

Early Twentieth Century Networks of Ethnicity: The Galveston Movement

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I have often thought that if it had not been for Jacob Schiff,
I might well be living in a tenement in the Lower East Side of
New York without ever having had the opportunity to become
a Texan.

—*Leo J. Hoffman, 2001*

Snapshot images of refugees arriving in the U.S. from Eastern Europe and Russia usually depict scenes of exhausted newcomers huddled on shipboard just off Ellis Island, or crowded tenements in New York's Lower East Side. Nowhere in these images are pictures of Russian immigrants wearing wool coats and fur hats stepping off German passenger ships onto the Texas Gulf Coast.

Historical geographers and other scholars have long been interested in the migration, settlement, and impacts of new immigrants in the U.S. Yet, despite an extensive list of prior studies of Jewish refugees forced to flee their homelands to relocate to the U.S., little to date has been said about a surprising and relatively undocumented migration stream between isolated villages in Eastern Europe with the port city of Galveston, Texas.¹ This dramatic episode in international migration history, known as the *Galveston Movement*, lasted from 1907 through 1914. Ultimately, a broad political, cultural, social, and economic network linked more than 10,000 Russian Jewish migrants to the South and the interior U.S. by way of Galveston, the “Ellis Island of Texas.”

In this article, “networks of ethnicity” connecting North America and Eastern Europe are analyzed through the lens of two seemingly disparate sets of images—Jewish refugees fleeing persecution from devastated rural villages in Russia and Ukraine, and a hot, humid Gulf Coast port. The migration of Jews from Eastern Europe and the push factors shaping their

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decision-making before leaving the Jewish Pale of Settlement in Russia is presented first in this article to help explain the reasons for their migration to the U.S. Then, the key factors causing the organizers of the Galveston Movement to select the relatively unknown city of Galveston as the destination point for incoming refugees from this part of the world is discussed. Information about the rise of Galveston's Jewish community in the decades prior to the arrival of these second-wave Jewish immigrants is then summarized. Throughout the analysis, the key to understanding the migration routes, experiences, and impacts of Galveston Movement immigrants is the process of analyzing how various "networks of ethnicity" linked peoples and places here in the U.S. and in Russia or Ukraine. Social, political, religious, and ethnic networks not only connected migration source areas and destinations, they also helped define migration processes as well as the individuals who shaped them. Thus, the interrelationships of various networks on migration experiences and patterns emerge in this study as nuanced and fluid intersections of ever-changing meanings.

The analysis presented in this article is grounded in ideas recently put forth by Katharyne Mitchell and other scholars calling for a deeper understanding of the role of ethnic networks that link time and space and help explain the ways people and place are embedded socio-economically, culturally, and politically.² Building on work by Nigel Thrift, Kris Olds, and other scholars, Mitchell reminds us that networks provide a useful way to think about spatial linkages and other institutional formations.³ Networks of ethnicity, according to Mitchell, are "relational, social, and economic ties based on various commonalities shared by a group of people and include some combination of traits such as language, culture, religion, and/or home town origin."⁴

Despite this culturally prescribed definition of "networks of ethnicity," Mitchell and other scholars have grounded their use of this concept primarily in empirical work focusing on economic connections rather than cultural ones. Likewise, economic sociologists such as Alejandro Portes have used social and ethnic networks to help explain and analyze economic questions relating to the role of ethnic businesses in immigrant economies and enclaves in the U.S.⁵ As such, "social connections based on ethno-religious commonalities formed the glue that held economic relationships together across space and in times of economic distress."⁶ This article argues that networks of ethnicity are not only economically defined but are also shaped by cultural systems such as ethnicity and religion, as well as by political decision-making and other political processes. These networks also play an important role in helping define and explain migration at the micro level via individual choices and decisions.

Methods and Approaches

This story of the “Ellis Island of the Texas Gulf Coast” differs from the traditional story of Jewish migration to the U.S. in a number of significant ways. In addition to documenting connections between European ports and American ports *not* located on the East or West coasts, the article also adds to a growing number of migration studies now underway by human geographers that employ a set of interrelated methodologies to analyze and more fully understand the migration experience. While many scholars interested in migration continue to view it as a topic best investigated via a one-dimensional methodology that focuses on analyzing push-pull factors documented primarily by quantitative models and methods, this article joins other scholars who have begun to argue for using multiple methodologies to uncover processes shaping migrant experiences and impacts. Beginning with seminal publications in the 1970s and ’80s, and an expansion of these earlier ideas in recent years in projects outside the U.S., a few geographers have begun to critique migration scholars who have failed to take into account the important role of migrants’ perceptions, memories, and feelings in analyzing and understanding migration processes more fully.⁷

I depended upon four primary sources of information to learn more about the “networks of ethnicity” linking Russia with Galveston. These included interviews with descendants of Galveston immigrants living in Galveston, Houston, San Antonio, Dallas, Kansas City, and Rock Island, Illinois; data contained in U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service ships’ passenger lists (see Table 1); archival information from synagogue records and other Jewish organizations; and information gathered through a survey and follow-up interviews distributed by the Texas Jewish Historical Society to members of other U.S. Jewish organizations requesting information from descendants of Galveston Movement immigrants. The data gathered by the latter three primary sources of information were integrated into a set of comparative databases containing the names, ages, genders, places of birth, dates of arrival in Galveston, and destinations of immigrants who arrived at Galveston between 1907 and 1914. This information was then loaded into a GIS and plotted onto maps for comparison with qualitative information gathered during personal interviews and in written narratives.

Migration and Networks of Ethnicity

Migrants from Russia who found their way to Texas in the early twentieth century formed but one part of a much larger story. In his book, *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie, called the international migrant the “defining figure of the twentieth century.”⁸ As if responding to Rushdie’s call for attention to this important dynamic of the last century, scholars in

Table 1. Contents of Ships' Passenger Manifests Between 1898 and 1914.

Name of ship
Date of departure and arrival
Full name
Age
Sex
Marital status
Occupation
Literacy
Nationality
Race
Last permanent residence (country and city or town)
Final destination (U.S. state and city or town)
Whether possesses ticket to final destination
Person or organization who paid the passage
Whether in possession of \$50; if less, how much
Location and dates of prior residency in U.S. if any
Whether planning to join relative or friend (and their name and address)
Ever in prison
Whether a polygamist or anarchist
Condition of health, mental and physical
Personal description (height, hair color, complexion)
Place of birth

the social sciences and humanities have published numerous studies charting the migration flows and settlement patterns of new migrants and refugees. In the past three decades in particular, a host of studies focusing on migration have been completed by historical geographers and other scholars interested in the migration experience.⁹

In the years prior to the Galveston Movement, almost all Jewish immigrants from Russia entered the U.S. at New York's Ellis Island and settled in large urban areas in the Northeast such as New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh; in Chicago; or in West Coast cities. In the early years of the twentieth century, the Russia-U.S. migration path to these cities intensified. The Galveston Movement, in contrast, marked the first effort in U.S. history to divert immigration from the East Coast to the territory west of the Mississippi River through a Gulf Coast port city.

The Global Context: Russia-to-U.S. Ethnic Networks

When interviewing descendants of Galveston Movement survivors, the word "pogrom" still brings back memories of the hardships their relatives survived. After threats and rumors of destruction circulated among the Jewish residents of eastern European/Russian villages, the Jewish Quarters of many of the towns and small cities in the area were invaded by

angry citizens of non-Jewish descent, who savagely beat and sometimes killed local residents. Homes were burned. Police might finally arrive, but most exhibited complacency and failed to do anything to stop outsiders from launching their attacks. In most cases, the Russian government also refused to do anything to assure local residents that this kind of persecution would not be repeated in the future.

Although Jewish residents of Russia had emigrated abroad in small numbers during the 1870s to relocate in Germany or in the U.S., their out-migration began in earnest after the first large-scale pogroms broke out as a reaction against the assassination of Czar Alexander II in the spring of 1880.¹⁰ By the end of the summer that year, thousands of Jews were fleeing westward across the Russian border as a “veritable panic seized the Jews of southern Russia.”¹¹ Once in the U.S., they relocated in north-eastern port cities where other Jews had settled in earlier decades. This pattern continued through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—between 1870 and 1900, an average of 100,000 Jews settled in the U.S. each year. Overall the Jewish population in the U.S. grew from 250,000 in 1880 to more than 3,000,000 by 1914.¹² Broad in its impact, the devastation and despair of pogroms in Russia between 1903 and 1906 also compelled large numbers of Russian Jewish immigrants to relocate to Palestine, South Africa, and England.

These events set the stage for increasing levels of activism by politically aware Jewish leaders in the U.S. and Europe. Perhaps no one single event did more to shape Jewish immigration rescue efforts in the U.S. and Europe than the horrifying destruction of the city of Kishineff by Russian militia in 1901. This massacre resulted in the deaths of forty-five people with at least eighty-six others seriously injured. Though small compared to later pogroms, the Kishineff attack served as a catalyst for emigration out of Russia thereafter by all who could find a way to escape.

Kathie Friedman-Kasaba and other scholars of the Russian Jewish diaspora have employed world-systems theory and other macro-level global economic and political explanations to interpret Russian Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to the U.S.¹³ In their view, Russia was a relatively powerless peripheral state while America was a magnetic core nation-state. While these larger scale issues were certainly at work, I argue that it was micro-level factors that most shaped the creation of networks of ethnicity linking Russia with Texas. Primary among these were the anti-Semitic attitudes and values of Russian political leaders and their advisors of the time. These attitudes resulted in increasingly harsh anti-Jewish policies in Russia on the one hand, and new more open emigration policies on the other, factors that made it possible for Jews to leave Russia legally after centuries of forced settlement in restricted places there. Thus, changing social, cultural, and political conditions in Russia affected the Jewish migration stream. These interrelated processes, in turn, shaped the migration decisionmaking of individuals, as well as the spatial and social outcomes of their decisions.

Processes impacting the decisions of the 1907-14 Galveston Movement Jewish migrants actually had been set in motion almost a half-century earlier. In the 1860s, the Russian government reframed its emigration policy to allow certain groups to emigrate, especially those they judged to be negative influences on the nation. These new policies fluctuated dramatically between two poles. On one end of the spectrum were new laws that eased restrictions on Jews and their place of residence and encouraged full assimilation. At the other extreme was the passage of new laws facilitating their emigration out of the country.¹⁴

The devastating impacts of these shifting attitudes and policies most severely affected western Russia, Poland, and present-day Ukraine. By 1897, there were more than five million Jewish residents in Russia.¹⁵ Government policies forced the majority to live in the Jewish Pale of Settlement which included the fifteen western districts of Russia and ten districts in Poland. Approximately 94 percent of all Russian Jews lived in the Pale.¹⁶ Thus, it was this part of the Russian Empire that was most severely affected by fluctuating government policies, and Galveston Movement organizers targeted the Jewish Pale of Settlement for their most intense rescue effort. Clearly, a complex and interrelated set of “push factors” in Russia and “pull factors” in the U.S., encouraged large numbers of Russian Jews to try to find ways to relocate to North America. These factors, and renewed pogroms in Russia in 1903 and 1904, culminated in the work of Galveston Movement organizers. These Jewish leaders and philanthropists envisioned a tightly structured ethnic network organized and funded by both co-religionists and political leaders in the U.S. and in Europe (Figure 1). Interestingly, the leading organizer in England, Israel Zangwill, was the playwright who coined the term “melting pot” in a popular play about a Russian Jewish immigrant escaping from his native land who falls in love with a Christian social worker. In New York, banker and philanthropist Jacob Schiff, the universally recognized leader of Jews in the U.S., played a key role in helping fund the effort. In Galveston, Henry Cohen, local rabbi and leader of the Galveston Jewish community, as well as local Jewish residents originally from Germany and Poland, provided local support.¹⁷ This planning team intended to not only rescue Jewish families from the dangers and persecution of pogroms in Russia but also to help reduce the overcrowding in New York’s Jewish ghettos by encouraging newcomers to settle in smaller cities located in interior states.¹⁸

Why Galveston? Why did this network of organizers select a small city in Texas as the new and untested port of entry for Jewish newcomers to the U.S.? Even today, the island city of Galveston remains relatively unknown to outsiders unless they have heard about the devastating hurricane that leveled the city in the fall of 1900 (still the worst natural disaster to strike North America in recorded history). Despite the city’s relative obscurity today, Galveston was the largest urban area in Texas from the time of the first census in 1850 and remained in that position until San

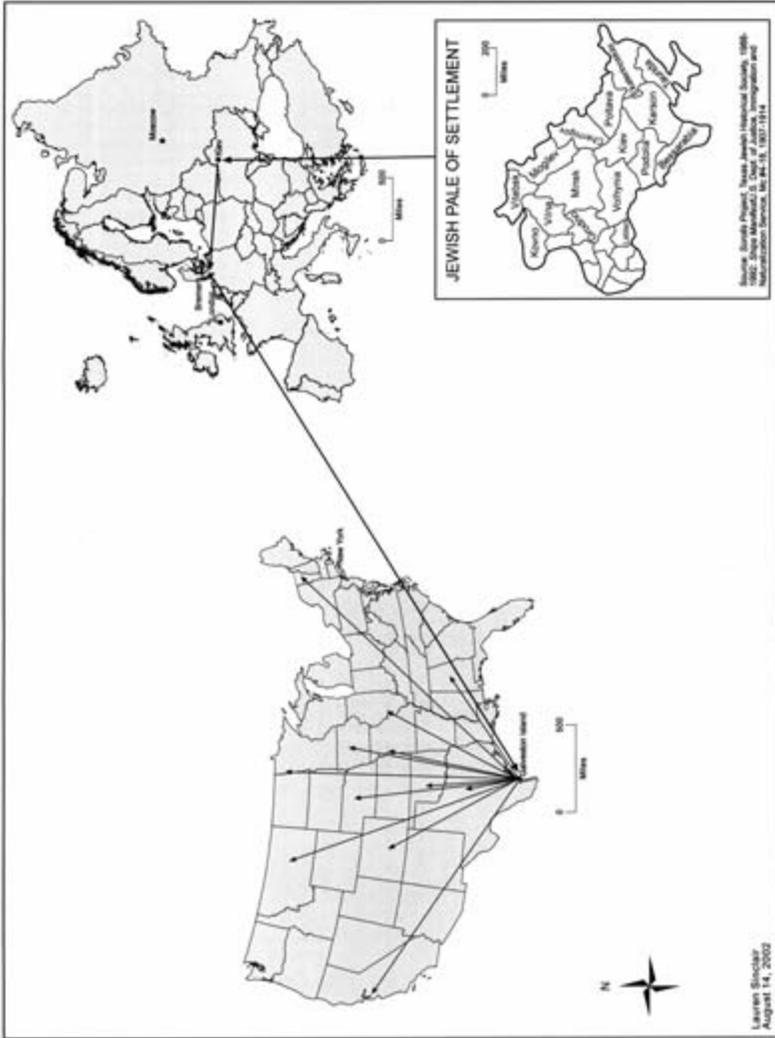


Figure 1. Networks of activity linking key places involved in the Galveston Movement.

Antonio's growth outpaced it in 1890.¹⁹ During the years of the Galveston Movement, the city was a busy, cosmopolitan place with a diverse population of immigrants, many of whom were German Jews.²⁰ As early as 1868, Galveston was home to at least 100 Jews and, by 1910, there were more than 1,000. In 1853, the city elected a Jewish mayor, giving Galveston the distinction of having a Jewish mayor a century earlier than New York City.²¹ The existence of this relatively large and stable Jewish community in Galveston, therefore, encouraged Schiff and other movement organizers to look favorably at this Gulf Coast city as a port of entry for newcomers from Russia. Over the years, German Jewish residents had contributed to shaping not only the Jewish community on the island, but also its cultural landscape and economic development.

The city's spiritual leader was Henry Cohen, a Jewish immigrant born in London. Rabbi Cohen served the Galveston community for 62 years as religious leader, philanthropist, humanitarian, scholar, social worker, and teacher. Cohen first was sent from England to serve the needs of the Jewish community at Kingston, Jamaica, and then Woodville, Mississippi, prior to his arrival at the B'Nai Israel synagogue in Galveston in 1888.²² His signature bow tie and dress jacket, his clipped British accent, and his bicycle riding through the busy streets of Galveston's commercial and residential districts are remembered even today. Cohen also was well known by Jewish Texans who lived outside of Galveston because he traveled widely to give speeches, conduct religious rituals, and perform marriage ceremonies in places such as Nacogdoches in East Texas and Brownsville on the Rio Grande.²³ The London-educated Cohen was a contemporary of Zangwill's, thus, his personal network of connections with leaders on both sides of the Atlantic also influenced the selection of Galveston as the port-of-call for movement refugees.

No one, however, shaped the decisions of Galveston Movement organizers more than Schiff. As a former immigrant himself, the New Yorker's solid financial backing, vision, and leadership abilities proved invaluable in launching the effort to rescue and resettle second-wave Russian Jews. At first, Schiff's vision was to relocate Jews to any number of U.S. ports, as long as they were *not* New York. In a December, 1904 letter to the secretary of the primary German-Jewish relief agency in Bremen he wrote:²⁴

I suggest to you the following suitable ports to which part of the emigration could be advantageously directed: Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, New Orleans, Charleston, Savannah, and Galveston; also Montreal.

From this longer list, Schiff and others initially seemed to favor the selection of the port of New Orleans.²⁵ Aiming to provide for the resettlement of two million immigrants in underpopulated western states, New Orleans' connection to the vast interior hinterland by way of the Missis-

issippi River and beyond made it a strong possible destination port for the project. In the end, however, organizers of the movement selected the city of Galveston over New Orleans for several other reasons. First, Galveston's location was remote enough to be able to divert new migrants farther from the attraction of the well known and much more popular port city of New York. In addition, the Lloyd German steamship line had already established a direct line with the port of Galveston by way of the German city of Bremen. Galveston also was judged to be small enough to assure that there would be little employment available for non-English speaking newcomers—thereby discouraging new arrivals from remaining there permanently. Finally, Galveston also had well-established railroad connections with the interior of the U.S. that extended as far north and west as the cities of Denver, Kansas City, St. Louis, and even Minneapolis.²⁶

Arguments against port cities in other parts of the South were quite dramatic. Charleston, for example, was reported to be inhospitable to Jews. New Orleans was not selected because it was believed to be the worst place for yellow fever and other epidemics on the Gulf Coast. This largest of all Gulf Coast port cities also had a sordid and lurid reputation that made immigration organizers uncomfortable. They favored the city of Galveston because numerous other European aid societies, particularly in Germany, had successfully used it over the years as a port of entry for the resettlement of large farming communities in the interior of Texas.²⁷ In the end, then, it was the successes of this antecedent migration process that swayed the Galveston Movement organizing committee to choose Galveston.

Global Networks of Ethnicity: Implementation and Issues

Once Galveston was selected as the port of entry for new immigrants, Schiff, through his personal lobbying efforts, gained the backing and support of the U.S. government. He then made contact with the Jewish Territorial Organization (JTO) in London. The vitally important role of this international organization in the Galveston Movement was to help locate the most desperate potential immigrants who were both employable and free of disease. To accomplish this, the JTO worked closely with the Jewish Emigration Society in Kiev via its eighty-two recruitment and placement committees. They helped spread the word about emigration plans via the distribution of letters and fliers extolling the glories of the American West throughout the Jewish Pale of Settlement in western Russia.²⁸ Once selected, individuals and families received tickets for the train to Bremen and lodging in this German port city before they boarded ships bound for Galveston. Each Jewish passenger also carried a letter of introduction written in English to give to potential U.S. employers.

Social workers and religious leaders kept close watch over every aspect of the migration process. In Bremen, workers assisting the Galveston Movement effort cabled the Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau (JIIB)

with a passenger list each time a ship left Germany. The JIIB's manager in Galveston then made a decision about the most appropriate place to send the new arrivals based on each person's reported employment skills,²⁹ and Jewish leaders in mid-western cities and towns then were contacted about the pending arrival of new immigrants. Most only stayed in Galveston a few days—or even only a few hours—before leaving on the train for the interior. This gave newcomers just long enough to go through processing, clear all paperwork, and receive information about their transportation.

In 1907, a young social worker named Morris Waldman was sent to Galveston to oversee the opening and operation of an immigration office for the JIIB. He rented an empty warehouse near the port and remodeled it soon thereafter, adding comfortable furniture, a bathroom, and showers. The building, which was to serve as a shelter and processing center for new immigrants, was completed and ready to open on a Saturday evening and its insurance coverage was to go into effect on Monday morning. At midnight Saturday night, however, a fire broke out that destroyed the building and all its contents. Almost immediately, Waldman located another space for the offices and started the on-site organizational effort all over again.³⁰

Back in operation after the fire, the Galveston-based office negotiated with the railroad to reduce fares for delivery of their expected new arrivals. Since Schiff served on the boards of three of the largest railroad networks in the region—and he was willing to contribute \$500,000 to the cause of redirecting new arrivals north and west—this railroad network played a major role in the destination of Galveston Movement passengers. His funding made it possible for all incoming immigrants to receive a free ticket for the train ride north. Schiff also raised the funds to provide the financial support needed to help launch newcomers in their new lives in the U.S.

Immigrants traveled to a selected town or city because each place already had a nucleus of Jewish residents. Local religious leaders and members of congregations in each place sent letters to the Galveston Movement's New York office requesting that workers be sent for certain types of jobs. Letters from El Paso, for example, asked for trunk, harness, and saddle makers; Corsicana asked for weavers, spinners, and doffers for their new textile industries; and Waco needed shoemakers. The most common requests were for tailors, clerks, shoemakers, and carpenters. Guidelines established by the network listed the types of immigrants who could be most easily absorbed according to their occupations. According to this list, strong laborers between the ages of twenty and forty secured positions most easily. Men who were ironworkers, carpenters, cabinetmakers, butchers, tinsmiths, painters, paper hangers, shoemakers, tailors, masons, plumbers, and machinists were in great demand and received strong encouragement to become part of the movement. The Galveston JIIB office then organized each person according to their occupation, assigning them

to one of the towns or cities in the South, West, or the interior U.S. where prior contacts had been made with local Jewish leaders.³¹

Groups of earlier arrivals from Russia had already settled in many parts of the nation's interiors in the decades prior to the Galveston Movement (Tables 2 and 3). According to ships' manifest listings, Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Colorado, in particular, were key destinations for Russian immigrants in the years between 1898 and 1904. The final destinations of new immigrants from Russia after 1907, therefore, matched the settlement patterns established by earlier Jewish immigrants. Thus, a combination of employment opportunities and prior Jewish settlement nodes helped determine the selected destinations of new Galveston arrivals.

The first ship to arrive in Texas carrying Galveston Movement passengers was the *S.S. Cassel*. Overflowing with passengers from Russia, the *Cassel* docked at the Galveston wharf on July 1, 1907. Russian passengers on this ship—and every Russian passenger on every ship that followed it

Table 2. Pre-Galveston Movement Russian Immigrant Destinations from the Port of Galveston, 1898-1904.

	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904
Texas	45	35	31	5	10	44	79
Kansas	26	75	89	23	25	109	46
Oklahoma	0	5	12	5	21	45	15
Indian Territories,							
Oklahoma	0	0	0	0	3	12	2
Colorado	14	82	38	1	0	108	72
California	27	2	57	1	4	41	23
Nebraska	52	15	22	0	1	23	0

Source: *Passenger Manifests* (San Francisco: U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1898-1904.)

over the next seven years—were met by Rabbi Cohen (see Figures 3 and 4), who shook hands with each person on board when they arrived. Later that afternoon, Cohen gathered the new immigrants into a group in the Jewish Immigrants Information Bureau office in Galveston where he introduced the mayor of Galveston who greeted them with these words: “You have come to a great country. With industry and economy all of you will meet with success. Obey the laws and try to make good citizens.”³²

Following this personal greeting, each passenger received a full inspection and tag and then was approved—or not approved—to enter the country. The majority of the passengers were men in their twenties and early thirties who intended to send for their families after they secured work and found a place to live. Immigrant Gershom Geifman who left his village in Russia in 1911 with the promise of returning for his bride

Table 3. Destinations and Total Numbers of Pre-Galveston Movement Immigrants, 1898-1904.

Texas					
Galveston	52	Brenham	10	Waco	15
Houston	31	Rosebud	1	Boerne	1
Dallas	10	Austin	1	Kyle	4
Richmond	1	Victoria	3	El Paso	4
San Antonio	4	East Bernard	10	Henrietta	6
Fort Worth	35	Bryan	1	Plantersville	28
Belleville	1	Floresville	1	Katy	6
Gainesville	3	Sealy	4	Grimes County	10
Hempstead	8	Lockhart	2		
Kansas					
Lehigh	8	Sparks	6	Hillsboro	22
Topeka	3	Otis	5	Wilson	6
North Topeka	2	Lucas	9	Herrington	1
Hays City	36	Russell	106	Bison	4
La Cross	3	Victoria	26	Marion	75
Elinwood	4				
Oklahoma					
Oheene	4	Bessie	2	Lohomia	4
Stout	3	Kingfisher	2	Cordell	6
Hitchcock	8	Rusk	7	Perry	5
Richmond	1	Lovel	1	Enid	5
Isabella	4				
Indian Territories, Oklahoma					
Hartshorne	13	Wilburton	15		
California					
Oakland	12	Berkeley	2	San Francisco	17
Fresno	116				
Colorado					
Longmont	7	Denver	124	Windsor	37
Globeville	80	Sugar City	9	Johnstown	3
New Windsor	1	Rocky Ford	8	Loveland	13
Trinidad	2				
Nebraska					
Grand Island	2	Lincoln	60	Omaha	29
McCook	9				



Figure 2. Galveston Movement migrants waiting for medical tests required for approved entry into the U.S., Port of Galveston, 1907.



Figure 3. Rabbi Henry Cohen greets Galveston Movement migrants upon arrival at the Port of Galveston, 1907.

was typical.³³ As expressed in the words of a Texas descendant of a Galveston Movement refugee born in a village in the Pale of Settlement near today's Ukrainian-Polish border:³⁴

In 1913, my father left Hrubieszow all alone to emigrate to the U.S....He corresponded with some family and sent money home, but he never had the opportunity to speak to any member of his immediate family again...In any event, because his entry into the U.S. was not sponsored by any relative or friend, the Jewish agency which was processing Jewish immigrants shipped him off to Fort Worth to look for a job.

Despite what must have been extreme fatigue after the long trip from Europe to Texas, almost all of the refugees were sent out of Galveston on a train the same day they arrived in Texas. Butchers were sent to stockyard cities such as Kansas City, Fort Worth, and Omaha; carpenters went to furniture centers such as Grand Rapids and Topeka; and tanners were sent to Milwaukee. Jewish committees in each community then took responsibility for providing clothing and lodging for the new arrivals. Evening classes were established in many of these relocation cities to help Russian and Yiddish-speaking Jews learn English.

Surprisingly, many of these Galveston Movement immigrants eventually owned their own businesses in these communities—unable to find other employment due to language barriers and lack of skills. Some began by selling bananas, an exotic and unknown fruit that fascinated newcomers from colder climates.³⁵

As shown in Figure 4, the following states (in descending order) were the primary destinations of new Russian immigrants between 1907 and 1914: Texas, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, Nebraska, Louisiana, Colorado, Illinois, Oklahoma, Kansas, Tennessee, Arkansas, Wisconsin, North Dakota, and Mississippi. Second only to Texas, Iowa was the destination of 1,225 immigrants.³⁶

In many ways, it is unfortunate that none of these newcomers stayed in Galveston. The well-organized Jewish community of this thriving city must have seemed appealing to many weary travelers after their long ocean voyage to the U.S. Just the same, when ships' passenger lists were compared with subsequent *Galveston City Directory* listings, not even one of the movement passengers is listed as a Galveston resident.³⁷

The most important reasons newly arriving Russian Jews did not opt to stay in Galveston were the decisions of Galveston Movement organizers. Their relocation policies grew out of a strong belief that it was essential for them to do all they could to settle new Jewish refugees far away from New York City. Their decisions were grounded in a set of cultural and geographic factors embedded within early twentieth century Jewish networks of ethnicity. As discussed earlier, the tremendous size of the post-1880 diaspora of Jews from Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe

rapidly began to outnumber the existing Jewish community in the U.S. most of whom were of German origin. By the time this second wave of newcomers arrived at Ellis Island, many of the pre-1880s Jewish immigrants from Germany were well established in their new lives and had earned solid reputations in educational, entrepreneurial, and political circles. New Russian and Eastern European Jewish émigrés not only outnumbered German Jews, their unassimilated appearance and lack of language skills also embarrassed some of the earlier arrivals. To make matters worse, these newcomers congregated in poor neighborhoods such as Manhattan's Lower East Side, a part of the city that quickly became the most densely populated concentration of Jewish residents in the world.³⁸

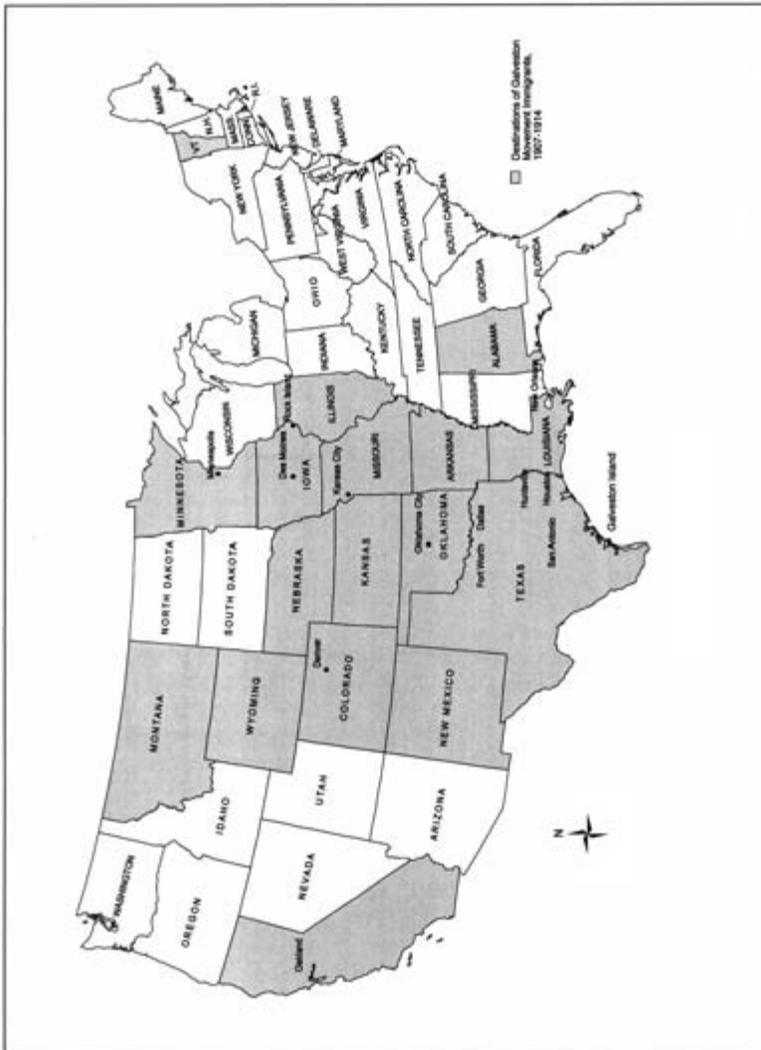


Figure 4. Destinations by state of Jewish passengers from Russia arriving in Galveston, 1907-14.

Describing the wide gulf that separated earlier Jewish migrants from Germany and other parts of Western Europe and later migrants from Eastern Europe/Russia, sociologist Thomas Sowell wrote:

The German Jews already established in America were appalled not only by the numbers but also by the way of life of the eastern European Jews. The eastern Jews were not only poorer—most arrived destitute, with less money than any immigrant group—but were also far less educated...and with rougher manners than the more sophisticated and Americanized German Jews. Eastern European Jews had lived a provincial life outside the mainstream of the general European culture in which the German Jews were immersed.³⁹

One might surmise from this “geography of difference,” then, that newcomers from Eastern Europe and Russia had become an uncomfortable presence among more assimilated Jews living in East Coast U.S. cities. Not only did these new immigrants look different, with their old-fashioned Russian clothing, ear locks, skull caps, and beards, they exhibited a general attitude reminiscent of the painful past that German Jews had long ago left behind.⁴⁰ Although *uptown* (German) Jews and *downtown* (Russian) Jews were unique to New York City, the differences dividing them were not. In Chicago, for example, many German Jews regarded Polish Jews as an “inferior caste.”⁴¹ These “feelings of difference” likely existed on Galveston Island where earlier groups of (German) Jewish settlers had worked hard to earn their respected status and class within the transparent social climate of this relatively small urban area. Thus, the reasons that the Galveston Movement organizers worked hard to remove newly arriving immigrants from their Gulf Coast port of entry as quickly as possible lie as much in social and cultural factors as in the more obvious economic ones.

It is important to note however, that despite divisions brought on by socioeconomic status and place of origin, and the resulting desire of many long-term residents to remain socially and physically apart from newly arriving immigrants, divisions and antipathies were overcome in a larger sense by the Jewish philanthropic tradition. As such, the Galveston Movement was but a part of a much larger effort to Americanize Eastern European and Russian newcomers with educational, medical, and cultural programs and projects proclaiming by the late 1880s: “In dispensing money and matzos to the poor, all are recognized as the children of one father, and no lines are drawn between natives of different countries.”⁴²

The Galveston Movement: An Ending or a Beginning?

Despite differences among and within various immigrant internal and external networks in the U.S., more than 10,000 refugees from the Jewish Pale of Settlement were rescued by Galveston Movement efforts by the

end of 1917. As evidence of the lingering power of “networks of ethnicity,” ships carrying movement passengers continued to arrive at the port of Galveston in all seven years of the Movement (Table 4) despite unexpected economic and political problems in the U.S. Indeed, from its first year to its last, the Galveston Movement faced a series of challenges. These included the unexpected and quite severe recession in the U.S. in 1908 and 1909 that eliminated many of the jobs for new immigrants; medical problems exacerbated by the long journey across the Atlantic Ocean; and ongoing threats by several hostile Texan port authorities who attempted to restrict the incoming flow of newcomers through the port of Galveston based on a list of unproven accusations that they were unfit. These factors came together to help bring the Movement to an end only seven years after its beginning. In addition, little could any of the organizers have known in the final year of the movement that World War I was at hand, and that this event would “seal the fate of an uncertain but vast number of thwarted potential beneficiaries of the Movement.”⁴³

Table 4. Number of Russian Jewish Passengers on Ships Arriving in Galveston, 1907-14.

	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914
Kohn	3	4	2	2	2	1	0	0
Hannover	4	4	2	4	4	6	1	0
Chemnitz	4	2	0	2	0	0	4	2
Cassel	1	0	2	2	1	2	4	1
Frankfurt	3	2	2	6	5	1	0	0
Breslau	0	0	2	0	1	3	5	1
Other	1	0	1	0	1	3	3	6
Total Ships	16	12	11	16	14	14	17	10

Finally, in an ever more vigilant move toward isolationist policies, the U.S. Congress was poised to pass a series of laws in the decade following the war that would severely limit the number of immigrants from Russia and elsewhere who would be allowed to enter the country. Unknown to organizers of this effort, then, the seven critical years of the Galveston Movement stand as the final moment, the “last hurrah,” of a till-then-uninterrupted era of uncontrolled immigration into the U.S.

Did the Galveston Movement fail? Despite not accomplishing its goal—to dramatically alter the distribution patterns of Jewish immigrants in North America—this international effort rescued at least 10,000 people and helped them begin new lives in a new land. And, regardless of pressures brought about by an economic depression between 1907 and 1909 and other problems that curtailed the flow of Russian migrants to Texas after 1914, descendants of those who were brought to America on

Galveston Movement ships remember and appreciate the stories told of their relatives' journeys to new and unknown places in the interior U.S. Overarching these individual stories and the impacts of these newcomers on the places they helped shape in subsequent years is a reminder that only once did the U.S. make any effort to divert immigration from either the East Coast or the West Coast to the interior states by way of a Gulf Coast port. Thus, in the end, the Galveston Movement stands as a testimony to the power of individual decisionmakers working within collaborative networks to bring about social change in the U.S. and beyond.

Notes

1. Scholarly publications on Russian Jewish settlement in North America abound in the literature. See, for example, Stephen Birmingham, *Our Crowd: The Great Jewish Families of New York* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); Henry L. Feingold, *Zion in America* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1974); James Edmund Jr., *The Immigrant Jew in America* (New York: B.F. Buck and Company, 1907); Samuel Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1910* (reprint ed. New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times*, 1969); Max L. Margolis and Alexander Marx, *A History of the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956).
2. Katharyne Mitchell, "Networks of Ethnicity," in Eric Sheppard and Trevor J. Barnes, eds., *Companion to Economic Geography* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2000): 392-407.
3. Nigel Thrift and Kris Olds, "Refiguring the Economics in Economic Geography," *Progress in Human Geography* 20 (1996): 311-27; Alejandro Portes and J. Sensenbrenner, "Embeddedness and Immigration: Notes on the Social Determinants of Economic Action," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1993): 1320-51; and Mitchell, "Networks of Ethnicity," 392.
4. Mitchell, "Networks of Ethnicity," 392.
5. Alejandro Portes and Leif Jensen, "The Enclave and the Entrants: Patterns of Ethnic Enterprise in Miami Before and After Mariel," *American Sociological Review* 54 (1989): 929-949.
6. Mitchell, "Networks of Ethnicity," 392-3.
7. For a classic example of humanistic approaches to cultural geography see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977). More recent work by geographers and other social scientists interested in infusing "humanistic" approaches to studies of migration include K. England and B. Stiel, "They Think You're as Stupid as Your English Is: Constructing Foreign Workers in Toronto," *Environment and Planning A* 29 (1997): 195-216; M.P. Erdsman, "Portraits of Emigration: Sour Milk and Honey in the Promised Land," *Sociological Inquiry* 69 (1999): 337-63; A. Findlay and E. Graham, "The Challenge Facing Population Geography," *Progress in Human Geography* 15 (1991): 149-62; K. Haffacre and P. Boyle, "The Challenge Facing Migration Research: The Case for a Biographical Approach," *Progress in Human Geography* 17 (1993): 333-48; Susan W. Hardwick, *Russian Refuge: Religion, Migration, and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); N. Kibria, *Family Tighrope: The Changing Lives of Vietnamese Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Victoria A. Lawson, "Questions of Migration and Belonging: Understandings of Migration under Neoliberalism in Ecuador," *International Journal of Population Geography* 5 (1999): 1-16; Victoria A. Lawson, "Arguments Within the Geographies of Movement: The Theoretical Potential of Migrants' Stories," *Progress in Human Geography* 24 (2000): 173-89; Doreen J. Mattingly, "Job Search, Social Networks, and Local Labor Market Dynamics: The Case of Paid Household Work in San Diego, California," *Urban Geography* 20 (1999): 46-74; Rachael Silvey and Victoria Lawson, "Placing the Migrant," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 89 (1999): 121-32; and P. White and P. Jackson, "(Re)Theorising Population Geography," *International Journal of Population Geography* 1 (1995): 111-23.
8. Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (New York: Viking, 1991).
9. Although ethnic geography has been practiced by cultural geographers since the early twentieth century, this subfield of the discipline emerged in the past decade and a half as an increasingly important focus of study. Work completed by ethnic geographers up to 2000 is summarized by Lawrence E. Estaville, Susan W. Hardwick, James P. Allen, and Ines M. Miyares, "American Ethnic Geography: Development, Contributions, and Challenges," in G. Gaile and C. Willmott,

- eds., *Geography in America at the Dawn of the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). As summarized in this publication, human geographers interested in issues in ethnic geography most commonly focus on the themes of migration, settlement, landscape change, and adjustment to life in a new environment.
10. Steven Bayme, *Understanding Jewish History: Texts and Commentaries* (New York: KTAV Publishing House and the American Jewish Committee, 1997): 350.
 11. Cyrus Adler and Aaron M. Margoloth, *With Firmness in the Right: American Diplomatic Action Affecting Jews, 1840-1945* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1946): 276.
 12. *Ibid.*, 276.
 13. The background for my thinking for this critique grew out of work published by Kathie Friedman-Kasaba in her book on gender, ethnicity, and work in New York, *Memories of Migration* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996); I. Wallerstein, "The Construction of Peoplehood: Racism, Nationalism, Ethnicity," *Sociological Forum* 2 (1987): 373-88; and I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System III; The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World Economy, 1730-1840s* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1989); Wallerstein's earlier book *The Modern World-System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); and a host of other books and articles using world-systems approaches by geographers are summarized in Debra Staussfogel's helpful "A Systems Perspective on World-Systems Theory," *The Journal of Geography* 96 (1997): 119-26. Although several other scholars, including Silvey's and Lawson's "Placing the Migrant," have recently critiqued the use of world-systems theory as a framework for analyzing migration (because it pays too little attention to the ways personal narratives may influence political and economic systems), I found some of Friedman-Kasaba's ideas useful in this particular study of historic migration patterns and flows because they helped clarify the political and economic interconnections influencing migration patterns between western Russia and the U.S. in broad terms in the early twentieth century.
 14. See Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration*; I.M. Aronson, "The Prospects for the Emancipation of Russian Jewry during the 1880s," *Slavonic and East European Review* 55 (1977): 348-63; Steven M. Lowenstein, "Governmental Jewish Policies in Early Nineteenth Century Germany and Russia: A Comparison," *Jewish Social Studies* 66 (1984): 303-20; and Raymond Pearson, *National Minorities in Eastern Europe, 1848-1945* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983).
 15. These figures are taken from the *Census of Population* of Russia (St. Petersburg, Russia: n.p., 1897). As with all figures taken from national census data, the total of five million Jewish residents of Russia should be considered only as an estimate of the actual number.
 16. Isaac M. Rubinow, *Economic Conditions of the Jews in Russia* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Commerce and Labor, Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor 15, 1907): 490-1.
 17. Information discussed in this paper relating to Rabbi Henry Cohen was gathered from the *Cohen Papers* (boxes # 3M226-234 and 3M323), Austin: Barker Center of American and Texas History, University of Texas, as well as from a publication by his children, Anne Cohen Nathan and Harry I. Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed in Texas* (New York and London: Whittlesey House, a division of McGraw-Hill, 1941).
 18. Most American Jewish philanthropists had been immigrants themselves, and along with thousands of other immigrants, entered the U.S. through Ellis Island. The vast majority lived in crowded neighborhoods in New York's Lower East Side, especially along Hester Street, finding work in the garment industry or in small shops. Most lived in congested apartments and were afraid to cross the well-defined religious, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries marking their neighborhoods.
 19. *Census of Population, Texas* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 through 1890).
 20. Sources on immigrant settlement in Texas, especially German settlement, include Terry G. Jordan's seminal work *German Seed in Texas Soil: Immigrant Farmers in Nineteenth Century Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966); "The German Settlement of Texas after 1865," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 73 (1969): 193-212; and "Immigration to Texas" in Cary D. Wintz, ed., *Readings in Texas History* (Boston: American Press, 1983); Susan W. Hardwick's *Mythic Galveston: Re-inventing the Third Coast* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Walter Struve's *Germans and Texans: Commerce, Migration, and Culture in the Days of the Lone Star Republic* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); and Donald Meinig's *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969).
 21. Carol Christian, "Living History: Synagogue Served Island for 130 Years," *Galveston Daily News*, 26 March 1998: A-1.
 22. See Nathan and Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed in Texas*.
 23. Rabbi Cohen was an active community organizer and supporter for the entire community in Galveston for many years before, during, and after his work with the Galveston Movement. For

- example, he provided aid to the island's destitute residents, both Jewish and non-Jewish, after the devastation of the "great storm" in 1900. Later, Rabbi Cohen sent aid to U.S. citizens who were trapped in Mexico during the Mexican Revolution in 1914.
24. Cyrus Adler, *Jacob H. Schiff: His Life and Letters* (New York: Doubleday, 1928): 97.
 25. See Bernard Marinbach, *Galveston: Ellis Island of the West* (New York: State University of New York, 1983): 12-13.
 26. Natalie Ornish, *Pioneering Jewish Texans* (Dallas: Texas Heritage Press, 1989): 123.
 27. See especially Walter Struve's *Germans and Texans: Commerce, Migration, and Culture in the Days of the Lone Star Republic* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996) and Jordan's *German Seed in Texas Soil*.
 28. Marinbach, *Galveston: Ellis Island of the West*.
 29. *Ibid.*, 17.
 30. Marinbach, *Galveston: Ellis Island of the West*, 15.
 31. Bernard Marinbach, *Ellis Island of Texas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983): 17.
 32. Adler, *Jacob H. Schiff*, 103. Leo J. Hoffman, "From Poland and Russia to Comanche, Texas," *Newsletter of the Texas Jewish Historical Society* n.v. (Winter 2000): 12.
 33. One of the key informants for this study of the Galveston Movement was Geifman's son Richard Geifman of Rock Island, Illinois. I interviewed the younger Mr. Geifman on the telephone and online in 1999. The elder Mr. Geifman, who emigrated to the U.S. by way of Galveston in 1911, was born in the village of Gorneshtople located in the Jewish Pale of Settlement in western Russia. As such, he was typical of the other single young men who left their homeland to travel to the port of Galveston. His route was also typical. Geifman left his place of birth and traveled first to Kiev. He met with Galveston Movement assistants who gave him his ticket for the train ride to Bremen, Germany, where he boarded a steamship for Texas. Penniless upon arrival in the U.S., Geifman learned English and worked his way up from selling brooms to collecting scrap metal from farmers to buying failed grocery stores to eventually owning a chain of eleven large groceries in the Rock Island area. By the time he died at age 78, Geifman had become a well-known and respected name in the area and had amassed a small fortune through decades of hard work and careful investing.
 34. Data collected from the *Scroll's Project Records, 1984-1992* (Galveston: Texas Jewish Historical Society, 1997).
 35. Memories of relatives working as banana peddlers, and later becoming dry-goods storeowners, in fact, were the most common stories shared in interviews with descendants of Galveston Movement immigrants. Ornish, *Pioneering Jewish Texans*, 123.
 36. These statistics were gathered by hours of tedious work conducted by graduate research assistant Susan E. Hume from a hand count of immigrant arrival records housed in the San Francisco office of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. I was able to purchase microfilm copies of all immigrant arrivals at the port of Galveston between the years of 1907 and 1914. The information is in the form of ships' manifests and contains specific data on passenger names, ages, genders, biographical and physical descriptions, accompanying passengers, dates of arrivals, marital status, money in possession, nationality, and race. All Jewish passengers were listed as "Hebrew Race" in these records. Therefore, all Jewish arrivals to the port of Galveston who came from Russia could be counted and compared for various years. There was no way to determine which of the passengers were part of the Galveston Movement, however, but nonetheless, the data gathered from INS records proved invaluable for establishing general Russian Jewish arrival information and destination patterns.
 37. *Galveston City Directory*, 1914.
 38. Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981): 80.
 39. *Ibid.*, 80.
 40. *Ibid.*, 80.
 41. *Ibid.*, 82.
 42. Leo Shpall, "Spreading the Jewish Migrant in America," *The Jewish Forum* 28 (1945):119-20, 139-40, 144, 156-8.
 43. Zangwill letter to Schiff, December 5, 1913 (in *Immigrants and Immigration File*, AFA/HUC, reprinted in Harold M. Hyman, *Oleander Odyssey: The Kempners of Galveston, Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990): 246.