The historian of the Holocaust Walter Laqueur, dubbed “our” generation, in a book of that title, the “Generation Exodus” (2001). By that he meant Jews born between 1914 and 1928, in what became Nazi Germany. Members of this cohort were old enough to remember their lives before emigration and young enough to make a new start. They/we had managed not only to survive, but also to escape and begin new lives elsewhere. That “elsewhere” seems to have covered the world beyond the frontiers of Nazi German. It ranged from the obvious places—the United States, all parts of the British Empire, including, for example Nigeria and India as well as Palestine, also to include places as diverse as the Soviet Union, Shanghai, The Caribbean (Haiti and Cuba), Latin America, even Japan. Few people nowadays are aware, I believe, of that range and few are aware of the actual numbers. I recall the puzzlement, some 30 years ago, of some of my colleagues when they learned that one of our graduate students had relatives both in the UK and in Latin America.

A different approach to the question of young survivors is taken by Sonnert and Holton in their book What happened to the children who fled Nazi Persecution (2006). These authors deal with those who were below the age of 16 when they came to the United States. That age as a marker can be justified on the basis of schooling. In New York State, at least in 1940, school attendance was obligatory until 16. Beyond that, a youngster could obtain a work permit. I remember several acquaintances in whose lives this clearly made a difference:
for example, a sister who arrived at 16 and went to work while her brother, a year younger, attended high school and thereby enlarged his educational and occupational options.

In contrast to Lacqueur’s work, the Sonnert and Holton volume is a highly statistical study, focusing on 28,000 children. The sample is taken from *Who’s Who* and information about individuals is derived from questionnaires. The problem with questionnaires, however, is that they contain the implicit assumption that the questions will be relevant to the all participants. Questions meaningful to some participants, perhaps a minority, that are not asked and consequently are no answered. Comparisons are made with American-born groups of men and women, and some contrasts by country of birth are found.

There is a clear advantage to limiting studies to a particular age group, in these cases specifically the younger migrants. The definition of a “generation” as a segment of a population is helpful not only in that it reduces the totals number of individual cases, but that it highlights the importance of age and with it developmental status at the time of migration. This in turn is clearly of significance to understanding the subsequent experience and adaptation of the migrants in their new country. We had a clear advantage over our parents the disruption I whose lives was much more drastic. To a large extend, they were declassed and constituted a “lost” generation, a generation of the desert.

Like Laqueur, Sonnert and Holton do not deal with Austrian Jews separately. This is regrettable, because in many respects this population is quite different from the others with which it is grouped in these studies. There are not
only differences among the Jews but also among the countries where they lived. While Germany remained largely intact after World War I and its Jewish population dispersed throughout the country after the war as before, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dismembered. In Austria after 1918 Jews were concentrated in Vienna.

We learn a lot from these books, but they left me perhaps with more questions than answers. Part of the problem lies in the lack of available, accessible data. For one thing, with a few exceptions, U.S. Immigration data for the period 1933 to 1945 do not identify a category of “refugees” as distinct from other immigrants. There was no official status of “refugee.” That was established by various national and international agencies only after 1945.

Most of those who came between 1933 and 1945 arrived with immigrant visas, that is, there was no official assumption—or visa category— that the US might be a temporary place of refuge, that people might want to go back where they came from when the danger had passed. Applicants were classified by country of birth, that is, the country as established after the various post-World War I treaties. Would-be immigrants to the United States were assigned to quotas on this basis. Some regions that had been Austria were now Poland, others were now Romania. The Polish quota was oversubscribed, the Romanian even more so, with a waiting period estimated in years. Children born in Vienna, whose parents were born in other parts of the empire, therefore were assigned to different quotas, with shorter waiting periods. In numerous cases, children were then able
to arrive in this country before their parents—and sometime the parents were not able to escape.

Applicants furthermore needed to have an affidavit of support from an individual or organization in the U.S., but not—with some exceptions—the promise of a job. They also needed a police certificate and to have passed a medical exam: no trachoma, no insanity, no tuberculosis, no polio. In 1940, the Alien Registration Act was passed, and once the US entered the War, those, like my parents and I, who had German passports, became Enemy Aliens. One of the provisions of the Act included a prohibition against owning a short wave radio.

Both Laqueur and Sonnert and Holton point to what they see as the great professional success of the cohort they study and propose several reasons for this. Henry Kissinger provided a publisher’s blurb for the book by Laqueur. Given the large number of people he attempts to survey, some of the most prominent necessarily receive pride of place.

The problem that these several authors face is that the universe they attempt to study is very large and the data are sparse and scattered. Laqueur has neither statistics nor a bibliography, but he and his staff read a large number of memoirs and interviewed a great many people in many countries. Summarizing and generalizing is not within reach. As the years go by, matters are complicated by the publication of fictional accounts. Though some are clearly labeled as such, a few have been exposed as fraudulent.
My own admittedly limited research in this area, convinces me that in spite all potential generalizations, each story of the many that make up the whole, is unique and special, depending on a list of variables too long to count. Let me give a small personal example, a point which I note has been misreported in some accounts of my history: Like many Jews in the Vienna of the early ’30s, my father had an interest in Zionism, just an interest. When Hitler came to power, and the first anti-Jewish boycott occurred in Germany in the spring of 1933, my father had the foresight to see that the Nazis would come to power next in Austria. He went to Palestine. The British mandate system limited immigration, but that could be arranged. After some months in Tel-Aviv, my father found life there difficult, but concluded that everything would work out if my mother and I would join him. By November, we did do just that. My mother, a physician, found work in a clinic and I went to school. However, things didn’t improve. By the spring of 1934, Hitler had not come to Austria and my father decided to go back. Again, my mother and I followed, arriving in September. For me, that meant that I had not taken the required Gymnasium entrance exam at the end of 4th grade. The only such university-preparatory school that would take me, and then only on probation, was the Chajes Gymnasium, the only such Jewish school in Vienna, and also the only co-educational school. Three and a half years later, in March of 1938 Hitler did come, as my father had predicted and we emigrated again. This time first to Switzerland, where we awaited our American visas, and then in October of 1939, to the United States. It is this “abnormal” sequence, i.e., one that
doesn’t follow an apparently expected order, that some people have tried to straighten out, to normalize.

If I stress individual uniqueness, I mean by this both a unique history and a unique memory. To quote Susan Sontag: in *Regarding the Pain of Others* she writes:

> All memory is individual, unreproducible— it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds.

I warned a moment ago against generalizations. And yet, I want to propose one of my own, a very obvious one. Here I draw on the writings of the psycho-analyst Erik Erikson, who was a student of Anna Freud. In his influential 1950 volume, *Childhood and Society* he develops a universal scheme of human development. In each of eight stages of life the individual faces developmental tasks, involving both opportunities and dangers. What these are and how they are met depends both on the individual’s previous development, and the social and historical context in which they are experienced. Adolescence is the period at which personal and social identity is formed. In a stable environment, under perhaps ideal conditions, the process of development from infancy to old age may proceed relatively smoothly. However, it seems to me that those of us who experienced “exodus,” in whatever form, and all that was connected to it, adolescence was linked to a hiatus, a break, an interruption of an ordinary life, a negation of what might have been expected and perhaps planned for.
The events of the Anschluß, including the weeks that led up to it, initiated a critical period, that did not end until a secure settlement was achieved elsewhere. Much happened in that preliminary period, the winter of 1938. On my 14th birthday, that February, I had a small party. Afterwards, when I walked several of my friends to the street car station on Mariahilferstraße, a band of teenage boys was marching and chanting Ein Volk, ein Reih, ein Führer. (One people, one country, one leader). They, and we, didn’t have to wait long. When they got their wish, they chanted Wir danken unsern Führer (we thank our leader).

For those of us who were able to leave, it generally took several years to achieve what I am calling “a secure settlement.” For young men in the US and a number of other countries, the intermediary period often meant military service. Some of my classmates who had escaped to Palestine, served in the British Army, at various locations, including Egypt and the Persian Gulf. Among those who came to America, I remember two who served in the Pacific, others in Europe. The anthropologist Eric Wolf, a fellow Viennese, who was my college classmate in New York, served with American ski troops in Italy and Germany. For all of us it took a period of time, of variable length depending on the circumstances, before a clear path emerged. Perhaps even that did not happen for all.

The resulting identities, however that word is defined, were greatly affected by this crisis, by this break.
For all, however, there was the encounter with different languages, with different ways of life, with different foods, patterns of interpersonal relationships, in sum, different cultures. Typically children learned languages and manners more quickly and easily than their parents. One little boy, after attending school for a day or two in New York, came home with the announcement that he was no longer Hans but Bruce. His parents accepted this change with some surprise. More importantly, the consequence of the differences in not only in the exposure to American culture and its relatively easy acceptance by children and young people was one familiar to other immigrant groups: the children, more at ease and more knowledgeable than the parents in their new setting, began to act as linguistic and cultural translators for their parents. That is, parents who were losing class status and professional status, were also losing family authority, never to regain it.

In college I took a class in American Minorities. In those days—the 1940s, the category included various immigrant groups, e.g., Italians, Poles and so on. The class was taught by the anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker. We were to write a paper on one particular minority group, but she said, surveying this class of New Yorkers, not your own—every one here belongs to a minority. I wrote about Italian immigrants, about whom I knew nothing. It was probably the most useful thing I did in college: I learned that what I had perceived to be problems

At this point some people like to play with counterfactuals: what if…A friend, after visiting Vienna in the 1980s, said she imagine me there, as if I had gone on to live there and become an anthropologist. That fantasy startled me. I
never wondered about what would have happened if no Hitler, if no war,…On the large scale, historians make such speculations, but how could it possibly have turned out otherwise?