

## REBECCA ERBELDING, PHD

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**Contact:** I am based near Washington, DC. Please contact me via [the webform](#) on my website for any personal correspondence or questions related to the War Refugee Board. For questions or information related to my work at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, please email [rerbelding@ushmm.org](mailto:rerbelding@ushmm.org).

**Summary:** I am the author of [\*Rescue Board: The Untold Story of America's Efforts to Save the Jews of Europe\*](#) (Doubleday, 2018), which won the National Jewish Book Award for excellence in writing based on archival research. My work was featured in the 2022 PBS documentary "[The U.S. and the Holocaust](#)," directed by Ken Burns, Lynn Novick, and Sarah Botstein, a film for which I served as a historical advisor and on-camera expert. I have been a historian, curator, and archivist at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum since 2003, writing and presenting frequently on behalf of the Museum. I served as the lead historian on the Museum's special exhibition, [Americans and the Holocaust](#). My work on the Hoecker album, a photograph album created by the final adjutant to the commandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau, has also been adapted into a theatrical production, [Here There are Blueberries](#), written by Moisés Kaufman and Amanda Gronich, and developed by the Tectonic Theater Project. I am currently at work on a second book project.

### **Education:**

**PhD, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA: History (with honors), 2015**

**Dissertation:** About Time: The History of the War Refugee Board

**MA, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA: History, 2006**

**BA, Mary Washington College, Fredericksburg, VA: History and American Studies, 2002**

### **Work Experience:**

**Historian, Education Initiatives, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 10/2018-present**

I am the historian supporting the Education Initiatives department at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, which is responsible for creating resources and professional development for secondary school teachers throughout the United States, often in cooperation with local and national Holocaust education centers and organizations. In this role, I review all educational material for this audience, create lesson plans and resources, present at local and national professional development conferences, and ensure the Museum's resources reflect current scholarship and meet the needs of educators. I am also the Museum's historian on American responses to the Holocaust. In this capacity, I frequently review social media posts, write articles for the Holocaust Encyclopedia, present on this topic to audiences at Museum fundraisers, and answer historical reference questions on behalf of the Museum. I also support the traveling *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibition, which traveled to fifty public and university libraries from 2021-2023, with another fifty libraries to host from 2024-2026 in partnership with the American Library Association.

**Advisor, Florentine Films, 1/2020-9/2022**

I was a historical advisor to Florentine Films as they were researching, writing, and creating the Emmy-winning three-part documentary film *The U.S. and the Holocaust*, which debuted on PBS in September 2022. In this capacity, I reviewed scripts, answered historical questions, advised on the creation of maps, and wrote materials to prepare the directors (Ken Burns, Lynn Novick, and Sarah Botstein) for interviews and film promotion. I also worked with PBS on selecting the key art, reviewed promotional materials and viewer discussion guides, and served as the historical advisor on the creation of the educational resources for PBS Learning Media. I served as a historian panelist for multiple promotional events sponsored by Bank of America, the film's corporate sponsor.

**Historian, *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibition, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 5/2015-9/2018**

I served as the lead historian on the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's *Americans and the Holocaust* special exhibition (on display in Washington, DC, April 2018-present). In that role, I curated the web version of the exhibition; prepared research briefs; proposed curatorial approaches (such as the "refugee ships at sea" animation, which I conceived, researched, and drafted); vetted Museum texts, presentations, and social media; gave presentations on related topics; wrote articles for USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia; and collaborated on teacher and docent training materials in advance of the exhibition's opening.

**Archivist/Curator, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: 8/2003—5/2015**

I was responsible for incoming archival collections, working with donors, the legal donation paperwork, and the initial cataloging and organization of an average of 300 new collections each year. I also sought to bring the Museum's collections to the public by curating online exhibitions, social media content, and membership premiums (including the USHMM 2010, 2011, 2012 calendars) and speaking extensively about the Museum's collections at Museum public programs and fundraisers.

***Publications***

Note: This list does not include any of the extensive material I've written on behalf of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum unless it included my byline. All views represented are my own.

***Monographs:***

*Rescue Board: The Untold Story of America's Efforts to Save the Jews of Europe*. New York: Doubleday, 2018. (Winner of the National Jewish Book Award 2018, paperback edition by Anchor, 2019)

***Chapters:***

"Fort Ontario and the United States' First Debates over Refugee Admission," in *International Approaches to the Holocaust*. Mark Celinscak and Mehnaz Afridi, eds. University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming.

“Making Sure They are Alive to be Rescued: The War Refugee Board’s Food Package Program” in *More than Parcels: Wartime Aid for Jews in Nazi-Era Camps and Ghettos*. Jan Láníček and Jan Lambertz, eds. Wayne State University Press, 2022.

“[American Immigration Policies from World War I through World War II](#),” in *Identity, Art, and Migration*, an online exhibition by the Fritz Ascher Society, 2021.

“The War Refugee Board: Formulating Rescue from Washington,” in *Unlikely Heroes: The Place of Holocaust Rescuers in Research and Teaching*. Ari Kohen and Gerald Steinacher, eds. University of Nebraska Press, 2019.

“Auschwitz durch die Kameralinse der SS—Die Entschlüsselung eines vielschichtigen Fotoalbums,” in *Das Höcker Album: Auschwitz durch die Linse der SS*. Christophe Busch, Stefan Hördler, and Robert Jan van Pelt, eds. Philipp von Zabern, 2016.

“The United States War Refugee Board, the Neutral Nations, and the Holocaust in Hungary,” *Bystanders, Rescuers, or Perpetrators? The Neutral Countries and the Shoah*, International Holocaust Remembrance Authority, 2016.

#### ***Book Reviews:***

“Rescue, Relief and Resistance: The Jewish Labor Committee’s Anti-Nazi Operations, 1934-1945” by Catherine Collomp, for *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (36:2, Fall 2022), 267-269,

“Hitler’s Jewish Refugees: Hope and Anxiety in Portugal” by Marion Kaplan and “Philippine Sanctuary: A Holocaust Odyssey” by Bonnie Harris, for *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (35:2, Fall 2021), 276-280.

“Well Worth Saving: American Universities’ Life-and-Death Decisions on Refugees from Nazi Europe” by Laurel Leff, for *Central European History* (53:4, December 2020), 881-883.

“The Evian Conference of 1938 and the Jewish Refugee Crisis” by Paul Bartrop, for *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (33:1, Spring 2019), 136-138.

#### ***Miscellaneous:***

“[What are the Responsibilities of Nations to Intervene in Humanitarian Crises?](#)” Big Picture Essays series in connection with *The U.S. and the Holocaust*, PBS, September 2022.

“[Pittsburgh’s Silent Call](#).” *Monitor: Global Intelligence on Racism*, November 2018.

“[German Bombs and US Bureaucrats: How Escape Lines from Europe Were Cut Off](#).” Published research brief co-authored with Dr. Gertjan Broek of the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, July 2018.

“[The Trump administration’s refugee and border policies cruelly ignore the lessons of the past](#).” *The Washington Post*, “Made By History” blog, May 27, 2018.

[“Encouraging Nuance in Holocaust History.”](#) AHA Today blog, February 26, 2018.

[“After the Holocaust, the U.S. promised to protect refugees. We’re failing.”](#) *Washington Post*, January 31, 2018.

[“The dark political history of American Anti-Semitism.”](#) *The Hill*, August 21, 2017.

### ***Selected Media:***

Teaching about the Holocaust using “Finding Your Roots,” PBS Learning Media, forthcoming.

[\*The U.S. and the Holocaust\*](#), a film by Ken Burns, Lynn Novick & Sarah Botstein, PBS, September 2022.

[“How Photos of Nazis Partying at Auschwitz Gave Rise to a New Play,”](#) *The Washington Post*, August 2022.

[“1944: Should We Bomb Auschwitz?”](#) BBC Two, September 2019.

[\*The Home Front: Life in America During World War II\*](#), Audible Original, released September 7, 2017.

[Live Here: Witness](#), KACV-TV, Amarillo, TX, April 13, 2017.

“Engineering Evil: Inside the Holocaust,” History Channel, 2011.

[“Scrapbooks from Hell: The Auschwitz Albums,”](#) National Geographic Channel, 2008.

[“Picturing Auschwitz,”](#) *The New Yorker*, March 17, 2008.

[“In the Shadow of Horror, SS Guardians Frolic,”](#) *New York Times*, September 19, 2007.

### ***Presentations:***

I frequently present to public and academic audiences on all aspects of American responses to the Holocaust; immigration and the refugee crisis; American college students and the Holocaust; refugee aid networks; Holocaust-era diaries; and the Hoecker album. The selected presentations listed below represent my own scholarship, not talks given under the auspices of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

### ***“Rescue Board” and the War Refugee Board***

I have given hundreds of talks in 28 states and Washington, DC, on *Rescue Board* and the work of the War Refugee Board. Through the Jewish Book Council network, I was invited to 30 communities between 2018-2020. This list represents a sample of my War Refugee Board talks.

Chautauqua Institute (Chautauqua, NY), July 2023  
Holocaust Museum Houston (Houston, TX), June 2023  
New Hampshire Humanities (Concord, NH), virtual, 2023  
National Capitol Historical Society (Washington, DC), virtual, 2023 ([video link](#))  
Echoes and Reflections (nationwide), virtual, 2022  
Holocaust Resource Center (Buffalo, NY), virtual, 2021  
Tolerance Minnesota (Minneapolis, MN), virtual, 2021  
Holocaust Center for Humanity (Seattle, WA), virtual, 2020  
Jewish Federation of Omaha (Omaha, NE), 2020  
Jewish Federation of NE NY (Albany, NY), 2020  
JCC of Dallas (Dallas, TX), 2020  
Kean College, Pantirer Scholars Lecture (Union, NJ), 2019  
Mizel Arts and Culture Center (Denver, CO), 2019  
University of Connecticut (Storrs, CT), 2019  
Midwest Center for Holocaust Education (Overland Park, KS), 2019  
Washington Hebrew Congregation (Washington, DC), 2019  
Greensboro Bound Book Festival (Greensboro, NC), 2019  
University of Northern Iowa (Cedar Falls, IA), 2019  
Joint Distribution Committee Archives (New York), First Annual Helen Cohen Memorial Lecture, 2018 ([video link](#))  
JCC of Metropolitan Detroit (Detroit, MI), 2018  
St. Louis Jewish Book Festival (St. Louis, MO), 2019  
Marcus JCC Book Festival (Atlanta, GA), 2019  
FDR Presidential Library (Hyde Park, NY), 2018  
Rutgers University (New Brunswick, NJ), 2018  
Claremont McKenna College (Claremont, CA), 2018 ([video link](#))  
Heinz History Center/Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, PA), 2018  
US Treasury Department (Washington, DC), 2018  
US State Department (Washington, DC), 2018  
Politics and Prose (Washington, DC), 2018 ([video link](#))  
Wilson Center History and Public Policy program (Washington, DC), 2018

### ***Selected Presentations:***

“Fort Ontario and the Birth of American Refugee Policy,” Chautauqua Institute, 2023.

Shakespeare Hour Live, *Here There are Blueberries*, panelist, Shakespeare Theater Company, Washington, DC, 2023. ([video link](#))

“Treasury’s Response to the Holocaust,” panelist, US Department of Treasury, 2023.

“The Fort Ontario Refugees: Should They Stay or Should They Go?” keynote, Fort Ontario conference, Oswego, NY, 2023.

“*The U.S. and the Holocaust*,” panelist alongside filmmakers, Kino International, Berlin, Germany, 2022. (Sponsored by US Embassy Berlin)

Governor’s 42<sup>nd</sup> annual Holocaust Commemoration, with Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, Cincinnati, OH, 2022. ([video link](#))

“Defiance in Connecticut: When Southbury Said No,” panelist, Museum of Jewish Heritage, NY, 2022. ([video link](#))

“America’s Refugee Camp: Voices of Fort Ontario,” panelist, Museum of Jewish Heritage, NY, 2021. ([video link](#))

“Artists Migrating to the United States, In and Beyond the Nazi Period,” panelist, The Fritz Ascher Society for Persecuted, Ostracized, and Banned Art, NY, 2021. ([video link](#))

“Our Man in Budapest: Raoul Wallenberg, the United States, and the Myth of a Plan,” 31<sup>st</sup> annual Belin Lecture, University of Michigan, 2021. ([video link](#))

“The Fort Ontario Refugees,” keynote, 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion and commemoration of the arrival of the Fort Ontario refugees, Oswego, NY, 2019.

“American Responses to the Rise of Nazism and the Refugee Crisis in the 1930s and 1940s,” US Commission on Civil Rights, 2019.

“The Last Boat’: The Impact of the Encroaching War on Refugee Immigration to the United States, 1938-1941,” Association of Jewish Studies annual conference, Boston, MA, 2018.

“The Last Boat’: The Impact of the Encroaching War on Refugee Immigration to the United States, 1938-1941,” Exploring Refugee Data conference, Prague, Czech Republic, 2018.

“Myths of American Indifference: The *St. Louis*, Anne Frank, and the War Refugee Board,” American Historical Association annual conference, Washington, DC, 2018.

"The United States War Refugee Board, the Neutral Nations, and the Holocaust in Hungary," "Bystanders, Rescuers or Perpetrators? The Neutral Countries and the Shoah" conference, sponsored by the International Holocaust Remembrance Authority, Madrid, Spain, 2014.

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