

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:01,150

2

00:00:01,150 --> 00:00:02,690

(film slating)

3

00:00:02,690 --> 00:00:07,060

4

00:00:07,060 --> 00:00:14,950

John Pehle, you were, during
the Second World War, Assistant

5

00:00:14,950 --> 00:00:21,330

to Henry Morgenthau, Junior,
who was Secretary of the.

6

00:00:21,330 --> 00:00:22,760

Treasury.

7

00:00:22,760 --> 00:00:28,660

You were personally the Director
of the Foreign Funds Control

8

00:00:28,660 --> 00:00:30,140

Division.

9

00:00:30,140 --> 00:00:31,330

That is correct.

10

00:00:31,330 --> 00:00:39,970

Later on, in January, 1944, you
were appointed by the President

11

00:00:39,970 --> 00:00:45,310

Roosevelt. You were appointed
the Executive Director

12

00:00:45,310 --> 00:00:53,860

of the War Refugee Board, which
was a special agency created

13

00:00:53,860 --> 00:01:02,110

to help the Jews who were
in danger of destruction

14

00:01:02,110 --> 00:01:06,580

in Europe, or were
actually destroyed.

15

00:01:06,580 --> 00:01:09,660

This seems to be a
very strange story.

16

00:01:09,660 --> 00:01:14,170

How does one come
from the Treasury

17

00:01:14,170 --> 00:01:18,240

and from the Foreign
Funds Control Division

18

00:01:18,240 --> 00:01:21,270

to this very special task?

19

00:01:21,270 --> 00:01:22,900

And I know that it
is a long story,

20

00:01:22,900 --> 00:01:28,016

but we have to try to
go into it in order

21

00:01:28,016 --> 00:01:33,400

to explain how it happened.

22

00:01:33,400 --> 00:01:37,180

Well, the War Refugee Board
was established, really,

23

00:01:37,180 --> 00:01:40,000

because of the
Treasury Department,

24

00:01:40,000 --> 00:01:44,920

although the Treasury had
no jurisdiction in refugee

25

00:01:44,920 --> 00:01:48,970

matters, which were entirely
supposed to be handled

26

00:01:48,970 --> 00:01:51,430

by the State Department.

27

00:01:51,430 --> 00:01:55,270

But the Treasury Department,
particularly the people

28

00:01:55,270 --> 00:02:04,810

in the Foreign Funds
Control, came upon some facts

29

00:02:04,810 --> 00:02:10,660

with regard to the
handling of refugee matters

30

00:02:10,660 --> 00:02:13,780

that were so shocking
that they were

31

00:02:13,780 --> 00:02:18,340

brought by us to the attention
of Secretary Morgenthau.

32

00:02:18,340 --> 00:02:21,790

And he, in turn, went
to President Roosevelt,

33

00:02:21,790 --> 00:02:26,110

and brought these facts to
the President's attention.

34

00:02:26,110 --> 00:02:28,570

And the result was
the establishment

35

00:02:28,570 --> 00:02:36,180
by Executive Order of the War
Refugee Board in January, 1944.

36

00:02:36,180 --> 00:02:41,560
Yes, and what was the specific
task of the War Refugee Board?

37

00:02:41,560 --> 00:02:45,520
I see that there was an order
which established the Board.

38

00:02:45,520 --> 00:02:46,420
Yes.

39

00:02:46,420 --> 00:02:50,200
Could you explain
in a few words?

40

00:02:50,200 --> 00:02:53,470
Well, the most important thing
about the War Refugee Board

41

00:02:53,470 --> 00:02:58,500
was that it dramatically changed
the policy of the United States

42

00:02:58,500 --> 00:03:01,120
overnight.

43

00:03:01,120 --> 00:03:03,550
Before the Board
was established,

44

00:03:03,550 --> 00:03:07,000
nothing really was
being done to help

45

00:03:07,000 --> 00:03:15,550
Jews who were being destroyed
in Germany and occupied areas.

46

00:03:15,550 --> 00:03:17,250
With the establishment
of the Board,

47
00:03:17,250 --> 00:03:21,460
it became the policy
of the United States

48
00:03:21,460 --> 00:03:27,190
to do whatever could be done,
consistent with the war effort,

49
00:03:27,190 --> 00:03:32,250
to help people escape, to
help private agencies who

50
00:03:32,250 --> 00:03:37,660
were operating in the area,
to facilitate the transmission

51
00:03:37,660 --> 00:03:41,260
of funds to areas such
as Switzerland, which

52
00:03:41,260 --> 00:03:45,640
could be the base of operations
to assist refugees coming

53
00:03:45,640 --> 00:03:48,385
over the border from
France into Spain--

54
00:03:48,385 --> 00:03:51,430

55
00:03:51,430 --> 00:03:57,130
all the things that seemed
to have some possible effect

56
00:03:57,130 --> 00:03:59,380
of alleviating the conditions.

57
00:03:59,380 --> 00:04:03,520

Yes, you say that the policy
of the government of the United

58
00:04:03,520 --> 00:04:06,930
States changed
suddenly overnight.

59
00:04:06,930 --> 00:04:07,720
That's right.

60
00:04:07,720 --> 00:04:11,400
And took a complete turn.

61
00:04:11,400 --> 00:04:13,210
That is correct.

62
00:04:13,210 --> 00:04:14,200
Yes.

63
00:04:14,200 --> 00:04:19,195
And I think that we have to
enter now into the details.

64
00:04:19,195 --> 00:04:22,390

65
00:04:22,390 --> 00:04:26,640
Well, the fact of
the matter was that--

66
00:04:26,640 --> 00:04:30,630
I mean, I would like that
the necessary thing is

67
00:04:30,630 --> 00:04:33,060
to start to talk about policy.

68
00:04:33,060 --> 00:04:37,320
What was in 1944, which was very
late already during the war--

69
00:04:37,320 --> 00:04:38,200

Yes, very late.

70

00:04:38,200 --> 00:04:41,610

Very late in the war,
what had been up till now

71

00:04:41,610 --> 00:04:45,660

the policy of the government
of the United States?

72

00:04:45,660 --> 00:04:50,130

I think the policy, to
the extent that there

73

00:04:50,130 --> 00:04:57,720

was any policy, was to
ignore what was going on

74

00:04:57,720 --> 00:05:07,110

in Europe, to interfere with
the transmission of stories

75

00:05:07,110 --> 00:05:10,650

about what was going on to the
Jewish agencies in the United

76

00:05:10,650 --> 00:05:18,720

States, to deny licenses to
people who wanted to transmit

77

00:05:18,720 --> 00:05:24,390

funds to rescue
people, and generally,

78

00:05:24,390 --> 00:05:26,650

not to take any
affirmative action.

79

00:05:26,650 --> 00:05:29,910

Yes, and what were the
governmental agencies who

80

00:05:29,910 --> 00:05:33,500

were specifically in
charge of these questions,

81
00:05:33,500 --> 00:05:35,340
if there were any?

82
00:05:35,340 --> 00:05:38,880
Well, the State Department had
to do with all these questions,

83
00:05:38,880 --> 00:05:39,690
really.

84
00:05:39,690 --> 00:05:41,640
They had to do with
the granting of visas

85
00:05:41,640 --> 00:05:46,770
to people trying to
flee occupied France.

86
00:05:46,770 --> 00:05:48,900
They participated
for the United States

87
00:05:48,900 --> 00:05:53,140
in intergovernmental conferences
such as the Bermuda Conference,

88
00:05:53,140 --> 00:05:54,740
where these matters
were talked about.

89
00:05:54,740 --> 00:05:56,920
But nothing ever happened.

90
00:05:56,920 --> 00:06:02,130
And so it was really a problem
at the State Department.

91
00:06:02,130 --> 00:06:08,970
This was the State
Department, but I

92

00:06:08,970 --> 00:06:13,140

think that it was at the
time a lot of pressure

93

00:06:13,140 --> 00:06:15,360

in order to change the policy.

94

00:06:15,360 --> 00:06:18,840

There was pressure in Congress.

95

00:06:18,840 --> 00:06:21,550

Congressman Sellers,
for example,

96

00:06:21,550 --> 00:06:25,470

was very active in trying to
get the State Department to act.

97

00:06:25,470 --> 00:06:28,080

There were people in the State
Department such as Sumner

98

00:06:28,080 --> 00:06:30,300

Welles, who showed
some inclination

99

00:06:30,300 --> 00:06:35,730

to take advantage of
opportunities of rescue,

100

00:06:35,730 --> 00:06:39,870

but other people seemed to
thwart those activities.

101

00:06:39,870 --> 00:06:42,150

Yes, if we enter
into the details,

102

00:06:42,150 --> 00:06:50,050

let's say the visa policy,
what would you say about it?

103

00:06:50,050 --> 00:06:58,770

Well, all I can say is that the
councils that we had in France

104

00:06:58,770 --> 00:07:01,492

made life very difficult
for anybody who wanted

105

00:07:01,492 --> 00:07:02,700

to come to the United States.

106

00:07:02,700 --> 00:07:05,610

107

00:07:05,610 --> 00:07:06,610

In France only?

108

00:07:06,610 --> 00:07:11,370

No, but France was one place
that this question came up

109

00:07:11,370 --> 00:07:14,320

very readily.

110

00:07:14,320 --> 00:07:16,410

They took the position
that these people

111

00:07:16,410 --> 00:07:20,760

might become dependents of
the government if they came,

112

00:07:20,760 --> 00:07:23,100

despite the fact that
there were Jewish agencies

113

00:07:23,100 --> 00:07:26,610

willing to guarantee that
this would not happen,

114

00:07:26,610 --> 00:07:29,970

and who had the funds to

back up the guarantee.

115

00:07:29,970 --> 00:07:36,040

There was a strict limitation
on sticking within the quotas.

116

00:07:36,040 --> 00:07:38,600

And very often, the
quotas weren't filled.

117

00:07:38,600 --> 00:07:39,420

Were not filled.

118

00:07:39,420 --> 00:07:42,720

Were not filled,
and so there was

119

00:07:42,720 --> 00:07:50,610

no real attempt made to
facilitate entry of refugees.

120

00:07:50,610 --> 00:07:54,360

On the contrary, very
few reached our shores.

121

00:07:54,360 --> 00:07:58,470

Yes, I see that there
are very striking figures

122

00:07:58,470 --> 00:08:02,070

about this question of the visa.

123

00:08:02,070 --> 00:08:09,990

Because as far as I know, if
one takes immigration quotas

124

00:08:09,990 --> 00:08:13,710

since 1933--

125

00:08:13,710 --> 00:08:17,990

from 1933 to, let's say, 1944--

126

00:08:17,990 --> 00:08:23,370
the amount of refugees the
United States could and should

127
00:08:23,370 --> 00:08:30,100
have saved goes up to 1
million and a half people.

128
00:08:30,100 --> 00:08:31,630
Yes.

129
00:08:31,630 --> 00:08:37,840
And I think that the exact
figures are about 500,000.

130
00:08:37,840 --> 00:08:39,590
Very close to that, yes.

131
00:08:39,590 --> 00:08:40,400
You agree with it?

132
00:08:40,400 --> 00:08:41,320
That's correct.

133
00:08:41,320 --> 00:08:42,159
Yes.

134
00:08:42,159 --> 00:08:48,230
But among this 500,000, I
see that the Jews were even

135
00:08:48,230 --> 00:08:49,890
a minority.

136
00:08:49,890 --> 00:08:51,780
That could be true, too.

137
00:08:51,780 --> 00:08:53,485
Yes.

138
00:08:53,485 --> 00:08:57,830
And how do you explain this?

139
00:08:57,830 --> 00:08:59,800
I don't know that I can.

140
00:08:59,800 --> 00:09:01,580
Please.

141
00:09:01,580 --> 00:09:03,740
Well, the definitely
people who were handling

142
00:09:03,740 --> 00:09:07,280
visa matters and the policy
in the State Department

143
00:09:07,280 --> 00:09:10,940
seemed to be such that
instead of facilitating

144
00:09:10,940 --> 00:09:14,270
the entry of
refugees, obstructions

145
00:09:14,270 --> 00:09:16,250
were thrown in the way.

146
00:09:16,250 --> 00:09:17,840
It's as simple as that.

147
00:09:17,840 --> 00:09:18,500
Yes.

148
00:09:18,500 --> 00:09:26,780
I think that we have
some settlements which

149
00:09:26,780 --> 00:09:30,770
exist in one of the drafts
of this report, which

150
00:09:30,770 --> 00:09:33,260
was forwarded to the

president and which

151

00:09:33,260 --> 00:09:38,420

led to the creation of
the War Refugee Board.

152

00:09:38,420 --> 00:09:48,360

I think I would like you
to read this, for instance,

153

00:09:48,360 --> 00:09:51,860

about the visa.

154

00:09:51,860 --> 00:09:56,810

Maybe you read it, and
you choose what you--

155

00:09:56,810 --> 00:09:59,210

because there was a
committee, a special committee

156

00:09:59,210 --> 00:10:03,070

which was appointed
to deliver the visa.

157

00:10:03,070 --> 00:10:06,530

158

00:10:06,530 --> 00:10:08,271

And also, it is underlined.

159

00:10:08,271 --> 00:10:11,430

160

00:10:11,430 --> 00:10:14,430

This is what
Congressman Dickstein

161

00:10:14,430 --> 00:10:28,540

stated in the House of
Representatives in 1943.

162

00:10:28,540 --> 00:10:30,970

He stated, "There was no effort of any kind made

163

00:10:30,970 --> 00:10:34,760

to save from death many of the refugees who could have been

164

00:10:34,760 --> 00:10:37,420

saved during the time the transportation lines were

165

00:10:37,420 --> 00:10:39,020

available.

166

00:10:39,020 --> 00:10:40,930

And there was no obstacle to their admission

167

00:10:40,930 --> 00:10:42,940

to the United States.

168

00:10:42,940 --> 00:10:45,220

But the obstructive policy of our organs

169

00:10:45,220 --> 00:10:48,520

of government, particularly the State Department,

170

00:10:48,520 --> 00:10:51,280

which saw fit to hedge itself about with rules

171

00:10:51,280 --> 00:10:55,420

and regulations instead of lifting rules and regulations,

172

00:10:55,420 --> 00:10:59,050

brought about a condition so that even

173

00:10:59,050 --> 00:11:04,070

the existing immigration
quotas were filled."

174
00:11:04,070 --> 00:11:07,620
And there is something
else about this committee--

175
00:11:07,620 --> 00:11:12,310

176
00:11:12,310 --> 00:11:13,910
(film slating)

177
00:11:13,910 --> 00:11:17,810

178
00:11:17,810 --> 00:11:21,960
In 1943, as the
facts with regard

179
00:11:21,960 --> 00:11:25,410
what was happening in Germany
and Poland particularly

180
00:11:25,410 --> 00:11:29,250
became more known
to the public, there

181
00:11:29,250 --> 00:11:33,870
was a good deal of attention
given to this in Congress.

182
00:11:33,870 --> 00:11:38,190
For example, Congressman
Dickstein stated in the House

183
00:11:38,190 --> 00:11:45,360
on December 15, in talking
about the visas, said,

184
00:11:45,360 --> 00:11:47,340
"There was no effort
of any kind made

185
00:11:47,340 --> 00:11:50,730
to save from death many of the
refugees who could have been

186
00:11:50,730 --> 00:11:54,270
saved during the time the
transportation lines were

187
00:11:54,270 --> 00:11:57,480
available and there was no
obstacle to their admission

188
00:11:57,480 --> 00:11:59,910
to the United States."

189
00:11:59,910 --> 00:12:01,920
"But," says
Congressman Dickstein,

190
00:12:01,920 --> 00:12:04,110
"the obstructive
policy of our organs

191
00:12:04,110 --> 00:12:07,710
of government, particularly
the State Department,

192
00:12:07,710 --> 00:12:10,530
which saw fit to hedge
itself about with rules

193
00:12:10,530 --> 00:12:15,090
and regulations instead of
lifting rules and regulations,

194
00:12:15,090 --> 00:12:17,400
brought about a
condition so that not

195
00:12:17,400 --> 00:12:22,430
even the existing immigration
quotas were filled."

196

00:12:22,430 --> 00:12:25,200

And then Congressman Seller
on the floor of the House

197

00:12:25,200 --> 00:12:28,740

said, according to "Earl G.
Harrison, who was Commissioner

198

00:12:28,740 --> 00:12:32,220

of the immigration and
Naturalization Service,

199

00:12:32,220 --> 00:12:36,690

not since 1862 had there
been fewer aliens entering

200

00:12:36,690 --> 00:12:38,890

the country."

201

00:12:38,890 --> 00:12:41,560

He said, "The inter-departmental
review committee,

202

00:12:41,560 --> 00:12:44,610

which reviews the
applications for a visa,

203

00:12:44,610 --> 00:12:47,880

are composed of one official
from each of the following

204

00:12:47,880 --> 00:12:48,630

departments--

205

00:12:48,630 --> 00:12:53,610

War, Navy, FBI, State,
and Immigration.

206

00:12:53,610 --> 00:12:56,850

That committee has been
glacier-like in its slowness

207

00:12:56,850 --> 00:12:58,362
and cold-bloodedness.

208

00:12:58,362 --> 00:13:01,500
It takes months and
months to grant the visas

209

00:13:01,500 --> 00:13:03,420
and then it usually
applies to a corpse."

210

00:13:03,420 --> 00:13:06,000

211

00:13:06,000 --> 00:13:08,530
It's a very strong
statement, no?

212

00:13:08,530 --> 00:13:09,030
Yes.

213

00:13:09,030 --> 00:13:11,670

214

00:13:11,670 --> 00:13:14,970
And what were the reasons
which were bought up

215

00:13:14,970 --> 00:13:19,130
by these people of the State
Department, the main reasons,

216

00:13:19,130 --> 00:13:23,940
in order not to grant the visa?

217

00:13:23,940 --> 00:13:28,590
Well, as far as I
know, one of the areas

218

00:13:28,590 --> 00:13:31,440
in which obstructions
were raised

219
00:13:31,440 --> 00:13:39,690
was that these
refugees might become

220
00:13:39,690 --> 00:13:41,700
dependent on the
public for support

221
00:13:41,700 --> 00:13:44,820
when they came to
the United States,

222
00:13:44,820 --> 00:13:50,070
despite the fact that various
organizations, including

223
00:13:50,070 --> 00:13:53,760
Jewish organizations,
were willing to guarantee

224
00:13:53,760 --> 00:13:57,840
that these people would not
become dependent on the United

225
00:13:57,840 --> 00:13:58,758
States for support.

226
00:13:58,758 --> 00:14:00,300
They were ready to
take care of them.

227
00:14:00,300 --> 00:14:02,790
They were ready to make
guarantees to this effect,

228
00:14:02,790 --> 00:14:04,640
and to take care
of the refugees.

229
00:14:04,640 --> 00:14:10,860
Yes, and didn't they talk,
too, about security reasons,

230
00:14:10,860 --> 00:14:12,420
saying that these
people would be

231
00:14:12,420 --> 00:14:17,100
a security risk in time of war?

232
00:14:17,100 --> 00:14:18,600
That was one of the reasons.

233
00:14:18,600 --> 00:14:21,180
And I have no doubt
that the FBI probably

234
00:14:21,180 --> 00:14:33,300
felt that the Nazis would
use refugees, secrete agents

235
00:14:33,300 --> 00:14:35,940
among refugees come
into the United States.

236
00:14:35,940 --> 00:14:42,052
Yes, but I think that
it was [Personal name] -

237
00:14:42,052 --> 00:14:45,750
Duboise who was one
of your assistants,

238
00:14:45,750 --> 00:14:50,130
who wrote this report that
it would have anyhow been

239
00:14:50,130 --> 00:14:55,890
possible, even, to put these
people in camps for several

240
00:14:55,890 --> 00:14:58,680
weeks or months, to clear them.

241

00:14:58,680 --> 00:15:00,460

Yes, they could
have been screened.

242

00:15:00,460 --> 00:15:01,950

Yes, they could
have been screened.

243

00:15:01,950 --> 00:15:09,130

This means that this
argument is rather weak, no?

244

00:15:09,130 --> 00:15:12,610

Well, I think that
while some people might

245

00:15:12,610 --> 00:15:17,080

have had real fears
in this regard,

246

00:15:17,080 --> 00:15:19,540

I don't think that
that was something that

247

00:15:19,540 --> 00:15:21,200

couldn't have been dealt with.

248

00:15:21,200 --> 00:15:21,700

Yes.

249

00:15:21,700 --> 00:15:24,320

250

00:15:24,320 --> 00:15:27,340

The mere fact is that--

251

00:15:27,340 --> 00:15:31,745

do you agree with this,
that these people who

252

00:15:31,745 --> 00:15:36,390

were in charge of the
problem, in place of using,

253
00:15:36,390 --> 00:15:41,080
let's say, the government
machinery to help solve

254
00:15:41,080 --> 00:15:45,260
the question of the refugees,
used this machinery in order

255
00:15:45,260 --> 00:15:47,440
to block everything.

256
00:15:47,440 --> 00:15:51,790
Well, I don't want to
interpret people's motives,

257
00:15:51,790 --> 00:15:55,420
but the answer is that there
were fewer people coming in

258
00:15:55,420 --> 00:15:57,460
at a time when
there was a greatest

259
00:15:57,460 --> 00:16:00,300
need for people to find
asylum in the United States.

260
00:16:00,300 --> 00:16:05,080
Yes, because what is so
striking, and even shocking,

261
00:16:05,080 --> 00:16:10,500
is that when one
studies this period,

262
00:16:10,500 --> 00:16:14,890
there is the
complete discrepancy

263
00:16:14,890 --> 00:16:19,660
between the emergency
actions which

264

00:16:19,660 --> 00:16:22,750
were needed, because
each day counted,

265

00:16:22,750 --> 00:16:24,760
and each day, there
were thousands

266

00:16:24,760 --> 00:16:28,490
of people who were murdered
in the death camps,

267

00:16:28,490 --> 00:16:34,020
and the very slow and
bureaucratic and red tape path.

268

00:16:34,020 --> 00:16:37,000