GOING PUBLIC IN SUPPORT:
AMERICAN DISCURSIVE OPPOSITION TO NAZI ANTI-SEMITISM, 1933-1944

By

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Shortly after Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in Germany, Christian and Jewish Americans initiated an argument that held Nazi anti-Semitism did violence to their democratic freedoms. They observed the scapegoating of Jews, the hallmark feature of German fascism, indicated a pervasive hostility toward the civil liberties outlined in the U.S. Constitution. Publicly contesting Nazi anti-Semitism became a recurring topic in public discourse. Politicians used the reports of Jewish persecutions to differentiate between fascist and democratic values. Social commentators and artists saw in the issue a path for softening sociocultural attitudes domestically. As members of the Christian majority learned more about Hitler’s wide-ranging intolerance, some concluded that tolerating similar domestic prejudices was harmful to society.

Rejecting Nazism—and, specifically, its negative portrayal of Jews—became part of a much larger reconfiguration in mainstream American attitudes. Evidence that citizens, both private and public, opposed Nazi anti-Semitism appeared in periodicals, political statements, plays, motion pictures, novels, private correspondences, and government publications. The common thread binding these texts together was the expression of hostility toward Nazi religious intolerance. Although for some Americans, negative sentiments toward ethnic, racial, and
religious minorities undoubtedly persisted, there is a larger story involving the ways both Jews and Christians used the issue of Nazi intolerance toward religious minorities as a tool for promoting a more pluralist worldview.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION:
AMERICAN DISCURSIVE OPPOSITION TO NAZI ANTI-SEMITISM, 1933-1944

The cause of liberty, freedom and justice, three of the most important parts of modern civilization, has received its most recent blow at the hands of Adolf Hitler and his subsequent persecution of the Jews. Americans everywhere recognize the rights of human beings to worship God as they please.

—Representative Jesse Swick to House, May 22, 1933

Any man who loathes fascism will fear anti-Semitism. Fearing anti-Semitism, he will fear also the various conditions which encourage its appearance. Any nation that permits a minority to live in fear of persecution is a nation that invites disaster.

—Editors of Fortune, Jews in America, 1936

In the future days which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms…the freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world.

—From Franklin Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” Declaration, January 6, 1941

America is a dream of justice, a light held aloft to the sacred ways of humanity. Speak for us and give not only the Jews, but mankind back its fair name. The Jews have only one voice left. It is the voice of prayer. Perhaps the Four Freedoms will hear it.

—Closing to We Will Never Die, Madison Square Garden, March 9, 1943

Shortly after Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in Germany, Christian and Jewish Americans initiated an argument that held Nazi anti-Semitism did violence to their democratic freedoms. They observed that the scapegoating of Jews, the hallmark feature of German fascism, hinted at a much more pervasive hostility toward civil liberties—e.g., freedom of speech and religious assembly—as outlined in the U.S. Constitution. Publicly contesting Nazi anti-Semitism became a useful exercise for those Americans interested in differentiating between two starkly opposite

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1 Congressional Record, H 73, 1st sess. (May 22, 1933): 3968.


3 For the full text, see http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrthefourfreedoms.htm

ideological visions. These discussions also helped some to provoke further debates about sociocultural attitudes in the United States. As members of the Christian majority learned more about Hitler’s wide-ranging intolerance, some concluded that upholding or tolerating similar domestic prejudices was harmful to society.

To date, historians have ignored these expressions of outrage and have instead examined the utterances and activities of Americans who saw little to fear from the new German regime. During the 1930s, Ambassador Joe Kennedy lauded Hitler’s government; the pilot-icon Charles Lindbergh established a German residency during the Third Reich; and Henry Ford visited Berlin to accept a medal from Nazi representatives. Although striking, these expressions of support caused each man—Kennedy, Lindbergh, and Ford—irreparable damage to his public credibility. Indeed, during the 1930s and early 1940s, rejecting Nazism—and, specifically, its negative portrayal of Jews—became part of a much larger reconfiguration in mainstream American attitudes toward ethno-religious minorities.

Evidence that Americans, both in and outside the government, opposed Nazi anti-Semitism appeared in periodicals, political statements, plays, motion pictures, novels, private correspondences, and government publications. The common thread binding these artifacts and texts together was the expression of hostility toward Nazi intolerance. Although negative sentiments toward ethnic, racial, and religious minorities undoubtedly persisted for many


citizens, the larger story involved the ways that both American Jews and Protestants came to
denounce bigotry.\textsuperscript{7}

As early as 1911, leaders in the American Jewish Committee had lobbied officials in
Congress and the executive branch to punish Czarist Russia for violating the liberties of Jewish
Americans traveling abroad. They argued that the rights of citizenship were universal, even
outside the nation. Congress agreed. In 1912, both houses voted overwhelmingly to abrogate a
long-standing American-Russian trade treaty to protest the Czarist abuse.\textsuperscript{8} During the early
decades of the twentieth century, Americans of multiple faiths continued to promote a secular
identity by joining new organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (1913) and the
National Conference of Christians and Jews (1928).\textsuperscript{9} Jews and Christians worked together to
organize nationwide boycotts against racist newspapers such as Ford’s \textit{Dearborn Independent}.\textsuperscript{10}
Following episodes in which Jews stood accused of sensational crimes, such as the Massena

\textsuperscript{7} Marc Dollinger, \textit{Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America}
Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race} (Cambridge: Harvard
University Press, 1999), 188; Stuart Svonkin, \textit{Jews against Prejudice: American Jews and the
Fight for Civil Liberties} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 15; Stephen J.

\textsuperscript{8} Judith Goldstein, \textit{The Politics of Ethnic Pressure: The American Jewish Committee
Fight against Immigration Restrictions, 1906-1917} (New York: Garland, 1990), 162-83; Allen
Hertzke, \textit{Representing God in Washington: The Role of Religious Lobbies in the American Polity}
(Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 38; Gary Dean Best, \textit{To Free a People:
American Jewish Leaders and the Jewish Problems in Eastern Europe} (Westport, Ct.:
Greenwood, 1982), 17, 142-44.

\textsuperscript{9} Naomi Cohen, \textit{Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906-1969}

\textsuperscript{10} Neil Baldwin, \textit{Henry Ford and the Jews: The Mass Production of Hate} (New York:
Public Affairs, 2001), 103, 173.
Blood Libel (1924) and the Leopold and Loeb Affair (1924), these groups and their supporters played a pivotal role in defusing social anxieties.¹¹

Jews further benefited from new ideas such as “cultural pluralism.” During the first decades of the twentieth century, the American philosopher Horace Kallen insisted that the truest test of U.S. democracy lay in the nation’s ability to highlight, rather than homogenize, the ethnic variances among its citizens. Neither Jews nor Catholics could ever “become American” if that designation exclusively denoted Protestantism. Cultural pluralism offered a rationale for embracing those tens of millions who otherwise remained outside of the mainstream.¹² In many cases, the ideas associated with cultural pluralism found expression through the efforts of such liberals as John Dewey and Joseph Pulitzer. These men and their many associates, followers, and admirers embraced the Progressive notion that an enlightened government based on secular values was the surest way to improve society.¹³

During the 1930s and 1940s, numerous ethno-minority groups in the United States gained greater social status within the political world. Historians have already started to explain


how events such as the Great Depression and the Second World War forged a new national identity. The many millions of immigrants and first-generation citizens who lived through the experiences emerged as bona fide “Americans.” On the cultural landscape, radio and movies projected the nation’s new character. The federal government also took bold and unprecedented actions to promote ethnic variety. Organizations such as the Farm Security Administration, the Works Progress Administration, and the Office of War Information dedicated significant resources to disseminating images of the many different people who lived in the U.S. As early as 1938, radio programs such as *American All, Immigrant All*, a twenty-six-week-long nationally broadcast series sponsored by the federal government, reset the domestic boundaries of ethnicity, religion, and race. These programs presented Protestant citizens with richly detailed—and complimentary—portraits of the various new ethnicities and races now included within the designation “American.”

But if cultural pluralism was affecting a broad range of subgroups—African Americans, Italians, Poles—then why is it necessary to examine the Jewish experience independent of the

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other groups that were making their way into the mainstream? The theme of this dissertation is that the appearance of Nazism—a thoroughly antidemocratic and antireligious philosophy—intensified the drive to transform American national identity, making it more secular. Jews clearly had something tangible to fear from Nazism. That other citizens felt similarly is a fact sometimes overlooked in discussions of the 1930s.17

Examining the relationship between opposition to Nazism, on the one hand, and a reconfiguration of American attitudes, on the other, provides a pathway to the field and subfields of Holocaust Studies. During the 1960s, scholars began to publish books and articles documenting the Nazi destruction of Europe’s Jews. Raul Hilberg was one of the first historians to depict the Nazi war crimes in intricate detail and to assess the world’s reaction.18 Hilberg designated the Germans as perpetrators of genocide and developed additional categories such as bystanders and witnesses to indicate his belief that the Western democracies, by not intervening, had failed to act on their moral responsibility.19 This view has proved remarkably resilient. Many Holocaust Studies researchers, particularly those who specialize in the American response to Nazi anti-Semitism, have based their inquiries on the presumption that the nation’s leaders chose not to intervene on behalf of Europe’s Jews.20


Hilberg’s work also set a stylistic benchmark for the subfield. Having served with the U.S. War Crimes Documentation Commission, he was fully conversant with the Nuremburg Trial transcripts. He accessed many dozens of state archives, pursuing multiple long, winding paths of inquiry that at times exasperated his dissertation advisor. However, this fine-grained method—that is, a Rankean approach to selecting source materials and evaluating artifacts—became standard in many of the field’s later publications. The Destruction of the European Jewry offered advances in theory as well. Hilberg’s decision to compress the entire narrative of European anti-Semitism within the twelve-year Nazi regime was unique. His conflation provided an accepted linear framework that, owing to the fact the Third Reich and New Deal were almost contemporaneous, encouraged later historians to contrast various facets of Nazi and American behaviors.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Arthur Morse’s While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy, Saul Friedman’s No Haven for the Oppressed, Henry Feingold’s The Politics of Rescue, and David Wyman’s Paper Walls followed this blueprint. Focusing on


24 Roosevelt and Hitler both took power in March 1933. Both ruled continually until their deaths in the spring of 1945. The two men grappled with many of the same challenges, leading their respective nations through the Great Depression and into World War II. For an excellent discussion, see John Garraty, “The New Deal, National Socialism and the Great Depression,” American Historical Review 78 (1973): 907.

political events and persons from the 1930s and 1940s, these scholars argued that American indi
cerence to European issues—what Wyman termed “nativist nationalism”—permeated the government and society.\textsuperscript{26} Of course, not all officials were bigots. However, archival research in the records of the State Department and other federal agencies suggested that anti-Jewish feelings limited expressions of sympathy.\textsuperscript{27}

Some historians reached even starker conclusions. Herbert Druks argued, in \textit{The Failure to Rescue}, that Franklin Roosevelt and the British government had “prevented” the release of European Jewry.\textsuperscript{28} Richard Rubenstein suggested that American attitudes toward racial minorities provided German leaders with justifications for their behaviors.\textsuperscript{29} In 1978, David Wyman ratcheted up the field’s rhetoric with his article “Why Was Auschwitz Never Bombed?” His counterfactual approach lent sway to the growing perception that the United States had possessed the wherewithal, but not the moral gumption, to destroy the death factories.\textsuperscript{30}

During the early 1980s, the opening of additional State Department records led to repetition of this charge. “The American government,” Monty Penkower argued, in \textit{The Jews Were Expendable}, “discriminated in their unwillingness to save European Jewry.”\textsuperscript{31} Wyman’s \textit{The Abandonment of the Jews} frankly stated that little compassion existed for those with the

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\textsuperscript{26} Wyman, \textit{Paper}, 10.
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\textsuperscript{28} Herbert Druks, \textit{The Failure to Rescue} (New York: Speller, 1977), 98.
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“particular misfortunes of being foreign and Jewish.”

During the 1980s, historians specializing in the U.S. response to Nazi anti-Semitism began to assert as fact the proposition that bigotry in the American government and society played a tangible role in the destruction of European Jewry. The degree to which scholars allowed their feelings of grief or regret to influence their interpretations has varied. Michael Marrus stated, in The Holocaust in History, that “clearly more could have been done.” Indeed, he dedicated an entire section of his monograph to discussing the “bystander” nations that had allowed the Holocaust to occur without impediment. However, Alan Kraut and Richard Breitman argued, in American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945, that humanitarian considerations are “not easily translated” into government policy.

In addition to highlighting anti-Jewish sentiments within the State Department, one of the most provocative debates from the 1980s involved the question of Jewish American behaviors. In The Terrible Secret, Walter Laqueur and Richard Breitman have noted that prominent Jews in the United States dismissed the atrocity reports as false. During the First World War, sensational news stories describing German brutality against noncombatants were common and often incorrect. The news of Nazi gas chambers, crematoria, and millions of murdered faced a residue of the skepticism that those earlier reports had engendered. However, Haskel Lookstein

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34 Ibid., 156-84.


still examined the obvious question. In *Were We Our Brother’s Keeper?* he speculated that a more “active concern” from American Jews might have saved “millions.”\(^{37}\) Rafael Medoff agreed. His study, *The Deafening Silence*, likewise claimed that the leaders of Jewish American organizations had turned away from their European brethren.\(^{38}\)

Sustaining or attacking the view that Jews in the United States did little to publicize or combat the outrages in Europe has led to additional observations. Henry Feingold, in an article first published by *American Jewish History*, argued that Jewish leaders did not wish to contradict the prevalent social mood. Well aware that the federal government had “relocated” hundreds of thousand Japanese, German, and Italian American citizens, Jews in the United States feared any type of discussion in which they might appear to exhibit interest in foreign affairs. Feingold characterized the academic effort to assign guilt an anachronistic form of “self-flagellation.”\(^{39}\) As Karen Greenberg reminded scholars in her essay “The Burden of Being Human,” the true enormity of the Holocaust—the killings, cremations, deciding who was guilty and who would escape condemnation—exceeds the limits of the cognitive process. The people involved with the Holocaust were human beings who struggled to understand, as later generations continue to do.\(^{40}\)


It was not until the 1990s that the Holocaust became entrenched as a part of the American collective consciousness. The opening of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. (1993) marked a significant point along this path. Public schools throughout the nation began teaching a Holocaust curriculum to their older students. Movies such as *Schindler’s List* (1992) and survivors-turned-celebrities such as Elie Wiesel have widened the locus of enlightenment further. Have Christian Americans, particularly those born after 1945, accepted an inherited responsibility for the past persecution of Jews? This is the conclusion that Frank Brecher has reached. In *The Holocaust in American Life*, Peter Novick has also stressed this point. He has concluded that Christian Americans today join with Jews in seeing the defeat of Hitlerism as the grand metaphor for the U.S. victory over fascism. This argument conflicts with earlier claims by Hilberg, Wyman, and others and reflects a new effort to revise long-standing assessments of guilt.

As Robert Rosen has recently argued, perhaps no two men in the world differed so dramatically and publicly on the “Jewish Question” than did Franklin Roosevelt and Adolf Hitler. Scholars whose methodology requires a negative conflation of German and American actions often overlook the many ways that American leaders expressed their aversion to Nazi

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opinions. Hitler’s Nuremberg Laws (1935) specifically barred Jewish employment in the Reich government. However, Roosevelt’s administration employed a number of Jews at both the Cabinet and senior staff levels. He also appointed two German Jews to the U.S. Supreme Court. William Rubenstein explained in *The Myth of Rescue*, once we abandon the urge to blame the U.S. and its leadership for European crimes, we could unwind a broader narrative that reflects changes in attitudes, representations, and mentality. The overriding challenge for historians lies not in divining the numbers of European Jews who might have lived. A far more meaningful exercise is trying to understand how Americans altered their opinions about Jews after they came to understand the threats that Nazi anti-Semitism posed to the Western liberal tradition.

The shift toward a less condemnatory interpretation has fostered new paths of discovery. Scholars have started examining the ways that the Second World War diluted religious biases. The Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant Americans who fought to uphold Western liberal values became the defenders of a new “Judeo-Christian” ethic. Jews, in particular, earned a greater degree of tolerance. Charles Stember and others have concluded that in the decades immediately following the Second World War, Christians in the United States expressed significantly less anti-Jewish bigotry than in previous epochs. Americans now supported a global defense of

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what diplomatic historian Akira Iriye has termed “core values” such as the freedom of speech, assembly, and unfettered worship.  

Anti-Jewish attitudes and expressions of bigotry did not entirely disappear. During the 1960s, George Lincoln Rockwell’s American Nazi Party advocated and perpetrated violence against Jews. In turn, these actions provoked added bloodshed, sponsored by the members of organizations such as the Jewish Defense League. However, the larger point is that, for some, the seeds of greater tolerance took root. The fight against fascism became the backdrop against which a more secular American identity started to take form. What historians have failed to recognize is that the postwar turn toward a more ethnically varied national identity appeared in its nascent outline during the 1930s, from Hitler’s first days as chancellor, specifically after Christian and Jewish American learned more about Nazi hostility toward private worship.

The broad question, then, becomes one of timing. When and how did Americans begin to recognize that Nazi anti-Semitism represented an inherent threat to the Western vision for humankind? For historians who specialize in documenting the American reaction to the Holocaust, answering that query opens a pathway to a series of related issues. Who were the people involved with highlighting the common threat that Nazism posed to Jews and Christians

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51 Novick, Holocaust, 174.

alike? What mediums did they employ to raise levels of public awareness? Were these efforts influential, or did a schism exist between announcement and action? Do historians face methodological problems when trying to arrange and understand the different texts in which opposition to Nazi religious intolerance appeared, or does a common thread help to bind seemingly disparate artifacts?

Uncovering early discursive evidence of American opposition to Nazi religious intolerance would significantly modify current scholarly understandings. The finding that public officials and private citizens offered European Jews expressions of solidarity should prompt historians to revisit their understandings of the 1930s as a wholly isolationist and anti-Semitic era defined by the Father Coughlins and Henry Fords.\(^{53}\) There is an urgent need to contrast this settled conclusion with the various public expressions of concern that appeared during the 1930s and 1940s. That the rhetoric perhaps holds greater weight today than it did during the period in which it first appeared is an important intellectual point, but one that remains outside this dissertation’s purview. The language has gained additional significance, not necessarily because of its influence on historical events but rather because it contradicts the canons of a well-known academic debate.

This is the untold story of the American response to Nazi anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. It is a tale that depicts Christians and Jews struggling with a difficult problem in uncertain and dangerous times. Not always successful in obtaining the full results that they desired, they took repeated steps to raise levels of sociocultural and political awareness about the

many dangers associated with German fascism. Such a finding—that Americans embraced the challenge to confront and condemn intolerant behaviors—stands in sharp contrast with mainstream academic claims. To date, no scholars have explored the various public discussions in which the prevalent theme was that Nazi hostility toward Judaism posed a larger threat to Americans of all faiths and creeds.

Evidence that both Jews and secular-minded Christians began to discuss publicly anti-Semitism appeared most clearly after the rise of German Nazism. Starting in March 1933, various members of Congress offered detailed remarks and resolutions that bound together Jewish and Christian concerns with such intolerance. Chapter 2 presents remarks and resolutions from the Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Congresses (1933-35), in which members opposed anti-Jewish biases because they did violence to long-standing Western beliefs. In the congressional dialogue, historians will find the basic formula that Americans applied when framing later condemnations. Nazi anti-Semitism was antiliberal, harmful to democratic ideals, and an insidious threat to the pluralist vision that many citizens embraced. The claim that Nazi religious intolerance did violence to humankind became a distinctive facet of public opposition during the period 1933-44.

Congress was not the only source for information. Chapter 2 also documents cultural efforts to publicize the emerging Nazi threat. During the 1930s and 1940s, the New Republic, Nation, Reader’s Digest, Christian Century, and Time Magazine discussed Nazi hostility to democratic structures. At the same time that Congress was learning about the menace, the themes of fascist violence and sociocultural intimidation also appeared as plotlines in best-selling novels, theatrical productions, and major motion pictures. One did not have to follow
congressional debates to learn that Nazism was dangerous, anti-Jewish bigotry was abhorrent, and the two phenomena were inexorably linked.

Chapter 3 presents a microstudy of one prominent American. Prior to the U.S. entry into the Second World War, Archibald MacLeish, the poet laureate and Librarian of Congress, grappled with these related issues. MacLeish did not contribute to the preexisting congressional discourse. However, he expanded upon the observation that Nazi anti-Semitism was a threat to the democratic values that Americans claimed to cherish. From 1933 to 1941, he dispersed news of this nascent argument throughout the nation.

MacLeish is vital to this story, perhaps more so than others who spoke out on behalf of Jews—such as the president, Robert Sherwood, and Edmund Wilson—because he hammered away at the point through various public media. As editor of Fortune, he proposed to investigate the spread of Nazi anti-Semitism in the United States. In 1936, he published a book that addressed the topic. As Librarian of Congress and head of a federal information agency, MacLeish took advantage of numerous opportunities to explain publicly his belief that Americans should reject the phenomenon. During W.W II, his specific anxiety for European Jewish welfare remained apparent during his tenure at the Office of War Information, as well as in the State Department as undersecretary for cultural affairs.

What facilitated his concern? In memorandums and private letters, MacLeish explained his belief that anti-Semitism blighted heterogeneous societies. Bigoted sentiments were atomistic and lent support to the Nazis’ “divide and conquer” strategy. In addition, MacLeish directed his creative efforts toward combating the threat by promoting a more cosmopolitan national identity. This was not simply a case of artistic license: MacLeish corresponded with Jews, befriended
Jews, dined with Jews, and on occasion sponsored Jews for memberships into exclusive social clubs.

The poet was a Protestant-establishment figure who used his professional talents and positions of power to publicize the dangers associated with Nazi intolerance. His prolific record of written and oral statements decrying anti-Semitism makes him an attractive subject of study when investigating discursive opposition. Historians have not yet examined his numerous efforts, and they have overlooked entirely MacLeish’s role in binding a defense of religious freedom to discussions of Nazi behaviors. Particularly before the United States entered World War II, these labors hinted at later assertions that Americans would uphold democratic liberties globally.

This course of thought was not capricious, nor was it out of step with the political mainstream. Well before the United States entered the fighting, President Roosevelt had included the unfettered right to worship in his “Four Freedoms” (1941) declaration. Chapter 4 offers a discussion of the governmental efforts to connect condemnations of Nazi religious intolerance with the war effort. The Office of War Information was a midlevel bureaucratic agency designed to provide Americans with an “informed and intelligent” understanding of the war’s aims and progress. One way they fulfilled this charge was through the publication and distribution of brochures that connected stories of the fighting to larger messages of why Americans waged the struggle.

The agency administrators selected certain themes to shape the public’s enlightenment. These themes—upholding the Four Freedoms and religious liberties, condemning the Holocaust, and promoting racial tolerance—appeared throughout public discussions of the period. Moreover, men who had publicly committed to spreading these ideas, such as Archibald
MacLeish, worked in the agency and had a direct hand in steering this sort of subject matter toward the American public. Such politicized brochures ultimately provoked reprisals against the bureau’s leadership. However, hidden in the backlash is evidence that administrators in the Office of War Information—and their efforts to join sociocultural issues to discussions of the fighting—contributed to an ongoing discursive contest over the treatment of Jews and other minorities.

A decade after some in Congress had first voiced concern, the opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism was entrenched in political, cultural, and bureaucratic discourses. Chapter 5 builds upon the variegated nature of a decade of American response. Specifically, interest groups formed that took advantage of the issue’s resilience in public circles. Their activities produced a more targeted strain of American discursive opposition, one in which scholars will observe familiar themes—the defense of religious freedom and opposition to intolerance—juxtaposed against desperate reports of the escalating atrocities. During 1942-43, interest groups and their leaders reconfigured the public discussion by demanding that government officials transform their prior expressions of support into more concrete policy.

These efforts revived dormant congressional debates. Legislators, some of whom had served during early 1930s, now learned that the earlier Nazi bigotry had evolved into a program of murder. In November 1943, interest-group leaders had two resolutions introduced in the Congress—one in each chamber—that advocated the creation of a specific federal agency to formulate an official response to the killings. After nearly ten years of disparate talk in various public forums, American opposition to Nazi intolerance would now emanate from a specific federal agency.
Chapter 6 covers the War Refugee Board. In January 1944, amid interest-group, congressional, and intrabranch pressures, President Roosevelt devised this agency to develop “immediate actions that forestalled the Nazi plan to exterminate Jews and other persecuted minorities.” This was no half step. The action mirrored exactly the sentiments of interest groups and a unanimous U.S. Senate. Moreover, the president’s decision to empower a War Refugee Board was no empty measure. Roosevelt provided the agency with a $1-million budget directly from his emergency operating funds. In taking this action, the president forged a common cause with those Americans concerned by Nazi anti-Semitism.

During the Second World War, no other country created a specific government entity to combat the genocide. The new bureau represented a capstone to a decade-long effort that bound together Jewish and Christian opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism.

In Chapter 7, I consider future avenues of inquiry, which include possible interdisciplinary paths. Currently, the arguments that hold the most sway mirror the views underlying Hilberg’s “bystander” category and Wyman’s “abandonment” thesis. Sustaining those findings, however, requires that historians continue along the path of a predetermined narrative. Rather than creating new methods with which to assess and analyze fresh evidence, the challenge has become sustaining a well-worn indictment that holds the United States partially culpable for the Nazis’ homicidal actions. Even studies that do not stress this syllogism rely upon the same timeline and evidence. There is little effort devoted to disentangling the complexities that surrounded this thorny sociocultural and political issue.

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54 In contrast, that same year the domestic branch of the Office of War Information received a $50,000 congressional appropriation. See A Guide to the Microfilm Edition of Information Control and Propaganda: Records of the Office of War Information compiled by Janice Mitchell (Frederick, Md.: University Publications, 1986), 6.
Additional research into newspapers, magazines, movies, novels, and theater would widen the locus of investigation. Describing and classifying the many forms of public activity that emerged in opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism would be helpful and would represent a clear methodological achievement. Enterprising scholars might compare and contrast domestic anti-Semitic utterances with statements of tolerance. They might weigh the variations between Christian and Jewish statements or explore the significance of a Jewish issue emerging from a predominantly Christian discourse. Of course, the most challenging project would involve connecting these nascent ethno-religious rumblings from the 1930s and 1940s with the full-blown emergence of postwar pluralism.

My study contributes to scholarship about the U.S. reaction to Nazi anti-Semitism. Historians who specialize in this subfield will find herein many forms of evidence that Americans, both in and outside the government, unwound a sustained and intricate discursive opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism. Starting in March 1933 and continuing until the war’s conclusion, citizens spoke out, terming ethno-racial bigotry a collective threat to humankind. Such a finding—that Americans embraced the challenge to confront and condemn German behaviors—stands in sharp contrast with claims outlined in Hilberg and Wyman’s work.

Thus, my dissertation splits with the current scholarly consensus that the U.S. government and society abandoned Europe’s Jews to the Nazis, and thus must bear a portion of responsibility for later German behaviors. Setting aside such guilt-ridden expressions opens the way to reconsidering the intricate public nature of American reactions. Contrary to the claims of pervasive neglect, my study aims to make more familiar the different types and tones of American discursive opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism.
CHAPTER 2
CONGRESS BEGINS A PUBLIC DISCOURSE
CONDEMNING NAZI ANTI-SEMITISM, 1933-1941

I can no longer sit back quietly and trust that Germany will come to her senses.
Christianity cannot ignore the debts she owes to Judaism.

—John McCormack (D-MA) to the House, June 9, 1933

On June 4, 1941, Congressman M. Michael Edelstein (D-NY) rose before the House of Representatives to rebut the latest round of anti-Jewish invective delivered by John Rankin, a Mississippian known for making inflammatory statements. In this particular instance, Edelstein responded to the charge that Jewish banking interests wished to steer the United States into war.

One week earlier, Edelstein had submitted a statement into the Congressional Record that addressed aspects of this popular public calumny. However, in his spontaneous, direct, and verbal response to Rankin and to those onlookers who sympathized with his views, historians will uncover the clearest evidence of an ongoing effort to oppose these divisive sentiments. “I deplore the idea,” Edelstein informed his colleagues, “that men in this House and outside this House attempt to use the Jews as their scapegoat. . . . It is un-American.” “We are living in a democracy,” the New York Democrat proclaimed, “all men are created equal, regardless of race, creed or color.”

These impromptu remarks by Edelstein would be his last. Shortly after exiting the floor, he suffered a fatal heart attack and expired in the House cloakroom. Fellow New York Democrat Samuel Dickstein, who had observed the entire episode, eulogized Edelstein almost immediately

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1 Congressional Record, H 73, 1st sess. (June 9, 1933); 5441.


3 M. Michael Edelstein, “Americans of Jewish Extraction Do Not Act and Think En Bloc,” Congressional Record, H 77, 1st sess. (May 28, 1941); A 2542.

4 M. Michael Edelstein, Congressional Record, H 77, 1st sess. (June 4, 1941): 4727.
after his passing. In a statement on the floor of the House, Representative Dickstein directed his fire at Rankin and praised Edelstein’s willingness to “protect his people, his integrity and his Americanism.” Congressman Edelstein, he continued, died a “martyr” to the cause of promoting liberal ideals.\(^5\)

The significance of this event lies more in the resonance of, rather than the reasoning for, Edelstein’s assault on anti-Semitism. Negative Jewish stereotypes, Edelstein had argued, were blatantly “un-American” in that they did violence to the national creed. A number of other lawmakers also praised their fallen colleague for his valor. Due to the uproar, Rankin quickly backtracked, apologizing profusely for his intemperate statements.\(^6\)

The Edelstein incident was a significant event in an ongoing rhetorical effort to combat religious bigotry that stretched back into the early 1930s. Indeed, only weeks after Hitler’s seizure of total power in Germany, congressmen from varying regions, religions, and parties spoke out against anti-Semitism. Disparaging Judaism, they maintained, was part of the Nazi doctrine and was incompatible with Western ideals. Despite such passionate rhetoric, however, the challenge for antifascists in the United States lay in convincing the larger public that Nazism meant more than only the targeting of Jews: it meant persecuting Catholics, victimizing Quakers, oppressing Jehovah Witnesses, and outlawing labor organizations. The very tenets of Nazism threatened core American values such as the freedom of speech and the protection of individual liberty.

The congressional rhetoric that appeared soon after Adolf Hitler’s rise to power opens a pathway to a much larger story—one in which elected government officials used the issue of

\(^5\) Samuel Dickstein, *Congressional Record*, H 77, 1st sess. (June 4, 1941): 4727.

\(^6\) Shapiro, “Approach,” 63.
combating Nazi anti-Semitism to signal their disgust with ethno-racial bigotry. The vicious character of the Nazi regime, immediately apparent, helped to launch a broad reassessment of fascism and dictatorship among those who had cautiously admired it.\(^7\) Over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, the view that sociocultural intolerance was itself intolerable took greater hold. A distinctive American mind-set emerged that welcomed Jews, blacks, and first-generation citizens into the mainstream. The specter of Nazism—specifically its ethno-religious bigotry and related antidemocratic doctrines—had provided a catalyst for reconfiguring the contours of acceptable thought and speech.

Uncovering various public forums in which American expressions of outrage with Nazi intolerance evolved into a related discussion of bigotry in the United States might present a problem to the received narrative. According to the historian David Wyman, during the 1930s the U.S. government and society exhibited a purposeful indifference to the plight of European Jewry.\(^8\) Christian Americans viewed European Jews as a threat, an attitude that Wyman argues is perhaps best captured by the negative Judeo-Bolshevik construct, in which Bolshevism is considered as a Jewish ideology intended to subvert Western liberal societies.\(^9\) Many Jewish Americans did not wish to risk implication by becoming involved with the matter.\(^10\) Such collective inaction lent weight to the arguments of those scholars who maintained that the


Western world “abandoned” Europe’s Jewry to the Nazis. Far from being a period where scholars might expect to uncover public sympathy for an ethnic concern, Wyman’s argument depicts the 1930s as an ominous decade when Americans were oblivious to the protection of the human rights of minorities.

One reason that scholars continue to omit discussions of European Jewry from their survey of American society during the 1930s is a flawed methodology that privileges the executive-branch power over the legislative. Richard Breitman and Alan Kraut have outlined a sweeping argument about American passivity toward Nazi anti-Semitism based solely on a review of State Department records.\(^\text{11}\) Monty Noam Penkower has followed a similar path, concluding that American callousness reflected the fact that “stateless Jews commanded no political leverage.”\(^\text{12}\) These studies are merely the tip of the iceberg. In scores of monographs that have come to define this subfield of Holocaust Studies, the prevalent view is that Americans—that is, State Department officials—stood aloof from Jewish suffering.\(^\text{13}\)

The behaviors of dozens of members of the U.S. Congress, however, reveal a markedly different story. Far from exhibiting indifference, the discourse in the \textit{Congressional Record} shows sustained levels of opposition. Scholars who have, either purposefully or unwittingly,


concentrated solely upon the executive branch are missing a vital component of the historical record. Congressional officials, or representatives, offer a credible glimpse of alternative strains in public opinion. Moreover, the themes and rationales that officials presented in their floor statements and in committee hearings would reappear in later public forums.

The Seventy-third Congress (1933-34) convened more than two decades after the famed revolt against Speaker Joe Cannon (R-IL). While the Speaker’s power over debate and assignment declined, the Rules Committee retained its centralized control. During the famous first “hundred days,” House Rules Committee chair Edward Pou (D-NC) was extraordinarily efficient. His committee reported out ten pieces of “closed” legislation, including such major bills as the Emergency Banking Act and the Agricultural Adjustment Act. Following Pou’s death in the spring of 1934, his successor ran an equally orderly committee. On its face, a period of tight centralized control would seem to be incongruent with attention dedicated to nonessential issues. This would especially be the case at the height of the Great Depression. It therefore would be unusual for any European concern—let alone opposition to Nazi religious intolerance—to appear in this environment.

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But appear it did. In March 1933, less than two months after Adolf Hitler became Germany’s chancellor—but before he acquired dictatorial power—the Congress debated House Resolution 24. Outraged by the Nazi scapegoating of Jews, the resolution’s drafters called on the U.S. State Department to express strong displeasure with the Nazi mistreatment of its Jewish citizens. “Once again humanity is aroused from its lethargy by the persecution of a member race of the human family,” thundered Representative Joe Gavagan, a Catholic Democrat from New York. He asked his colleagues, “[I]s there a more appropriate legislative body in the world than the House of Representatives to send forth an appeal against this injustice and iniquity?” Apparently Gavagan’s remarks struck a chord with his fellow legislators; the resolution passed by acclamation.¹⁷

If the passage of House Resolution 24 represented a burgeoning concern over the treatment of Jews in Germany, an intriguing conversation that took place eight days later points to a phenomenon of equal significance. Indeed, the open floor debate provides a portrait of the ways in which some Americans tied their outrage over anti-Semitism abroad to fears of anti-Semitism at home.¹⁸ Members of both parties spoke out, from various religions and regions of the country. The motivation for condemning Nazi anti-Semitism—and related forms of domestic intolerance—related to a larger wish to express support for a pluralist democratic vision.

On March 27, 1933, William Sirovich, a New Yorker of Jewish origins, addressed the House for ten minutes. In his stirring remarks, Sirovich blasted the “foul, iniquitous, and brutal

¹⁷ Joe Gavagan, Congressional Record, H 73, 1st sess. (March 22, 1933): 771-77.

¹⁸ This chapter presents Congressional Record statements from the House during the Seventy-third Congress (1933-34) and the first session of the Seventy-fourth Congress (1935). Unless otherwise noted at the pagination, the rhetoric reflected floor remarks. The famous “hundred-day” session met March 9-June 15, 1933. It was, in fact, a ninety-nine-day period. See Members of Congress since 1789, 2nd ed. (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1981), 171.
treatment of the nationals of Jewish extraction by the cowardly, sadistic, paranoid madman in modern Germany, Adolf Hitler.” Additional lawmakers—Christian Americans from states with small Jewish constituencies—joined Sirovich in a collegial exchange. They noted that anti-Jewish discrimination existed in the United States as well. What followed was an exchange in which statements initially tailored to condemn Nazi intolerance evolved into a discussion of American bigotry. Thomas Blanton, a representative from the 17th District in Texas was especially explicit, complaining about the “unreasonable, foolish and cruel persecutions of the Jews right here in the nation’s capital.” Why should we, he asked, “tolerate without protest Jewish persecution here in Washington?”

It is important to acknowledge that opposing foreign religious bigotry was a legislative oddity with little precedent. No quantitative mechanism exists to demonstrate how many members of Congress drew a connection between Nazi anti-Semitism and domestic anti-Semitism. It may not be possible to determine how many members became more sympathetic to the plight of Jews, but it is possible to observe that, during 1933-35, congressional concern over German mistreatment of its Jewish citizens became a part of the public record. Since the House of Representatives provides the most credible record of public discourse in the United States, these remarks may be said to capture the beginnings of the American discursive opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism that emerged during the 1930s and 1940s.


20 Thomas Blanton to Sirovich, Congressional Record, H 73, 1st sess. (March 27, 1933): 883.

21 Ibid.
Table 2-1 contains the aggregate data related to floor remarks and resolutions made in the House of Representatives during 1931-35 addressing Nazi hostility toward German Jews. The Congressional Record indexed this activity mainly under the categories of “Jews” and “Germany.” The Record contains no floor statements under the category of “Jews”—in fact, no such category existed—during the Seventy-second session (1931-32). But in 1933-34, the time in which Adolf Hitler gained power, there were a total of forty-four remarks or resolutions in which Judaism was addressed. In 1935, thirty-eight instances were recorded. It would seem that once Adolf Hitler seized power in Germany, some members of Congress recognized a potential danger and shared their concern with their colleagues.

One such person was Emanuel Celler (D-NY). In remarks he delivered in April 1933, Celler depicted the Nazis in an extremely negative light. “Hitler may not be murdering the Jews, but he is killing them economically and starving them into submission.” He warned, “There are repercussions far beyond Germany’s borders as anti-Semitism is rearing its foul head in other countries.” The sentiments of Edith Nourse Rogers (R-MA), recorded less than a week later, were expressed even more powerfully than Celler’s floor statements. “Mr. Speaker,” she began, “I take the floor to protest the brutal and unwarranted treatment of the nationals of Jewish extraction in Germany by Adolf Hitler. Our forefathers fled from religious oppression to New England. We from that section especially sympathize with any persecuted race. Jews are being subjected to unwarranted treatment in Germany today.”

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23 Edith Nourse Rogers, Congressional Record, H 73, 1st sess. (April 26, 1933): 3289.
Two months later, Massachusetts’ John McCormack spoke out on the issue. “I have watched with increasing anxiety developments in Germany since Adolf Hitler assumed controlling power,” he began. “Like members throughout the session, McCormack expressed concern that the “ruthless agonizing of the Jews” in Nazi Germany reflected a much larger hostility to democratic principles such as “liberty, justice, and equality.”

The most pertinent observation about this type of rhetoric—that appeared consistently throughout 1933—is that members bound together Jewish and Christian American outrage. Moreover, many officials used their statements to signal a larger commitment to promoting democratic pluralism, expressing their support for Jews as a worthy people. In stark contrast to the earlier Judeo-Bolshevik construct that had depicted Jews a threat to American liberties, some citizens saw the task of defending Jews as a way to demonstrate the strength of democratic rights. One might both oppose Nazism and still harbor unseemly opinions about Jews, but that particular strain of thought would have seemed especially strained, and was not apparent in 1933.

The second session of the Seventy-third Congress opened in January 1934. Almost immediately, some lawmakers renewed their warnings about the evils of Nazism. Samuel Dickstein introduced a resolution proposing a new panel charged with investigating Nazi propaganda efforts in the United States. The proposal carried overwhelmingly, and by so doing, it gave birth to the first House Special Committee on Un-American Activities. Ironically, a

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committee that would later become infamous for its so-called Jewish red baiting had its origins in an effort aimed at combating religious intolerance.\textsuperscript{25}

Not surprisingly, members who had previously been active in condemning anti-Semitism sought out leadership positions on the new committee. Chairing the seven-member body was John McCormack. Serving as the vice chairman was Samuel Dickstein.\textsuperscript{26} During 1934, they scheduled hearings in several cities including Washington, D.C.; Newark, New Jersey; Asheville, North Carolina; and New York City. In their investigations, the members focused on the domestic dispersion of Nazi propaganda, which in practical terms was wholly anti-Jewish material.

The charge, leveled by Dickstein and others, that Nazis abroad were cultivating Nazis here at home was not without substance. In Germany, fascist leaders like Deputy \textit{Führer} Rudolf Hess and Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels recognized that racially based arguments might very well appeal to Germans living in the United States.\textsuperscript{27} The challenge for antifascists in


\textsuperscript{26} Dickstein had investigated Nazi anti-Semitism for the Congress previously. In November 1933, he read passages from Hitler’s \textit{Mein Kampf} before a subcommittee hearing. Specifically, he noted Hitler’s belief that the German imperial government should have used the cover of World War I to “exterminate completely all these Jewish instigators of the people.” \textit{See U.S. Congressional Committee Hearings Index, 73rd Cong., 1st sess., (H)-(Imm.)} November 13, 1933; 63. Hereafter cited as \textit{U.S. Hearings}.

America was opposing the effects of negative Jewish depictions by explaining how bigoted portrayals threatened the liberties of all citizens. This would not prove an easy task. During the early and middle 1930s, more than 120 private organizations distributed anti-Jewish literature in the United States. The Committee on Un-American Activities was a clear, official step taken by the Congress to ensure that the purveyors of hate speech, as well as their possible adherents, understood that their views were outside the pale of acceptability.  

In May 1934, the House Un-American Activities Committee investigated a group called the “Friends of New Germany.” Led by a publicity-seeking demagogue named Heinz Spanknoebel, the “Friends” received their charter and funding directly from Berlin. Spanknoebel maintained affiliates in New York City and Chicago, and at its peak the group’s size ranged anywhere from five thousand to ten thousand members. His greatest strength lay in his organizational ability. Spanknoebel was particularly effective at bringing together disparate anti-Jewish associations. His ability to stoke bigoted sentiments, however, contributed to his hurried departure from the United States. When Immigration Committee chair Dickstein alerted Justice Department officials that Spanknoebel had failed to register as a paid foreign agent, deportation procedures commenced, and Spanknoebel clandestinely left the country.

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28 Although not a member of the committee, Adolph Sabath (D-IL) also fought against the domestic spread of anti-Semitic literature. In April 1936, responding to a constituent’s compliant, he requested the Post Office’s chief inspector to investigate a Chicago newspaper entitled *American Gentile*. The reply correspondence advised him that the paper was “not regarded as unmailable.” See Aldrich to Sabath, April 24, 1936, box 1/12, Adolph Sabath Papers, 1903-52, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. For more on the *American Gentile*, see Phillip Jenkins, *Hoods and Shirts: The Extreme Right in Pennsylvania, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 120.

But while Spanknoebel returned to Germany, his “Friends” remained behind. In May 1934, the House Un-American Activities Committee subpoenaed the new leader, Fritz Gissibl, to explain his group’s political objectives.30 “Does your association see its discontent and anger against the Jew in general?” asked Chairman McCormack. Gissibl’s response was somewhat ambiguous. He replied, “We are against those that were against the Germans.” “Well you [and your associates] came over here and engaged in activities against the Jewish people,” responded McCormack. The witness replied, “I do not think it was that so much, Mr. Chairman, as it was to organize the Germans and unite them.” Apparently Gissibl’s explanation did not go very far in satisfying Chairman McCormack, who pointed out that the efforts of the Friends of New Germany “were directed only against the Jews.”31

Later in the hearing, committee counsel Thomas Hardwick succeeded in baiting the witness. Gissibl blurted, “I believe that if one is attacked, he has a right to defend himself.” The counselor stopped: “[L]et’s see about that a minute now. Take the Jew. He did not raise a row about Germany until Hitler went to persecuting him and removed him from his place of domicile. They are merely defending themselves, are they not?” In his curt response to Hardwick’s question, Gissibl conceded the point.32

30 Dickstein also inquired with the State Department about Gissibl’s immigration status. In the request for information, the vice chairman attached for Secretary of State Cordell Hull’s review a two-page memorandum containing redacted testimony in which Gissibl acknowledged that he received his orders directly from Adolf Hitler. See Dickstein to Cordell Hull, December 5, 1935, box 5/3. Samuel Dickstein Papers, 1923-44, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

31 U.S. Hearings, 73rd Cong., 2nd sess. (H)-HS (May 17, 1934): 100-101. In 1936, the “Friends” changed their name to the “German-American Bund.” Gissibl played a leading role in selecting the new Bund leader, Fritz Julius Kuhn. See Diamond, Movement, 162, 217-18; Bell, Shadow, 55-58; Goodman, Extraordinary, 17.

Walter Kappe, the editor in chief of the pro-Nazi Deutsche Zeitung, was another witness hauled in before the committee. The Zeitung was an American-based paper geared toward German immigrants. In practice, it served as a domestic outlet for Nazi propaganda. Dickstein saw the Zeitung for what it was. “As a member of Congress I have tried to clear the air in this country,” he proclaimed. “But you and your paper made unjustifiable attacks upon me as a Jew.” When Kappe retorted, “[O]nly as one that is fighting and saying things about Germany that are in my estimation untrue,” Dickstein continued to press the witness. “If I said the Nazis have removed certain Jewish doctors, lawyers, and judges, that is not an untrue slander against Germany,” he asked. In his reply, Kappe answered “no.” “And if I said that Germany has put certain Jewish peoples into a concentration camp,” continued Dickstein, “that was not lying about Germany was it?” Once again, the witness agreed.33

These and other exchanges expanded congressional knowledge of the Nazi supporters in their midst. They revealed the existence of nefarious plans to smuggle and distribute anti-Jewish propaganda within America’s borders. Since anti-Jewish representations were the hallmark of Nazi propaganda, one line of defense lay in characterizing such stereotypes as “un-American.” As the historian Leland Bell observed, Nazi leaders believed that “all Germans were united in a racial community which bound them to the Fatherland by their common blood.”34 This was the message that fascist sympathizers promoted within the United States through newspapers, pamphlets, and public demonstrations.35 It was an idea that some in Congress tried to dilute by


34 Bell, “Failure,” 587.

helping citizens to understand how and why Nazi ideology was incompatible with American civic guarantees.

By July 1934, Chairman McCormack and Vice Chairman Dickstein convened the House Committee on Un-American Activities sixteen times. Some hearings focused on domestic groups such as William Dudley Pelley’s “Silver Shirt Legion.”36 Others examined Nazi summer camps for children located on Long Island, New York.37 Some sessions were public, others were private [executive session]. But, on each and every occasion, the committee examined the issue of Nazi anti-Semitism in the United States. Over a seven-month period, elected officials deposed scores of witnesses regarding the domestic dissemination of such propaganda. They further submitted a report that found that Adolf Hitler “made every effort to disturb American citizens of German birth in this country . . . and through the form of propaganda to have twenty million honest-to-goodness Americans subscribe to his racial philosophies.”38

Congressional concern over the intolerant aspects of Nazi ideology also appeared outside the Un-American Activities Committee. Additional members began speaking out. In the minds of these lawmakers, religious discrimination was unacceptable whether directed at Jews or at fellow Christians. One such person was William Connery. An Irish Democrat from

36 For Pelley, see Jenkins, *Hoods* 120-25; and Ribuffo, *Old*, 25-79. Before becoming a demagogue, Pelley wrote a number of Hollywood movies. He penned a romantic comedy entitled *What Women Love* (1920); a western called *Backfire* (1922); and a drama titled *The Light in the Dark* (1922) depicting a worker girl struck by a wealthy matron’s car, as well as contributing to the period’s gangster genre with *The Shock* (1923), starring Lon Chaney.

37 In 1937, a number of lawmakers spoke out against Nazi summer camps operating in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Michigan. Representative Dickstein tracked this activity; his private files contain numerous reports published in the *New York Times*, *New York Post*, and *New York World-Telegram*. See Dickstein Papers, box 16/5.

Massachusetts, Connery blasted the new German leadership. In remarks on the House floor, he reminded his colleagues that the Nazis were not “confining their brutality to just Catholics and Jews,” but rather that their actions were a part of a larger pattern of religious oppression.\textsuperscript{39} Democrat John Higgins expressed similar sentiments, as did a freshman member from Connecticut named James Shanley, and Representative Thomas Ford from California.\textsuperscript{40}

In their discussions of Nazism, lawmakers did not confine their criticism entirely to religious issues. Some members addressed the seemingly bizarre fact that Nazi Germany would host the upcoming Olympic Games.\textsuperscript{41} Others expressed concern that German Jews faced difficulties securing entry visas into the United States. But concerns over Germany’s ill-treatment of Catholics occurred even more frequently—indeed, ten such statements from different members addressed this issue. This activity suggests that a larger process was under way, one in which some Americans felt compelled to speak out against ethno-religious persecution. The lawmakers’ opposition stemmed from an aversion to despotic rule that had its origin in the Nazi suppression of secular rights, suppression that arose from—above all else—Nazi religious intolerance.

Members of Congress were not the only Americans publicly discussing threats to the Western liberal tradition. Indeed, during the 1930s, writers, newspaper editors, artists, and actors


\textsuperscript{41} For the 1936 Berlin Olympics, see Richard Mandell, \textit{The Nazi Olympics} (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 73-83; and Bell, \textit{Shadow}, 39-42. Leni Riefenstahl’s film \textit{Olympia} (1937) is also instructive. During the games, Hitler at times smiled and waved to onlookers. However, after several Jesse Owens victories, Riefenstahl’s cameras showed him and his entourage hurriedly departing Berlin’s Olympic stadium. See also Donald Niewyck, ed., \textit{The Holocaust} (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 3.
also spoke out. Cultural mediums proved to be important conduits for enlightening citizens about events occurring outside the United States. Defeating “fascism”—a term that could have been applied to governments in Italy, Spain, Japan, or Germany—emerged as a larger metaphor used to highlight the differences between life in the United States and in foreign lands. As the decade evolved, and as the collision between liberal and fascist worldviews took on a military nature, writers and artists played a vital role in presenting citizens with a nuanced portrait of the enemy.

Notably, the themes that had first appeared in Congress later permeated the cultural discourse. During 1934–41, Americans had the opportunity to both read about and watch depictions of fascist violence and intolerance. Just as no quantitative method exists for determining how many Americans learned about Nazi anti-Semitism from congressional rhetoric, it is likewise impossible to determine the number of Americans who gleaned that information from cultural sources. Nevertheless, the larger point is that a number of popular discussions existed from which citizens might have learned of the Nazi contempt for religious liberties.

From the industry’s earliest days, Hollywood studios bosses, with a clear influence over American public opinion, introduced citizens to foreign political threats. During 1917–22, silent movies scripts detailing communist subterfuge were in particular demand. In *Bolshevism on Trial* (1919), misguided Americans fall prey to cunning Bolshevik agents who infiltrate their bourgeois reform organization. It was a case of earnest, Progressive-style advocacy gone horribly awry. The film’s message explained that communist subversion was an unpleasant fact in the United States, encouraging Americans to exercise greater caution in their public and private dealings. In *Dangerous Hours* (1920) and *The New Moon* (1919), moviegoers observed images that are more sinister. They saw representations of wanton destruction, the murder of

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children, and repeated scenes documenting an alleged Bolshevik decree that rendered Russian women the communal property of all male Party members.43

This increase in public attention might have damaged Jewish portrayals. Some Americans perceived communism—or, more specifically, Soviet Communism as derived from Marxist-Leninism—as a modern example of Jewish efforts to upset the democratic order. These observers noted that the ideology had provided a devastating critique of the Western liberal tradition by questioning private property ownership and the legitimacy of Christian institutions. A reasonable person could conclude that such doctrines were “Jewish heresies” since Jews also seemed uncomfortable with the dominance of Christian norms. Hollywood studio moguls, almost all of whom were Jewish, were acutely aware of these calumnies, and took care to offer audiences generic, faceless themes such as mob violence and the international Comintern.44

In films such as *The Red Viper* (1920) and *The Great Shadow* (1920), Americans learned about a host of presumed threats: anarchists, Bolsheviks, unionists, and social reformers.45 *The Volcano* (1919), which depicted the spate of Bolshevik bomb plots directed against U.S. officials immediately following the First World War, featured a modified anti-Semitic storyline. The movie’s hero, originally “Captain Garland,” became instead “Captain Nathan Levinson.” The hook-nosed antagonist remained, but in the remake he delivered the decisive line: “I am not a Jew. I am a Bolshevik.”46

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43 Ibid., 135-43.


46 Ibid., 141. Changing a character’s ethnicity by modifying his/her surname was a common technique. Sensitive to charges of anti-Semitism, the poet Archibald MacLeish changed one letter of his 1933 work *Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller’s City*. In the book’s second edition, the fictitious Comrade Levine instead became Comrade Devine. See Archibald MacLeish, *Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller’s City* (New York: John Day, 1933), 25. See also Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 2004), 131-32.
These efforts to use a foreign political issue to ignite a larger discussion about cultural identity are most enlightening when viewed as part of an ongoing public contest. Hollywood studio executives might have wished to downplay the connection between communism and Judaism, but to some Christian Americans, this silence was deafening. Film historian Steven Carr has termed the emerging concern about Jewish control of the entertainment industry—and about this cohort’s ability to sculpt social norms—the “Hollywood Question.”\(^{47}\) This idea, which Carr has juxtaposed against the more familiar “Jewish Question” construct, helped Christian Americans during the 1920s and 1930s to recognize that new technologies had allowed Jews to exercise influence within American society that was disproportionate to their numbers.

During the middle and late 1920s, the most successful expression of the idea that Jews posed a threat to Christendom involved arguments published in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This fabricated work, which first appeared in Czarist Russia at the turn of the twentieth century, described a sinister plot hatched by a shadowy group of Jews seeking to enslave Christians.\(^{48}\) The work became hugely popular in Europe following the First World War, and later appeared in the United States. Automobile manufacturer Henry Ford was particularly involved with sharing the *Protocols’* message with Americans. In 1923, his Dearborn Publishing Co., which boasted a peak circulation of 700,000, issued a four-volume set of bigoted tracts known collectively as *The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem*. This compendium

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\(^{47}\) Steven Carr, “The Hollywood Question: America and the Belief in Jewish Control over Motion Pictures before 1941” (Ph.D. diss., Austin: University of Texas, 1994), 45, 171.

included the *Protocols*, as well as stories previously published in his anti-Semitic weekly paper *Dearborn Independent*.49

In *The International Jew*, Ford shared with readers his suspicions that Jews controlled the world’s banking systems and the American education system and were sowing the seeds of sociocultural and political disruption. In topical chapters such as “Jewish Supremacy in the Theatre and Cinema” and “Jewish Jazz Becomes Our National Music,” Ford further outlined his belief that the emerging entertainment industry had provided Jews too much influence in shaping opinions.50 Restating the *Protocols*’ overarching theme, the magnate alerted his readers that a reckoning day between Anglo-Saxons and Jewish “Orientals” was at hand. He implored Christian Americans to recognize that nothing less than the fate of the twentieth century was at stake.51

Countervailing pressures from secular-minded Americans—both Jewish and Christian—compelled the magnate-turned-hatemonger to truncate his public activities. In 1927, domestic boycotts of his automobile company, as well as a string of lawsuits filed by the Anti-Defamation League, resulted in his “open letter” of apology.52 This backlash demonstrated that even during the nativist 1920s, there were occasions where bigoted sentiments met with public


51 Some scholars have indeed argued that the Jews “won” the twentieth century from its Christian stewards. See Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 44.

52 The Jewish American performer Billy Rose wrote a song commemorating Ford’s enlightenment. Entitled “Since Henry Ford Apologized to Me,” the ditty began, “I was sad and blue but now I’m just as good as you. Since Henry Ford apologized to me. I’ve thrown a-way-a my lit-tle Che-vro-let and bought my-self a Ford Cou-pe. . . . My mother says she’ll feed him if he calls . . . Ge-fil-te-fish and mat-zo-balls.” See Lee, *Ford*, 82-83.
rebuke. Of course, this is not to suggest that public aspersions directed against the Jews desisted.⁵³ Even following Ford’s change of heart, the ongoing contest to define a range of ethnic minorities persisted.

Take, for example, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s The Callahans and the Murphys (1927). This silent film—a slapstick summer comedy—provoked condemnation from Protestants, Catholics, and Jews alike. Adapted from an identically titled novel written by Kathleen Norris, the movie was set in a New York City tenement neighborhood. The screenplay delivered a basic “Romeo and Juliet” plot that relied heavily on anti-Irish stereotypes to portray the two feuding families. There were images of excessive alcohol consumption, promiscuity, violence, and stubbornness. The film’s leading characters, Mrs. Callahan and Mrs. Murphy, were tawdry drunks. “This stuff makes me see double and feel single” read Mrs. Murphy’s (Polly Moran) line-card as the camera captured her drinking a large bottle of beer in a saloon. In a later scene, the two matrons, who were now both drinking in the saloon, soaked each other’s blouses in booze before instigating a barroom brawl.⁵⁴

These lowbrow representations of non-Protestant ethnicities captured the sociocultural tensions apparent in the United States during the twenties.⁵⁵ Naturally, Catholics resented the depiction of Irish women as bawdy and ill-tempered. Their husbands were effectively absent,

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⁵³ The Samuel Dickstein Papers include a file devoted to political cartoons. One document was a reproduction of an image first published in 1927 by the Paris paper Le Boulevardier. The slide depicted Ford’s apology by representing him as an angel in loincloth, set upon by a gang of merry Jewish angels who pricked and poked him for blood with Stars of David. See “The Return of the Prodigal Son,” box 16/6, Dickstein Papers.


either simpletons or, worst of all, British. The *Time* magazine review, entitled “Irish Belittled,” noted “Mrs. Callahan and Mrs. Murphy hurl garbled Hibernian-English at each other over a backyard fence. They grab at each other’s hair, throw pots and pans. They swat their children, who make love in cow-like fashion.”

56 Editors at the *Irish World and Independent Liberator* coyly identified the larger problem: “Hollywood [Jews] should confine their talents to the Rebeccas of their own families. If they [Jews] want stupidity and indecency, they needn’t go out of the [Jewish] Ghetto to find it. If they [Jews] want grotesque figures, Hester Street is full of them.”

57 However, Jews also disliked the movie, particularly its subplot about the machinations of “international bankers.” This theme hinted at a contemporary euphemism, specifically the “Merchants of Death” thesis that held Jewish bankers and munitions makers responsible for the outbreak of war in 1914. Shortly after its release, in the face of intense public outcry, studio executives at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer responded to the backlash by removing the film from distribution.

The public’s intensity following the negative onscreen depiction of Irish-Catholics was a precursor to the fury unleashed later that same year when Pathé studios released Cecil B. DeMille’s *The King of Kings* (1927). On the face of it, one might think that a film about the life of Jesus between the Crucifixion and Resurrection would have interested Christian Americans. However, many citizens found the treatment blasphemous, despite the fact that DeMille was a

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56 *Time Magazine*, August 22, 1927, 8. One month earlier, *Time* had published a far more positive review. “In the best tradition, Mrs. Callahan and Murphy squabble incessantly over the backyard fence which is comical because their children are inter-engaged.” See also *Time Magazine*, July 25, 1927, 17.


Carr, “Hollywood,” 179. As was the case with The Callahans and the Murphys, Jewish Americans also protested the film. These citizens worried that Kings was little more than modern “passion play” that served to reinforce the notion that the Jews—and not the Romans—had killed Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{59} By late 1927, the Anti-Defamation League had joined with Christians in protesting the film because it promoted invidious anti-Jewish stereotypes.\textsuperscript{60} Despite finally reaching some level of agreement with protest organizations, boycotts continued into 1928 in Denver, Colorado, and Omaha, Nebraska.

By the close of the 1920s, Jews had been associated with Bolshevism, heresy, bigotry, and murder. Those responsible for publicizing such depictions varied; so, too, did those who benefited. The larger point, however, is that throughout the decade Americans had yet to embrace the pluralist sociocultural identity that later emerged as mainstream. A useful point for inquiry becomes trying to understand when and why Americans became more accepting of ethno-religious minorities. The challenge therein lies in reconciling the hostility of what Jonathan Sarna has termed the “tribal twenties” with evidence that this tension lifted in the following decade as the national identity became more ethnically varied.\textsuperscript{61}

Lizabeth Cohen has examined this phenomenon. She has concluded that the role that first-generation Americans played in promoting economic recovery following the Great


Depression changed the nation’s identity. Blue-collar, unionized workers, mostly Catholics, forged a path into the heretofore-Protestant middle class. Additional macrochanges in the society brought Americans closer together. Disappearing, for example, were local grocery stores. In their stead, national supermarket chains emerged that also functioned as cultural agents. Executives at the Atlantic and Pacific (A&P) company, a leading supermarket chain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, began stocking a range of ethnic foods and nontraditional wares. Since A&P stores comprised a national chain, patrons throughout the United States had access to the products. As citizens consumed similar foods—a probability due to marketing, coupons, and recipe cards—a distinctive American diet emerged that reflected the nation’s new ethnic variety.

In a similar way, Broadway musicals also helped to soften hardened attitudes about Jews and other minorities becoming part of the mainstream. Productions such as The Jazz Singer (1925), Whoopee (1928), and Babes in Arms (1937) dealt with some of the issues that Jewish immigrants faced during their assimilation into a predominantly Christian American society. In these plays, the characters—and the audience—first must recognize who they are (e.g., Anglo-Saxons, Asians, Celts, Tartars, Teutons, Jews). They next must learn to hone whatever sociocultural skills would best facilitate the path to acceptance.

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An Anglican disposition was not necessarily preferred. *The Jazz Singer* (1927) portrayed the son of an immigrant Russian Jewish family who disguised himself as an African American to pursue a career in vaudeville.65 In *Whoopee* (1928), the famous Jewish American actor Eddie Cantor played a Protestant. The fact that audiences knew of Cantor’s ethnicity, but his various interlocutors remained oblivious, made the goings-on more comical. Indeed, by the early 1930s, Broadway audiences were “comfortable with Jewish ethnic humor and characters performing on stage.”66 A further observation might be that audiences were starting to learn that a person’s sociocultural identity could not be accurately exhibited, or gauged, solely through physical characteristics.

All of this activity suggests that by 1933, when Adolf Hitler became the leader of Germany, Americans were perhaps familiar with Jews, fascism, and their relationship to life in the United States. A review of popular novels, plays, and movies from the period demonstrates that writers and artists played a role in publicizing fascist intolerance toward religious and civil liberties. Ideas that first appeared in the congressional statements, such as upholding democratic values in the face of autocracy, reappeared in the cultural discourse. Moreover, unlike the political attention, which waned in the middle and later 1930s, there was no apparent drop-off in cultural interest. As the decade evolved, so, too, did the commitment that artists and writers dedicated to raising levels of public awareness.

In May 1934, *Christian Century* published “Will America Go Fascist?” The article drew a direct link between the fascist hysteria of the early 1930s with the “Red Scare” of the preceding decade. While dismissing the nation’s prior fears, the article informed its readers that

65 Ibid., 32-39.

66 Ibid., 24, 45. In 1933, the same year that Hitler took power in Germany, Eddie Cantor was the Screen Actors’ Guild president.
fascism was a true menace. “Everyone who had any understanding of the American scene knew perfectly well at the time that our post-war Red Menace was a ridiculous piece of fiction.” “But every student of foreign affairs,” the article continued, “knows that fascism is not trumped up.” 67 The author argued that fascism appealed to those citizens who did not “understand the values and ideals of American democracy.” One way to ensure that “no doughty opposition entrenched itself” lay in differentiating for the American public the chasms separating fascist and liberal ideals. 68

Author Rex Stout, best known for creating the fictitious detective-extraordinaire Nero Wolfe, was one artist who embraced this challenge. In 1934, he anonymously published a suspense thriller entitled The President Vanishes. 69 The plot depicted a fascist conspiracy to capture the White House launched by Wall Street financiers, munitions makers, and a paramilitary group known as the “Gray Shirts.” The book’s protagonist, President Stanley Craig, was a peace-loving man who maintained noninterventionist views. However, following a steady stream of fascist propaganda, the tide of public opinion turned against him. When Craig became aware that the fascists had gained in popularity, the president decided to stage his own abduction.

The gambit worked, as the American people soon concluded that fascist groups had orchestrated the antidemocratic undertaking. The “vanishing” instigated a period of national introspection for citizens who had forgotten the value of their civic freedoms. In the book’s closing, President Craig and his advisors acknowledged to a grateful public that they had


68 Ibid., 593.

perpetrated the hoax. Stout’s book sold over one million copies. In December 1934, Paramount studios retold the story in an identically titled film.\textsuperscript{70}

The fictional plot to \textit{The President Vanishes} resembled a factual occurrence that General Smedley D. Butler (Ret.) had related to the House Committee on Un-American Activities. This is an example in which current events and culture might have become interwoven in a citizen’s consciousness. In late 1934, General Butler testified that some Wall Street brokers had contacted him with a plan to seize the government. The \textit{New Republic} reported the story as a brewing cabal, observing, “General Butler does not habitually tell lies.” Its authors concluded, “The fact that such an attempt would be silly does not make it incredible.”\textsuperscript{71}

Fears of fascist subversion continued to capture the imaginations of writers, film producers, and the public. Indeed, in 1935 Sinclair Lewis published a cautionary tale entitled \textit{It Can’t Happen Here}.\textsuperscript{72} In Lewis’s story, a demagogic senator named Berzelius “Buzz” Windrip undermined the nation’s democratic system. Campaigning legally, Windrip secured his party’s presidential nomination by pandering to religious, racial, economic, and social anxieties. In Lewis’s narrative, as in real life, a popular radio priest fomented unrest in the American heartland. Additionally, Lewis’s tale included some nefarious Wall Street bankers who subsidized a paramilitary organization known as the “Minutemen.” However, unlike the

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\textsuperscript{70} MacDonnell, \textit{Insidious}, 29-30.


\textsuperscript{72} Sinclair Lewis, \textit{It Can’t Happen Here} (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1936).
Revolutionary-era group, which stood vigilant in defense of civil liberties, Lewis’s patriots specialized in electoral intimidation.\textsuperscript{73}

Upon winning the presidency, Buzz Windrip accumulated all federal powers. Dissenting legislators and judges faced imprisonment. The nation soon began a diversionary war of conquest against Mexico. Individual liberties rapidly disappeared as a heightened state of national zeal took root. A political police force known as the “Corpos” gained extensive authority. So-called enemies of the state were murdered or sent to concentration camps, where they disappeared forever. This plotline was a thinly veiled accounting of actual events occurring inside Nazi Germany. Lewis had used a cultural medium—and an American setting—to explain how fascism trampled freedom.\textsuperscript{74} \textit{It Can’t Happen Here} does not end with a democratic realignment. The underground resistance group failed in its efforts; the play closed with the protagonist’s young grandson fleeing to Canada to “carry on the fight.”\textsuperscript{75} The audience must ponder the tensions between the false promises offered by fascist demagogues and upholding civic liberty. The author’s latent point was that economic, religious, and cultural factions could indeed lead to violence in the United States.\textsuperscript{76}

Lewis’s unsettling story earned him a Hollywood “blacklisting.” His tale was widely considered an achievement in “agitprop.”\textsuperscript{77} In February 1936, Metro-Goldwyn Mayer canceled

\textsuperscript{73} MacDonnell, \textit{Insidious}, 30.

\textsuperscript{74} Lewis, \textit{It Can’t}, 57, 61, 64, 67, 69, 95, 104, 108, 114.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 121, 129, 134.


its commitment to produce a film based on the story. The studio had spent $50,000 for the story’s rights, but executives feared that the grim plot and unsettling resolution might lend undue substance to the lingering charge that Jews in the entertainment industry promoted anti-American movies. Some remained concerned that writers in Hollywood were trying to use the Nazis’ treatment of Jews to make propaganda pictures.\textsuperscript{78} Although Sinclair Lewis was Christian, he was a member of the “Hollywood Anti-Nazi League.”\textsuperscript{79} During 1936-39, this organization took an active role in leveling protest against the German regime. The League sponsored two weekly radio programs, published a biweekly tabloid called \textit{Hollywood Now}, and constituted a number of advocacy committees designed to investigate domestic issues related to racial, religious, and gender inequality.\textsuperscript{80}

While \textit{It Can’t Happen Here} never appeared as a film, its message still reached the country. In the wake of the controversy surrounding the decision to deny the play access to the silver screen, retail sales boomed. Lewis’s work ultimately reached fifth place on the 1936 nationwide best-seller list.\textsuperscript{81} The story also found a home as part of the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Theatre Project. During fall 1936, government-funded actors performed the tale over twenty-five times in cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, San


\textsuperscript{80} Gabler, \textit{Empire}, 328-31, 344.

\textsuperscript{81} Alice Payne Hackett and James Henry Burke, \textit{80 Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1975} (New York: Boker, 1977), 121.
Francisco, Cleveland, Miami, and Seattle.\textsuperscript{82} The plot’s worst-case scenario about a fascist takeover in the United States provided citizens with an accessible narrative that explained the need for vigilance.

Reviews of the play varied. In a synopsis entitled “Fascism: Nightmarish History That Hasn’t Even Happened Yet,” \textit{Newsweek} reported, “Lewis had taken the bit in his teeth and galloped off to never-never land.” Other reviewers, such as Clifton Fadiman of the \textit{New Yorker}, were more charitable. Fadiman warned his readers: “It can happen here. Read Lewis’s book and find out how.”\textsuperscript{83} The larger point is that by the decade’s middle year, opposition to fascism and Nazism was a clearly defined topic in political and cultural discourses. Numerous mediums existed for Americans to learn about the impending collision between the liberal and fascist-Nazi worldviews.

One of the most provocative episodes dealing with this strain occurred in February 1939, when the German-American Bund orchestrated a massive rally at New York City’s Madison Square Garden. More than twenty thousand fascist sympathizers listened to pro-Hitler rhetoric espoused before a thirty-foot portrait of George Washington. Along with the presence of various Nazi paramilitary units, the more than two thousand uniformed New York City police officers lent a martial air to the meeting. These feelings became more perceptible as both official and unofficial authorities applied strong-arm tactics to hecklers. The Bund rally attracted national and international press coverage. The reports of a massive convention of Nazis unnerved the


mainstream American public. It provided citizens with a compelling factual example—joining the fictional accounts—of the dangerous role that German fascism could play in undermining the United States.  

However, perhaps the clearest evidence that news of the threat reached Americans involved the film *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939). Based on a factual story involving a foiled German spy ring operating in the United States, Warner Bros. released the picture specifically to heighten national levels of concern.  

The decision to produce a movie that philosophically and morally attacked Nazism was risky. Some studios executives feared they could not survive without the German market, a rationale that enraged Jack Warner. In a postwar interview he recalled, “The Silver Shirts and the Bundists are marching in Los Angeles right now. There are high school kids with swastikas on their sleeves a few blocks from our studio. Is that what you want for some crummy film royalties out of Germany?”  

American media outlets demonstrated an interest in the story. As early as 1934, the *Pennsylvania Weekly News* detailed the “nefarious work” of German-funded organization in the United States. The article noted that Hitler hoped to weaken the nation by “promoting racial antagonism among the different national groups in the United States.” During the mid-1930s, the possibility of Nazi infiltration, again aided by their stoking of bigoted appeals, remained a viable issue.  

While many Nazi spy rings indeed operated in the United States, the case that inspired *Confessions of A Nazi Spy* involved an American citizen who schemed to steal blank

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86 Birdwell, *Celluloid*, 69-70.  
87 “U.S. Finds Nazi Menace,” box 16/6, Dickstein Papers.  
88 “Kuhn Admits Aims Are Same As Nazis,” box 18/1, Dickstein Papers.
passports. Guenther Gustav Rumrich was born in Chicago in 1911. He grew up in Europe and only returned to the United States in 1929. In January 1930, he enlisted in the U.S. Army but went AWOL shortly after his induction. For this offense, Rumrich was court-martialed and received a six-month prison term. Following his release, he opted to reenlist. During 1932-34, he soldiered without incident in the Panama Canal Zone, as well as in Fort Missoula, Montana. In late 1935, after going AWOL for a second time, Rumrich headed for New York City, where he took on several jobs including dishwasher and Berlitz language instructor.

It was not until March 1936 that Rumrich decided to pursue work as a secret agent. He sent a letter offering his services to the official Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*. Rumrich falsely claimed to be an American army officer previously posted to Pearl Harbor. He requested that officials in Berlin contact him through the *New York Times*’ public notice column. The Germans took up Rumrich’s unsolicited proposal. Throughout 1936-37, Rumrich (aka Crown) passed information to his Nazi handler. Despite his eagerness to do so, however, he was in no position to help significantly the Fatherland. This disappointment perhaps lent itself to his agreeing in 1938 to attempt a theft of American passports. Some aspects of his scheming, Rumrich confessed during his interrogations, involved the possibility of using a gadget that dispensed poison gas from a pen in order to subdue American officials.

90 Ibid., 52.
91 Ibid., 53.
In addition to the official details of the case, a subplot soon emerged. Prior to the jury’s decision, the lead government detective, Leon Turrou, a naturalized American who moved to the United States after living in Shanghai, Berlin, and London, penned several media contracts. This untoward decision put the “G-Man” publicly at odds with his superiors, and he resigned soon after the case ended. Such controversy did nothing but whet the public’s interest. Warner Brothers signed the enterprising investigator to a $25,000 contract that named him “technical advisor” on any future film documenting the case. Production began soon after the guilty verdicts appeared in October 1938.

First released in April 1939, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* was a trailblazer that specifically identified Hitler’s regime as an antidemocratic threat to the United States. The film’s plot was not fictional and the movie’s cinematographer achieved a documentary feel by interspersing newsreel. Directed by the German émigré Anatole Litvak, and starring the famed Jewish actor Edward G. Robinson as Turrou, both men were members of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League. All the people associated with the film felt strongly about making a movie that publicized the Nazi danger. Much to the chagrin of the studio’s legal department, Jack Warner refused to open the picture with a disclaimer indicating that the characters and events portrayed in the film were

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98 Birdwell, *Celluloid*, 70.
fictitious. The movie mirrored real-life events, and any filmgoer who had followed the newspapers would have recognized the factual and artistic overlap.

Much like the congressional committees five years earlier, Confessions stressed several basic points. First, Nazi Germany sought to destroy the United States by fomenting religious, racial, and class hatreds. Second, the Nazis maintained domestic-based propaganda organizations that would help them to achieve this dastardly goal. Last, Americans needed to awaken to the dangers posed by the Nazis. If citizens had not followed the earlier congressional discourse, the movie offered them an additional venue. Warner Brothers provided the film with “a vigorous and often outrageous public relations campaign” that befitted the studio’s expectations that the film would be a big winner at the box office.

Local theater owners were encouraged to drum up interest by placing anonymous phone calls that alerted citizens “the Nazis were coming.” In Texas and New Mexico, the advertising strategy for Confessions was so effective that worried citizens alerted the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Special Agent R. J. Untreiner reported to his superiors that theater owners had distributed “small pink cards bearing a Swastika and the words “Heil Hitler!” Differing colored cards conveying similar sentiments appeared in neighboring areas. On the reverse side of all the cards was the full title of the picture, together with the performance dates and times. In

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99 Ibid., 65-69, 75.
100 Koppes and Black, Hollywood, 21, 27; Gabler, Empire, 341.
101 Birdwell, Celluloid, 74-75; Koppes and Black, Hollywood, 28-29.
102 MacDonnell, Insidious, 63. In fact, the movie did poorly at the box office. Warner Bros. rereleased the film in 1940, adding new scenes that kept abreast of the current situation in Europe. See Birdwell, Celluloid, 78.
103 MacDonnell, Insidious, 67.
104 Ibid.
Washington State, law enforcement officials received a handbill—ostensibly produced by the Bund—that warned citizens “if you see this film Hitler will take serious reprisals on you when he realizes his inevitable destiny over America!” In fact, the placards were publicity stunts engineered by the local theater chain.105

The German consul in Los Angeles reacted to the movie with fervor, writing an angry letter to Joseph Breen, head of the Hollywood Production Code Administration. This noncompulsory office, founded in 1934, allowed the government input over movie scope and content.106 The diplomat issued oblique threats that Confessions might result in “difficulties” between the American and Nazi governments.107 Likewise, the German charge d’affaires stationed in Washington D.C. complained bitterly to Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Nazis threatened the State Department by saying that German filmmakers would respond to Confessions with their own series of quasi-documentary films that depicted America as a land of greed, corruption, crime, and general discontent.108 The German government banned the film, as did their Axis partners. A number of European countries—Ireland, Hungary, Switzerland, Holland and Norway—refused to show the film. In light of what would happen to those nations during the next five years, all might have benefited from watching the movie and taking its message regarding the need for vigilance to heart.109

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105 As quoted in MacDonnell, Insidious, 67-68.


108 Birdwell, Celluloid, 76.

In the United States, *Confessions* earned positive critical reviews. The *New York Daily News* rated the movie “good to excellent.”\(^{110}\) Taken as pure cinema,” Franz Hoellering wrote for *The Nation*, the story was “first class . . . a new style of movie journalism,”\(^{111}\) Such encouraging responses also reflected a new appreciation for Jack Warner’s decision to level a public attack against Hitler and his followers. To this end, in May 1939, *Variety* published a particularly prescient story. After praising Warner Brothers for making a movie of great importance, the piece closed by noting “decades from now what’s happening may be seen in perspective. And the historians will almost certainly take note of this daringly frank broadside from a picture company.”\(^{112}\)

Movies did not have to strike alarmist tones in order to convey a negative sense of Nazism. Perhaps the best-known film about the issue was a comedy that ridiculed the danger. Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* (1940) delighted Americans with its farcical plot of two identical-appearing citizens from the fictitious country of Tomania. The storyline centered on a pedestrian Jewish barber with amnesia who at times is mistaken for the nation’s dictator, Hynkel. The barber is unable to comprehend, or remember, why strangers cheer him. The dictator, conversely, is unable to understand why he sometimes received treatment befitting a commoner. Chaplin’s impersonation of Adolf Hitler via Hynkel was notable for both his uncanny physical likeness, and his mastery of explosive, gibberish-laden diatribes.\(^{113}\) A huge success in the United States, *The Great Dictator* was the all-time highest-earning Chaplin project

\(^{110}\) As quoted in MacDonnell, *Insidious*, 69, 204 n. 84.

\(^{111}\) As quoted in Birdwell, *Celluloid*, 77, 200 n. 101.

\(^{112}\) As quoted in MacDonnell, *Insidious*, 70.

and, indeed, was the third-highest moneymaking film of the ten-year period from 1933 to 1942.\footnote{Alpers, \textit{Dictators}, 87-88.}

As the decade of the 1930s ended, the issue of combating Nazism as a fundamental American responsibility appeared in various public discourses. The theme that appeared most frequently was that a civic democracy, such as the Founding Fathers had envisioned, protected minority rights. On the other hand, fascist dictatorships, the path that Adolf Hitler favored, used any means necessary to trample individual freedoms. During 1933-41, whether from Samuel Dickstein, Rex Stout, Sinclair Lewis, Edmund G. Robinson, or Charlie Chaplin, American citizens had opportunities to learn what the looming struggle against the Nazi enemy denoted. In sharp contrast to the 1920s—a period during which citizens paid little attention to events occurring outside the United States—the 1930s featured efforts to raise levels of public awareness about Nazi hostility. Specifically, some observers noted the connection that existed between the Nazis’ disparaging of Jews and their attack on democratic liberties. Americans faced a clear challenge, one in which they were asked to consider the idea that all forms of bigotry and social proscription contradicted the democratic freedoms that generations of citizens had claimed to cherish. Changing socio-cultural thinking, however, would be a gradual process, one that would require leadership. In the next chapter, we find one such prominent American. A member of the Protestant establishment elite who used his professional talents and positions of power to sculpt new attitudes in which the protection of Jews and other persecuted minorities held inherent moral value.
Table 2-1  Number of House Remarks and Resolutions Related to Religious Intolerance (1931-1935)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress</th>
<th>Remarks/Resolutions</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>72nd (1931-1933)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73rd (1933-1934)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74th (1935; 1st sess.)</td>
<td>38</td>
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Source: *Congressional Record Index* (H) 72nd through 74th Congresses.
CHAPTER 3
ARCHIBALD MACLEISH AND THE GROWING DISCURSIVE OPPOSITION TO NAZI ANTI-SEMITISM, 1933-1941

There is anti-Semitic talk around the country. The activities of Mr. Hitler in Germany have had their effect here. This particular antipathy flourishes because no one has ever dug down to get at the underlying facts.
—Archibald MacLeish, editor, Fortune magazine, to Henry Luce, November 14, 1935

The unbelievable record of Nazi barbarities concerns non-Jews as well as Jews. . . . Any man who loathes fascism will fear anti-Semitism.
—Editors of Fortune, Jews in America, 1936

When the Nazi regime took power in Germany, Archibald MacLeish was a little-known American literary figure. A member of the Protestant elite, he was seemingly unthreatened by the persecution of European Jewry. Yet during the period from 1933 to 1941, Archibald MacLeish employed various media to put forth an argument that expressions of religious intolerance—whether in Germany or the United States—did violence to Western liberal values. Much like Congressmen Samuel Dickstein and John McCormack, as well as the writer Sinclair Lewis and the movie mogul Jack Warner, MacLeish feared that Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda could become a powerful weapon in subverting the democratic values of heterogeneous Western societies. In books, speeches, radio plays, and governmental brochures, MacLeish contributed to an ongoing discursive effort to raise levels of awareness about this insidious threat.

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Archibald MacLeish’s contributions to a larger public dialogue—one in which expressions of religious tolerance signaled his support for pluralist rationales—remain insufficiently understood, even though several scholars have documented MacLeish’s life as a poet, playwright, and government official. Moreover, in none of these works will scholars find an adequate discussion of his unique use of Nazi anti-Semitism, against which he articulated his own pluralist view of cultural tolerance. In scholars’ accounts of the U.S. response to Nazism, MacLeish has appeared as a minor figure. For example, in Richard Breitman’s masterful study of American handling of reports concerning Nazi atrocities, MacLeish appears unexpectedly and departs quickly, with Breitman simply claiming that MacLeish feared a “morbid” result were the reports to be released domestically. Clayton Laurie, a student of Breitman, has argued that under MacLeish’s leadership, the Office of Facts and Figures “accomplished little due to a lack of direction.”

The most influential historiography of the 1930s has focused on the growth of anti-Semitism that occurred in this period, perhaps making it difficult for scholars to appreciate the full complexity of the U.S. response to Nazi anti-Semitism and the part played in that response by people like Archibald MacLeish. For example, historians such as John Higham and Alan Brinkley have argued that the nation’s economic depression led to unseemly episodes in which

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anti-Semitism played an increasingly visible role in damaging Jews. What has received much less scholarly attention is that during the same period, rural and elite citizens throughout the United States proved willing to embrace—or, at a minimum, tolerate—public calls for religious tolerance. Indeed, MacLeish’s expressed interest in combating Nazi anti-Semitism offers stark contrast to the views and actions of his contemporaries H. L. Mencken, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and John Dos Passos, all of whom employed anti-Semitic language in their depictions of modernity. The challenge for historians, however, is not to argue which set of views—pluralist or nativist—held greater sway, but rather to explore the contest that was under way. Even prior to Hitler’s unprovoked declaration of war against America, citizens recognized autocracy as the greatest threat to democracy, and they increasingly defined their own nation as the antithesis to foreign dictatorships. MacLeish was a deep thinker, particularly sensitive to dangers that democratic societies faced when handling episodes of sociocultural and political persecutions. In his efforts to “sound the alarm,” we can also observe wider changes in elite attitudes toward Jews and others non-Protestant citizens.

Currently, Gary Gerstle, Peter Novick, Marc Dollinger, and Deborah Dash Moore argue that prejudices against Jews, Catholics, African Americans and other non-Protestant citizens softened after the Second World War, as the nation’s collective struggle against Hitlerism

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reshaped American identity.\textsuperscript{10} However, there are hints that a readjustment in attitudes was under way in earlier decades. The tragic events associated with the Leo Frank case (1912) alarmed Jews and Christians alike.\textsuperscript{11} The anti-Semitic prejudices that led to Frank’s conviction demonstrated that seemingly innocuous prejudices could beget deadly consequences. Following the affair, citizens of multiple denominations formed new organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (1913) and the American Civil Liberties Union (1920).\textsuperscript{12} Members of these groups coordinated boycotts of racist-owned businesses and sponsored campaigns designed to dilute “poison pen” letters that injured Jews socially.\textsuperscript{13} Their message of tolerance no doubt found some common cause with associates in the National Conference of Christians and Jews (1928).


\textsuperscript{12} Note also the earlier National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (1909). By the 1920s, Jewish leadership in the group was vital. See Lewis, “Parallels,” 553; and Eugene Levy, “Is the Jew a White Man?: Press Reaction to the Leo Frank Case, 1913-1915,” \textit{Phylon} 35 (1960): 220.

\textsuperscript{13} “Poison pen” letters are correspondences sent en masse to public media outlets (for example, letters to the editor) in which the author vilifies Jews. They often appear published anonymously, or under a nom de plume. During the 1930s and 1940s, a common theme found in such documents was the alleged Jewish control of American foreign policy, as well as references to the “Merchants” thesis. See Stephen Norwood, “Marauding Youth and the Christian Front: Anti-Semitic Violence In Boston and New York During World War II,” \textit{American Jewish History} 91 (2003): 238-239, 249.
An impatience with the inherently gradual nature of change in pluralist societies has caused historians to overlook the larger connections between these earlier public pleas for social equality and subsequent efforts to condemn Nazi bigotry. In order to trace and understand this dynamic, it is useful to focus on a figure like Archibald MacLeish, who was actively involved in combating Nazi anti-Semitism during the 1930s and 1940s. That Archibald MacLeish articulated an unflinchingly pluralist position is perhaps not remarkable. Like others in his milieu, he believed that all citizens should enjoy civic equality, and that the civil government was the proper vehicle for promoting such egalitarianism.\textsuperscript{14} His life’s story, however, provides historians access to a more intricate tale of changing social attitudes. He was part of a much larger generational cohort, one whose experiences fighting to uphold democratic structures during World War I had instilled in them the value of opposing autocratic behaviors such as the persecution of religious minorities.

Born in 1892, in Glencoe, Illinois, Archibald MacLeish was the offspring of an immigrant Scottish father and a mother whose lineage traced back to the Pilgrims. Andrew MacLeish operated a successful retail store in Chicago. Martha Hillard MacLeish graduated from Vassar College in one of its first classes during the 1880s, and later served as president of Rockford Woman’s College.\textsuperscript{15} During his earliest years, Archibald experienced two different visions of American society. His father, who spoke with a distinctive accent and still adhered to European customs, imbued in his son an appreciation for cultural heterogeneity. Accompanying


\textsuperscript{15} Donaldson, \textit{MacLeish}, 6-8; Drabek and Ellis, eds., \textit{Reflections}, 16.
the elder MacLeish on the streets of Chicago, Archibald observed the many ethnic cohorts that constituted the city’s identity. From his Progressive-minded mother, who also served as an officer in the National Conference of Christians and Jews, MacLeish learned there was a larger social value associated with promoting religious tolerance. This theme—the formation of a unified culture from differing wellsprings—remained with him throughout his life.

At fifteen years of age, Archibald moved, by himself, to Lakeville, Connecticut, where he attended the Hotchkiss School. During the early twentieth century, life at the Hotchkiss School epitomized white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant society. The institution’s customs reinforced the types of acceptable behaviors found in elite circles. MacLeish was an active and accomplished student. He served as the yearbook editor and as president of the Forum Literary Society. He played for both the football and the baseball squads. He was also his class poet. MacLeish’s many recorded distinctions revealed his worth to his school and peers. It further signaled MacLeish’s acceptance of, and personal comfort with, life in the nation’s most exclusive sociocultural milieu.

In 1915, after finishing his undergraduate degree at Yale University, MacLeish enrolled in Harvard Law School. Upon returning from service in the First World War, during which, like his fellow midwesterner Harry S. Truman, he rose to the rank of captain, MacLeish earned the editor’s post at the *Harvard Law Review*. His grasp of Western legal thought, as well as his

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17 For MacLeish’s high school years, see *Mischianza*, Hotchkiss School yearbook, 1911, Lakeville, Ct., 30, 60-72. Hotchkiss apparently admitted Jews to their institution. The 1910 class registry listed a “R.A. Meyrowitz” from East Twenty-third Street in New York City.

18 At Yale University, MacLeish was a Phi Beta Kappa and the recipient of numerous prizes for poetry. He characterized the intellectual atmosphere as “discouraging. . . . Yale was really pretty close to the bottom. . . . It wasn’t an educational institution.” See Drabeck and Ellis, eds., *Reflections*, 16.
experiences in the war, had instilled in him an appreciation for the differences between
democratic and autocratic governments. Like so many others in his generation, the young
veteran viewed the “Great War” in more than military terms. It was also an ideological struggle
that had featured the capitulation of three feudal-era monarchies. For intellectuals, the challenges
of the postwar years were philosophical in nature. The grand task involved spreading Western
liberal values as a means to ending international conflict.

MacLeish began his professional life in 1921 with a position at the Boston law firm of
Choate, Hall, and Stewart. The Sacco-Vanzetti verdict occurred just prior to his employment, but
along with others of his generation, he recollected “next to no concern.” Indeed, during the
early 1920s, while still in his twenties, the young lawyer determined that the legal profession
would not sustain his creativity. In 1923, on the same day that his firm planned to invest in him
as a partner, MacLeish quit his job. Soon thereafter, he moved with his wife and two young
children to Paris.

19 Robert Zieger, America’s Great War: World War One and the American Experience
(Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 2, 228; Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern
Memory, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 146; Modris Eckstein, The Rites
of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989),
205.

20 The 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact in fact rendered war “illegal.” See Birdsall Viault,

21 Drabeck and Ellis, eds., Reflections, 20. The Sacco-Vanzetti Affair (1920-27)
represented the epitome of early twentieth-century American nativism. In April 1920, two men
killed a Boston-area paymaster during a daylight robbery. Police charged Nicola Sacco and
Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two recent Italian immigrants, with the crime. Their 1921 state court trial
was troubling. Judge Webster Thayer demonstrated overt and private prejudices. His instructions
to the jury encouraged a guilty verdict; and he privately referred to the accused as “those
“anarchist bastards.” The men were convicted and given capital sentences. As their
electrocutions drew closer, the case gained national attention. See John Neville, Twentieth-
Century Cause Celebre: Sacco and Vanzetti and the Press, 1920-1927 (Westport, Ct.: Praeger,
2004), 12; and William Young and David Kaiser, Postmortem: New Evidence in the Case of
Sacco and Vanzetti (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 36.
For many American artists and writers, living in Paris during the 1920s signaled their larger commitment to creating a new culture following the destruction wrought by the First World War. It was a bohemian city, where Hemingway wrote The Sun Also Rises (1926), Dos Passos finished Manhattan Transfer (1925), and F. Scott Fitzgerald created Jay Gatsby. Upon first arriving, MacLeish observed the city’s somber rhythms. Perhaps more than any other nation, France suffered terribly from the First World War. “The great slaughter on the battlefield,” MacLeish noted, had produced a “vacuum” of youth. “Even the young women,” he recollected, “dressed in black, their faces unsmiling, didn’t look young.”22 The poet recalled that the city’s pulse lagged until the mid-1920s, when a new youth “flooded” in from Africa, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and Asia.23

This massive convergence of the world’s young impressed MacLeish deeply. It was the first time that he recognized his generation’s potency.24 He saw more clearly the role that he and others could play in determining the course of human events. It was MacLeish’s five-year stay in Paris, during his early thirties, which facilitated his change from bourgeois lawyer to enlightened cultural critic. As it did for others in his generation and milieu, living in Paris during the 1920s provided him with a model of how to shape and defend diverse national cultures. He learned that the challenges of living in a pluralist environment encompassed far more than the polite cohabitation of different people. Rather, the task involved common behaviors borne from repeated cultural exchange. These observations helped to guide MacLeish during his stay abroad and remained useful to him once he returned to the United States, when he worked to sculpt a

22 As quoted in Drabeck and Ellis eds., Reflections, 23. See also Winnick, ed., Letters, 106; and Bush, ed., Dialogues, 27.

23 Drabeck and Ellis; eds., Reflections, 23.

24 Drabeck, Ellis, and Rudin, eds., Proceedings, 22.
new American identity that included the many millions of new citizens who entered the nation during the early decades of the twentieth century.\footnote{Barbara Savage, \textit{Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 60-61.}

In Paris, MacLeish joined the city’s other non-native residents in a social experiment. Many of the participants, like the MacLeishes, were new to the city, and the fact that their interactions were not based upon linguistic or national bonds may have contributed to the vibrant cultural atmosphere that emerged. On any given day, a person functioned as a producer, consumer, and patron of the arts. In this way, a heterogeneous mix of people, without a common tongue or liturgy, reawakened a city. MacLeish shared a story in which his wife, Ada, a pianist and singer, was practicing a composition by the Frenchman Erik Satie. A young man knocked on the family’s door. “Who is singing Satie?” asked the unknown visitor. “My wife,” replied the poet. “But nobody sings Satie anymore,” blurted the teen as tears ran down his face.\footnote{Drabeck and Ellis, eds., \textit{Reflections}, 37.} This anecdote captured the ability of foreign participants to join—indeed, to help redefine—a national culture. In his examination of nineteenth-century France, the historian Eugen Weber has observed this process as it related to the peasantry’s “mimicking” of Parisian society.\footnote{Eugen Weber, \textit{Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 485. See also Leslie Choquette, \textit{Frenchmen into Peasants: Modernity and Tradition in the Peopling of French Canada} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 54.} Perhaps drawing on limited knowledge, the outsider can still form a credible tie to dominant traditions. For MacLeish, this organic melding of differing perspectives retaught him a lesson that he first learned as a young boy on the streets of Chicago. Indeed, the idea of dissimilar people achieving—or losing—collective unity was a recurring theme in his later professional writings.
The most significant work that MacLeish wrote while living overseas was *Einstein* (1929), published with the top avant-garde press in Paris. Black Sun Press released the work in the same year that saw the publication of James Joyce’s *Tales Told of Shem and Shaw* and D. H. Lawrence’s *The Escaped Cook*. *Einstein* was a sixteen-page, free-verse soliloquy in which MacLeish attempted to recast the atomic process as a metaphor for cultural heterogeneity.28 MacLeish used the idea of a nucleus gaining mass by incorporating disparate particles as a figure for a civil society that became stronger by amalgamating various ethnicities. MacLeish’s decision to ground his narrative in the figure of a Jewish scientist is significant because it connects the poet to a larger intellectual development. During the first decades of the twentieth century, scholarship from Jews gained wider credibility in Protestant academic circles.29 Particularly at Ivy League universities, the hiring of Jewish émigrés broadened the curriculum taught to the nation’s most privileged students.30 Some Christian students gleaned from their personal experiences with Jewish scholars a new admiration that persisted throughout their lives. Indeed, MacLeish studied under the Jewish professor Felix Frankfurter at Harvard Law School; he lionized Princeton’s Einstein in a major poem. MacLeish was one of many in the Protestant establishment who was determined to fraternize with Jews, and to raise levels of awareness about obstacles to Jewish welfare.

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30 A letter from Professor Edwin Wilson, Department of Vital Statistics, Harvard University, recommended the hiring of a German Jewish émigré named Felix Bernstein, “the world’s leading medical and biological statistician notified by the Nazi government that his position had been vacated.” See Wilson to Noback, February 27, 1936, box 1/12, Adolph Sabath Papers, 1903-52, American Jewish Archives, Cincinatti.
cosmopolitan mind-set was becoming apparent during the late 1920s and 1930s, as Americans began to embrace a range of ethnic and racial icons. In 1927, the same year that Charles Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic, the Catholic orphan George Herman “Babe” Ruth attracted phenomenal acclaim for his baseball skill as well as for a lifestyle that flew in the face of the decade’s teetotaler values. At the Berlin Olympics (1936), Jesse Owens represented the promise and power of the American “melting pot” versus the myth of Aryan racial supremacy. In 1938, the African American heavyweight boxer Joe Lewis became a domestic and international sensation after defeating the German Max Schmeling in New York’s Yankee Stadium.

It was in this fertile atmosphere that Archibald MacLeish would ask Americans to ponder the many textures of their national identity. Determining the degree to which his pluralist attitudes comported with, or deviated from, others in the public sphere is an important effort that lies beyond the scope of this project. Rather, I want to examine the more narrow issue of when MacLeish came to connect his broad belief in promoting sociocultural tolerance with a specific concern for combating Nazi anti-Semitism. This will allow me to present the accomplishments of this often-overlooked historical figure while shedding further light on the increased discursive opposition provoked by reports of German religious persecutions.

In 1929, shortly after his return from Paris, MacLeish accepted a job offer from Henry Luce to serve as an editor for the newly created *Fortune* magazine. According to Luce

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biographer John Kobler, the publishing magnate envisioned the new periodical as a cutting-edge business journal that would reinvigorate the recently depressed financial-news market. Luce’s strategy was to recruit popular literary talent who would write “human interest stories.” In contrast to the drab business periodicals of the decade, Fortune featured color photographs and splashy advertisements. In 1930, the magazine debuted with thirty thousand subscribers; seven years later, the operation maintained a circulation of nearly five hundred thousand.

From his editorial post, MacLeish possessed a national platform for influencing the American public discourse. Moreover, he wished to use this powerful tool for directing the public’s awareness toward Nazi anti-Semitism. Journalists in the United States were already reporting on the phenomenon. In October 1930, almost three years before the Nazis assumed power, Time devoted a full column to a story titled “Plate Glass Riots,” which reported that German citizens, “stones in their pockets,” had “shrewdly distributed themselves in front of Jewish-owned stores.” “So adroit was the vandalism,” the reader learned, that “there remained not one person to be arrested.” An additional Weimer-era article from the New Republic told of a “scandalous attack on Jewish students” that “constituted another link in the chain of fascist anti-Semitic activity.”


33 W. A. Swanberg, Luce and His Empire (New York: Scribner, 1972), 121.

34 “Plate Glass Riots,” Time, October 27, 1930, 22.

35 Ibid.

36 New Republic, July 13, 1932, 224.
After January 1933, and Hitler’s rise to the chancellorship, the pace and breadth of the reporting increased. “Who Stands behind Hitler?” asked a headline in the Nation. Listing several of Hitler’s goals, such as abjuring the Versailles Treaty and reviving the German economy, the related article closed with the observation that the new leader “emphasized the anti-Jewish position.” In a Time magazine article titled “Nazis Amuck,” American readers learned that German paramilitary soldiers had assaulted seven Americans traveling abroad. The story closed by reporting that the number of German Jews attacked by followers of the new regime ranged “into the hundreds.” During the Nazi’s six-month “coordination” period, as party members took control of federal, state, and local governing apparatus, similar reports appeared frequently. Americans had numerous opportunities to connect Nazism and anti-Semitism. These early stories clearly conveyed the idea that German fascism had a violently anti-Jewish and antidemocratic strain. They also demonstrated that a burgeoning interest among writers and journalists was helping to bring these reports to the American public.

Stories of Nazi anti-Semitism also appeared in Christian periodicals. “Leave the Jewish Problem Alone!” read the headline of one such piece in the April 1934 issue of Christian Century, the period’s most influential Protestant journal. “Since Locke,” the reader learned, “religion, opinions, and philosophies are personal matters.” “If we are to carry on Western civilization . . . neither the state nor society has the right to deny the Jews.” Non-Jewish readers


39 Robert Abzug, America Views the Holocaust, 1933-1945 (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999), 36.

40 “Leave the Jewish Problem Alone,” Christian Century, April 25, 1934, 556.

41 Ibid.
had the chance to learn from yet another public discourse that anti-Semitism posed a threat to all people of faith. As public expressions of these bigoted sentiments were becoming unacceptable, the editors of Christian publications took steps to enlighten their subscribers. To be sure, public expressions of anti-Semitism continued to appear throughout the decade. The subtler point, however, is that Christian American citizens came to learn that while anti-Semitic epithets might earn one social acceptance in Nazi Germany, in the United States, they would place one outside the pale of the cultural mainstream.

Similar periodicals adopted this approach, though with some variations. The prominent Catholic periodical *Commonweal* focused on the Nazi harassment of priests. “A dozen priests,” reported a story from March 1933, “were recently charged with organizing communists. . . . This is no time for discussion.” Priests charged with demonstrating fealty to the Vatican comprised many of the first prisoners sent to the Dachau concentration camp. Harassment of both the Catholic and Protestant churches remained an unpleasant fact throughout the Nazi’s twelve-year regime.

Drumming up American public indignation over Nazi anti-Semitism was no easy task. During the interwar years, many citizens felt compassion for the Germans impoverished by the First World War. The historian A.J.P. Taylor has argued that these sentiments contributed to the
“appeasement” of the fascist powers that occurred during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{45} When placating Hitler, Western leaders often noted the vital geostrategic position that Germany occupied as a bulwark to the spread of Soviet communism. Acknowledging that Hitler was not “a champion of legal and constitutional methods,” the \textit{Literary Digest} nevertheless included “destruction of the communists” among Hitler’s primary goals.\textsuperscript{46} Well into the 1930s, monitoring the spread of communism—rather than of fascism—remained the primary objective for American foreign policy experts. An additional reason for this tilt was that it served the interests of American big business. Nazi ideology was not hostile toward private property, and Adolf Hitler’s regime promoted a variation of capitalism known as cartelism. Consequently, companies such as IBM and Ford Motors overlooked German antagonism to other liberal freedoms.\textsuperscript{47} Neither did Jewish-owned businesses immediately leave the German marketplace. The film mogul Louis B. Mayer was reportedly “relieved” when William Randolph Hearst assured him that “Hitler’s motives were pure.”\textsuperscript{48}

By contrast, American worker organizations recognized the danger immediately. In solidarity with German laborers, many northeastern unions organized boycotts against Nazi


products. A 1934 poster from the Jewish Labor Committee represented this effort. It featured a bare-and barrel-chested male worker swinging a sledgehammer down upon a two-headed snake labeled “Hitlerism” and “fascism.” Additional organizations such as the “Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League” implored New York retailers not to sell German supplies. “Boycott Is the Moral Substitute for War,” read their letterhead. “Nazi Germany Is the Enemy of Western Civilization.” Despite these efforts, a significant rejection of German goods failed to materialize. During the early 1930s, Americans were still learning who Hitler was, and they were determining what, if anything, his Nazi Party had to do with America. This willingness of many citizens to “do business” with the Germans challenged those concerned by the regime’s intolerant character to articulate more clearly the reasons for severing relations.

As an editor at Fortune, MacLeish determined that a story about Jewish scapegoating would help Americans differentiate the vast differences between democratic and Nazi values. In keeping with his magazine’s stated mission to discuss potent sociocultural issues—and with his personal commitment to promoting religious tolerance—he suggested a series that examined anti-Jewish bigotry. On November 12, 1935, MacLeish sent a memorandum to Henry Luce, the chairman of Time, Inc. On the subject line, MacLeish listed “Series on the Jew.” Following a brief introduction, he informed Luce that “the whole question comes down to whether [or

49 Abzug, America, 35; Ludwig Lore, “The Fate of the Worker,” in van Passen and Wise eds., Assault, 109.

50 In September 1933, the group’s founder, jurist Samuel Untermeyer, inquired with F.W. Woolworth Co. officials about reports that store employees continued to sell German goods. On November 18, Woolworth’s president, B. D. Miller, informed him “we are not buying goods from Germany.” See box 1/3, Samuel Untermeyer Papers, 1911-52, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. See also Sharon Gewitz, “Anglo-Jewish Responses to Nazi Germany, 1933-1939: The Anti-Nazi Boycott and the Board of Deputies of British Jews,” Journal of Contemporary History 26 (1991): 258, 261.

51 Alpers, Dictators, 13, 33; Zalampas, Hitler, 5, 214.
not] . . . there is an anti-Semitic epidemic in this country capable of having important effects.”
“If there is,” MacLeish stated, “then *Fortune* will be usefully occupied in dragging the whole
thing into the light and air.” In a “muckraking” spirit perhaps borne of his childhood days,
MacLeish expressed a view that the journalist’s function was “ridding society of its festering
sores.”

Two days later, MacLeish sent his boss a lengthy follow-up memo. In the second
correspondence, historians will find the clearest evidence to date that MacLeish enthusiastically
embraced the task of combating Nazi anti-Semitism: “There is anti-Semitic talk around the
country. . . . The activities of Mr. Hitler in Germany have had their effect here.” Turning to what
steps *Fortune* might take, MacLeish noted, “There are always racial antipathies to be faced in
this world.” This particular antipathy, he observed, “flourishes because no one has ever dug
down to get at the underlying facts.” In February 1936, inspired by factual reports of Nazi
barbarities, *Fortune* published an article written expressly to head off fascist-fomented prejudice
in the United States. MacLeish sent advance copies of the article to a number of prominent
Jews, including his former professor Felix Frankfurter. MacLeish informed Luce, “the piece was
considered valuable and should give offense to no one.”

Shortly thereafter, MacLeish and the editors of *Fortune* with whom he coauthored the
article expanded upon this effort with a one-hundred-page study entitled *Jews in America*. “The
unbelievable record of Nazi barbarities concerns non-Jews as well as Jews. . . . Any nation that

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52 November 12, 1935, “Luce,” box 8, MacLeish Papers. See also David Chalmers, *The
55 Ibid., 244.
permits a minority to live in fear is a nation which invites disaster.”56 MacLeish used this book as another vehicle through which he could publicly discredit bigotry as incompatible with American traditions. “The connection between fascism and Jew-hatred is not accidental. . . . Any man who loathes Fascism will fear anti-Semitism.” Fearing anti-Semitism,” the editors of Fortune concluded, “he will fear also the various conditions which encourage it.”57

The following year, MacLeish took an innovative step to remind Americans of their responsibilities, as a free people, to uphold liberty. The Fall of a City: A Verse Play for Radio does not specifically discuss aiding Jews, but it does employ the theme of looming autocracy undermining democratic freedoms.58 The Fall was the first radio play ever aired in the United States. It debuted more than a year before The War of the Worlds.59 MacLeish recognized that radio programs were more cost-effective than stage productions, and they reached a far wider audience. This innovation dispersed his artistry nationally and increased his stature as a sociocultural critic.

Airing April 11, 1937, The Fall of a City described an unnamed European town whose citizens awaited an oncoming conqueror. MacLeish first wrote the play in early 1936, during the events that led to the Anschluss, the uncontested Nazi takeover of Austria.60 His theme was that a failure to uphold collective democratic liberties had led to a society’s downfall. Fall of a City also featured some meaningful stylistic innovations. Most notable was MacLeish’s use of a

56 Editors of Fortune, Jews, 9-10.

57 Ibid., 11.


60 Ibid., 107; Winnick, ed., Letters, 285-86.
“radio announcer” to unwind the story in the form of a news broadcast. The announcer—MacLeish selected for this role a still-unknown actor named Orson Welles—did more than just report the “facts.” He also described the crowds, their cries, and their decisions.

The Central Broadcasting Station broadcast *The Fall of a City* live in New York City, and later in Hollywood, California. Executives estimated the program reached “well over one million souls.”

“Are we free?” one voice asked from the crowd. “Will you fight?” replied another. “You can stand on the stairs and meet him.” “There is still a niche in the streets.” “You can hold in the dark of a hall.” “You can die today—or your children will crawl for it tomorrow.” *The Fall of a City* also featured never-before-used “sound effects” including marching boots, drumbeats and the shouts of men and women. A group of schoolchildren visiting from New Jersey provided the sounds of “glee.” According to MacLeish, the program succeeded because it captured a sense of desperation. Was the conquering inevitable? Would the citizens defend their liberty? Or, as a nameless voice from the crowd declared, should they “give him [the conqueror] the town for masterless men need a master?” In *The Fall of a City*, MacLeish took care not to politicize the narrative too heavily. The play was less about a specific threat than it was an examination of the

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64 MacLeish, *Fall*, 16-18.

65 Drabeck and Ellis, eds., *Reflections*, 119.

ways that people might react to such a contingency. MacLeish wanted the public—the soon-to-
be-oppressed citizenry—to recognize that they were the main characters. Totalitarian practices
were a reality in Europe; MacLeish hoped to alert Americans that their liberty might become the
next target.

Listeners reportedly enjoyed the radio play. MacLeish recalled that he received letters
soon after the airing, and more so after the Nazi Anschluss. His work had appealed to a wide
cross section of the American society, and correspondence came from members of the
establishment and the common citizenry alike. Charles Andrew Merz, an editor at the New York
Times, inquired how MacLeish had known that the Nazis were going to enter Austria unopposed.
MacLeish told his friend, “I only know from what I read in the Times.” Merz replied, “Well, we
didn’t know, but what happens in your play is exactly what happened in Austria. I called to
know if you have prophetic gifts, or whether you are a phony who stumbled onto something.”
A stranger wrote MacLeish from New Orleans, telling the poet that he normally listened to the
radio while soaking in his bathtub. The man said that when he heard MacLeish’s verse he had
almost emerged from his tub to change the station, but he didn’t. In fact, he had thought the
program was “great.”

Building from the success he enjoyed with The Fall of a City, MacLeish produced an
additional radio play in 1938. Air Raid, which debuted in late October, protested Spanish
fascism. The poet first visited Spain in the 1920s while traveling with Ernest Hemingway. In

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67 Alpers, Dictators, 91; Drabeck and Ellis, eds., Reflections, 107, 110-11.

68 Drabeck and Ellis, Reflections, 275 n. 35. See also John Hiden, Germany and Europe,

69 As quoted in Drabeck and Ellis, eds., Reflections, 108.

70 Archibald MacLeish, Air Raid: A Verse Play for Radio (New York: Harcourt and
Brace, 1938).
1938, he joined with Hemingway, John Dos Passos, and Lillian Hellman to form a group called “Contemporary Historians.” These artists hoped to explain how ethno-religious strife—a theme familiar to MacLeish—helped Francisco Franco achieve an ill-gotten victory. The backdrop of a still-smoldering civil war provided MacLeish with a tangible and metaphoric framework for explaining how autocratic regimes used sociocultural hostility to subvert democratically elected societies.

Air Raid featured unnamed characters that the listener could follow throughout the play. As its title revealed, MacLeish again employed the theme of a looming invasion. His dialogue captured the different ways that people assessed the danger. A sick old woman recalled, “They came when I was young once. I remember them. They had blue capes on their coats with scarlet lining. They gave us milk to drink from jars of metal.” These were the sentiments of an elderly citizen who had little time left to live. Near her, however, sat a young boy. He had the most to fear from the loss of freedom. Not surprisingly, the lad blurted the most alarming statements: “They kill children when they come. . . . I’ve heard they kill the children’s mother.”

A set of lovers tried to ignore the world’s frailty. These characters represented young adults who ignored their civic responsibilities. “Are you still there?” the man asked. “I dreamed that you had gone.” The two sit alone, away from the crowd. “Say that we’re happy. Tell me that we are happy,” pleaded the girl. “Stay as you are,” he replied. “Do not ever move. Stay as you are with this sunlight on your shoulders.” MacLeish’s use of sunlight imagery, inherently

73 MacLeish, Air Raid, 15.
74 Ibid., 16.
fleeting, symbolized the inevitability of change. Indeed, reports from the play’s radio announcer soon pierced the tender dialogue. The approaching planes were “still circling. Still wheeling. He is working the air as a hawk would.” The girl’s voice returns, “Tell me we are happy. No, but say that we are.” “Just stay with this sunlight on your shoulders,” says her companion, “Stay with this sunlight on your hair.”

As with The Tale of a City, the fictional citizens in Air Raid did not uphold their collective liberties in the face of oncoming autocracy. Though all knew of the threat, they lacked a larger understanding of what they were fighting to uphold. They had lost sight of their civic identity. By Air Raid’s closing, the sick old woman had died, and the young lovers separated. The men futilely went for arms, and the women took to the cellars. Chaos reigned. The men, women, and children all eventually gathered in the town’s square, in an anxious mob that MacLeish represented through a building cacophony. Absent a secular order—one guaranteed by a democratic government and defended by an active citizenry—the people in Air Raid endured lawlessness until the forces of autocracy imposed order. In the closing scene, as the invading planes arrived, machine-gun fire rained down from the skies, blood ran on the streets, and a woman’s shriek overlapped the sound of air raid alarms. The forces of tyranny had arrived unchecked. The citizens had failed to uphold liberty, and liberty was lost.

MacLeish continued into the 1940s to publicize his concern that strains of autocracy—of which Nazi anti-Semitism was a prominent example—loomed as a threat to the Western world. His activities took on greater weight after he accepted a presidential offer to become the

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75 Ibid., 18.
76 Ibid., 35.
77 Ibid., 36.
Librarian of Congress, as his entrance into the federal government provided him with a more powerful vehicle for disseminating his pluralist vision. A March 1940 letter, sent to MacLeish from the Department of Labor, captured his increasing centrality to public discussions of the American identity. That year, MacLeish was selected as the keynote speaker at the Immigration and Naturalization’s program “I Am an American.” At this event, MacLeish agreed to read excerpts from his poem “America Was Promises.” So important was his participation deemed to the program’s success that the organizer was prepared to “tape his portion in advance” if the Librarian of Congress could not attend the function personally.

As MacLeish’s stature increased, his commitment to opposing Nazi anti-Semitism remained intact. In September 1940, he wrote a letter about the topic to Felix Frankfurter. The letter was unsolicited, and its tone was informal. It indicated both the positive relationship that he maintained with his Jewish mentor, as well as MacLeish’s larger interest in helping Jews during a difficult period. “Dear Felix,” the correspondence began, “Stephen Wise called me up last night in a state of considerable anxiety for the safety of Leon Blum [Nazi-deposed Jewish French premier]. . . . I gathered that you knew something of his thoughts on the matter.” The

78 For his initial letter of regret (“I am afraid that I will not be of much use to the public service because the one thing I have ever wanted to do with all my heart was to write poetry.”), see Winnick, ed., Letters, 299-301.

79 Archibald MacLeish, America Was Promises (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1939). MacLeish dedicated the publication to Felix and Marion Frankfurter.

80 “Donnell,” box 6, MacLeish Papers.

81 Rabbi Stephen Wise was a prominent figure in Washington, D.C., political circles. During the 1940s, his American Jewish Congress was numerically the most significant domestic Jewish interest group. Justice Frankfurter was a member of the more elite—and more powerful—American Jewish Committee. See Spencer Blakeslee, The Death of American Anti-Semitism (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 96; Eli Evans, The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 100-102, 253-54; and Henry Feingold, “Stephen Wise and the Holocaust,” Midstream 29 (1983): 46.
well-informed Librarian of Congress assured Frankfurter that “Blum is in no danger” and that “people here are in continual touch.”\textsuperscript{82} This letter suggests that by 1940, when Wise placed his call, MacLeish had gained some sort of reputation as someone who was sympathetic to—and, might be in a position to assist—the Jewish people’s struggles with Nazi anti-Semitism.

Such a conclusion appears sustained the next month, October 1940, when MacLeish addressed a gathering of the Brooklyn Jewish Charities. At the time of his remarks, the German Army controlled much of Western Europe. MacLeish and his audience together worried that Nazism would become entrenched throughout the Continent. The future of Western civilization was uncertain because “the war is not solely a war between European powers.” Rather, the poet-in-government observed that the war was between “human beings who believed different things as to the kind of society in which men should live.”\textsuperscript{83}

In his closing, MacLeish specifically incorporated Jews into his sweeping defense of democratic values. “There are those who tell us that liberty must retire . . . that Jews must retire and not be Jews.” However, the poet implored, “Democracy will not fail if it is a democracy in action. . . . Faith will decide the issue.” “And faith,” he concluded, “cannot be a faith against—but a faith for.”\textsuperscript{84} That same month, MacLeish delivered a very similar message to a more prestigious audience. Again, his growing appeal as a social commentator is apparent. As the keynote speaker at the “Forum on Current Problems,” a conference that Nelson A. Rockefeller attended, the poet explained, “Fascism is an inward enemy. . . . The defense of democracy compels free people to build higher and stronger the house of freedom.”\textsuperscript{85} These

\textsuperscript{82} “Frankfurter,” box 8, MacLeish Papers.

\textsuperscript{83} “The American Cause,” box 24, MacLeish Papers.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
sentiments represented a continued evolution of an idea that MacLeish first conceived in Paris twenty years earlier: people could form and defend their collective identity irrespective of sociocultural differences.

In fall 1941, with an increased social and political consciousness, MacLeish accepted an additional assignment from President Roosevelt to serve as director at the newly created Office of Facts and Figures. The president had conceived of the bureau as a centralized station for answering media inquiries about the fighting.\textsuperscript{86} The poet described the midlevel agency as “sort of a nexus” for processing war-related information.\textsuperscript{87} However, the assignment was most significant because it placed MacLeish in a position to use the government’s auspices to influence public discourse.

Though poorly funded, staffers had the capacity to publish and distribute informational brochures. The challenge for MacLeish lay into determining which issues best captured national concerns. This was indeed a pressing task. More than six months after the United States had entered the Second World War, 52 percent of the public admitted they did not have a clear idea what the war was about. “I can see why we are fighting the Japanese,” one respondent told a Gallup pollster in August 1942, “but I cannot see why we are fighting the Germans. . . . I suppose we are fighting for democracy.”\textsuperscript{88}

Perhaps not surprisingly, one issue that MacLeish chose to publicize involved opposing Nazi religious intolerance. In early 1942, the Office of Facts and Figures released Divide and


\textsuperscript{87} Drabeck and Ellis, eds., \textit{Reflections}, 153.

Conquer, a sixteen-page brochure published by the Government Printing Office. This federal document—with 2.5 million copies distributed—outlined several reasons for Americans to fear Nazism. 89 “Hitler hopes to destroy unity in America,” advised the publication. “Both physically and mentally,” readers learned, “all his tricks are now being directed against us.” 90 Squarely addressing the issue of German intolerance toward Judaism, citizens read, “The Jews in Warsaw have been packed into a ghetto.” “Nazi guards,” the prose continued, “patrol an eight foot wall topped by broken glass and barbed wire.” 91 Divide and Conquer also contained some discussion of persecutions leveled against Christians. “Poland’s Catholic Church,” the narrative continued, “has been practically wiped out. . . . Six hundred churches, four hundred chapels, and two hundred convents have been destroyed or closed.” 92 MacLeish’s imprint is apparent in the brochure’s closing. The language called to mind the fears of social atomization he first expressed as an editor during the 1930s. “We have seen,” the section began, “how Hitler’s strategy was to create internal distress in every nation he planned to attack.” “Our job as Americans,” this government pamphlet advised its citizens, “is one of individual awareness to avoid falling into Hitler’s trap.” 93

As director of the Office of Facts and Figures, Archibald MacLeish also used his public charge to initiate a related discussion “appraising the present Negro situation.” 94 In a cover letter


90 “O.W.I.,” box 53, MacLeish Papers.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.


94 “Sweetser,” box 21, MacLeish Papers.
to Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, a well-known proponent of greater racial equality, MacLeish suggested that the “federal government inform the white population of this nation of the important role played by Negroes in the history and development of the United States.”

Secretary Ickes embraced such sentiments. “I have been concerned with this problem [the treatment of blacks] for a number of years,” the secretary informed his “dear Archie.” “I am glad to see that your office has turned its attention to this worthwhile matter.” Secretary of War Henry Stimson likewise responded to MacLeish’s outfit with a letter stating that the War Department was considering the “color” problem. A final message of support also arrived from the Office of Civilian Defense. These collected correspondences did not amount to much in immediate, practical terms. However, they serve to direct our attention to the discussions underway among the establishment elite in which expressions of concern for the plight of minorities signaled a larger allegiance to pluralist attitudes. During the years from 1933 to 1941, Archibald MacLeish was a harbinger of these upcoming changes. His mind-set was common throughout the Roosevelt administration, and it would continue to gain sway throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

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95 Ibid.

96 In 1937, Ickes delivered a speech dealing with American racial inequality. He decried the “bitter hate fanning a searing flame” against Jews living in fascist European nations, but he also noted that one only has to “turn his mind from fascism to Ku Kluxism to discover here in America a rich field of oppressions.” “United States Department,” box 1/13, Sabath Papers.

97 “Ickes,” box 11, MacLeish Papers.

98 “Stimson,” box 21, MacLeish Papers.

99 “Daniels,” box 6, MacLeish Papers.

The appearance of Nazism clearly hurt Jews, as the fanning of religious hatreds served to undermine the rights and security of Jewish people. But in response to this phenomenon, a broad-based movement that transcended religious lines came into existence. In the United States, the battle against Nazi anti-Semitism became the means through which some Protestant elite sought to fulfill the American promise and to strengthen the national character. This liberalizing impulse would receive additional momentum during the early 1940s, with the nation’s entry into war, and the subsequent movement that emerged ultimately outstripped all efforts that preceded it. Once we free ourselves of a vision of the 1930s as a period in which pervasive hostility toward minorities reigned unchecked, we can find people such as Archibald MacLeish, who dedicated years of his life to an effort to ensure that America lived up to the lofty goals its founders and inheritors claimed to cherish.
CHAPTER 4
THE OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION:
SCULPTING AMERICAN ATTITUDES WITH BROCHURES, 1942-1943

All available evidence points to the fact that most Americans still have little accurate conception of what domination by the Nazis means.

—Office of War Information director Elmer Davis to Senator Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. (R-Mass.), explaining his agency’s domestic publications division, April 2, 1943

The Office of War Information feels a responsibility to provide information of particular interest to minority groups.

—Elmer Davis to Senator Harry Byrd (D-VA), explaining the publication *Negroes and the War*, June 30, 1943

During the early 1940s, the American discursive opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism became more mainstream and practical. For example, in January 1941 President Roosevelt included the right to unfettered religious worship in his “Four Freedoms” proclamation. Once the United States entered the fighting, his guarantee to uphold “the civil liberties of all peoples” became a standard theme in governmental explanations of the war effort. Federal information officers saw in the reports of Nazi hostility to religious freedom a useful tool for educating those who remained unclear about the struggle’s significance.

One agency responsible for enlightening the American public was the Office of War Information. In June 1942 via an Executive Order, the president empowered the neophyte bureau with the authority to “coordinate an informed and intelligent understanding at home and abroad

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101 Ibid., pt. 1, reel 9: 0207. For more on Byrd and his opposition to the widening of the Executive branch bureaucracy during the 1930s and 1940s, see Ronald Heinemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia* (Charlottesville, Va: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 167.

102 Delivered as the closing to the president’s “State of the Union” address, the three remaining liberties included the freedom of speech, the freedom from fear, and the freedom from want. See http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrthefourfreedoms.htm.
of the war effort, government policies, combat activities, and general war aims.” An expansive midlevel agency with offices in Washington, D.C., London, New York, and San Francisco, the new organization provided a home to a range of “New Dealers,” many of who had held previous positions in the Roosevelt administration. To its supporters, the Office of War Information played a vital role in expanding the public flow of knowledge. Detractors, however, claimed that the bureau, like others it joined in Roosevelt’s “alphabet-soup” administration, represented an effort to disseminate a partisan, pluralist vision.

During 1942-43, the Office of War Information published many dozens of informational brochures. Distribution levels for these documents ranged into the tens of millions, helping to ensure the agency’s public visibility. Writers and artists covered a wide number of topics including *The Japanese Are Tough* (1942), *Report of the Rubber Survey* (1942), *Chinese Pilots* (1942), *Why Rationing?* (1943), and *The Four Freedoms* (1942). Officials betrayed a particular

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commitment to publicizing stories rooted in sociocultural themes such as race, creed, and
gender. *War Jobs for Women* (1943) and *Negroes and the War* (1943) examined the role that
females and African Americans played in strengthening the national effort. *Nazi War against the
Catholic Church* (1942) and *Tale of a City* (1943) condemned German hostility toward
organized religion.

Through its brochures, the Office of War Information unwound vision for humankind
that contrasted starkly with images of fascist atomization. There were, however, subtler aspects
to these publications. Americans, too, maintained a legacy of human inequalities borne from
ethno-racial and religious hatreds. By focusing light on the enemy’s racism, administrators
attempted to hammer away at a larger point that the United States was struggling to inaugurate a
new epoch in human history in which all forms of intolerance were taboo.

One reason that scholars who specialize in American reactions to Nazi anti-Semitism
have not examined the Office’s role in sculpting a more temperate public discourse is the
dominance of David Wyman’s “abandonment” thesis. The discovery that some officials in
Roosevelt’s State Department viewed the Nazi persecutions dispassionately has cemented the
manner in which historians frame inquires. Take the case of the oft-noted “Riegner Cable.” In
August 1942, this World Jewish Congress communiqué to the State Department outlined in
detail the ongoing German program of murder; its authors requested that American officials
share news of the report with Jewish American leaders. Instead of disseminating the information,
diplomats suppressed the message after determining that its contents were extraneous to
“definite American interests.”

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Long Jr. might have cared little about the Jewish pleas for help, but others did express concern. A need exists to widen the locus of investigation beyond a review of the utterances and activities of men who exhibited professional incompetence and personal shortcomings.

At roughly the same time that State Department officials decided how best to ignore the genocide, administrators at the Office of War Information discussed publicizing these types of reports. They recognized that contrasting the stories of Nazi religious intolerance with an exposition of American liberties would yield a tangible ideological gain. Prior to June 1944, when the United States first landed troops in Western Europe, winning this type of battle against the enemy took on an even greater significance. The accounts of German violence against noncombatants demonstrated the very strains of repression that the nation had mobilized to defeat. An examination of the Office’s war records—its intra-agency memorandum, correspondences, as well as published materials—reveals the efforts taken to use Nazi atrocity stories as a foil against which to define the contours of a pluralist American society.

The president’s choice to run the Office of War Information was the noted foreign correspondent Elmer Davis. Davis possessed no previous governmental experience, but he was knowledgeable about European affairs. In 1916, Davis covered Henry Ford’s “goodwill journey.” Following World War I, he reported on the Paris Peace Conference. During the 1920s and 1930s, he had worked for the New York Times as both a writer and editor. Once the Second World War began, Davis appeared on the Columbia Broadcasting System radio network.
Seven days a week, at shortly before 9 p.m., Davis told listeners about events in Europe. Citizens reportedly enjoyed his droll wit and “Hoosier” perspective.111

Davis surrounded himself with some capable and experienced administrators. Archibald MacLeish, who during 1941-42 had supervised the Office of Facts and Figures, served briefly as an assistant director. Pulitzer-winning playwright and presidential speechwriter Robert Sherwood ran the Overseas Branch.112 The Office of War Information also incorporated hundreds of artists, writers, photographers, and editors from the Works Projects and Farm Security Administrations.113 Agency leaders possessed a clear ability to sculpt an audiovisual message, and to share this vision with the American public.

Indeed, the array of talent has led historian Michael Denning to conclude that the Office was part of a much larger “cultural apparatus” that during the 1930s and 1940s helped to foster new social norms. “The state sponsorship of writers, artists, theatres and musicians,” he has argued, “redefined American culture.”114 Federal bureaucracies joined the entertainment and

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advertisement industries in defining the social mainstream. Contemporary observers took note of this development. In June 1942, Edmund Wilson decried the role that “second-and-third-rate writers” had come to play in shaping the “social consciousness.”

“With MacLeish and Sherwood at the White House,” he noted in a letter to author Maxwell Geiser, “the whole thing makes me uneasy.” Wilson’s specific concern with what he termed their “awful collectivist cant” captured precisely the contest under way to reconfigure American thinking and behavior.

Against this landscape, the ever-escalating reports of Nazi atrocities, steeped in ancient prejudices and medieval barbarity, clearly differentiated between the democratic and fascist vision for humankind. Even before the Office of War Information appeared, later administrators such as Archibald MacLeish had discussed the need to present publicly the reports of fascist violence. Working with Robert Kitner, an executive of the National Broadcasting Company, and political figures such as Milton Eisenhower, Adlai Stevenson, Nelson Rockefeller, and Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy, MacLeish chaired a group called the “Committee on War Information.” On April 30, 1942, in response to a question about the “handling of atrocity material,” MacLeish suggested first the need for a written statement covering what existed.

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116 Ibid.


119 “O.W.I.,” box 52, MacLeish Papers.
Two weeks later, these men met to “develop a policy for the disclosure of atrocity information.” They agreed that such releases should occur with “the specific purpose of giving the public an accurate idea of the enemy.” One way to ensure that Americans developed a positive image of the fledgling war effort was to depict the fascists in as unfavorable a manner as possible. Attached to this agenda is an eight-page discussion of how best to present the evidence, after “absolutely irrefutable and horrible reports come in.” “Photographs, movies, posters, speeches, governmental and eyewitness testimony” were possible methods listed. “It would be wise to have a policy [on atrocities] ready.” “If we do not prepare,” the Committee on War Information determined, “any number of unfortunate things may happen.”

Office of War Information administrators took this lesson to heart. In July 1942, only one month after the agency’s founding, George Barnes, Director Davis’s assistant, authored an internal memorandum on the topic. “Is there any facility,” the message began, “for checking the authenticity and accuracy of reported atrocities?” Citing a concern that “we shall certainly have an increasing number of inquiries,” the document closed with the statement that “we should be prepared to answer them with some authority.”

Ten days later, Director Davis received a related letter. The message informed him that presidential advisor Adolf Berle had shared with the Office a prospective White House statement

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120 Ibid.


122 “O.W.I.,” box 52, MacLeish Papers.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid.

on the topic of “civilian atrocities.” This document also contained a description of a new category termed “crimes against humanity.” This construct connected the United States directly with a defense of European Jewry. The category’s intellectual roots held that the Nazi actions, steeped in anti-Semitism, were incompatible with democratic values. As the memo’s author observed: “those perpetrating these atrocities must know that they cannot absolve themselves. The crimes are being recorded in all countries with great care.”

Of course, the Office of War Information exerted modest authority. Its midlevel bureaucratic apparatus was insufficient for stopping the genocide. The new organization also experienced intra-agency fractures, which hastened Archibald MacLeish’s departure. In his resignation letter to Elmer Davis, penned less two months after the Office’s founding, the poet noted a “confusion” that resulted from overlapping jurisdictions. Indeed, the agency was but one of several organizations involved with the collection and dissemination of war information. On the same day that President Roosevelt had authorized Davis’s bureau, he also created an “Office of Strategic Services.” The main distinction between the two resided in their staffs. Elmer Davis ran a civilian organization manned by literary talents. The Office of Strategic Services was a military unit, commanded by Col. William “Wild Bill” Donovan. A New York lawyer and Republican friend of the president, Donovan had prior experience with information gathering and propaganda. He was a forceful figure who staked out a broad vision. Perhaps not

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126 Ibid., pt. 1, reel 12: 0805.

127 Ibid.

128 “Davis,” box 6, MacLeish Papers.


surprisingly, frictions emerged between the new organizations over the best way to fulfill their similar mandates.  

“The confusion as to the respective jurisdiction and functions of this Office and the Office of Strategic Services requires clarification,” Elmer Davis informed the president on New Year’s Day 1943. The dispute centered on what was termed “white” versus “black” propaganda. The former category was a passive, reactionary approach that used factual stories to enlighten citizens about the enemy. Davis favored this method, and his staff had produced numerous pieces of “white” propaganda during late 1942. The Office of Strategic Services, however, preferred “black” propaganda, an offensive, proactive concept designed to penetrate enemy populations. These types of activities, what Davis characterized in his letter to the president as “psychological and secret,” included dropping fictional leaflets, airing false news reports and otherwise engaging in the spread of demoralizing information.

The impasse proved no trifling matter. Nine months later, Robert Sherwood sent Davis a cable reporting “Donovan’s demands for participation in propaganda planning.” In October 1943, Davis again learned from his overseas chief “OSS is attempting to have its mandate for


black propaganda reinterpreted.”136 As late as June 6, 1944, the day that American forces landed in France, the propaganda chiefs continued to hash over their respective powers. “The Office of War Information is solely responsible for the dissemination of American propaganda,” Davis informed his counterpart via letter. “The Office of Strategic Services,” he continued, “is responsible for the dissemination of propaganda which originates within enemy or enemy-occupied territory.”137

The Office of War Information faced bureaucratic obstacles throughout its three-year tenure.138 There was, however, a productive aspect to these challenges. The agency’s commitment to producing white propaganda had an impact on raising the levels of public attention regarding the issue of Nazi religious intolerance. Indeed, in March 1943, the Office of War Information published a piece of white propaganda entitled Tale of a City. This twenty-three-page brochure depicted through words, statistics, and illustrations the German tyranny ongoing in Warsaw. At the time of its release, the Nazis had emptied almost the entire infamous Jewish ghetto. Details about what awaited those sent “east” had appeared in the American media, the president had likewise condemned the Nazi extermination program.139

This publication was not an ephemeral effort. It reflected a much larger national concern with Nazi anti-Semitism. Tale of a City began with an inscription from the president stating, “Punishment shall be meted out to those responsible for the organized murders and commission of atrocities which have violated every tenet of the Christian faith.”140 Along with Divide and


137 Records, ed. Culbert, pt. 1, Davis to Donovan, June 6, 1944, reel 4: 0893.

138 Shulman, Voice, 33; Winkler, Politics, 1.


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Conquer (1942) and Nazi War against the Catholic Church (1942), Tale of a City represented efforts taken by the Roosevelt administration to raise levels of awareness about Nazi intolerance and to bind the nation’s fight with Germany to a larger defense of religious freedom.

Readers met with frank discussion of alarming topics such as Aryan “race laws” and Gestapo death squads.¹⁴¹ In an effort to portray German intolerance as broadly as possible, the Tale of a City noted injustice against Catholics, Protestants, Slavs, women, and the working class. Tale also bore a clear similarity in its title and tone to Archibald MacLeish’s 1937 radio play about fascist social atomization, Fall of a City. In fact, the poet began writing Tale of a City while heading the Office of Facts and Figures.¹⁴² What separates the two stories, however, is the fact that Tale conveyed explicit images of the violence and destruction that the Nazis had wrought. This evolution in rhetoric suggests that as information officers gained deeper knowledge about the persecutions, they passed their awareness on as a public service.

“In Poland,” Tale explained, “the Germans periodically create artificial food shortages as a weapon to demoralize the population.” “Milk cans are wastefully punctured and eggs smashed.” Americans learned that the Polish Jews were being “deprived of the necessary fats and vitamins,” with the result that “Warsaw today is dying out.”¹⁴³ This government publication paid particular attention to Jewish welfare. “Polish Jews were given three to six hours to pack and get into the ghetto.”¹⁴⁴ Tale of a City described the zone as a “dismal section of one hundred

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pt. 1, reel 9: 1053-55. MacLeish’s private papers contain a comic book entitled There Are No Master Races! Published in 1944, the short work dispels Nazi racial claims about differences in human blood. Its closing features a depiction of Abraham Lincoln uttering the phrase “our nation is dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” See “Correspondences,” “Starr,” box 20, MacLeish Papers.

¹⁴² See “Subject File,” “OWI,” box 53, MacLeish Papers.


¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pt. 1, reel 9: 0150.
blocks in the northern part of Warsaw, surrounded by an eight foot wall topped by broken
glass.\footnote{Ibid., pt. 1, reel 9: 0158. This line also appears verbatim in the Office of Facts and
Figures brochure \textit{Divide and Conquer} (1942).} “No one could enter or leave without a pass; no streetcars run between the Ghetto and
other parts of the city.”\footnote{Ibid.} \textit{Tale} provided specific data about Jewish death rates. At “eighty-three
deaths per thousand men,” the U.S. government reported to its citizens, the life expectancy for
Jews living in the Warsaw Ghetto was “sixty percent less” than it was for occupants residing in
other modern cities.\footnote{Ibid., pt. 1, reel 9: 0159} \footnote{Ibid.}

\textit{Tale of a City} advised that in Poland, “which has been made the principal Nazi
slaughterhouse,” German authorities are now carrying into effect “Hitler’s oft-repeated intention
to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe.”\footnote{Ibid., pt. 1, reel 9: 0160.} The ghettos established by the Nazi invaders
were “systematically emptying.” “None of those taken away is ever heard from again. The able-
bodied are worked to death in labor camps. The infirm are left to die of exposure or are
deliberately massacred in mass execution.”\footnote{Ibid.} Since the 1930s, Americans might have known
that the German government terrorized its religious minorities with concentration camps and
forced ghettoization. The \textit{Tale} broadened this lore by explaining that in Nazi-conquered
lands—the presumable fate of the United States if the nation’s war effort failed—ethno-religious
groups faced deliberate extermination.

At a distribution of just under 2 million copies, \textit{Tale of a City} represented the Office’s
second-largest domestic release of white propaganda. The brochure’s publicity far exceeded that

\footnote{Ibid., pt. 1, reel 9: 0158. This line also appears verbatim in the Office of Facts and
Figures brochure \textit{Divide and Conquer} (1942).}

\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Ibid., pt. 1, reel 9: 0159}

\footnote{Ibid., pt. 1, reel 9: 0160.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
of numerous other works including *The Four Freedoms* (1942), *Battle Stations for All* (1943) and *Nazi War against the Catholic Church* (1942).\textsuperscript{150} The Tale was a tangible example that government officials took seriously the need to teach Americans about the Nazi violence. The brochures implicit message was that the United States was battling such forces of persecution. In sharp contrast with State Department behaviors, the Office of War Information’s staff integrated condemnations of Nazi atrocities into public discussions of the war. Soon after the president first expressed his abhorrence of the extermination program, almost 2 million pieces of official literature trumpeted these sentiments to the nation.

The *New York Times* discussed the brochure. The article represented an additional layer of public discourse through which citizens could have inferred the relationship between World War II and the fight against ethno-religious persecution. “Warsaw is being subjected to a deliberate Nazi pattern of death, disease, starvation and the wholesale elimination of population,” the story began.\textsuperscript{151} Crediting the Office of War Information as its source, the *Times* piece continued, “all religion is persecuted: large numbers of prominent priests are in concentration camps or have been tortured or put to death.”\textsuperscript{152} In its closing, the reader learned the stark fact that “German officials are now carrying into effect Hitler’s oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people of Europe.”\textsuperscript{153}

Director Davis received a number of letters about *Tale of a City* from private citizens. One came from Stuart Perry of Adrian, Michigan. On March 19, 1943, Perry stated that he was

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., pt. 1, reel 8: 0049. Distribution levels: *Four Freedoms*: 600,000; *Battle Stations*: 200,000; and *Nazi War against Catholic Church*: 250,000.


\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
“perfectly delighted” with the Office’s brochure. He noted, “the subject matter is exactly the kind that I want to see widely broadcast.” As the editor of his town’s newspaper, Perry informed Davis that he was planning to reproduce immediately *Tale of a City* without any content or stylistic changes. Stuart Perry was certainly not an epic figure. However, his letter is significant because it validates the Office’s ability to shape the public discourse at various social strata. In addition to the millions of copies otherwise distributed, the citizens of Adrian, Michigan, possessed an additional medium through which to learn about the American fight against bigotry.

“I am very glad to know that you liked *Tale of a City,*” Director Davis wrote in reply. “It has as wide a distribution as our budget could permit, and the reception has been quite gratifying.” Davis received additional plaudits from within the academy. “You are to be congratulated on the excellence of your pamphlet *Tale of A City,*” wrote Dr. Douglas Hill at Duke University. The professor’s closing, perhaps obliquely noting the document’s educative purpose, characterized the effort as “one of the best of its kind.” The most compelling reaction came from an organization called “American Friends of Polish Democracy.” The group’s representative termed the *Tale of a City* a “wonderful contribution to the Polish-Allied cause.” This private association was not specifically concerned with the fate of European Jewry, but it asked permission to reprint the publication in its newsletter. This again shows a layering in the public discourse, brought about directly from the Office of War Information brochure, which in

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155 Ibid., pt. 1, Davis to Perry, March 27, 1943, reel 9: 0173.

156 Ibid., pt. 1, Hill to Davis, April 28, 1943, reel 9: 0182.

157 Ibid., pt. 1, Malinowski to Davis, June 3, 1943, reel 9: 0189.
turn reflected a larger decision to disseminate war stories that covered more than military matters.

_Tale of a City_ also attracted congressional attention. In an April 1943 letter to Senator Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., Director Davis explained the importance of publicizing atrocity information. “All available evidence points to the fact that most Americans still have little accurate conception of what domination by the Nazis means,” he informed the Massachusetts senator. “_Tale of a City_ illustrates from a concrete example what happens under Nazi occupation.” Noting his agency’s commitment to publicizing such stories, the letter closed by relaying that “the pamphlet has been widely reprinted by a great many newspapers throughout the country.”

However, not all the feedback discussing _Tale of a City_ was supportive. Some citizens disputed the pamphlet’s accuracy; others resented the federal government’s effort to frame the war as a defense of minority rights. Such disapproving replies do not mitigate the previous expressions of praise. Rather, the more meaningful point is that the Office of War Information—and, specifically the decision to join sociocultural issues into discussion of the war—had provoked a conversation with the American public.

A. B. Lambert from St. Louis, Missouri, wrote on April 15, 1943. He expressed his opinion that “the publication was uncalled for and out of line with the Office of War Information’s bureaucratic purpose.” Lambert rejected the pamphlet as “an emotional appeal with certain social inferences.” Similar sentiments arrived from Mrs. Fritz Downey in Kansas City, Missouri. She disliked “the propaganda pamphlet _Tale of a City_.” Questioning the agency’s

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158 Ibid., pt. 1, Davis to Lodge Jr., April 2, 1943, reel 9: 0178.

159 Ibid., pt. 1, Lambert to Davis, April 15, 1943, reel 9: 0177.
decision to “use public funds for such a purpose,” her letter closed by asking the Office to “try and limit the amount of resources directed to such stories.”

That spring, some legislators began paying closer attention to Office of War Information publications. Congressional concerns centered on the agency’s unusual bureaucratic structure: its motion picture, radio, and publications divisions. Some claimed that the Office of War Information—with a stated interest in crafting white propaganda—was the counterpart to the Nazi’s Reich Propaganda Ministry. Such criticism quickly took a toll. “O.W.I. can be no more concerned with politics than the Army or the Navy,” Director Davis stated in a March 1943 Washington Post story. “The Office’s job is not to make policy but to help people understand what it is and why.”

However, the decision to employ white propaganda to sculpt sociocultural and political attitudes proved a serious liability. During the spring 1943, two additional brochures soon attracted public and congressional ire. The Life of Franklin Delano Roosevelt outraged Republican lawmakers who asked why a New Deal agency used its legislative appropriation to extol the chief executive. A more ambitious effort, Negroes and the War, proved far costlier. Legislators from both chambers of Congress began to contest the Office’s efforts to imbue the war effort with pluralist political undertones.

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160 Ibid., pt. 1, Downey to Davis, April 29, 1943, reel 9: 0183.


163 Ibid.

164 See Winkler, Politics, 37.
John Taber, the ranking member on the House Appropriations Committee, was particularly critical. In a letter to Elmer Davis, the New York Republican expressed his view that in the *Life of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* the agency had far exceeded its mandate to “coordinate an intelligent understanding of the war effort.”\(^\text{165}\) The legislator peppered the director with numerous questions related to the topic’s selection, its distribution levels, and costs.

Davis replied quickly, if coyly, to the inquiry. He explained that the Office’s overseas division, run by Robert Sherwood, was responsible for the *Franklin* brochure. The publication had no domestic distribution; only American troops stationed in Europe had received the material. The director reported the existence of five hundred thousand copies, printed at a cost of almost $14,000. “I cannot see any political propaganda in the booklet,” he earnestly observed. “It has been a practice in America since 1776 to identify the president as a symbol for the entire nation.”\(^\text{166}\) His closing was a whimsical combination of conciliation and candor. “If you would like further elucidation as to what we are trying to do at the Office and why,” he wrote, “I would be very happy if you would come down and lunch with me some day next week.” “It is true that we are coming up before Congress to ask for next year’s appropriation,” he informed the committee’s ranking member. “But I assure you that this invitation [to lunch] is not in any sense an endeavor to divert or neutralize your criticisms.”\(^\text{167}\)

Taber was not interested in dining with Davis. One week later, he sent the agency a scathing letter detailing what he believed to be grave errors in judgment. In reference to the *Franklin* publication, he chastised the agency’s overt politicization: “We are now engaged in a

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\(^\text{166}\) Ibid., pt. 1, Davis to Taber, March 4, 1943, reel 12: 0364-65.

\(^\text{167}\) Ibid.
war against those enemies who embrace the public deification of one man as the leader of a
country.” “That you are copying one of the most hideous elements of Nazism and fascism,” he
continued, “is a startling thing.” Snidely addressing Davis’s claim that the publication was an
overseas endeavor, Taber noted, “I will accept that your right hand does not know what your left
hand is up to.” In closing, he further disparaged the Office’s movie and radio programs as
“subtle propaganda and drivel distributed under the name and at the expense of the Office as
official matter.”

This outrage captured the brewing congressional backlash forming against Davis’s
activist agency, and specifically the effort to frame discussions of the war broadly. Tale of a City
had resulted in relatively few problems, and perhaps The Life of Franklin Delano Roosevelt was
innocuous. Nothing, however, insulated the Office of War Information following Negroes and
the War. Also appearing in spring 1943, with 2.5 million copies printed, this sixty-nine-page
tome was the Office’s largest publication. Its sweeping scope and massive distribution
demonstrated the agency’s commitment to using taxpayer funds to sculpt a new discourse of
racial tolerance and cooperation. However, the brochure/book provoked citizens living in the
southern United States, who rejected its overt efforts at social engineering.

On March 18, 1943, at the same time that Elmer Davis worked at placating Congressman
Taber, Senator John Bankhead also contacted the embattled agency. The Alabaman Democrat
registered concern with the Negroes publication, and he requested the documents’ overall costs
and distribution levels. The senator explained that he only first became aware of the matter after

168 Ibid., pt. 1, Taber to Davis, March 11, 1943, reel 12: 0361.
169 Ibid., 0362.
170 Ibid., pt. 1, Taber to Davis, March 11, 1943, reel 12: 0363. See also Shulman, Voice, 13-14; Larson, “Domestic,” 434; and Barnes, “Fighting,” 35-38.
a constituent received the conspicuously sized mailing unsolicited. The citizen was reportedly alarmed that the federal government took such an extensive use of public resources to address this particular issue.  

Davis replied to Senator Bankhead within a week. The rapidity of his response reflected his awareness that the Office had succeeded in provoking a controversial public debate. His letter began by providing several basic facts about *Negroes*: “A total number of two-and-one-half million pamphlets were printed at an estimated cost of seventy-two thousand dollars.” He explained that distribution occurred primarily through “Negro organizations,” although “public libraries” also received some copies. The decision to bind a domestic racial issue to the larger military effort was not capricious, nor was it incongruent with past agency behaviors. Earlier that month the Office’s second-largest domestic publication had called for a defense of Europe’s Jews; now its largest project lauded African Americans.

Senator John Overton, a Louisianan Democrat, termed such actions “dangerous.” He charged Davis and his staff with promoting racial antagonism. Enclosed with his correspondence, the legislator included a resolution from the Shreveport, Louisiana, Chamber of Commerce. “We reject,” the document read, “efforts to place the Negro on the same social basis as the Caucasian.” In his closing, Senator Overton stated that the Office of War Information

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172 Ibid., Davis to Bankhead, March 26, 1943, reel 9: 0195. *Negroes* cost $85,000. See ibid., pt. 1, reel 8: 0434.

173 Ibid., pt. 1, Overton to Davis, April 15, 1943, reel 9: 0198.

174 Ibid.
had little understanding of the south, “where the two races have been living side by side in perfect harmony and mutual workable understanding.”\footnote{175}

As was the case with 	extit{Tale of a City}, the negative letters nevertheless hinted at the Office’s success in provoking public discourse. C. H. Hach of Richmond, Virginia, recognized, but did not agree with the Office’s tactic. He sent a disapproving letter via the offices of Senator Harry Byrd (D-VA). “How does this publication help the war effort?” The letter closed with the statement that “this mawkish, glorifying hand-out, bearing the Government Printing Office label, is a real waste of public money.”\footnote{176}

However, as Director Davis stated in his reply, the Office’s administrators saw value in the publication. “The Office feels that its responsibility to convey information about the war includes providing information of particular interest to minority groups.” Expressing a rationale that Archibald MacLeish had earlier outlined, the letter closed with the statement that “the pamphlet was written specifically to counteract enemy propaganda designed to foment racial discord in this country.”\footnote{177}

Indeed, although no longer working with the Office of War Information, Archibald MacLeish’s footprint had remained in the agency. He also continued to publicize his support for social and religious tolerance to private audiences. In a November 1943 speech delivered before Chicago’s Sinai Temple Forum, he explained, “the field of battle today is men’s minds and opinions.”\footnote{178} The United States was not simply trying to “conquer cities, islands, elevations or

\footnote{175} Ibid.

\footnote{176} Ibid., pt. 1., Hach to Byrd, April 19, 1943, reel 9: 0203.

\footnote{177} Ibid., pt. 1, Davis to Byrd, June 30, 1943, reel 9: 0207.

\footnote{178} “Literary File,” “Sinai Temple,” box 47, MacLeish Papers.
continents.” The larger objective involved the “expansion of human freedoms.” As President Roosevelt first observed when outlining his Four Freedoms declaration, such civil liberties were the collective rewards for all who rejected tyranny and intolerance.

In practical terms, however, the decision to bind sociocultural and political issues to the larger military effort spelled disaster for the Office of War Information. Only one year after the president had first devised the agency, Representative John Taber (R-NY), in direct retaliation for the incendiary brochures, orchestrated a massive reduction in its appropriation. In 1944, the domestic branch received a token budget, leaving Director Davis and his staff incapable of further sculpting public norms. The agency joined a stocked graveyard, full of New Deal agencies that had succumbed to political pressures. Although the pluralist worldview that agency officials preferred eventually took root in the U.S., congressmen and citizens alike viewed with skepticism a government-controlled information apparatus.

In the ideological contests of the Second World War, the American “Four Freedoms” contrasted favorably with the German “Final Solution.” The Office of War Information’s decision to frame the fighting as part of a larger global struggle for core democratic values proved controversial. However, if the federal government failed during the First World War to capture the public’s imagination, the Office of War Information represented a far more

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179 Ibid.

180 Davis received some encouraging news from Capitol Hill. Appropriations Committee member John Coffee (D-WA) wrote him a letter declaring, “I am resentful of the idiotic and absurd denunciations of the O.W.I., obviously generated for political purposes.” See ibid., pt. 1, Coffee to Davis, reel 12: 7652.

ambitious effort. Its administrators and staff outlined a new image for Americans, one that welcomed a diversity of minority issues into the mainstream.

After the Office of War Information ceased its domestic publications, public opposition toward Nazi anti-Semitism—and related forms of intolerance—remained apparent. Citizen organizations, particularly interest groups, took advantage of the issue’s exposure and appeal. During late 1943 and 1944, a more thoughtful and dynamic discourse emerged, one that introduced scores of additional people to the effort. The momentum generated by this activity would lead to an institutionalization of American opposition, ultimately dwarfing all forms of public resistance that had preceded it.
CHAPTER 5
INTEREST-GROUP ADVOCATES PUSH FOR
A MORE TANGIBLE RESPONSE, 1942-1943

The American tradition of justice and humanity dictates that all possible means be employed. The Senate recommends and urges the creation by the President of a commission of diplomatic, economic, and military experts to formulate and effectuate a plan of immediate action designed to save the remaining Jewish people of Europe from extinction at the hands of Nazi Germany.

—S Res. 203; Adopted Unanimously by the Chamber on December 21, 1943

Readers of the New York Times might have been startled on February 16, 1943, by the full-page advertisement that appeared on page eleven. In bold, capitalized letters, what appeared to be a banner headline reported, “For Sale to Humanity: Seventy Thousand Jews: Guaranteed Human Beings at Fifty Dollars a Piece.” In the accompanying text, Americans were informed, “Rumania is tired of killing Jews. It has killed one hundred thousand of them in the last two years. Rumania will now give these Jews away for practically nothing.” Also appearing on the page—and set at a diagonal angle to attract attention—was a typed business letter pointedly addressed to the “Four Freedoms.” The short message read: “I know that you are very busy. For that reason, I am writing an ad. They are easier and quicker to read than stories.”


3 Ibid.

The letter’s signatory was the prominent American journalist and Hollywood screenwriter Ben Hecht. By the 1940s, Hecht was a well-known cultural figure whose film credits included *The Front Page* (1928), *Scarface* (1932), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), and *Some Like It Hot* (1939). His decision to reference the Four Freedoms suggested that the metaphor remained a relevant device for rooting discussions of the war. Much like the president and his administrators at the Office of War Information, Hecht saw in the declaration an explicit American promise to uphold religious freedoms. With reports of the Nazi onslaught against Europe’s Jews appearing more frequently, that was precisely the sort of guarantee that concerned citizens wanted the government to honor.

In this newspaper advertisement, Hecht was not simply conveying his personal sentiments. Rather, an interest group called the “Committee for a Jewish Army” had paid for the layout. Based in New York City, a Palestinian Jew named Peter Bergson (aka Hillel Kook) founded this organization to raise support for his idea that the U.S. government should arm Palestinian Jews to attack Nazi forces in the Middle East. During 1942-44, the so-called Bergson Boys dispersed news of the unfolding genocide throughout Washington, D.C., New York, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles. Bergson, Hecht, and the numerous

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6 The American painter Norman Rockwell visually depicted these four ideas in an identically entitled series. In April 1943, for four successive weeks, the *Saturday Evening Post* reprinted his images on their cover page. See Stuart Murray and James McCabe, *Norman Rockwell’s Four Freedoms: Images That Inspire a Nation* (Stockbridge, Mass.: Berkshire House, 1993).

This most unlikely figure in the story of the American response to the Holocaust arrived in the United States in July 1940. A slight man with fine-grained blond hair and bespectacled blue eyes, he spoke English with a British accent that “squeaked” when he was excited.12 Bergson, however, possessed innate charisma, moxie, and intelligence. Congressman Will Rogers Jr. recollected: “Bergson never made his appeal on the Jewish basis. . . . I wouldn’t have accepted it on that basis either.” The Californian Democrat was one of many Americans who believed “the U.S. should do something about it [genocide] whether the victims were Jews or Cherokees.”13 The list of the persons who at some point lent their name or talents to Bergson’s efforts stretched from Marlon Brando and Frank Sinatra, to Harry S. Truman and Mrs. Roosevelt.

Did these people speak out owing to kindred sympathy? Or did their comments betray a subtler, more dispassionate support borne of a general disinclination toward state-sponsored violence? These Gordian questions require deep consideration. What compels interest-group formation and activity? Why do people mobilize in support of specific causes?14 In the public campaign that Bergson directed, the motivating factor appeared to be outrage over the “Final Solution,” which had sprung in turn from an earlier disgust with Nazi anti-Semitism; together they provided Bergson a fertile ground for mobilizing a growing political support.

12 Wyman and Medoff, Race, 25.
13 As quoted in Wyman and Medoff, Race, 80.
Peter Bergson also pioneered new forms of advocacy. He paid little mind to the tradition that found Jewish American organizations treading quietly in their approach to the corridors of power.\textsuperscript{15} Bergson preferred a plebian strategy, soliciting a wide range of political offices. He lobbied the Department of Navy, Interior Department, Treasury Department, State Department, President’s War Relief Control Board, as well as scores of members on Capitol Hill. “Bergson was a stranger coming in the door,” one official later recollected. “I assumed he had just been walking around banging on doors and he happened to bang on my door at this particular time.”\textsuperscript{16}

Moreover, while some Jews feared that public discussions of Nazi anti-Semitism might ignite similarly held domestic passions, Bergson rooted his advocacy in the supposition that Americans would uphold the universal right to worship.\textsuperscript{17} As his interest group’s letter to the Four Freedoms suggested, the Bergsonites believed that the United States was fighting on behalf of a larger Judeo-Christian ethic. During 1942-44, he unwound a basic message that an unchecked genocide blighted all humankind. His effort produced a spate of new and unlikely allies, as both public officials and private citizens registered their support for his message.

Congressman Andrew Somers was one such person. Somers was an Irish Catholic Democrat who represented a working-class district in New York City. First elected in 1925, Somers had recorded no previous statements about Jews. Following an unsolicited visit from Peter Bergson, however, the congressman began publicly to condemn Nazi anti-Semitism. He also volunteered the use of his office space and secretarial staff.\textsuperscript{18} Somers delivered floor

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\textsuperscript{15} Monroe Billington and Cal Clark, “Rabbis and the New Deal: Clues to Jewish Political Behavior,” \textit{American Jewish History} 80 (1990): 195.
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\textsuperscript{16} As quoted in Wyman and Medoff, \textit{Race}, 80.
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\textsuperscript{17} Rapoport, \textit{Shake}, 82.
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\textsuperscript{18} Wyman and Medoff, \textit{Race}, 26.
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speeches written by Bergson’s lieutenants, and offered resolutions pertaining to Jewish welfare. In his remarks and official submissions, the legislator advanced the familiar pluralist claim that ending religious persecution in Europe was part and parcel of the American vision for humankind.  

Congressman Somers was not the only member who, at Bergson’s behest, offered these types of rationales. During the Seventy-sixth and Seventy-seventh (1939-43) Congresses, Bergson and his associates orchestrated more than a dozen prewritten insertions into the *Congressional Record*. This process is most interesting when non-Jewish members with no previously recorded activity expressed highly specified positions. Political scientists generally observe this sort of behavior—that is, interest groups using their sway to have favorable submissions included as part of the public record—in much later Congresses.\(^\text{20}\) That this occurred during the early 1940s, and in connection with the issue of opposing Nazi anti-Semitism, remains unexplored.

Take, for example, a statement offered by Congressman John Dingell Sr. (D-MI). In his comments, the powerful midwestern legislator followed a template of Bergson-penned remarks. Four days prior to the Japanese attack against Pearl Harbor, Dingell observed, “millions of Jews in Europe have been deprived of their elementary human rights.” \(^\text{21}\) “These people are wearing a yellow badge,” he informed his colleagues. “I say that the badge is one of courage and honor.” \(^\text{22}\)

\(^{19}\) Andrew Somers, *Congressional Record*, H 77th Cong., 2nd sess. (May 24, 1942): A1706.

\(^{20}\) Kelly Patterson, “The Political Firepower of the National Rifle Association,” in Cigler and Loomis, eds., *Interest*, 129.


\(^{22}\) Ibid.
In closing, Dingell explicitly connected Bergson’s pleas for aid to a defense of the Four Freedoms. “We must support the Jews of the world,” he thundered. “The cause,” he exclaimed, was rooted in “decency, democracy, the four freedoms, and humanity.”

Peter Bergson succeeded in stoking a near-dormant congressional discourse that had opposed Nazi anti-Semitism during the prior decade. The members’ names and states had changed, but the urge to condemn as abhorrent Nazi measures remained consistent. George Grant, an Alabaman, expressed an uncannily precise grasp of the dire situation. “If any group of people should hate Hitlerism, and that what it stands for, it is the Jewish race.” Adopting some conspicuously well honed logic, the Dixiecrat member reasoned, “Jews know that Hitler wants to exterminate them from the face of the earth.”

The United States would not officially acknowledge a German program of extermination for five additional months. News of the killings had previously reached Western outposts, but it remains notable that a second-term member from the Deep South possessed such detailed knowledge. This pattern reappeared the next week, when another non-Jewish member from a region well outside the Northeast entered a statement about the need to offer American aid to Europe’s endangered Jews. Congressman Richard Gale (R-MN) won his election to the House in 1941. His sentiments in a piece entitled “Jewish Army” were both accurate and grim. “The Jews have no illusions as to their fate,” he wrote. Noting that the genocide posed a threat to all, Gale closed his piece with the observation, “Their [Jews] cold-blooded slaughter, butchery, and liquidation renders humankind vulnerable to the nightmare of Poland, the concentration camps, and extinction.”

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23 Ibid.


The next day, Delaware Democrat Philip Traynor entered remarks that were even more incisive. Like his colleagues from Alabama and Minnesota, Traynor was a non-Jewish, freshman member who believed that a defense of Judaism was consonant with the basic tenets of American society. Representative Traynor had recorded no prior, nor did he record any subsequent, remarks about Jewish issues. His submission, entitled “Need for a Jewish Army,” credited the Bergsonites directly. “In this tragic conflict we must be for or against the Jews,” he argued. “Hitler has chosen to make them his special target.” This choice was part of a larger showdown between “right, wrong, good, and evil.”

In these expressions of support—and there were more than a dozen submissions recorded during summer 1942—Christian members noted a sociocultural and political value associated with condemning Nazi intolerance. These members embraced the issue of decrying German bigotry as a shibboleth for signaling their larger commitment to promoting pluralism.

Bergson ultimately retreated from his Capitol Hill lobbying campaign without obtaining any provisions to outfit a Palestinian Jewish army. Instead, his new objective became raising levels of public awareness about the Nazi program of murder via a theatrical pageant entitled *We Will Never Die* (1943). The play represented a smart and accessible medium through which tens of thousands of Americans learned about the Nazi assault on European Jewry. Ben Hecht wrote the storyline; he and Bergson secured the financial backing. An expansive and expensive production, the pageant featured some of the period’s most popular talent, including Billy Rose,

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27 Hecht, *Child*, 553.
Edmund G. Robinson, Sid Caesar, Dean Martin, and Burgess Meredith. The fifty-piece NBC orchestra performed the score. It opened on March 9, 1943, when actors played two performances in one day before sold out audiences in Madison Square Garden.

The April 12, 1943, performance in Washington, D.C., was particularly important because it provided Bergson with an alternative medium for persuasion. The show’s performance date contained political undertones as it occurred shortly before an American-Anglo conference convened to discuss European war refugees. In the days and weeks leading up to the production, Bergson and Hecht increased their advocacy. They placed another full-page newspaper ad in the Washington Post under the headline “Action Not Pity.” Hecht wrote an editorial that again outlined the group’s maxim that genocide ravaged both Jews and Christians.

Actors performed We Will Never Die before two forty-foot tablets etched in Hebrew and intended to replicate the Ten Commandments. An illuminated Star of David hung above the stage. The pageant began with narrators—Burgess Meredith, Paul Muni, and Edward G. Robinson—reading off a “roll call” of Jewish contributors to Western society. Some of the names included Moses, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein. The second act, called “Jews in the War,” retold stories of Jewish American sacrifices in both the First and Second World Wars.

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30 “Save the Jewish People of Europe,” Washington Post, April 11, 1943. See also Rapoport, Shake, 75.

31 Palestine, ed. Morton, reel 8: 0238; Rosen, Saving, 326.

Frank Sinatra appeared in the role of a young soldier. The final act, “Remember Us,” convened a solemn conference where the “ghosts of the murdered” recounted their final minutes on Earth. A chorus of cantors sang “Sh’ma Yisrael (Long Live Israel).” At the pageant’s closing, the narrator stated—and this was printed in the official program—the “massacre of Jews is not a Jewish situation. It is a problem that belongs to humanity.”

The production was a tremendous success. The Constitution Hall audience included two hundred members of Congress, the entire cabinet, the entire Supreme Court, as well as Mrs. Roosevelt. The day following the performance, the Washington Post reported the event on its front page, and characterized the effort as a “gala.” What remained unclear, however, was whether this manufactured publicity could impress upon elected leaders a greater sense of urgency to devise a policy response.

The first opportunity for Bergson and his allies to gauge their level of effectiveness appeared a few weeks later at the Allied Bermuda Conference on Refugees. The meeting—purposefully held on a remote island to insulate the conferees from public pressure—marked the first time that Allied officials met to discuss European refugees since Western governments first acknowledged the existence of a Nazi extermination program. State Department administrators, mindful of the growing public interest, selected two legislators to join Princeton University President Howard Dodds on the three-man American delegation. Senator Scott Lucas (D-IL) represented a large Polish American constituency, many with family members displaced by the Nazi General Government. Congressman Sol Bloom (D-NY), chair of

33 Hecht, Child, 557-63.

34 Palestine, ed. Morton, reel 8: 0264.

the House Foreign Affairs Committee, was a prominent Jewish American representing New York City.

In terms of rescuing large numbers of Jewish refugees from the ongoing Nazi assault, the conferees did not obtain anything substantive. Neither side proposed a workable method for removing a massive amount of people from an active war zone in which neither nation had military forces stationed. One possible relief scheme—increased Jewish immigration into Palestine—faced resistance owing to the possible backlash that such an action might provoke against Allied troops stationed in the Middle East. “The whole Mohammedan world is tending to flare up at the indication that the Allied forces are trying to locate Jewish people in Moslem territories,” Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long Jr. recorded in a diary entry made during the conference.36 This dangerous impression, according to Long, lent “credibility” to German propaganda broadcasts charging that Jews controlled the Western democracies.37

For Peter Bergson and his associates, the tepid Bermuda Conference marked a turning point in the tone and scope of their advocacy. No longer content to solicit or implore, their pleas assumed a new stridency. “Poor men and women,” began a full-page New York Times advertisement they placed in conjunction with the American delegation’s arrival home, “Bermuda was not the dawn of a new era of humanity and compassion.” Rather, the group charged, Bermuda was a “mockery and a cruel jest.”38 In addition to condemning the Nazi regime for its continued murderous actions, the Bergson Boys impugned the U.S. government


37 Ibid.

38 New York Times, May 4, 1943. See also Wyman and Medoff, Race, 86; and Peck, “Campaign,” 376.
for its sustained lethargic response. For the first time since Hitler’s rise to power, there was open criticism in the public discourse faulting the U.S. for not combating Nazi behavior.

Listed on the May 1943 advertisement were the names of dozens of lawmakers. The implication was clear that these officials also endorsed Bergson’s scathing critique. Senator Lucas, however, objected that some of the legislators’ names had appeared without their permission. Senator Harry S. Truman (D-MO) was one of the men surprised to find himself included in the attack ad against his colleague. After finding his name appended to the published blast, the first-term senator personally upbraided Bergson: “I like my friends. Scott Lucas is a friend of mine. I am loyal to my friends and I want to help Scott Lucas.”

Colorado senator Edwin Johnson, accurately identified as the group’s national cochairman, also chided Bergson. “Scott Lucas is a very powerful man,” the Palestinian refugee recalled hearing via the phone. His unsettled senatorial ally further confided that his colleague was “angry as anything.”

Much like with the negative letters sent to the Office of War Information, these outbursts indicated that Bergson contributed to an ongoing public discourse about Nazi anti-Semitism. Editors at the New Republic did likewise with their 75,000-copy supplemental entitled The Jews of Europe and How to Help Them. “The war against civilization began when the first Jew in Germany was murdered in cold blood by a Nazi storm trooper.” “Of Germany’s innumerable crimes the extermination of the Jews is basically the most evil and morally heinous.”

Periodicals such as the New Republic first published reports of German violence against Jews

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39 As quoted in Wyman and Medoff, Race, 85.

40 Bergson retained some other allies. William Langer (R-ND) held a personal animus toward Scott Lucas. During the summer of 1943, he harangued Lucas about the Bermuda Conference, claiming that his colleague from Illinois attempted to disguise his own diplomatic shortcomings by shamefully attacking Bergson. See Wyman and Medoff, Race, 86.

during the early 1930s; ten years later the issue remained prominent. One the one hand, this might indicate a culture of American inaction, but on the other hand, it also betrayed a depth of concern.

For his part, Bergson continued sharpening his advocacy. In July 1943, he decommissioned his Committee for a Jewish Army in favor of the “Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe.” Ben Hecht remained in a leadership role, but the change in moniker and agenda reflected a new call for a federal agency to administer American relief.\footnote{Rapoport, \textit{Shake}, 82-85.} The methods selected to articulate such demands—newspaper ads and direct lobbying—recalled earlier efforts. An August advertisement placed in the \textit{New York Times} exhorted, “Only the U.S. government can save the Jewish people.” The Emergency Committee characterized the task as being “vital to the victory of democracy.” Moreover, following a loss of support associated with the Bermuda Conference ad campaign, the Bergson Boys listed a new national cochairman, the popular Will Rogers Jr.\footnote{\textit{New York Times}, August 30, 1943.}

The Californian Democrat greatly admired Ben Hecht. “With Ben Hecht’s participation,” the legislator later recalled, “I believed this was a group that was actually going to rescue the Jews.” Rogers thought that Hecht’s newspaper advertisements “did more than any other single event to stimulate Americans to take action.”\footnote{As quoted in Wyman and Medoff, \textit{Race}, 91.} Criticizing the president concerned him, but he believed that Roosevelt was “very wrong on this point. I thought he should have interested himself immediately in the rescue issue, made stirring declarations, and set up a committee or group that could save these people when he knew they were being killed \textit{en masse}.\footnote{Ibid., 143.}
In November 1943, Congressman Rogers took such a step when he offered House resolution 352, concomitantly submitted as Senate Resolution 201 by Guy Gillette, a Bergson ally from Iowa. Trumpeting the interest-group calls for a new federal agency to administer American relief, the resolutions opened with an explicit reference to the “mass crime that has already exterminated close to two million human beings.” Members of Congress heard that a defense of Europe’s Jews complemented the “American tradition of justice and humanity.” What distinguished these resolutions from previous expressions of support was a closing section that “recommended and urged the creation of a commission to save the surviving Jewish people of Europe from extinction.”

The House Foreign Affairs Committee received the Rogers resolutions. Although the sponsor served on the committee, Sol Bloom held the chair. The Bermuda Conference participant knew that Bergson had earlier characterized his diplomacy as a mockery. He was particularly sensitive to interest-group criticism. In a private letter written to the jurist J. Sidney Bernstein, dated the day of his return from Bermuda, Bloom exclaimed, “we accomplished everything that we started out to do not withstanding the fact that pressure groups criticize what we have done.” In his closing, the man who earlier had successfully steered the American declarations of war through the House pondered, “I do not know anyone who could have done half as much.”

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46 Problems, 15.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
Bloom resented the fact that Bergson’s interest group had foisted the pending resolutions before his committee. He warned Will Rogers, “These are not the people [Bergsonites] you should be associated with.”

His clear animus toward the Emergency Committee ensured that the interrogations addressed more than just the issue of aiding Europe’s Jews. For more than a decade, the concern with Nazi anti-Semitism had lingered in the American mainstream. Bergson and his supporters had succeeded in repackaging the existing, disparate opposition and steering the issue before the nation’s most official public forum.

The so-called Holocaust Hearings convened on November 19, 1943, under the legislative heading “Establishment of a Commission to Effectuate the Rescue of the Jewish People of Europe.” In these proceedings, called to session several times over a span of weeks in November and December 1943, historians will find the most comprehensive public discussion of the Nazis’ genocidal activities. Late 1943 was a critical period in the escalating murder program, with millions of Jews living in Nazi spheres of influence. As credible new reports of gas chambers and crematoria joined previously known stories of mass executions, an opportunity existed for American officials to chart a course of action.

During the two weeks of testimony, some of the witnesses who appeared before the House included Peter Bergson, New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia, and Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long Jr. The pending question was whether Congress, in the performance of its oversight duties, should recommend to the president the creation of a new agency to save Europe’s Jews from the Nazis. There exists a need to spend a significant amount of time examining this testimony because in addition to representing another instance in which

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51 *Problems*, 15.
prominent Americans expressed their discursive opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism, the hearings featured instances of sharp acrimony between colleagues, coreligionists, and perfect strangers. Moreover, shortly following the excitement that surrounded the hearings, the president acted in accordance with the proposed resolution and created a specific agency that administered relief to European Jews.

The first Emergency Committee witness to testify was the group’s vice chairman, Dean Alfange. Alfange, who was born in Constantinople, and who was not Jewish, was a lawyer by profession. He became involved with Bergson’s interest group because he believed that ending the genocide was “essentially a Christian issue.” 52 His opening statement asserted that saving the Jews was “a difficult problem,” but he reasoned that creating a specific government agency would “carry out the task effectively.” 53 He also allowed for the possibility that such a step would reduce the need for pressure advocacy, as interest groups could instead work with the new federal entity. 54

The first congressman to address Alfange, Charles Eaton, posed a question exploring attitudes to Judaism in the Middle east. The New Jersey Republican wondered, “If we take this action, will it create any enthusiasm among the Arabs”? Alfange responded, “I do not know and I do not care.” 55 The legislator then asked, “Are the Jews a race, a nation, or a religion?” The baffled witness responded, “I have not given any thought to the matter.” Eaton insisted, “I was just wondering if you could please select one of the three categories.” 56 Alfange might then have

52 Ibid., 22.
53 Ibid., 19-20.
54 Ibid., 22.
55 Ibid., 23.
56 Ibid.
recognized that the hearings were off track. “Frankly,” he replied, “I do not think that issue has any relevancy.”

The next set of questions came from Edith Nourse Rogers. The Massachusetts Republican had first protested Nazi anti-Semitism in 1933. In 1939, she cosponsored legislation to increase immigration levels into the United States for German Jewish children. In November 1943, however, she discussed the difficulties of trying to separate the genocide from the larger question of helping displaced persons throughout Europe. “The Nazis in Poland are killing the Poles,” she observed. “The Nazis in Greece are murdering the Greeks.” Wondering where the Emergency Committee proposed to transfer these massive numbers of Jews, she asked, “Is it not true that during the past years more Jewish people have been brought into this country than any other race or religion?” Mr. Alfange responded, “This is not an immigration question. We are not proposing to open America’s doors to Jews.”

Following Congresswoman Rogers, the chair began his remarks. Sol Bloom first offered a fulsome assessment of the recent Bermuda Conference. He informed his colleagues that the British Parliament had agreed to extend the limits of its “White Paper” governing Jewish entry into Palestine. After Bloom praised his own diplomacy for several more minutes, Mr. Alfange interrupted the testimonial. He wished to redirect the discussion to the critical question of whether the U.S. government would demonstrate additional resolve in the form of a new government agency. “The pertinence of our complaint, Mr. Chairman, if I may interrupt you, is

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57 Ibid., 24.

58 Ibid., 29.

59 Ibid., 30.

this is not a refugee problem. . . . Once Germany and her satellites know the U.S. is intent on rescuing the Jews that alone would have a great psychological effect on ending the killings.” At that point, Ohio Republican John Vorys broke into the discussion. “Has there,” he asked, “been any psychological effect to the statements made to date by the President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress?” Alfange responded, “Yes, but it has not brought results because it was not backed up by action.” This spontaneous answer hinted at both the inherent existence and limitations of the discursive opposition to date. The question was whether the U.S. government, the Congress and the Executive branches, would transform prior rhetoric of concern for Jewish welfare into a practical reality.

Soon after this exchange, Chairman Bloom moved the proceedings into secret executive session. He wished to question the witness about an Emergency Committee telegram sent out prior to the hearings. The document, which listed the witness’s name, was a fund-raising effort that conjoined a request for money to the pending House resolutions. The line that Bloom found most disquieting read, “It is imperative to mobilize public opinion throughout this country to force passage of the resolution.” The chair especially bristled at the implication that money could “force” the House Foreign Affairs Committee into action. Bloom, a wealthy man with significant and varied assets, wished to dispel any impression that money affected the manner in which his committee dispensed with its legislation. “We have a lot of prominent Jews in New York and Washington,” he informed the interest-group representative. “If it is necessary to raise

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61 Ibid., 33.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 34-36.
money to force us to act, I think that places the chairman and this committee in a very embarrassing situation.”

Alfange adopted a conciliatory tact, stating, “I agree with you sir, but frankly I would not put too much weight on that language.” Bloom, however, wished to press further the point that his committee did not respond to compulsion. He asked the witness, “Did your group ask the chairman or any member of this committee to hear you?” The witness replied, “No sir.” Bloom continued, “You were thus never denied any hearing?” The witness again acknowledged “No sir. . . . I agree that the language is bad. Frankly, this is the first time it has come to my attention.”

Deference did little to mollify the committee. Additional members took turns impugning the interest-group’s tactics. Some reported receiving clandestine phone calls from citizens attempting to influence committee members. “I think the integrity of this committee and the House is in question,” West Virginian Andrew Schiffler stated. “This is a matter,” he continued, “that ought to be completely investigated.” Karl Mundt (R-SD) added his support to this idea. “I had a very prominent American call me on the telephone to lambaste the chairman,” he informed his colleagues. “I will give it to you privately that he [caller] belonged to one group and he was trying to knife the other group.”

That day, Congressman Bloom also wished to learn more about the Emergency Committee’s association with a New York radio broadcaster who had criticized the chair for

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65 Problems, 35.
66 Ibid., 37.
67 Ibid., 36.
68 Ibid., 38.
69 Ibid., 39.
scheduling the hearings on a Friday. Bloom told his colleagues that news bulletins had incorrectly claimed that he set the hearings to inconvenience observant Jews. Bloom repeatedly insisted that the date reflected the House parliamentarian’s preferences.\textsuperscript{70} Indeed, the chair, raised in an orthodox Jewish household, saw in the attack nothing more than a new strain of unfounded criticism related to his perceived insensitivity toward European Jewish suffering.\textsuperscript{71}

Unknown to contemporary critics such as Peter Bergson, Bloom was a dogged advocate for many dozens of Jews threatened by the Nazis. During the years from 1933 to 1944, he used his position to help a number of foreign Jews obtain entrance to the United States. Some of these cases were particularly complicated, taking many years to resolve successfully. Bloom’s decision to operate privately has skewered his contemporary and historical legacies. No framework currently exists for viewing Sol Bloom as anything other than a figure complicit with a much larger alleged American abandonment.\textsuperscript{72} The chair, however, was a complex person who had accumulated an array of life experiences prior to his entering Congress. Those who insist on seeing in Bloom an archetype for a larger failure must reconcile that view scores of instances in which he alleviated Jewish suffering.

Take, for example, the case of Herman Rothstein, a street sweeper who lived in Bloom’s Upper West Side Manhattan district. “I have been trying to bring my niece from Poland to live with me,” he told his congressman in a short, typed letter sent in February 1938. The correspondence occurred before the Second World War, and prior to Bloom’s leadership

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 40, 79, 94, 160.

\textsuperscript{71} Emanuel Celler recorded a particularly scathing analysis. The long-serving Jewish Democrat from New York offered a grim assessment of his colleague’s performance: “He didn’t help.” As quoted in Wyman and Medoff, \textit{Race}, 144-45.

\textsuperscript{72} Some experts stress the fact that Bloom cosponsored legislation that strengthened the State Department’s right of refusal to European Jews. See Breitman and Kraut, \textit{American}, 135.
position on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. “Would you kindly grant me an interview at your New York office?” 73 Ten days later, Bloom replied to Rothstein in a letter that closed, “Depend on it that everything that can be done will be done to help you in having your niece admitted to the U.S.” 74

And these were no idle promises. In some instances, Bloom struggled for years, throughout the entire span of the war, to unite European Jews with their American families. Ilse Berger was a forty-one-year-old German woman with impaired vision in both eyes. She lived in Breslau, Germany, where she worked as a housekeeper in a state-run children’s orphanage. In March 1936, after learning that Ilse had lost her job, Ilse’s sister, Anna, a constituent in Bloom’s 20th district, wrote about the possibilities of effecting a reunion. Aware that Ilse’s age, vision problem, inability to speak English, and unemployment might hamper her visa application, Anna Berger included with her correspondence a letter verifying her own employment as a research assistant at Columbia University. She also included her monthly bank receipts, intended to validate her claims that her immigrant sister would not become a “public charge.” 75

Along with a cover letter requesting assistance, Bloom sent a copy of the documents to the American Embassy in Berlin. Two weeks later, he received a perfunctory reply from Counsel General Douglas Jenkins. “The Counsel General has given the most careful consideration to the evidence submitted in Miss Berger’s case,” the letter informed the congressman. 76 Noting various sections of U.S. immigration law covering the “inadmissibility of aliens having physical

73 Rothstein to Bloom, February 24, 1938, box 17, “Rothstein,” Bloom Papers.


75 Anna Berger to Bloom, March 6, 1936, box 31, “Berger,” Bloom Papers. Anna worked for Professor Arthur Burns, Department of Economics.

defects,” Jenkins concluded in his denial, “She would experience great difficulty earning a living through her own efforts.”77 His closed this letter to his “dear Mr. Bloom” with the statement that the matter had received “every possible consideration consisting with the existing immigration laws and regulations.”78

Ilse Berger ultimately moved to London, where she awaited the war’s end. It is apparent, however, from the numerous correspondences sent between her sister, brother, and the congressman, that Bloom continued his crusade to reunite the family. He applied various bureaucratic tactics, at differing levels of the federal government. In February 1943, seven years after the American embassy in Berlin had rejected Ilse Berger’s first visa request, Bloom had managed for Ilse to submit a new set of forms on which “final action had not yet occurred.”79 Into the next year, and then onward, Ilse Berger’s pending immigration remained part of Bloom’s official workload. “I am enclosing herewith a copy of a self-explanatory letter which I received today from the State Department,” Bloom wrote Kurt Berger in January 1945. The correspondence claimed that investigators continued with their information gathering. In March, Bloom explained that security agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Military Intelligence Service, and Naval Intelligence Service remained involved with “routine examinations into Ilse’s character.”80

Nine years after the Bergers first contacted their congressman about the possibility of obtaining a visa for their enfeebled German sister, Bloom successfully stewarded her application through a thicket of obstacles. Via a Western Union cable, the news arrived on April 26, 1945,

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.


“that the State Department has given advisory approval for the issuance of an immigration visa in the case of Ilse Berger.” A follow-up letter that Bloom’s secretary penned the next day closed with the blithe assurance that “it was a pleasure for our office to have been of assistance in this matter.”

Trying, then, to understand the resentment with which Bloom viewed interest-group claims requires some understanding of his ongoing private efforts. Indeed, the same week that Bergson’s organization had forced the so-called Holocaust Hearings, Bloom was involved with aiding a displaced European Jew. “My dear Mr. Harrison,” he wrote on November 17, 1943, to the commissioner of the Philadelphia branch of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. “Advisory approval has been granted in the case of Juda Rozenblum,” a Jewish refugee forced to leave the United States due to an irregularity in his paperwork. Having moved to Toronto, Rozenblum had enlisted Bloom’s help in reobtaining his previous legal alien status. Two days later—a remarkably quick rate of response for any bureaucratic communication, not to mention an inquiry regarding Jewish immigration—a response arrived in Bloom’s office. Commissioner Harrison assured his interbranch colleague, “Rozenblum will be advised via the American Consul in Toronto as to the procedure to be followed to effect his readmission to the U.S.”

These examples reveal just a few of the efforts that Sol Bloom personally undertook. Such labors contributed to the impatience with which he received Peter Bergson’s advocacy. He further chafed at the idea that a foreign alien would direct public criticism toward elected officials. On November 23, 1943, shortly after successfully steering the Rozenblum matter, the

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81 Bloom to Kurt Berger, April 26, 1945, box 31, “Berger,” Bloom Papers.
83 Bloom to Harrison, November 17, 1943, box 17, “Rozenblum,” Bloom Papers.
84 Harrison to Bloom, November 19, 1943, box 17, “Rozenblum,” Bloom Papers.
chair had occasion, before his committee, to unwind these frustrations against Peter Bergson. In little time, the two men—both Jews intimately involved with combating Nazi anti-Semitism—became ensnared in a hostile and unproductive dialogue that played out before the House Foreign Affairs Committee and its onlookers.

“Are you a citizen of the United States?” the chair asked the witness immediately. Bergson replied, “No, sir.” As one need not be American to testify in the Congress, Bloom presumably saw an alternative reason to alert the chamber to Bergson’s foreignness. His follow-up question was, “Where were you born?” Rather than answering, Bergson retorted, “I fail to see the relevance of this to my testimony. . . . I will be very happy to occupy the time of the committee with the story of my life,” he continued, but I would appreciate knowing what the connection is. “We just want to know where you were born,” Bloom exploded. “I cannot understand why a man would become a witness of this committee if he were going to refuse to answer the questions.”

Helping to fuel the animosity between the two men were vital differences in age, nationality, education, wealth, and social status. In late 1943, Sol Bloom was seventy-three years old and near the end of his life. A grammar-school dropout, Bloom was self-made, an American who had thrived as a promoter, entertainer, developer, and politician in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. Bergson was forty years his junior, the dilettante son of a wealthy Palestinian Jewish family. Other than associating with Irgun resistance fighters who

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85 Problems, 96.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 99.
89 Bloom, Autobiography, 96, 131, 208.
dabbled in acts of sabotage against British colonial forces, Bergson’s professional resume included few accomplishments. 90 No clear reason is apparent for Bloom to have felt threatened by his witness. However, the stridency with which he hammered away at seemingly pedantic issues betrayed a level of recrimination unusual for such a weighty proceeding.

After satisfying himself as to Bergson’s non-American origins, the chair moved on to questions about Emergency Committee fund-raising practices. Bergson claimed no specific recollection of the telegram discussed at length in the prior session, so Bloom instructed the committee’s clerk to read the text aloud. The chair next asked, “What is your answer Mr. Bergson?” The witness replied flippantly that, had he received the telegram, he “probably would have sent some money.” 91

This sort of contentious exchange continued. Bergson alienated members by insisting that money “probably would help secure the resolution’s passage.” 92 Bloom soon returned to the witness’s immigration status and asked, “Are you legally in this country today?” Bergson replied, “To my knowledge, yes.” “Do you not know?” The alien replied, “No.” 93 Not relenting, the chair asked, “You do not know whether you are here legally?” 94 To this, Bergson exclaimed,

90 Rosen, Saving, 317-18; Wyman and Medoff, Race, 19.

91 Problems, 96. Bergson recalled being angry during his testimony. He later characterized Bloom, “not a bright guy at all…a small potato guy who got where he was merely by seniority. He was a weasel kind of guy generally. He was not an impressive fellow on any score.” See Wyman and Medoff, Race, 144.


93 Ibid., 100.

94 Ibid. Bloom later boasted to newspaper reporters that he exclaimed, “what the hell do you mean you don’t know!?!?” See Rapoport, Shake, 158.
“Is this an investigation of me or is this an investigation by a House committee to save the Jews of Europe?”

Chairman Bloom, however, was not prepared to move on. He returned to the fund-raising telegram. “When this committee finds out that you and your organization are sending out telegrams saying that you want money,” the powerful legislator thundered, “I say that is improper and it is wrong.” “How much,” Bloom implored, “did you raise from this telegram?” Eventually, Bergson demonstrated some contrition. He changed his tone from defiance to flattery. “I am personally deeply grieved,” he began anew, “that due to word choice an opportunity has been given to postpone the smooth proceeding of these hearings. . . . I appeal to you Mr. Chairman, stop adding insult to this important cause.”

Bloom instead turned his ire toward the pending resolution. “Who wrote House resolution 352?” Perhaps the chair had some knowledge of Bergson’s earlier successes at scripting member remarks. Bergson replied, “I should think that I am hardly the man to answer that question.” “Did you suggest them?” the chair coyly pondered. Bloom soon became impatient. He barked: “Who suggested the resolutions Mr. Bergson? Do you wish to answer the question? Who suggested this resolution? Do you know? Yes or no?” Bergson was nonplussed. The heretofore-combative witness stated, “I do not get it, Mr. Chairman.”

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95 Problems, 100.
96 Ibid., 101.
97 Ibid., 101-2.
98 Ibid., 103
99 Ibid., 104.
100 Ibid.
Subsequent members permitted Bergson to discuss briefly his hopes for a new government agency to combat Nazi anti-Semitism. However, Michigan Republican Bartel Jonkman peppered him with additional questions about his group’s fund-raising practices.  

Other congressmen expressed disappointment that prior Emergency Committee witnesses had discussed aspects of their secret testimony with Peter Bergson. Indeed, condemnations of the Emergency Committee were the final sentiments expressed before Bloom gavelled the session to a close. Witnesses that day had proved unable to convince legislators to support their calls for a new agency to save Jewish lives. Both Bergson and Alfange experienced little success in convincing legislators of the need to increase the level of official attention that American leaders dedicated to issue dealing with European Jewry.

Emergency Committee members later received more cordial treatment. The day following Bergson’s testimony, New York City mayor Fiorello La Guardia, on behalf of the Bergson group, registered his support for the resolutions. The popular mayor—a first-generation American offspring of Jewish and Italian immigrant parents—embodied an active cultural pluralism that was becoming more apparent in the American mainstream. From 1917 to 1933, La Guardia won six terms in the House and was familiar with its customs and courtesies. He also enjoyed a national reputation borne of his long-standing support for labor associations, as well as use of radio technologies to become “America’s Mayor.” La Guardia’s thoughts about the role that Congress could play in opposing Nazi ethno-religious violence carried influence with the assembly, and he proved to be the interest group’s most effective spokesperson.

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101 Ibid., 120.

102 Ibid., 137.

He began his testimony by deferring to the committee’s expertise. La Guardia acknowledged that its members possessed much better information about the complexities surrounding the issue. Nevertheless, the mayor challenged the Foreign Affairs Committee to embrace its global leadership role. “I believe an expression from the Congress at this time would be very beneficial.” “People in Nazi-dominated countries,” he continued, understand that in the United States, the “medium of public expression is the Congress.” “They would realize,” he reasoned, that these resolutions “represent the viewpoint and public opinion of our country.”104 La Guardia reminded the committee that Congress had previously assisted oppressed European minorities. He recalled Daniel Webster’s interest in the Hungarian independence movement. “There are plenty of precedents for action,” he informed his erstwhile colleagues.105 In closing, La Guardia expressed his “hope that the committee will avail itself of the opportunity now of doing a real humane act.”106

Unlike earlier witnesses, members offered the mayor even-handed queries designed to build a constructive dialogue. In the presence of a former colleague, they betrayed their larger concerns. Some lawmakers were bothered that the proposed resolution applied only to the Jews. Congressman Mundt (R-SD) wished to include an amendment that replaced the designation “Jew” with the phrase “oppressed peoples.”107 La Guardia wondered if Nazi propagandists might seize upon the dilution. He also discussed the standing question about possible backlash in Arab lands. “I cannot imagine,” he began, “how a resolution seeking to protect helpless people can annoy anyone who may need our help and protection later on.”108

104 Ibid., 150.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., 151.
108 Ibid., 153.
Legislators also discussed the possible interbranch tensions that the pending resolution might provoke. The Pennsylvanian Herman Eberharter noted, “There have already been certain statements issued by the State Department and the President to the effect that this government is doing everything it possibly can to rescue the Jews.”\(^{109}\) Congressman Mundt then asked, “In the language of Manhattan, in this resolution are we saying you better get busy Mr. President.” “In the language of Manhattan,” the mayor retorted, “What we are saying is ‘Atta boy . . . go to it.’”\(^{110}\)

Concern for executive branch powers arose again when the State Department’s refugee expert appeared before the House committee. On November 26, 1943, Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long Jr. appeared before the committee. More than any witness to date, Long was competent to discuss the administration’s efforts. Indeed, he was the diplomat responsible for organizing the Bermuda Conference that Chairman Bloom had attended six months previously. However, the assistant secretary was not a career public servant. He owed his position to his longtime friendship with the president. His testimony, designed to dilute the calls for a new agency to administer American relief, provided some of the most compelling evidence that such a step was indeed advisable.

Long began his testimony by reading a statement recalling his widespread efforts to administer to European refugees.\(^{111}\) During his uninterrupted remarks, the secretary provided data that he purported to document the number of immigration visas granted to European Jews during 1933-43. “We have taken into this country,” he testified, “approximately 580,000

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 154.

\(^{110}\) Ibid.

\(^{111}\) Ibid., 170.
refugees.” “From the start,” the assistant secretary of state assured the Congress, “we have recognized that Jews were the most persecuted.” 112 After several more pages, in which he outlined further relief efforts undertaken by the American Red Cross, Secretary Long closed with a reference to the proposed resolution. His assessment centered squarely on the interbranch tensions associated with the legislative dictum. “I think your committee will want to consider,” he mentioned, “whether or not you should take a step which might be construed as a repudiation of the executive branch.” 113 The State Department’s representative wound up his testimony that day by again assuring his inter-branch colleagues that the administration had taken extraordinary steps to aid European Jewry.

Committee members reacted favorably to such news. Luther Johnson (D-TX) was one committee member who “learned a great many things.” Alluding to the pending resolution, and the interest-group pressure behind its appearance, the congressman asked, “Does publicity hinder rather than help the solution to these problems?” The secretary responded, “That is correct.” 114 Subsequent questions and answers revealed a similar tone. Robert Chiperfield (R-IL) complimented Long’s efforts as “splendid.” He stated further, “He had always believed the State Department was doing everything that could be done.” 115 “I am gratified to learn all that you have accomplished,” Congressman Mundt likewise stated. “Previous witnesses,” he continued, had left the impression that “Congress had to step into the breach.” 116

112 Ibid., 171.
113 Ibid., 182.
114 Ibid., 184.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid., 197.
The only problem for Long, and for those he had helped to enlighten, was that his testimony was wildly inaccurate. The 580,000 figure he had provided reflected the total number of slots for all refugees who desired entry to the United States. Indeed, following September 1939, these slots remained mostly unfilled. Moreover, European Jews had never received preferential treatment in matters related to immigration. In his diary, the refugee expert acknowledged his mistake: “I spoke without notes and without any preparation. It is remarkable that I did not make more inaccurate statements.”

The miscue added fuel to the already smoldering public discourse about the need for a new federal agency. The New York Times ran a front-page story that reported the incorrect testimony. Readers throughout the nation and world learned Long’s false claim that “the majority of refugees admitted to the United States were Jews because we recognized from the start that Jews were the most persecuted peoples.”

A deluge of additional public criticism soon followed. On December 12, 1943, New York congressman Emanuel Celler called for Long’s resignation. The long-serving Jewish congressman surmised, “The secretary was woefully lacking in knowledge or did not tell the truth.” Celler explained that European Jews faced added burdens in gaining entry visas because State Department officials refused to acknowledge them as citizens of nationalized states. The Jewish Frontier, a domestic American publication, characterized Long’s congressional testimony as “fallacious and misleading . . . members were left in a complete fog.” “It is very difficult to understand,” the periodical’s editors argued, “how an informed diplomat could offer so bald a misstatement.”

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117 Israel, ed., Diaries, 334-37.
119 As quoted in Rapoport, Shake, 139.
120 Jewish Frontier, “Breckinridge Long’s Statement,” January 1944, 3.
Two weeks later, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee favorably reported out Bergson’s resolution to the full chamber, where it passed unanimously. Although the House recessed without having voted on the matter, the issue of how the U.S. government would respond to Nazi genocide was a part of mainstream political discourse. Along with this development, the issue provoked new and more intricate questions about the nature of the American government and society. Was the federal government, ever expanding since 1933, an appropriate vehicle for combating Nazi anti-Semitism? Was the American public ready for such a determination? Would the president demonstrate leadership? These issues, and the deep concerns they embodied, remained unsettled as the New Year 1944 began. However, within the first calendar month, Americans interested in the matter would witness the appearance of a practical governmental response.
CHAPTER 6
THE WAR REFUGEE BOARD: THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF AMERICAN DISCURSIVE OPPOSITION TO NAZI ANTI-SEMITISM, 1944

It is the policy of this government to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression, and to afford such victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war.

—War Refugee Board director John Pehle to Congressman William Barry, in response to a written inquiry about the agency’s mission, April 29, 1944)

In January 1944, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt institutionalized more than a decade of disparate public opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism. The War Refugee Board, he declared, would “develop plans and programs for the rescue and relief of the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death.” The board’s mandate did not specifically mention Jews, but in actuality, nearly all of the agency’s activities addressed ending the genocide. The *Washington Post* reported this step in a story entitled “President Roosevelt Moves on Behalf of the Jews.” The accompanying piece informed readers that the president had “stressed the urgent need for actions that forestalled the Nazi plan to exterminate Jews and other persecuted minorities.”

The War Refugee Board signaled the nation, and the world, that the U.S. government maintained a concern for Jewish welfare. During 1944, the agency functioned as a fulcrum for the different strains of American discursive opposition that first emerged in March 1933.

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1 Pehle to Barry, box 8, War Refugee Board Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y. Hereafter cited as WRB.

2 For the board’s full mandate, see “Clippings,” box 114, WRB.

Officials gathered information, issued press releases, and even administered direct-relief missions.\textsuperscript{4} By the time of the board’s creation, many millions of European Jews had perished. David Wyman thus views the new agency with skepticism, surmising that some of these victims might have survived had the president taken such a step sooner.\textsuperscript{5} However, his conclusion misses the larger point that in the board’s activities—its memorandums, press releases, intergovernmental as well as private correspondences—scholars will find clearest examples of public American efforts to rebut the Nazi claims that Jews were a friendless people.

Admittedly, the War Refugee Board did not erase anti-Semitism in Europe, or in the United States. During the early 1940s, some Jews in the U.S. endured physical and emotional abuse when in public.\textsuperscript{6} Many prominent Jewish Americans were convinced that domestic anti-Semitism posed a real threat.\textsuperscript{7} Moreover, the dominant Christian majority reportedly maintained little interest in the reports of genocide. As late as October 1944, a poll conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion found that one-quarter of respondents dismissed the stories as false. Even for those who believed the accounts, most surmised that the Nazis had killed fewer than one hundred thousand Jews.\textsuperscript{8}

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\textsuperscript{7} Michael Marrus, \textit{The Holocaust In History} (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1987), 166.

\textsuperscript{8} National Opinion Research Center, \textit{Germany and the Post-War World} (Boulder: University of Denver, 1945), 12.
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There are other reasons that historians might view the War Refugee Board with skepticism. Throughout the New Deal, President Roosevelt created numerous organizations that had angered rather than assuaged the citizenry. Far more significant entities such as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the National Recovery Administration succumbed to political and legal challenges. The president’s executive order mandating the War Refugee Board had called for representatives from the State, War, and Treasury Departments to staff the agency. In fact, this never occurred. The State Department declined to assign a liaison; and War Department officials viewed the board as nonessential to the military effort. Treasury Department officials stepped in to fill the breach, but one contemporary observer recalled, “they had a permanent fight [with the State Department] whatever they wanted to do.”

However, what distinguished the War Refugee Board from other agencies in the bloated middle bureaucracy administration was its $1-million presidential grant. Insulated from the congressional appropriations process—a process that earlier had devastated the Office of War Information—the board’s officials had all necessary means to institutionalize a federal response. During the Second World War, no other country created a specific government agency to combat the genocide. The new bureau represented a capstone to a decade-long effort that bound together Jewish and Christian concerns with Nazi anti-Semitism.

It is perhaps bizarre that in the years following the board’s creation, the total number of Jews killed in Europe actually increased. For thirty years, this perceived failure has provided a foundation for larger arguments about the board’s ineffectiveness. Tami David Biddle and

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Sharon Lowenstein have observed that in order to enact proposals such as the bombing of Auschwitz, or the transfer of European Jews to refugee camps, the War Refugee Board was powerless to act.\textsuperscript{11} Only the War and State Departments, where an anti-Semitic tradition was reportedly rife, possessed the practical capabilities needed to offer European Jews succor.\textsuperscript{12} To date, this syllogism is the standard course of thought historian use to demonstrate that depths of American missteps. The War Refugee Board, perhaps borne of good intentions, appears as a purely political creation, a pawn that was incapable of transcending obdurate bureaucratic resistance.

However, focusing exclusively on the total number of rescues confuses the board’s purpose and obscures its accomplishments. The board’s contribution lay in its ability to institutionalize, to make practical and official, the public’s decade-long interest in this issue. From the rostrums of privately funded dinners in Washington D.C., as well as offshore radio transmitters near Istanbul, War Refugee Board officials hammered away at the Nazi crimes. These efforts helped set the stage for the postwar Nuremberg trials that most clearly demonstrated American commitment to upholding Jewish welfare and religious freedom. They also served to reinforce a larger and more meaningful point: American-style liberties—as stated in the Four Freedoms and now defended by the War Refugee Board—existed as a bulwark against Nazi barbarism.

Numerous factors contributed to President Roosevelt’s decision to create the War Refugee Board. The first cause appeared in the form of increased media attention. By 1943, 


influential newspapers such as the New York Times and the Washington Post provided detailed—if marginalized—coverage about the genocide in Europe.\textsuperscript{13} On February 16, the title of an article in the Times informed readers, “Nazis Shift 30,000 Jews.”\textsuperscript{14} The accompanying text discussed the “selection process” for victims “marked for slaughter” and those “forced into labor.”\textsuperscript{15} An August 8 story informed Americans that Jews in Nazi-controlled nations faced a “deliberate policy of extermination.”\textsuperscript{16} A few days later, a story entitled “2,000,000 Murders by Nazis Charged” contained such unambiguous statements as “the victims now realize their doom is near. . . . The holding cells are filled and steam gas is forced through apertures.”\textsuperscript{17}

Another factor that might have influenced the president’s action was the political pressure swirling within Washington D.C. During late 1943, congressional critics faulted his administration for not addressing the public’s concern with Nazi anti-Semitism. His Assistant Secretary of State had recently proffered false and misleading testimony to an oversight committee investigating the administration’s response to the Jewish murders. Shortly before Christmas, the Senate had passed without one vote of opposition a resolution recommending that the president create a new federal agency specifically to address Nazi violence against religious minorities. As 1944 began, President Roosevelt might have recognized that adopting such a step would help to mute domestic criticism.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid.
\item “Two Million Murdered,” New York Times, August 8, 1943.
\item Wyman and Medoff, Race, 158.
\end{enumerate}
Like other prominent American leaders, the president first spoke out against German anti-Semitism in early 1933. Following the Nazi pogroms in November 1938, Roosevelt protested the extreme violence and deliberate humiliation meted out to the Jews by recalling his ambassador to Berlin for consultations. However, after his condemnation of the Nazi extermination program in December 1942, officials in the State Department exhibited little interest in devising a remedy. Some historians thus point to a third factor—private intrabranch tensions between the Treasury and State Departments regarding the matter’s urgency—when explaining why the president unexpectedly created a new agency to aid European refugees.

More than five years previously, the State Department, at the president’s direction, had taken some significant steps to investigate possible resolutions to the “Jewish Question” in Europe. In the summer of 1938, American diplomats traveled to France and hosted the Evian Conference on Refugees. In these sessions, the United States consulted with representatives from more than thirty nations. Following the meetings, the State Department took a lead role in forming a new body, the Intergovernmental Committee for Political Refugees, designed to facilitate Jewish immigration from Europe. However, prior to Hitler’s invasion of Poland in September 1939, the new committee had accomplished little. The non-military flow of human

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21 Nazi diplomats were absent, not invited by the United States to participate. See Rosen, *Saving*, 63-66.

traffic ended with the outbreak of war, further limiting any hopes for a large-scale demographic movement of Jewish refugees.

By 1943, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr., the only Jewish American serving in Roosevelt’s cabinet, accepted as fact the firsthand stories he had received about the genocide under way in Europe.\(^\text{23}\) He also believed that State Department officials, presumably equipped with similar, if not more credible, reports did not view this development with particular concern.\(^\text{24}\)

The treasury secretary had good reason to believe that his colleagues in the Foreign Service were not interested in helping European Jews. In 1940, he had joined with Interior Secretary Harold Ickes to cosponsor a proposal to the president designed to relocate German Jews to the U.S. Virgin Islands. The plan was creative. The two secretaries, the only two members of the president’s cabinet to serve him continuously, argued that they were not trying to bring Jews into the United States. Rather, they maintained that the Virgin Islands, at that time part of the Interior Department’s purview, were extraterritorial. However, the two agency heads could not overcome Secretary of State Cordell Hull’s strenuous objections. The president, wary of “fifth column” elements that might arrive among the refugees, and mindful of an isolationist


mood within the Congress, chose not to approve the proposal.\textsuperscript{25} This tension between the cabinet heads regarding the proper way to address Nazi anti-Semitism did not go away. The destruction of the Jews—and, particularly the absence of a coherent American response—caused continuing clashes between officials at the Treasury and Secretary Departments. Some episodes involved the Nazi seizure of American-owned assets, funds transfers between the U.S. and its allies, as well as the Rumanian offer that Peter Bergson’s group first publicized in February 1943.

In December of that year, the intrabranch frictions erupted. At a meeting held to discuss the State Department’s nonexistent response to the murder of several million Jewish noncombatants, Secretary Hull was “so poorly prepared he was unable to introduce four of five State Department refugee experts.”\textsuperscript{26} With reference to the stalled Rumanian matter, Hull implied that fault lay with Morgenthau’s office for “failing to devise a workable proposal for financing the program.”\textsuperscript{27} During the meeting, the treasury secretary and his senior staffs observed deep fractures within the State Department delegation. Soon after this unproductive session, they concluded that they had a responsibility to alert the president.

Working on Christmas Day 1943, Treasury Department officials John Pehle and Josiah Du Bois arranged a comprehensive report entitled “Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence

\textsuperscript{25} For the Virgin Island Plan, see Wyman and Medoff, \textit{Race}, 152; Richard Breitman, “Roosevelt and the Holocaust,” in Newton, ed., \textit{FDR}, 113; and Feingold, \textit{Bearing}, 113, 144.

\textsuperscript{26} Irwin Gellman, \textit{FDR}, Cordell Hull and Sumner Welles (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 347.

of This Government in the Murder of the Jews.” In this document, Morgenthau’s staff compiled a full account of State Department missteps and obstacles. They blasted the State Department for “not only failing to facilitate the obtaining of information . . . but in their official capacity have gone so far as to surreptitiously stop the obtaining of information.”

When Morgenthau Jr. presented the manuscript to Roosevelt on January 16, 1944, he had modified only the title. In his cover letter, the treasury secretary advised his longtime friend, “this lapse in attention will require little more in the way of proof to explode into a nasty little scandal.” Five days later, and following almost exactly the language contained in the standing Senate resolution, President Roosevelt institutionalized American opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism within the War Refugee Board.

It is perhaps not altogether important to determine the exact reason(s) behind the board’s creation. Historians might think of the board less as a temporal reaction to various pressures, and more as the zenith to more than a decade of American opposition. Beginning in January 1944, the U.S. government began to document for contemporary citizens and future generations exactly what Nazi anti-Semitism denoted. Officials at the War Refugee rendered practical the long-standing public assertion that Nazi violence against Jews represented a national concern. Indeed, ending such outrages encapsulated what the nation was fighting to uphold.

Roosevelt selected John Pehle, a young man in his early thirties, to serve as the War Refugee Board’s first executive director. His age aside, Pehle had risen to the senior staff level in the Treasury Department. Alongside fellow internal report author Josiah Du Bois, the two men were trusted Morgenthau lieutenants, and were some of the administration’s most knowledge

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28 As quoted in Laqueur and Breitman, Terrible, 224.

officials about the Holocaust. Particularly during the first eight months of 1944, they directed the new agency to spread word globally—and, within the administration—that the U.S. opposed the killings. With a staff of a couple dozen, and offices in both New York and Washington D.C., the board’s most basic function was coordinating the many preexisting strains of public opposition into a government-directed discourse.

The primary challenge was ensuring that Americans and Europeans alike recognized their offices as responsible. During 1933-43, many legislators, interest groups, and private citizens had spoken out. Pehle embraced these earlier efforts. By allowing unprecedented bureaucratic access, he not only successfully muted domestic criticisms, but he also gained a far more specialized knowledge of the thorny issue. Political scientists, in their definitions of “niche experts,” explain how bureaucrats sometimes seek out interest-group input. Particularly in cases without precedent, widening the locus of nongovernmental involvement, asking for new information and specialized interpretations, add a much-needed texture to discussions. The destruction of European Jewry was one of those instances, and Pehle demonstrated an immediate willingness to take counsel from, and provide assistance to, pressure organizations.

In January 1944, within days of the agency’s founding, John Pehle welcomed Peter Bergson to his Washington D.C. office. The basic problem, Pehle learned, was that the German government and people, as well as its satellites, were not aware that the United States “meant business” with regard to protecting the Jews. Bergson observed that, particularly in Eastern

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30 Wyman and Medoff, *Race*, 159.


32 Pehle to file, January 25, 1944, “Emergency,” box 7, WRB.
Europe, citizens had no idea that the United States was monitoring anti-Jewish activities and was
considering such steps as postwar military tribunals. A foremost task was alerting potential
persecutors that the United States was actively concerned with Jewish welfare. This idea imbued
Jews with a new political and moral value in the eyes of Christian Europeans.33

As a midlevel bureaucracy, the board was incapable of turning back the Nazi death
machine. Rather, Bergson and his organization surmised that the board needed to stage and win a
political argument that convinced nations anti-Semitic practices would cause them later troubles.
An Emergency Committee memorandum to Pehle dated February 9, 1944, explained this idea.
“Only a part of the some four million Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe can be evacuated,” the
document frankly stated. “The salvation of the majority of them depends upon the successful
creation inside Europe of an atmosphere which makes extermination unprofitable, impractical, or
impossible.”34 In its closing, the letter’s author again stressed a need for the American
government to “inform the Nazi satellites they might curry some amount of additional favor with
the United Nations if they adopt a new policy towards the Jews.”35 This assertion again speaks to
the strategy of assigning value to Jewish lives, as the implication appeared that postwar penalty,
or reward, awaited European nations depending on their expressions of tolerance.

Indeed, there is additional evidence that board officials helped Americans and Europeans
to build a new dialogue about the genocide. Not possessing their own wire service, the board

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33 Rosen, Saving, 462; Charles Fenyvesi, When Angels Fooled the World: Rescuers of
Jews in Wartime Hungary (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 8-9; Richard
Breitman, Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the Americans and British Knew

34 ECSJPE Memorandum, February 9, 1944, “Emergency,” box 7, WRB.

35 Ibid.
took advantage of White House and State Department facilities.\textsuperscript{36} On February 11, 1944, John Pehle sent a letter to Howard Travers, a senior official in the European Affairs division. The message, though short, was unambiguous: “It will be appreciated if you will have dispatched the attached cables from Peter Bergson, Chairman, Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe.”\textsuperscript{37} The State Department acquiesced to the request, and provided its service for the communication of information that it had previously deemed extraneous.

Both cables dealt with Jews trapped in Hungary and Turkey. While neither of the messages was particularly meaningful, the episode captured the process of conjoining the auspices of the U.S. government to efforts on behalf of the Jews. “Please cable about possibilities, needs, and expenses through the American consul via the War Refugee Board,” Bergson informed one contact in Istanbul.\textsuperscript{38} “Proceed immediately and contact again through the U.S. embassy,” he instructed a second associate in Tel Aviv.\textsuperscript{39} If the cable’s messages were not altogether significant, the larger point was that they publicized that Jews were no longer alone in the fight. As Bergson wrote to Pehle in February 1944, “the War Refugee Board was created because the vast majority of the American people have been deeply shaken by the German massacre of the Jews.”\textsuperscript{40} Using the War Refugee Board, the Palestinian-alien Bergson spread globally the official American opposition to genocide.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{36} Rosen, \textit{Saving}, 463-64.

\textsuperscript{37} Pehle to Travers, February 11, 1944, “Emergency,” box 7, WRB.

\textsuperscript{38} Bergson to Joseph Klarman, February 11, 1944, “Emergency,” box 7, WRB.

\textsuperscript{39} Bergson to Aryeh Beneliezer, February 11, 1944, “Emergency,” box 7, WRB.

\textsuperscript{40} Bergson to Pehle, February 9, 1944, “Emergency,” box 7, WRB.

\textsuperscript{41} Not all Americans embraced these efforts. In March 1944, a letter from an organization called the “Forest Hills, Queens Civic Association” reached Pehle’s desk. The group’s opinion was that the board “promoted entanglements in undesirable and dangerous foreign involvements.” See Charles Warren to Pehle, April 17, 1944, “Forest,” box 8, WRB.
interest groups they devised reconfigured the public discourse, removing the issue of condemning Nazi anti-Semitism from the rhetorical abstract and demanding that the U.S. government take practical action.

To date, scholars have disparaged, or at least diminished, these efforts. Peter Bergson, in a set of interviews conducted by David Wyman during the 1990s, has also lamented his own inability to “live up to the occasion.” “I have a frustrating sense of failure,” Bergson confided to the researcher most responsible for introducing the categories of “contrition” and “remorse” to the historiography. However, alternative methods exist for viewing Bergson’s activities. We can examine the interplay between his interest groups and the more established American Jewish Committee and American Jewish Congress. During the early 1940s, he successfully competed with these better-known domestic entities for access to policy makers. Bergson also amassed some notable cultural achievements, in particular demonstrating an ability to publicize the genocide theatrically. However, the extent to which Bergson and supporters contributed to an ongoing public discourse forming in opposition to Nazi religious intolerance remains less well known. An ingrained tendency among scholars to read fault into Bergson’s behaviors has served to obscure his vital role in bringing new voices into the debate.

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War Refugee Board officials also took private steps to ensure they could function effectively within the middle bureaucracy. Soon after the board’s creation, John Pehle met with Office of War Information director Elmer Davis to discuss the disclosure of genocide-related information. “Davis seemed cooperative and said he would arrange for a meeting in the near future with his regional chiefs,” Pehle recorded in a February 1944 memorandum to his files. This statement of fact ended with the recollection that “we made clear to him the importance that we attached to developing the propaganda side of our program.”  Two weeks later, Leo Pinkus, a staffer in the Office of War Information’s Foreign News division, observed this proclamation in action. A letter from Virginia Mannon, who performed public relations for the War Refugee Board, informed him, “Our reports on exterminations of the Polish Jews have been substantiated.” Discussing a need to monitor the fate of Jews in the Nazi satellite states, Mannon continued, “As the front approaches Balkans, there is an imminent danger for Jews in the German domination of Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria.” She closed her message by asking the Office of War Information to direct its various media apparatus to ensure the reports’ “widest distribution.”

Perhaps, the motivation for sending this type of “dear colleague” letter reflected an effort to strengthen interagency cooperation. A related memorandum from April 1, 1944, documents a War Refugee Board request for the Office of War Information to “assume all propaganda tasks pertaining to the refugee problem.” This step guaranteed that the board could disseminate atrocity information more broadly. Representatives from both agencies concluded that a

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42 Pehle to file, February 14, 1944, “OWI,” box 50, WRB.
43 Mannon to Pinkus, February 26, 1944, “OWI,” box 50, WRB.
44 Ibid.
45 Katz to Cowan, April 1, 1944, “OWI,” box 50, WRB.
specialized unit, stationed within the Office of War Information, would “be beneficial to both organizations.” These efforts to streamline a meaningful exchange of information suggest, at the least, that more officials had accepted the basic premise that genocide was ongoing, and that the federal government should oppose such activities.

As early as January 1943, the Office of War Information had demonstrated interest in opposing Nazi anti-Semitism from a political and moral position. Indeed, Robert Sherwood’s overseas branch circulated a report explaining how the process might work. Officials argued

we should coldly and factually establish Hitler’s plan to exterminate the Jews in Europe. We should make a point in news and talks of telling people the fullest facts. Anti-Semitism has been a potent weapon of Nazi political warfare and the time has now come to use it against them.47

The following week another communiqué suggested that when reporting atrocity stories, officials should “include at least one message of encouragement to the Jews.”48

This process, discouraging Nazi violence by highlighting American opposition, received help from the highest levels in the government. In March 1944, the president issued a statement about the precarious fate of Jews living in the Balkans. These were not Roosevelt’s first public comments about the Nazi murder program, but they were the first following the creation of the War Refugee Board. In his remarks, the president clearly stated that the American war effort related to protecting Jewish lives. “In one of the blackest crimes of all history,” he began, “the wholesale systematic murder of Europe’s Jews goes on unabated. . . . That these innocent people

46 Ibid.


should perish, on the very eve of the triumph over the barbarism which their persecution symbolizes, would be a major tragedy.”

Roosevelt did more than obliquely hint at this commitment. In closing, the president outlined American intentions. “These acts of savagery shall not go unpunished.” “The United Nations has made it clear they will pursue the guilty. . . . All who knowingly take part in the deportation of Jews to their death are equally guilty as the executioner. All who share the guilt shall share the punishment.” This type of unambiguous public statement mirrored the advice that Peter Bergson had offered John Pehle three months previously: The pace of the killings might slow if Americans leaders committed the government to upholding Jewish safety. There was also a favorable political sleight-of-hand, as America again assumed a role in protecting Europe’s “downtrodden masses.”

Various federal agencies publicized the president’s warning. The previously aloof State Department published the full text of the president’s message three days later in its Bulletin. The Office of War Information also took note of the statement. Its overseas summary included a seven-page addendum that “set out additional facts so they may be useful in connection with the president’s statements on religious persecution.” The enclosure in fact opened with a quotation from Mein Kampf, and then traced Nazi persecutions from the Nuremberg Laws, to ghettoization, and eventually to genocide. By March 1944, only two months after the president created the War Refugee Board, the stories of Jewish persecutions appeared in the highest levels

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49 For the president’s full statement, see Department of State Bulletin 10 (1944): 277-78.

50 Ibid.


52 Ibid.
of federal discourse. Particularly when contrasted with prior State Department behaviors, this positive attention is unexpected and demonstrated the degree to which the issue had become part of the political mainstream.\textsuperscript{53}

The effort to publicize an official American concern for European Jewish safety was also apparent in newspaper reports. During 1942-43, citizens in numerous cities had the opportunity to read about the genocide.\textsuperscript{54} However, it was one thing for the New York Times to publish an article quoting an overseas source with an unfamiliar name. It was another thing altogether to run a story based upon reports issued from a government agency. It is perhaps not possible to quantify if citizens indeed learned more about the genocide because of the board’s media, but at a minimum, the avenues now existed that might encourage such developments.

Indeed, newspaper reporters began citing the agency’s authority in their reports. An article in the April 4, 1944, New York Times highlighted this process: “More than forty thousand civilian victims of Nazi oppression have escaped from the path of Germany’s retreating armies, disclosed John Pehle, Executive Director of the War Refugee Board. . . .”\textsuperscript{55} These escapes took place only a few weeks after President Roosevelt set up the Board to help aid victims of enemy.\textsuperscript{56} In addition to establishing Pehle and his agency as the source for the reports of Jewish sufferings, this article also contained the assertion that helping the Jews was evolving into a global responsibility. “In opening their borders,” Pehle was quoted as saying, “nations have

\textsuperscript{53} Jewish liquidations were a recurrent topic in the Office of War Information’s overseas reports. On April 13, 1944, officials described several Polish death factories. The Treblinka camp received particular attention. See ibid., pt. 2, reel 14: 0988-93.


\textsuperscript{55} “40,000 Refugees,” New York Times, April 1, 1944.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
given consideration to political as well as humanitarian reasons.”

This assertion reinforced the larger U.S. strategy of helping Jews by informing European societies about possible benefits associated with offering protections.

These rhetorical efforts, however, did not necessarily translate into better treatment for Jews. A *Times* article from May 10, 1944, reported, “Hungary is now preparing for the annihilation of its Jews by the most fiendish measures.” The story informed readers that “the puppet Nazi government is laughing at President Roosevelt’s warnings and is about to start the extermination of one million human beings.”

While this article demonstrates the limitations of American opposition, the Hungarian government was nevertheless still aware that the United States was monitoring their actions. The State Department, too, became more involved. This represented a marked change in their behaviors. A front-page *Washington Post* story entitled “Nazi Reign of Terror Rising in Savagery” reported Secretary of State Hull’s concern.

“The U.S. will not slacken in its efforts to stop the puppet Hungarian government in its violations of the most elementary of human rights,” Hull declared. He continued by assuring the world that, “punishment will be dealt out to the Nazi perpetrators and their henchmen.” These statements might appear as mere rhetoric, but they are but one of dozens found where policy makers condemned Nazi anti-Semitism as anathema to the American creed. For Secretary Hull, who was woefully ill informed on this topic, these forceful sentiments reflected a personal modification in his public tone.

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57 Ibid.


60 Ibid.
Why, then, have historians dismissed the efforts of the War Refugee Board? How can the very agency responsible for helping to cultivate and convey American concern for Jews be associated with an alleged “abandonment”? For many scholars, these questions boil down to the board’s inability to act. Specifically, the debate has crystallized around the never-adopted proposal to bomb Auschwitz. The bombing of Auschwitz, if successful, might have provided a dramatic end to the extermination process in Eastern Europe. It certainly would have been a meaningful symbolic act.

However, the War Refugee Board did not possess an air force; its primary role was to develop plans and programs. The very fact that board officials, including John Pehle, forwarded the bombing request to the War Department reflected the board’s successful operations. One might rightly lament the agency’s impotence, but faulting the War Refugee Board for inaction seems akin to blaming the victim. In the case of bombing Auschwitz, a wide range of variables discouraged taking the action.

Located in southeastern Poland, Auschwitz was a large complex—several miles in length and width—that housed numerous different war-related concerns. The gas chambers and crematoria were located in the Auschwitz I (Main) and Auschwitz II (Birkenau) camps. The U.S. Army knew of the area and had twice bombed the Monowitz petroleum factory located less than a mile away. Yet as early as 1942, both the United States and Great Britain knew that

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61 Rosen, Saving, 467, 469.


Auschwitz served a more sinister purpose. Understanding the factors involved in deciding against bombing the extermination center, or its railways lines, remains a viable question. Even if undertaken, such a step might not have stopped the killings. Poland housed four additional extermination camps, and it seems quite possible that the Nazis would have devised alternative methods.

A spate of calls for aerial actions against Nazi death installations began to appear in the United States during the summer of 1944. The proposals did not originate in the War Refugee Board. They appeared before the board via European colleagues, as well as concerned private citizens. On June 18, 1944, John Pehle received a letter from an American named Jacob Rosenheim. In the correspondence, Rosenheim stated that he possessed incontrovertible evidence about the fatal deportation of Hungarian Jews to the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Imploring the board to take immediate action, he suggested that a “paralysis of rail traffic” could at least slow the pace of the killings.

Three days later, John Pehle forwarded this request to the War Department. Indeed, this private suggestion, received just two weeks after the “D-Day” landing, had garnered a remarkable level of attention. The expediency with which the letter passed through bureaucratic channels offered a stark contrast to the attention paid to the earlier Riegner Cable. Moreover, this swift response occurred despite the fact that the War Refugee Board did not receive its first

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microfilmed drawings and descriptions of Auschwitz until November 1944. In June, there was no way for Pehle to establish essential points of fact related to the bombing proposal. His willingness to pass the letter along, despite his personal reservations, demonstrated the agency’s commitment to exploring even seemingly remote options.

Six months earlier, no federal agency had existed for citizens to solicit regarding this issue. By mid-1944, however, the concern received attention from the highest echelons of the government. This new cognizance resulted from the board’s positive working relationship with other bureaucratic entities, which suggested that officials throughout the administration now acknowledged the War Refugee Board as performing a legitimate function. “It will not be contemplated,” however, a U.S. Army directive informed British officials in February 1944, “that the armed forces will be employed for the purpose of rescuing victims of enemy oppression.” Such rescue missions might occur only if “actions are the direct result of military operations conducted with the objective of defeating the armed forces of the enemy.”

Six months later, the basic mind-set against using military force to end the Holocaust remained unchanged. John Pehle enjoyed a productive working relationship with Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy, but this cordiality did nothing to alter set attitudes. “The War Department fully appreciates the humanitarian importance of the suggested [bombing] operation,” McCloy’s July 4 letter to Pehle read. “However,” he continued, “the most effective


71 For more on Secretary McCloy, including a photograph, see Clayton Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors: America’s Crusade against Nazi Germany* (Topeka: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 52-54.
relief which can be given victims of enemy persecution is to ensure the early defeat of the Axis.”

Additional prohibitions against striking Auschwitz appeared from leading representatives within the Jewish community. One such example was the case of Leon Kubowitzki, chief of the World Jewish Congress Rescue Division. On July 1, 1944, he wrote Pehle and registered his categorical opposition to bombing the camps because “the first victims killed would be the Jews.” However, by August 1944 Kubowitzki had changed his opinion. In a subsequent letter to John McCloy, he now advocated targeting the gas chambers and crematoria. The letter(s) accomplished nothing. A reply from McCloy noted that the proposed operation “would be of such doubtful efficacy that it would not warrant the use of our resources.” McCloy’s negative view rested on the government’s imprecise knowledge of the killing operations within the Auschwitz compound. Moreover, War Department officials expressed concern that guards might bind Jews to the railways as targets, or compel the prisoners to repair the damage.

The larger point, however, is not whether or not the United States decided to attack Auschwitz. Rather, the sustained, high-level attention directed toward combating Nazi anti-Semitism indicated that officials took seriously the concern that many citizens had expressed. Historians must not allow their knowledge of the continued killings to skew their analysis. It is

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72 As quoted in Rubenstein, Myth, 161.


74 Ibid., 32.

75 Wyman, Abandonment, 296.

overly cynical to conclude that the War Department’s decision betrayed an institutional bias against Jewish interests. The much richer story involves the new interplay between government agencies and private citizens. The administration responded to the raised levels of public interest that appeared during 1933-43. Previously aloof and perhaps even hostile, members of the administration now demonstrated a clear concern for upholding Jewish security in Eastern Europe.

An example of this institutionalized discursive opposition appeared in a series of fall 1944 correspondences, between the board’s John Pehle, the Office of War Information’s Elmer Davis, and Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Though none involved could have known it at the time, the last remnants of Hungary’s Jews had arrived at Auschwitz in mid-July. The killings were nearing their end. Pehle, however, continued to raise the issue. “We have received disquieting reports that the Nazis in Hungary recently slaughtered thousands of Jews,” the board chief informed Elmer Davis. “The German authorities must be informed that the U.S. government and its people are shocked by this brutality and are determined those deemed responsible shall pay for their crimes.” Of course, Davis already knew these sorts of “disquieting” reports. This formal exchange of information was an effort to employ the bureaucratic mechanism they had together created.

Two weeks later, on September 7, Pehle received a response. “I have received your letter on reports of Nazi atrocities,” began Davis. “As you know, we have constantly hammered away

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79 *Records*, ed. Culbert, pt. 1, Pehle to Davis, August 24, 1944, reel 8: 0021. The letter included an attachment discussing a Nazi attack against the S.S. Merkura, a private Turkish ship with 250 Jewish refugees traveling from Rumania to Hungary.
at this subject.” He informed the War Refugee Board: “we have written a new directive on Nazi war crimes and atrocities. The German, Balkan, and several other regional directives have also addressed the subject in detail.”

From this correspondence, Pehle could conclude that the issue of combating Nazi anti-Semitism remained a vibrant concern. A September 1944 letter from Secretary of State Cordell Hull upholds this judgment. “The persecution of Jews in Hungary is again being intensified,” he reinformed Davis. “Representatives of the War Refugee Board urge the Office of War Information take vigorous measures.” “I concur in their recommendations,” the mercurial secretary stated in his closing.

This information loop about the genocide ended a week later when Elmer Davis replied to the State Department. “We are continuing our utmost efforts to alleviate the distressing persecution of the Jews in Hungary,” he wrote to Hull in autumn of 1944. “Our current propaganda,” Davis continued, “tells the Hungarians in the sharpest terms that further atrocities against Jews will intensify indignation on the part of Allied public opinion.” In closing, the Office of War Information leader offered this assurance: “we shall repeat such warnings frequently until we have definite news the Jews in Hungary are safe.”

When viewed from a postwar vantage point, such correspondences appear insufficient, and maybe even a bit tragic. By fall of 1944, the Nazis had murdered many millions of Jews without any direct Allied intervention. However, this weighty point of fact has needlessly crushed the efforts of agencies such as the War Refugee Board to alter thinking and behaviors. Prior to its January 1944 creation, no coherent mechanism existed for the accumulation or

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80 Ibid., pt. 1, Davis to Pehle, September 7, 1944, reel 8: 0044.

81 Ibid., pt. 1, Hull to Davis, September 22, 1944, reel 8: 0071.

82 Ibid., pt. 1, Davis to Hull, September 30, 1944, reel 8: 0088.
processing of atrocity information. Officials at the administration’s highest levels displayed little knowledge of, or concern with, the Nazis’ destruction of European Jewry. However, within six months of its creation, the War Refugee Board steered a credible government discourse emerged focused on helping to end Jewish suffering. The board’s worth lies not in estimating the number of Jewish lives saved. Rather, the most valuable function performed related to its ability to advance an idea globally, and in the United States, that Nazi behaviors toward Jews violated Western sensibilities.

The War Refugee Board institutionalized the previously nebulous connection between European Jewish welfare and American national interests. The agency represented a capstone to the decade-long campaign to alter the public’s belief that Jews were a friendless people, whose welfare was extraneous to Christian societies. Though the body only existed for eighteen months during 1944-45, the step succeeded in making practical the much larger idea that combating anti-Semitism and related intolerance was a meaningful task. In the years following 1945, the notion that an inviolable connection existed between Jewish and Christian welfare—the bedrock idea behind the board’s creation—provided a foundation for engineering a more pluralist national identity. Opposing genocide and state-sponsored persecutions of human rights became a staple idea that appeared in later foreign policy discussions. During World War II, the United States was the only Allied nation that recorded and combated the Jewish destruction. The War Refugee Board served to differentiate for American citizens and the world that a stark contrast existed between the fascist and democratic conceptions of life, liberty, and the pursuit of individual happiness.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

Properly, the Jew ought hardly be heard of. But he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on this planet as any other people. The Jew saw them all, survived them all, and is now what he always was. All things are mortal but the Jew. All other forces pass, but he remains.

—Mark Twain, *Harper’s Magazine*, September 1897

This dissertation offers scholars who specialize in the American reaction to Nazi anti-Semitism a history that does not begin with the premise that citizens and leaders abandoned the Jews of Europe. Instead, I argue that some Americans saw in the public reports of Nazi anti-Semitism, as well as related expressions of German intolerance, an opportunity to initiate public discourse that explained how the fascist vision for humankind was abhorrent to citizens living in pluralist democratic societies. During the 1930s and 1940s, the comparing and contrasting of divergent ideologies was commonplace, apparent in newspapers and magazines, popular literature, theater, film, as well as in official governmental documents. The one unifying thread throughout these various artifacts is an opposition to the German persecution of sociocultural and religious minorities.

The March 1933 Nazi takeover in Germany revealed a wide-ranging hostility toward Jews, Catholics, Quakers, Masons, and labor organizations. The expression of such antipathies lent credibility to the emerging public claim that all Americans—and, indeed, all freedom-loving people—had something to fear from the spread of such a regime. Admittedly, this assertion was by no means prevalent during the 1930s. Americans were still figuring out who Adolf Hitler was and determining what, if anything, his beliefs meant to their lives. Indeed, some Americans embraced his racial views, and participated in violence against Jews. However, many other

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millions began to recognize that racism posed a threat to the nation. They planted a seed argument that persisted into the next decade: contempt for civil liberties, whether in Berlin or Boston, was itself contemptible.

In January 1941, prior to the nation’s entrance into the Second World War, President Roosevelt included the right of unfettered worship as one of the inalienable human rights delineated in his Four Freedoms speech. Once the United States joined the fighting, the claim that American forces battled to uphold this and other democratic ideals became standard in public discussions. Just as they still do now, five decades later, many Americans at the time identified the victory over Nazi barbarism as the war’s most significant accomplishment.

For those citizens, the rhetoric about American concern for human rights proved essential. These voters would have supported President Roosevelt’s decision to create a War Refugee Board that administered direct American relief to Europe’s persecuted minorities. The weight of the inherited narrative has discouraged scholars from investigating the proposition that the United States articulated a coherent opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism. For four decades, historians have begun constructing their studies with a predetermined conclusion.

I hope that the introduction of new texts, voices, and interpretations will lead scholars to reconsider questions once thought settled. How do the long-standing claims of a prevalent nativism in the United States mesh with evidence that Americans of varying faiths and levels of social status publicly attacked Nazi anti-Semitic behaviors? How are we to reconcile the dilatory anti-Semitism apparent in the State Department with countervailing bureaucratic narratives regarding other agencies? Which type of person, a Charles Lindbergh or an Archibald MacLeish, most successfully sculpted the public discourse during the 1930s and 1940s? Whose utterances and activities should the historian examine when assembling portraits of the period?
Allowing for the possibility that combating Nazi anti-Semitism played a meaningful role in American society during the 1930s and early 1940s opens up new routes of scholarly inquiry. Specifically, historians face the challenge of trying to demonstrate the degree to which the issue permeated mainstream life. Currently no academic framework exists for situating or evaluating this particular issue against related political concerns. Those scholars who specialize in the American reaction present the issue as an anomaly rather than as part of a much larger pluralist shift. No one has yet explained how the successful efforts to bring this ethno-religious issue into the mainstream signaled an upcoming sea change in the society.

Perhaps seeking out interdisciplinary methods and theories will help historians with the task. Since the 1950s, public policy scholars have examined the explosion of private pressure groups that accompanied the rise of executive government during the New Deal. One specific ramification of this trend was that narrow special interests began aggressively searching out access to the corridors of power. Much like Bergson and Hecht’s multifaceted lobbying, citizens representing a range of interests began demanding assistance from federal sources.

This macro change in the workings of the American political system provoked a ripple throughout the government, as well as the academy, where scholars began revising the manner in which they discussed the policy process. New categories of analysis widened the locus of what constituted official activity. Historians who specialize in the U.S. response to Nazi anti-Semitism, some of whom hold that Roosevelt followed only a policy of “gestures,” often overlook the fact that the term “policy” has a range of meanings. Viewing the record within a

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The easiest model for historians to adapt to their discussions is one referred to as “institutional rational choice.” This approach holds that representatives draft bills that reflect their personal preferences. The theory behind this approach is that delegates—all holding particularistic interests—will support panoplies of nonrelated or essential issues. In this schema, citizen-advocates appear as supplicants to the centers of power. Their grass-root participation is subject to the larger whims of the institutions and agencies that dominate the policy process.

Those specializing in the American reaction to Nazi anti-Semitism will find in the institutional rational choice model a basis for situating a range of different congressional activities. The challenge becomes affixing particular case studies, such as the issue of combating Nazi anti-Semitism, to an appropriate governmental committee. One specific end might be a more focused examination of the House Un-American Activities Committee, connecting the public struggles against Nazi anti-Semitism with private battles between committee members. This approach would complement a much larger study aimed at explaining the committee’s bizarre metamorphosis from a tool first designed to investigate the enemies of the Jews into a device for investigating the Jews as enemies. For two decades, the body played a leading role in

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the ongoing contest over Jews, and a study of congressional experiences with anti-Semitism would represent a clear achievement in meshing historical method and political science theory.

An additional way to broaden investigations is by exploring the relationship between the sustained opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism on the one hand, and the full-blown emergence of sociocultural pluralism on the other. The connection between the defeat of fascism, and greater domestic tolerance for sociocultural minorities, is logical as well as intuitive. As part of their fighting, American GIs had learned that persecuting minorities was abhorrent. Some had occasion to view firsthand what such bigoted practices had produced. Upon returning to their hometowns and cities, these former soldiers helped to promulgate a more inclusive mind-set that stressed respect and tolerance. In public leadership positions, as well as in private roles as the heads of new households, they constituted a new cohort that discouraged anti-Semitism.

Indeed, the results of public opinion polling conducted by the Gallup organization, National Opinion Research Center, Opinion Research Corporation, Office of Opinion Research, and Elmo Roper have demonstrated that Americans held—or at least expressed—more favorable opinions of Jews in the decades following 1945 than in the years leading up to the fight. Charles Stember’s work *Jews in the Mind of America* (1966), funded by the Anti-Defamation League as part of a multipart series entitled “Patterns of American Intolerance,” was the first study to offer quantitative evidence that demonstrated a decline in American anti-Semitism.

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Stember examined the results of eighty-three polls that asked Christian Americans over 250 questions about their Jewish fellow citizens. He presented his findings in more than 120 aggregated tables, grouped in five subsections, covering attitudes toward Jews, associations with Jews, active hostility against Jews, and effects of the war on opinions toward Jews. Striking declines in the number of bigoted sentiments recorded are apparent. For example, Stember reported that in 1940, 63 percent of respondents had affirmed the proposition that Jews had “objectionable traits.” In 1962, however, the number of citizens expressing agreement with that statement had dropped by 40 percentage points.\(^\text{12}\) In another table, Stember presented data related to the question of whether or not having a Jewish neighbor was objectionable. In 1938, one-quarter of Christian Americans found the possibility untoward; in 1962, however, only 3 percent of respondents expressed reservations.\(^\text{13}\)

The decline in public expressions of anti-Semitism coincided with a spike in Jewish American visibility. During the late 1940s, and continuing into the 1950s and 1960s, supporting the new Jewish homeland in Israel produced a spate of new pressure organizations such as the American Zionist Emergency Council and the American Palestine Committee.\(^\text{14}\) There were also new domestic groups such as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, representing the


\(^\text{13}\) Ibid. Interpreting the polls can be an imperfect exercise. Melvin Tumin has observed that status-seeking bigots, as well as rural citizens who moved to urban areas for employment, might suppress their anti-Semitism publicly, even for a lifetime. See Tumin, *An Inventory and Appraisal of Research on American Anti-Semitism* (New York: Freedom Books, 1961), 45.

largest [Reform] segment of the American Jewish community. Along with older assemblies such as the American Jewish Committee and American Jewish Congress, numerous public groups focused the dominant Christian public’s attention on the Jewish community. Indeed, the decision by Jewish Americans to adopt a more visible stance, particularly against expressions of bigotry and violence, fueled the cries of “Never Again” that emerged during the Middle Eastern conflicts during the late 1960s.

There is also evidence that Americans saw in the defeat of Nazism a chance to battle domestic anti-Semitism as well. In 1945, Arthur Miller’s novel Focus, set in Brooklyn during the last two years of World War II, rooted a discussion of the phenomenon in the fictitious Lawrence Newman, a bigoted office worker who was compelled to wear eyeglasses by a debilitative eye condition. Newman believed that the corrective lenses rendered him Semitic in appearance. In the glances of his neighbors, Newman perceived disgust and rejection. His level of paranoia increased, and he became withdrawn. The once-comfortable petit bourgeois became alienated from his neighborhood, and then, feeling himself an outsider, he turned for solace to the same Jewish immigrants he had previously so despised. Perhaps the novel’s most subtle observations relate to the malleable nature of identity and assimilation in the United States.

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17 Arthur Miller, Focus (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1945).

Hollywood’s silver screen also exposed domestic anti-Semitism. In 1947, *A Gentleman’s Agreement* was the first feature to confront squarely the realities of Christian American biases. The film starred Gregory Peck as a Protestant journalist named Phillip Green. Its plot centered on his experiences as a progressive writer who wanted to investigate anti-Semitism. Peck’s character decided to pretend to be Jewish in order to experience the varying forms of racism (e.g., epithets, refusal of service, physical intimidation) that existed in American society. He soon encountered a wide range of obstacles, some overt and crude, others more insidious. The film opened in late 1947 to both popular and critical acclaim. That year, *A Gentleman’s Agreement* won the Academy Award for Fox Studios for best motion picture.  

Also in 1947, RKO Studios released *Crossfire*, starring Robert Ryan, Robert Young, and Robert Mitchum. Set in postwar America, the movie depicted the story of a bigot named “Monty” Montgomery (Robert Ryan), a recently discharged soldier who murdered a Jewish American man during a drunken rage. Nothing in the events leading up to the homicide would have made that outcome foreseeable; the victim, like Montgomery, was also a veteran, and he and his wife had invited the mysterious soldier into their apartment. However, the material prosperity evident in the couple’s Washington D.C., home, joined with the GI’s inebriation and lifetime of accumulated bigotries, resulted in the attack. *Crossfire* director Edward Dmytryk sought to expose the conflict raging within a man who had fought bravely to defeat a regime steeped in religious hatred but was still unwilling to relinquish his own personal biases. Much like with *A Gentleman’s Agreement*, the citizens who viewed *Crossfire* (1947) learned that dark emotions toward Jews were not limited to European societies. The film encouraged Americans

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to be vigilant against such sentiments, characterizing them as incompatible with life in the
postwar United States.

During the early twentieth century, the legacy of anti-Semitism clearly damaged Jews, as
their relationship with members of the Christian majority remained unpredictable. This was the
case particularly in the decade following the First World War, when newspapers reported on the
activities of Jewish Bolsheviks, Merchants of Death, and Labor militants. However, beginning in
the early 1930s, and following into the next decade, a broad-based socio-cultural and political
movement came into existence. Condemning the Nazis’ hostility toward organized religion as
incompatible with the democratic vision for humankind provided a useful rhetorical device that
helped Americans to define their national purpose. Gradually the specter and realities of Nazism
replaced the threat of Judeo-Bolshevism as the main object of American consternation. A
nascent discourse formed about defending religious freedom, and the subsequent discussion that
emerged would ultimately reconfigure the manner in which citizens came to understand the
values they had long claimed to cherish.


Dickstein, Samuel. The Samuel Dickstein Papers, 1923-44. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.


------. *Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller’s City.* New York: John Day, 1933.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jeffrey Scott Demsky was born on Long Island, New York, on July 19, 1974, and attended the Sachem Public School System until his graduation from high school in June 1992. He attended the State University of New York at Albany and received a Bachelor of Arts in European History and Political Science, cum laude, in May 1995. That fall, he began graduate school, studying modern German History, at the American University, Washington D.C. In summer 1997, after receiving his master’s of arts degree, Jeffrey Demsky attended the Goethe Institut, Munich, where he studied German language and culture. From September 1997 through August 1998, he remained in Washington D.C., working as a researcher for the General Services Administration and National Geographic Society. In fall 1998, he enrolled in a European History doctoral program at the University of Florida. Soon thereafter, he became a research assistant to Professor T. W. Gallant. He spent much of summer 2000 working on a project funded by the National Science Foundation, classifying British imperial reports written in the early nineteenth century. While a graduate student, he presented a number of papers to conferences held at Rutgers University, Dover State University, and the University of Florida. A member of several academic honor societies, including Phi Alpha Theta, he received his PhD as a twentieth century American historian in May 2007.