The MS St. Louis, a German ship, left Hamburg, Germany for Cuba on May 13, 1939, with 937 passengers, most of them Jewish refugees. These passengers possessed landing certificates for Cuba, arranged for them by Manuel Benitez Gonzalez, the Cuban Director General of Immigration. Officially, the certificates were free, but Gonzalez took money for them.

Jealousy of Gonzalez's gain, local dislike of Jewish immigration, and the government's fascist tendencies led them to cancel the validity of the certificates on May 5, 1939, before the departure of the ship. When the ship reached Havana on May 27, its passengers were denied entry. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) tried to negotiate on their behalf, but the Cuban president insisted that the ship leave its harbor.

The ship left Havana on June 2, steering in circles while negotiations continued. An agreement was reached whereby the JDC would pay $453,000 in exchange for entry into Cuba. The JDC could not meet its deadline, however, and the ship returned to Europe where the refugees were taken in by Belgium, France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. Many of these refugees later came under the net of German occupation and were murdered by the Nazis.

ABOUT THE PHOTO

Passengers boarding the ship, MS *St. Louis,* in Hamburg, Germany, on May 13, 1939.

Photo courtesy of Yad Vashem Photo Archive (3323/5).