

*This lesson explores the obstacles people face in migrating to the U.S. and compares the process of Jewish immigration in 1938 to the one experienced by Dominican immigrants today.*

furnish the papers afterwards. But it would be better to have at least two affidavits for my brother, not therefore, because his conditions would require that absolutely, but to have a better chance for him, to facilitate the getting of the visa for him. My brother Ernest (his passport name is Elias) is perfectly healthy. I dontremember that he has ever been sick. He also can write and read, and even he has some English vocabulary. The only thing is that he didn't grow anymore since his 15th year. He is absolutely harmless and does not cause any troubles. He is not accustomed to have great claims and it would not make any large difference, regarding his livelihood. So I can promise you, too, that you will have no troubles, at all, neither with

**QUESTIONS EXAMINED**

**WHAT WERE THE OBSTACLES TO U.S. IMMIGRATION FACED BY PERSECUTED JEWISH PEOPLE IN 1938?**

**WHAT STOPS DOMINICAN IMMIGRANTS FROM SIMPLY MOVING HERE TODAY?**

Subject  
Social Studies

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Author  
Dilenny  
CISNERO

**THEMES:** Immigration, Affidavits, Silences, Exclusion, Perseverance

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*Cover image: Letter  
from Otto Neubauer to  
Herbert Reich from  
December 6 1938. Otto  
Neubauer Collection, AR  
25339*

## CONTEXT FOR THIS LESSON

### EXTERNAL LINKS

[About the Leo  
Baeck Institute and  
the 1938Projekt](#)

[Key Dates:  
Jews Under  
the Nazi Regime  
1933–1939](#)

The first part of this lesson asks students to examine letters written in the year of 1938. 1938 was a year of rapid changes for European Jews, whose best hope for survival was to immigrate. This lesson focuses on the Jewish immigration to the U.S, specifically examining the affidavit process where people needed someone living in the U.S to be legally responsible for them once they arrived. Affidavits created an obstacle for people without money, education, job skills and/or connections. Ultimately these affidavits tell a story of privilege. Those lucky enough to receive an affidavit held particular advantages not held by all in the Jewish community.

The second part of this lesson focuses on an interview with a Dominican immigrant speaking about her experience both seeking and providing affidavits for people in her community. The Dominican Republic in the early 2000s through today has had very few opportunities for poor people from rural communities. Dominican communities continue to immigrate in large numbers to the U.S because of the Dominican government's shortage of funding for education and lack of social mobility. This interview reveals similar experiences of community, immigration and perseverance as those of Jewish people in 1938. The interview sheds light on the challenges marginalized communities still face in their home countries and how the U.S immigration process continues to create obstacles to their immigration.

More than a broad comparison of immigration experiences, this lesson focuses specifically on the affidavit process and how it continues to exclude vulnerable people from migration opportunities. These lessons explore how in 1938 and today, the affidavits continue to exclude powerless communities.

#### **Leo Baeck Institute**

The Leo Baeck Institute – New York | Berlin is a research library and archive focused on the history of German-speaking Jews. Its extensive library, archival, and art collections comprise one of the most significant repositories of primary source material and scholarship on the centuries of Jewish life in Central Europe before the Holocaust. The Leo Baeck Institute was founded in 1955 by leading German-Jewish émigré intellectuals including Martin Buber, Max Grunewald, Hannah Arendt and Robert Weltsch, who were determined to preserve the vibrant cultural heritage of German-speaking Jewry that was nearly destroyed in the Holocaust. They named the Institute for Rabbi Leo Baeck, the last leader of Germany's Jewish Community under the Nazi regime, and appointed him as the Institute's first President, overseeing independent centers in New York, London, and Jerusalem. LBI – New York is a founding partner of the Center for Jewish History in Manhattan and maintains an office in Berlin and a branch of its archives at the Jewish Museum Berlin.

## TIPS FOR USING THESE RESOURCES

### LETTERS

The letters included in this lesson, written by Jews trying to secure a visa to the U.S, represent a small portion of the many letters written in 1938 to family, friends and even strangers in hopes of gaining an affidavit. To put these letters in context, teachers should familiarize themselves with the events in 1938 using the resources in the 1938Projekt website.

### AUDIO INTERVIEW

The second part of this lesson includes an interview with a Dominican immigrant. The 1938Projekt and the connections between immigrant experiences inspired this interview.

Questions to guide discussion of the interview:

- Who is the person speaking?
- What is the immigration process that the person is describing?
- What is happening today with Latino immigrants? And how can we connect it to the immigration of Jews in 1938?

### POTENTIAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

1. Resources explaining the process to obtain a visa, including the affidavit process.  
<https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/what-did-refugees-need-to-obtain-a-us-visa-in-the-1930s>  
<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/text/requirements-german-jews-applying-us-visas-1930-1940>
2. 1938 Timeline of events by the 1938Projekt. Under external links on page 3.
3. Context for Dominican Immigration:  
<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264276826-6-en.pdf?expires=1583852017&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=82A3C235B5B517AF610EFEEE0DB27AB1>

### TIMEFRAME & POTENTIAL LESSON EXTENSIONS

This lesson is designed to be taught in two class periods but it is easily adaptable depending on available time and student population. Teachers can add an extra lesson for more context to provide a richer experience for students. Teachers can also extend the final portion of the lesson with a longer writing assignment comparing both primary sources. Similarly, this lesson can be adapted into one teaching period, by only focusing the three primary sources from the 1938Projekt and the obstacles to U.S immigration.

## KEY TERMS / VOCABULARY

**Affidavit** The “Affidavit of Support” is a signed document to accept financial responsibility for a person who is seeking a green card or visa.

**Exclusion** The act of shutting or keeping out

**Contribution** To give along with others

**Desirable** Wanted or wished for as being an attractive, useful, or necessary course of action.

**Marginalize** To put or keep (someone) in a powerless or unimportant position within a society or group.

## FOCUS QUESTIONS

Who is excluded from the U.S immigration process?

Who are considered desirable immigrants?

How has the immigration process changed and/or remained the same?

What are the silences in this historical narrative?

How does historical context shape the U.S immigration process?

## BIG UNDERSTANDINGS

1. 1938 was a pivotal year in the acceleration of Nazi persecution of German and Austrian Jews leading to the desperation of the Jewish community seeking affidavits.
2. The U.S. immigration process excluded and continues to exclude people from marginalized communities.
3. Affidavits reveal the effects of privilege even within a persecuted community.
4. Affidavits from 1938 show how the U.S. ignores persecuted communities and further excludes those without privilege.

## TEACHING POINT

1938 was a year of rapid and desperate acts by Jews seeking escape from Europe. Letters requesting affidavits reveal the obstacles that the U.S. immigration process placed on those without certain privileges like education, connections to influential people, and money.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Students will examine letters from Jewish people seeking affidavits to examine the obstacles they faced applying for immigration.
2. Students will make connections and compare past and present immigration procedures.
3. Students will examine the immigration process through three common obstacles and reflect on how it has remained the same.
4. Students will use primary sources to understand how the immigration process silences marginalized communities.
5. Students will explore how the historical narrative silences people excluded by U.S. immigration policies and procedures.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

**Chromebooks, iPads, laptops or other electronic devices, one per pair of students**

**Worksheets 1 and 2**

**About the Leo Baeck Institute and the 1938Projekt (see Context section for link)**

**Timeline of Key Dates: Jews under the Nazi Regime 1933-1939 (see Context section for link)**

**[Link to 1938Projekt site](#)**

**[1938Projekt video](#)**

**1938 Projekt Sources (for Procedure Part 1):**

- [December 6<sup>th</sup> Merciless Bureaucracy](#)
- [August 6<sup>th</sup> Take a Number](#)
- [September 30<sup>th</sup> A Distant Relative](#)

**[Audio Interview MP3 File](#) (For Procedure Part 2)**

## PROCEDURE Part 1 (45 Minutes)

### Analysis of Primary Sources: Group Jigsaw

#### DO NOW

Why do people migrate to the U.S? *Students will have 3 minutes of independent Brainstorming. Whole class Share out for 2 minutes, write responses on the board.*

#### MINI LESSON

Transition: Today we will be discussing the year of 1938 and its impact on the Jewish community in Germany and Austria.

Provide students with background information targeting the following three big ideas: (1)Jewish persecution by the Nazis (2)Immigration (3)Affidavit process (see context, above) **3 Min**

#### GUIDED PRACTICE

Play 1938Projekt [video](#). Students can take notes with a protocol they already know. Ex. Boxes and Bullets **10 Min**

Stop twice for note taking and clarification. **2 Min**

Handout Worksheet 1 to all students.

Explain that we will be examining three obstacles to the U.S immigration process for German Jews in 1938. Project these on the Smart Board or other learning device to share with students.

*Have a student read them aloud: 2 Minutes*

Obstacles:

1. Personal contributions: Career, Education, Money, Business, Skills (What can you bring to the table?)
2. U.S. policies/ laws that can legally limit immigration (What does the U.S. government deem as desirable and how does it act on those preferences?)
3. Connections: Family, Friends, Business Partners (Who do you know?)

We will be using primary sources to investigate: How does this process exclude/ prioritize certain qualities in immigrants? In addition, try to figure out who is missing from this narrative.

Choose any of the three obstacles to model the first part of the worksheet using the 1938Projekt entry of *September 30<sup>th</sup>: [A Distant Relative](#)*. For older or higher level students, teachers can choose a different primary source from the [1938Projekt](#) to model and students can complete the entire worksheet independently.



## PROCEDURE Part 1 Continued

### GUIDED PRACTICE (Cont.)

Project the document of *September 30<sup>th</sup>: A Distant Relative* and read aloud the background information from 1938Projekt Website and Highlighted portion.

Ask: Which one of the obstacles can we identify in this letter? (skill: Connection)

Model using Doc cam or smart board:

Who/When? What was happening that led this person to write this letter? (Skill: Sourcing/Contextualization)

What/Why/How? What is this person asking for? How is the obstacle to immigration illustrated in this letter? **8 Min**

### GROUP WORK

For the next activity, students will need to be seated in groups of 4 and have an elbow partner to work with. Explain that each group will be finishing the two remaining documents: Aug. 6 and Dec. 6. **15 Min**

Explain that each set of partners will work with one document.

Steps: (Would be helpful to project these directions)

1. Read the document twice: Focus on background information and the highlighted portion.
2. With your partner, discuss which of the two remaining obstacles you think this letter is illustrating.
3. Sourcing Who/When? Who is writing this letter? When, Where?
4. Contextualization: What was happening at the time that led this person to write this letter?
5. What/Why/How? What is this person asking for? How is the obstacle to immigration illustrated in this letter?

### WHOLE CLASS SHARE-OUT / REFLECTION

Each set of partners will have 2 minutes to share out with their groups. While one partnership shares, the other takes notes on the worksheet.

Whole class shares out about the last two documents and the obstacles to securing an affidavit evident in each one. Encourage students to jot down any points they might have missed.

## PROCEDURE Part 2: 45 minutes

### DO NOW

Think about the following questions. Make a list of answers in your notebooks. You can use information from the documents we looked at yesterday and your own prior knowledge. **5 Min**

Who is a desirable immigrant? What qualities are desired in immigrants?

What are some obstacles to immigration?

Who does the U.S. immigration process exclude?

### MINI LESSON

Draw a T-Chart on chart paper or the board to jot down student responses to the guiding questions for discussion. Remind students to think about the three documents of the 1938Projekt in their responses. **5 Minutes**  
Excluded, Silenced, Desirables

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

Who is a desirable immigrant? What qualities are desired in immigrants?

What are obstacles?

Who does the U.S. immigration process exclude?

### GUIDED PRACTICE

Explain that in this part of the lesson we will use the three obstacles we studied in the documents from the 1938Projekt to examine the modern day immigration experience. Explain that the source used is an interview of a Dominican immigrant speaking about her experiences with affidavits. **10 Min**

Play audio twice. Students can take notes on the modern-day affidavit process.

### GROUP WORK

Students work in groups of three to identify the three obstacles to U.S. immigration in the interview. Each group member is assigned one of the obstacles to U.S. immigration.

Students share out in their groups as group members take notes on obstacles not assigned to them. They can use these questions to guide their discussion: **10 Min**

- Who is a desirable immigrant? What qualities are desired in immigrants?
- What are obstacles?
- Who does the U.S. immigration process exclude?

### SHARE-OUT

Whole class share-out about the three obstacles in the interview.

Go back to T-Chart Excluded, Silenced | Desirables

Have students continue filling the chart with ideas relating to the interview and the modern-day U.S. immigration process. **5 Min**

## PROCEDURE Part 2: 45 minutes

### REFLECTION

Project these questions on the board for independent writing or for a whole class discussion:

- Who is a desirable immigrant? What qualities are desired in immigrants?
- What are some obstacles to immigration?
- Who does the U.S. immigration process exclude?
- Who are desirable immigrants?
- How was the immigration process for Jewish people in 1938 similar to the experience of Dominicans today? What is different?
- How are the similarities important? How are the differences important?
- What are the silences in this historical narrative?
- How does historical context shape the U.S. immigration process?
- What is it like to learn about history through viewing and reading documents? Through hearing an interview?
- Which do you prefer? Why? What are the strengths of each type of source? What are their limitations?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Use the following graphic organizer to analyze the three letters requesting affidavits.

	Sourcing: Who / When?	Contextualization: What was happening at this time?	What/Why/How? How is the obstacle to immigration illustrated in this letter?
Personal Contributions:	Source: _____		
U.S Policies/ Laws:	Source: _____		
Connections:	Source: _____		

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Use the following graphic to analyze the interview.

	Sourcing: Who / When?	Contextualization: What was happening at this time?	What/Why/How? How are the three obstacles to immigration illustrated in this interview?
Personal Contributions:	Source: _____		Personal Contributions:   U.S Policies / Laws:   Connections:

## Group Discussion Questions

- Who is the person speaking?
- What immigration process is this person describing?
- What is happening today with Latino immigrants? And how can we connect it to the immigration of Jews in 1938?