ‘relatives’ in America, asking them to prepare an affidavit that they can use to obtain permission to come live in the U.S.

The remainder of the class will write affidavits (use the model affidavit in the Appendix).

Once the letters and affidavits are complete, the teacher can then assign ‘quota numbers’ to each ‘refugee.’

Have the students discuss this system for controlling immigration? How well might it work for people whose lives were in danger? How does it compare to the immigration rules in use today?

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APPLICATION FOR A VISA
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residing at Niedertiefenbach,
Germany.
TO Honorable Samuel W. Honaker,
American Consul General
Stuttgart, Germany.

HERMAN STERN, being first duly sworn on oath deposes and says:

That he is a naturalized citizen of the United States of America, having received his certificate No. 174105, on January 10, 1911, in the City of Fargo, District Court, County of Cass and State of North Dakota, and that he is now a resident of the City of Valley City, in the County of Barnes, and State of North Dakota.

That for many years last past he has been and is now the Manager of STRAUS CLOTHING COMPANY, located at Valley City, in the County of Barnes and State of North Dakota, which firm is valued at more than \$50,000.00 of which he is a half owner.

That he is insured with Mutual Benefit of Newark, N. J.; North-Western Mutual, Milwaukee, Wisc.; and New York Life, of New York, N. Y.; totaling \$40,000.00.

That he owns real estate and other property amounting to about \$45,000.00 consisting of a one-half interest of STRAUS CLOTHING COMPANY; a home in Valley City, North Dakota; and a one-half interest in a 320 acre well improved farm in Barnes County, North Dakota.

That he is and always has been a law-abiding inhabitant and that he has not at any time been charged with or arrested for any crime or misdemeanor.

That he is a second cousin of Siegfried Goldschmidt, residing at Niedertiefenbach, Germany, and who desires to come to the United States to join me.

That he does hereby promise, agree and guarantee that he will properly receive and take care of him, and that he will at no time become a public charge upon any community of municipality, and he does hereby further promise and agree that he will give him such schooling as may be suited to him.

That this petition and affidavit is made by him individually in order that the American Representative abroad will visa the passport of said Siegfried Goldschmidt.

Herman Stern.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this _____ day of _____ 1937.

A sample of an affidavit, from Herman Stern's personal papers at the University of North Dakota.

Using personal Stories from the book



Lotte Henlein (second from right) with school friends in early 1930s. Except for Dieter Ackermann (far left) who was also Jewish, Lotte's friends later snubbed her as a Jewish "untermensch" (sub human). Immigrating to the U.S. Lotte and her parents moved to Valley City, where she was warmly welcomed at the local school.



Although Jewish groups in America tried to have the immigration laws altered to permit more Jewish children to enter the country, Congress refused to consider the idea.

Lore Moser (seen here with her mother Bette) was among the children who were able to emigrate to the U.S. under Stern's sponsorship.



Herman Stern did more than help people get to America. When Hilda and Solly Levy (standing in rear) came to America with their son in 1936, he helped them find jobs and a place to live in Fargo.

Hilda's father, step-mother, and step-sister (all seated in photo) were unable to flee Germany and were murdered in the Holocaust.

FURTHER STORIES can be found at:

<http://www.mnstate.edu/shoptaug/LeavingGermany2.htm>

POWER POINT SLIDES to accompany this Guide may be downloaded and used at: <http://www.mnstate.edu/shoptaug/>



The role of Senator Gerald Nye

Herman Stern relied on U.S. Senator Gerald Nye for help when he needed immigration visas for his German relatives. Nye went to the Senate for North Dakota in the 1920s. He became known nationally in the 1930s for sponsoring neutrality laws that he hoped would keep the United States from becoming involved in any 'foreign wars.' Nye wrote letters to State Department officials, including the Secretary of State, asking them to 'clear the way' so that Stern's relatives could get the documents they needed to enter the United States. The State Department bowed to Nye's wishes.

When war began in Europe in 1939, Nye became a vigorous advocate for American neutrality. As Hitler's armies overrun much of Europe, critics of Nye charged that his speeches against sending any aid to Britain only helped Germany. Some charged that he was anti-Semitic. On December 7, 1941, Nye was giving another speech for neutrality – at the same time Pearl Harbor was being attacked by the Japanese navy. This embarrassing coincidence contributed to his defeat for re-election.

Compensation for victims of the Holocaust

Refugees who fled from Hitler's Germany were allowed to leave only after paying an 'emigration tax' that often amounted to two-thirds or more of all their property and savings. They were in effect buying their way out of the country. In order to pay this tax, families had to sell their homes and businesses, frequently to Nazi Party members who paid only a fraction of what the properties were worth.

After losing the war in 1945, Germany was occupied and divided. West Germany signed a treaty in which its new government promised to pay compensation to the victims of Nazi persecutions. Beginning in 1952, the government of West Germany adopted a series of Federal Indemnification Laws (the Bundesentschädigungsgesetz). These laws provided compensation to refugees. Jews and other refugees who had had their property confiscated by Hitler's government, or who had sold their property at ridiculously low prices in order to emigrate, could receive payments from West Germany for these losses. They had to fill out extensive paperwork about their property losses and an international 'claims commission' had to determine 'fair value' on what they had lost. In many cases this took years.

Many of Stern's relatives received compensation payments while they lived in the United States. For example, Tea Eichengreuen and her parents had been assisted by Stern in order to come to America.* Tea's father had to give up his business and his family's home; her mother had to sell her own business 'at a price less than she spent to build it.' They also sold furniture, paintings and jewelry at less-than-cost in order to pay the emigration tax. Through the Bundesentschädigungsgesetz program they received compensation in several payments. Nothing could compensate for the loss of Tea's brother Erwin. Having fled to Holland in 1938, Erwin never got out of Europe. He died in Auschwitz in 1942. Many other Stern relatives had similar stories.

* Tea (pronounced the-uh) was a name unknown to Americans, so she changed her name to Dorothy when she arrived in New York in 1938.

An assignment you could give your students:

Ask your students to pretend that they are being persecuted by an unfriendly government. In order to leave they have to pay an emigration tax that amounts to three-quarters of all they own.

Have them make up a list of everything they own – clothes, electronics, computers, all their personal belongings. Looking at the list, how much does each person think that she/he will have to pay in order to be allowed to leave?

Imagine that years later, a friendlier government offers to pay compensation for each person's losses. Ask your students to form "a compensation committee" and devise a system for determining how much each person lost and how much each person should receive. Things that they should think about while devising this plan:

1. How can each claimant prove that they were coerced into selling their property?
2. Should the values of the property be based on its original value or some proportion based on depreciation?
3. How should the state make the payments – all at once, over time, some combination?
4. One refugee says that he would rather return home and reclaim his lost property. How should the committee deal with this request? What is fair?

For further information on this and many other topics about the Holocaust, see the Jewish Virtual Library website (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/index.html>)