

Reconciling American Jewishness with the “100 Percent American”: Henry Morgenthau Jr. and
American Jewry, 1934-1945

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Reflecting on his childhood, his family, and his religion, Henry Morgenthau III, son and namesake of FDR's Secretary of the Treasury, wrote in 1991 of his Jewish heritage, calling it "a kind of birth defect that could not be eradicated but with proper treatment could be overcome, if not in this generation then probably in the next. The cure was achieved through the vigorous lifelong exercise of one's Americanism."¹ He goes on to recount a childhood memory that took place in the early 1920s in New York City when a fellow playmate asked about his religion. Later, he confronted his parents with the question, "What's my religion?" In response, Morgenthau III was taught the following: "If anyone ever asks you that again, just tell them you're an American."² And that is what he did for much of his life.

Had he asked his father, Henry Morgenthau Jr., this same question twenty years later, the answer would likely have been very different. By the end of World War II, Morgenthau Jr. was a leader in the American Jewish establishment, chairman of the United Jewish Appeal, and an aggressive actor in the struggle to save the remaining Jews of Europe. His son understood this change as having "sprung from something hidden deep within his conscience."³ In reality, Morgenthau was one of many American Jews who underwent a turbulent change in experience of Jewishness in the 1930s and 1940s. Lloyd P. Gartner refers to this time period as "American Jewry's eventful, trying midpassage,"⁴ and in many ways it was. From 1934-1945, American Jews saw anti-Semitic attitudes at home reach an all-time high,⁵ experienced an increase in momentum

¹ Henry Morgenthau III, *Mostly Morgenthau's* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1991), xi.

² Morgenthau III, xiv.

³ Morgenthau III, xix.

⁴ Lloyd P. Gartner, "The Midpassage of American Jewry: 1929-1945," in *American Jewish Life, 1920-1990*, ed. Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: Routledge, 1998), 2.

⁵ Charles Herbert Stember, *Jews in the Mind of America* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966), 122.

in the Zionist movement,⁶ took part in the American war effort both at home and abroad, and watched from afar as Nazi Germany murdered the Jews of Europe.

While Jews in all parts of American society felt these transformations one way or another, as the highest-ranking Jew in American politics at the time, Henry Morgenthau Jr. lived them in the public eye. Morgenthau Jr. served as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Treasury Secretary from 1934-1945, leading the department through both the New Deal and World War II. An analysis of Morgenthau before, during, and immediately after the war offers insight into the changing perceptions of Jewishness, both by American Jews and by non-Jews. Ultimately, the shifting landscape of American Jewish identity is visible in how Morgenthau identified with being Jewish in light of his public role and how others perceived his position of prominence.

Despite Morgenthau's complicated and fascinating relationship with Jewishness and despite his political position in one of the most trying periods in Jewish history, scholars of Jewish American history have not centered his story in larger discussions of American Jewishness. Because this paper will explore concepts of Jewish identity, scholarly work on this topic is extremely useful in drawing larger conclusions about Morgenthau's significance. Larger historical conversations regarding American Jewish studies and United States Holocaust history mention Morgenthau but not in any particularly meaningful way. Biographies of Morgenthau explore his Jewish identity but not in relation to larger trends in Jewish American history.

In her article "Reframing the Study of Contemporary Jewish Identity," Bethamie Horowitz asks two questions of Jewish identity: "How Jewish are American Jews?" and "How

⁶ American Zionists realized as early as 1933 that the refugee crisis occurring for the Jews in Europe was an opening for the Zionist movement. Stephen Wise wrote in 1933, "we may not be able to reawaken the interest of American Jews in Palestine and Zionism." Aaron Berman, *Nazism, the Jews, and American Zionism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 27.

are American Jews Jewish?”⁷ The first question, Horowitz argues, is centered on ideas of assimilation into American society. It also explores the level of religious practice and nature of ethnic behaviors of Jewish Americans.⁸ This paper will use Horowitz’s work surrounding her second question, “How are American Jew Jewish?” Her research in this capacity focuses on how American Jews “relate to anything Jewish in their own lives.”⁹ In practice, this involves looking at how one’s Jewish heritage is integrated into the “core” of one’s identity.¹⁰ Finally, she makes an argument on the importance of treating Jewishness as “dynamic” and “socially constructed.” In this way, Jewish identity is both a self-expression and a response to conditions in society and history.¹¹ Jewish Americans were forced to respond to the Holocaust as a condition in society, and for this reason, studies of identity surrounding the Holocaust are essential to understanding American Jewishness in this time period. Historian Shaul Magid considers the American Jewish response to the Holocaust to be a “microcosm” of the larger study of change in Jewish identity.¹² Jewish identity has changed since the Holocaust, he argues, because it is no longer a conventional practice for Jewish Americans but a “resource for contributing to global issues that concern Jews that they wish to address as Jews.”¹³

While anti-Semitism and Nazism were issues that plagued American Jewry at the time, deeply connected with both of these issues were changes in American Zionist mentality, as well as a general growth in support for Zionism in the United States leading up to and during World War II. Aaron Berman’s *Nazism, the Jews, and American Zionism* uses American Zionist sources

⁷ Bethamie Horowitz, “Reframing the Study of Contemporary Jewish Identity,” *Contemporary Jewry* 23, no. 1 (Dec. 2002), 14.

⁸ Ibid, 15.

⁹ Ibid, 22.

¹⁰ Ibid, 22.

¹¹ Ibid, 26.

¹² Shaul Magid, “The Holocaust and Jewish Identity in America: Memory, the Unique, and the Universal,” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 2 (Winter 2012), 101.

¹³ Ibid, 104.

to study the evolution of Zionism in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. Berman argues that not only did Jewish Americans respond to the Holocaust, their response was often manifested in a growth in Zionism.¹⁴ David H. Shapiro's *From Philanthropy to Activism, The Political Transformation of American Zionism in the Holocaust Years 1933-1945* also looks at the transformation of Zionism that occurred in this time period. Shapiro argues, however, that Zionism changed from a radical idea to a larger movement because leaders were able to integrate Zionist ideals into a wider political, philanthropic, and influential force in the United States.¹⁵

A study of Jewish identity in this time period, especially one centered around Henry Morgenthau Jr., is also grounded heavily in scholarship regarding United States World War II history, especially as it pertained to action, or lack thereof, towards the Holocaust. David Wyman's book *The Abandonment of the Jews* is perhaps the most complete study of America and the Holocaust. Wyman lays out points detailing the failure at all levels of American society in rescuing the Jews of Europe.¹⁶ He argues that while the Holocaust was a tragedy for all of civilization, non-Jewish Americans were either not aware of the issue or saw Hitler's Final Solution as a Jewish problem that the Jews of the world were responsible for solving.¹⁷ Wyman's book draws heavily from Arthur D. Morse's *While Six Million Died*. Morse was the first historian to research and define the extent of knowledge that the Allied nations had about the Holocaust and the extent to which they did nothing to stop it. His research is extremely important

¹⁴ Berman, 12.

¹⁵ David H. Shapiro, *From Philanthropy to Activism, The Political Transformation of American Zionism in the Holocaust Years 1933-1945* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1994), xi.

¹⁶ Wyman focuses on conscious efforts by the American State Department to suppress information coming from Europe about the Holocaust, anti-refugee sentiment, lack of popular pressure for a rescue mission, personal failures of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and failure of the military to bomb the gas chamber of Auschwitz. David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), x-xi.

¹⁷ Wyman, xii.

to Jewish American history because he effectively changed the terms of the debate surrounding America and the Holocaust.

Historian Richard Breitman argues in “The Allied War Effort and the Jews, 1942-1943” that it was Nazi propaganda that had the greatest effect in curbing Allied intervention in the Holocaust. This propaganda emphasized the idea that an international Jewry was intimately connected with Allied governments. Breitman wrote that Allied governments feared that any aid to European Jews would only bolster this conspiracy.¹⁸ In addition to this, Breitman claims that Allied nations, specifically the United States and Great Britain feared an influx of Jewish refugees because of domestic anti-Semitism and anti-Semitism in neutral countries.¹⁹

In his book *The Politics of Rescue*, Henry L. Feingold looks at United States rescue policies during the war in an effort to determine why European Jews were given such low priority.²⁰ While a Jewish refugee crisis existed throughout the 1930s, this book covers the crisis beginning in 1938, which Feingold believes to be the beginning of “the third and most serious wave of anti-Jewish violence in Germany.”²¹ This book lays out both the shortcomings and the small victories in rescue missions both from an American and European perspective. While Morgenthau receives attention for his work in alerting Roosevelt and the public to the wrongdoings of the state department, he is by no means the focus of the book. Feingold and scholars of American Jewish history like him are instrumental to a deeper understanding of Morgenthau and the historical context in which he operated.

¹⁸ Richard Breitman, “The Allied War Effort and the Jews, 1942-1943,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 1 (Jan. 1985), 136.

¹⁹ Breitman, 152.

²⁰ Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue, The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), xii.

²¹ *Ibid*, xi.

Because of his position in the Roosevelt administration and his leadership responsibilities during one of the most turbulent decades in American history, several biographers have tried to capture the Morgenthau story. The title of one such biography, *The Jew Who Defeated Hitler* by Peter Moreira, indicates that this book would be about Morgenthau and his identity as a Jewish American. Instead, while the book does talk about the fact that he was Jewish, Moreira admits in the book's prologue that the title "somewhat overstates the case."²² Even more so, the title would indicate a larger emphasis on Morgenthau's Jewishness. While it does talk about Morgenthau's work with Jewish causes towards the end of the war, it does not discuss American Jewishness in a larger sense.

Another Morgenthau biography by Herbert Levy gives a much more detailed description of Morgenthau's personal life, beginning with his childhood and ending with his life after government service. In an author's note at the beginning of the book, Levy describes the purpose of his biography as being "an effort to summarize how Henry Morgenthau Jr. understood his role as a technocrat during the presidential administration of FDR and an attempt at defining Social Darwinism as the concept that most affected Morgenthau's life."²³ In this sense, the book is written through a specific lens, but not a Jewish one.

These biographies give insight into information about Morgenthau's background that is essential for examining his Jewish identity. Their purpose is not, however, to draw larger conclusions about the American Jewish community or Jewish identity. Scholarly work covering Jewish identity and American World War II history do allude to these larger conclusions, but they do not bring Morgenthau into the fray in any meaningful way. By looking closely at

²² Peter Moreira, *The Jew Who Defeated Hitler* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2014), 15.

²³ Hebert Levy, *Henry Morgenthau Jr. The Remarkable Life of FDR's Secretary of the Treasury* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2010), 1.

Morgenthau, his perception of both his Jewishness and prominent public position, as well as how he was perceived by American Jews and non-Jews, it is clear that a simultaneous and ongoing dialogue existed among these groups in this time period that echo transformations occurring in American Jewishness.

“The Jewish Problem”

In late 1939, Morgenthau wrote a note to himself saying “Talk with the President about: the Jewish problem.”²⁴ One can only guess as to the full meaning of this note. Though likely an issue in regard to Jewish refugees, American Jews at this time period were conversing about many problems, including but not limited to Nazism and the destruction of European Jews, anti-Semitism, Jewish immigration to the United States, the Zionist movement, and practicing Judaism in an American context. These conversations were not new to this time period. They are, however, essential to an understanding of Jewishness and the Jewish experience from 1934-1945.

It is difficult to decide who was a Jewish American in the early to mid 20th century. Jewish Americans were divided based on religious practices, political leanings, and opinion towards Zionism, as well as by ethnicity. In the 1930s and 1940s, practicing American Jews were mainly divided into Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox practices. While all three became distinctly American when practiced by American Jews, they have roots in European Jewish practices. In this way, religious practice was often associated with country of origin for Jewish immigrants and their descendants.

²⁴ Henry Morgenthau Jr, *The Morgenthau Diaries*, 1939.

Most German Jews were part of the Reform tradition, which urged Jews to “shed the ways of the ghetto”²⁵ and to fully immerse themselves in secular life. Reform Judaism thrived in the United States, especially for Jews eager to assimilate. Conservative Jews agreed with Reform Jews that some changes in Judaism were necessary. At the same time, they argued that many Reform practices went too far by altering traditions that should remain untouched. Established in the United States primarily by immigrants from Eastern Europe and their descendants, Conservative temples were styled to “hold on to enough of the Jewish tradition to make second-generation Jews feel at home, but not so much as to interfere with modern American values.”²⁶ Orthodox Judaism formed as a response to Reform Judaism by Jews who did not agree with the proposed changes to the traditions of Judaism. Orthodox Jews in the United States were often noticed for their “Old World looks and manners.”²⁷ Despite this, Orthodox Jewry did become increasingly Americanized in hopes of competing with “counterparts in the Conservative movement for the allegiance of American-born traditional Jews.”²⁸

One of the starkest differences between the denominations of Judaism was support (or lack thereof) for Zionism. Until the 1930s, Reform Judaism was staunchly anti-Zionist, arguing that Jewish nationalism would threaten Jews’ acceptance as citizens in the nations they already inhabited.²⁹ Orthodox Jews were also anti-Zionist but for completely different reasons, the foremost reason being that the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was anti-messianic and therefore anti-Jewish. Conservative Jews, on the other hand, were generally more positive in regard to Zionism. Attitudes towards Zionism extended well beyond religious

²⁵ Lawrence Grossman, “Jewish Religious Denominations,” *Religious Culture and Institutional Practice* (May 2006), 81.

²⁶ Grossman, 84.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 86.

²⁸ The terminology “American-born traditional Jews” refers to individuals who wanted to practice Judaism steeped in tradition, without the European, Old World cultural traits. *Ibid*, 87.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 83.

denomination. As with denominations, affiliations towards Zionist organizations or anti-Zionist stances were often associated with country of origin. German Jews in the United States were often opposed to Zionism because, according to Aaron Berman, “Jews had found their ‘Zion’ in the United States.”³⁰ Until the 1930s, however, Zionism was very much on the backburner in the lives of most American Jews. Even while many Jews had opinions about Zionism, most were not actively involved in the issue.

As news of from Nazi Germany filtered out and Jews in the United States learned more about the issue facing their counterparts in Europe, this demographic began to change. Between 1932 and 1938, for example, membership in the Zionist Organization of America grew from eight thousand to twenty-eight thousand.³¹ Zionist leaders were some of the first Jewish Americans to condemn Nazism and Hitler, long before he implemented his Final Solution.³² Even rabbis in the Reform tradition became staunch Zionists. For example, Rabbi Stephen Wise is considered to be one of the most prominent Jewish leaders of the time period and was very influential in the Zionist movement. Although he was a Reform rabbi, many of his followers were from Eastern Europe. As a result, he was better able to attract attention to his cause and was influential in recruiting many Reform Jews to Zionism.³³ By calling attention to the grave injustices going on in Hitler’s Germany, Zionists were both able to alert other Americans to the plight of European Jews and to bolster their ranks.

After World War II came to an end and the full extent of the Nazi atrocities was brought to light, the Zionist cause reached its peak level of support in the United States. At least half a million American Jews were members of Zionist organizations at this point in time and these

³⁰ Berman, 32.

³¹ Shpiro, xxvii.

³² Ibid, xxx.

³³ Berman, 33.

organizations were starting to get support from the non-Jewish public.³⁴ American Jews, like Morgenthau, threw their weight behind the Zionist cause. Though not solely a Zionist organization, Morgenthau became a co-chairman of the United Jewish Appeal, with the goal of raising money both for Jewish immigrants coming to the United States and for aiding Jewish settlements in British-controlled Palestine.³⁵ Jews and non-Jewish supporters of Zionism jumped at this chance to fulfill the Zionist dream. Though the actual creation of Israel is beyond the scope of this paper, the struggle among American Jews and the ultimate consensus many groups came to in the 1930s regarding Zionism is very indicative of the sweeping changes going through the community throughout this time period.

One fear of anti-Zionist Jews was that support for a Jewish state in Palestine would appear to be anti-American and thus generate even more suspicion from non-Jewish Americans. This was not an irrational thought considering the social climate of the 1930s. Not only were many Americans nativist and opposed to European refugees entering the country, American anti-Semitism reached an historic high during this time period. Organized anti-Semitism flourished, with groups like the German American Bund and the Silver Shirt Legion spreading anti-Semitic sentiment, often taken directly from Nazi German propaganda.³⁶ Reasons for this flare up of anti-Semitism vary. Most historians agree that it was a combination of economic woes from the Great Depression, restrictions on immigration, association of Jews with communists, and Nazi propaganda.³⁷

One thing that united American Jews was the horror of learning the extent of the atrocities that occurred to European Jews in this time period. There is overwhelming evidence

³⁴ Shpiro, 151.

³⁵ Levy, 424.

³⁶ David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 14.

³⁷ Dinnerstein, 217.

that the United States State Department had evidence of the Nazi atrocities towards the Jews and knew of their intentions for mass murder. It is also true that the State Department actively worked to prevent this information from becoming public.³⁸ In 1942, members of Morgenthau's Treasury Department became aware of this fact and pressed him to go to Roosevelt.³⁹ By 1943, Roosevelt had established the War Refugee Board, but most argue that this effort was too little and much too late. This instance does, however, indicate Morgenthau's position at the crux of American political life, especially as it pertained to the government's role in saving the Jews of Europe.

Letters from "Little Henry"

In his official capacity as Secretary of the Treasury, Morgenthau acted not as a Jew but as an American. His son wrote of him that Morgenthau Jr. "had been groomed by his father to serve not as a Jew but as the 100 percent American the elder Morgenthau could never be."⁴⁰

Morgenthau was known in political circles for his tendency to "avoid representing the special interests of coreligionists,"⁴¹ and colleagues of Morgenthau remarked on the fact that he "believed his being Jewish was an impediment" and that he wanted to stand out for his work in the government, not as a Jewish man in government.⁴² His father, Henry Morgenthau Sr., a prominent voice in American politics during Wilson's presidency and the American Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, was well known for his staunch separation of Jewish issues from his personal life.

³⁸ Peck, 370.

³⁹ Wyman, 183.

⁴⁰ Morgenthau III, 321.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 323.

Morgenthau Sr. was, however, a friend of the influential Rabbi Stephen Wise. Both a Reform rabbi and long-time Zionist, Wise made a name for himself for much of the first half of the twentieth century both within and outside of the Jewish community. Because of his friendship with President Roosevelt, Wise is often criticized for his lack of effectiveness in aiding the Jews of Europe. In his book, David Wyman states his belief that Wise's admiration for the president led him to be "unable to be critical of, or even objective about, the President."⁴³

Morgenthau Sr. began his association with Wise in 1907, with the establishment of the Free Synagogue. Wise's Free Synagogue was established so that people could come together to be "vitaly, intensely, unequivocally Jewish."⁴⁴ Importantly, however, this idea of Jewishness was to be expressed "democratically, not dogmatically."⁴⁵ Morgenthau Sr. served as president of the Free Synagogue and, as a result, rubbed elbows with very influential Jewish Americans for some time.

Morgenthau Sr.'s relationship with Stephen Wise became fractured in 1921, when he published an article titled "Zionism a Surrender, Not a Solution." In the article, Morgenthau Sr. wrote a scathing critique of Zionism, calling it "the most stupendous fallacy in Jewish history...wrong in principle and impossible in realization...unsound in economics, fantastical in its politics, and sterile in its religious ideals."⁴⁶ As the leading American Zionist leader at the time, Wise was compelled to respond, writing that Morgenthau's "proofs are, to one who knows all of the facts, false proofs, even as the conclusions which he draws are false conclusions."⁴⁷ Wise makes a conscious effort to dispute almost all of Morgenthau's points in an attack that

⁴³ Wyman, 69.

⁴⁴ Melvin I. Urofsky, *A Voice That Spoke for Justice: The Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 61.

⁴⁵ Urofsky, 61.

⁴⁶ Henry Morgenthau Sr., "Zionism a Surrender, Not a Solution," *World's Work*, June, 1921.

⁴⁷ Stephen S. Wise, "Mr. Morgenthau's Article," *The Stephen Wise Papers*, n.d.

becomes very personal. Henry Morgenthau III attributes this conflict and the wider conflict it created between Morgenthau Sr. and other Zionist leaders as the catalyst for his grandfather withdrawing “permanently from all involvements with organized Jewry.”⁴⁸

This trend continued in the religious practices, or lack thereof, of Morgenthau Jr. His son, Morgenthau III did not recall that his parents ever went to temple when he was growing up.⁴⁹ Despite the conflict between Wise and the elder Morgenthau, Rabbi Wise played a significant role in reshaping Morgenthau Jr.’s relationship to his Jewishness. Their relationship developed throughout Morgenthau’s time in public office, beginning with his appointment to Secretary of the Treasury in 1934 and continuing after his appointment ended in 1945. Their correspondence is especially significant because Wise talks to and about Morgenthau Jr. as both a Jew and an American.

In January of 1934, soon after Roosevelt appointed Morgenthau to his cabinet, Wise wrote to Morgenthau in the hopes of “tendering you deepfelt congratulations upon the very great honor which has come to you in appointment.”⁵⁰ Although this letter does not mention anything about Jewishness or American Jewry, it sets a precedent for the type of correspondence that ensued between the two men. The correspondence was, at the same time, official but informal. In the same letter, Wise writes: “Just for the present moment I cannot deny myself the pleasure of continuing to call you ‘Henry’ you whom I have known from the days of your youth.”⁵¹ As time passes, Wise becomes more and more comfortable with asking Morgenthau for favors and insight into government affairs. For example, in a May 1941 letter, Wise writes to his “dear friend,” asking for “additional word on the situation as it has developed since your talk with

⁴⁸ Morgenthau III, 208.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 254.

⁵⁰ Stephen Wise, letter to Henry Morgenthau Jr., 9 Jan., 1934.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Harry.”⁵² It is unclear as to the particular situation that they are talking about, though “Harry” most likely refers to Harry Hopkins, former Secretary of Commerce under Roosevelt. This situation does indicate, however, that Morgenthau and Wise discussed policy matters quite frequently.

Perhaps the most significant form of communication between the two men occurred in 1942, a day that Morgenthau later says “changed my life.”⁵³ Morgenthau describes the day as when “Dr. Wise and his son James came to call on me in the Treasury and read me that unbelievable cable telling about the crematoriums in Europe...I will never recover from it.”⁵⁴ Accounts of this day and the relationship between Wise and Morgenthau vary. In his biography of Morgenthau, Herbert Levy writes that Wise went to Morgenthau because he was the best chance of reaching Roosevelt. Levy writes that the two knew each other “relatively well”⁵⁵ while Morgenthau III believed that “since Rabbi Wise and Henry Sr. had a falling-out over Zionism, Henry Jr. and Wise had managed to find few occasions to meet again.”⁵⁶ Letters between the two men indicates a more profound relationship than Levy and Morgenthau III credit. For example, in his biography of Morgenthau, Levy argues that Rabbi Wise went to Morgenthau “without any real choice” and that Morgenthau represented “his best and only approach.”⁵⁷ It is clear, however, that Morgenthau Jr. and Wise had corresponded about policy issues for years and that Wise not only had Morgenthau’s ear but had his trust.

This is evident from the very beginning of Morgenthau’s time as Secretary of the Treasury. In November 1935, Morgenthau Jr. wrote to Wise, “I hope that you will always feel

⁵² Stephen Wise, letter to Henry Morgenthau Jr., 21 May, 1941.

⁵³ Henry Morgenthau Jr. “Speech Delivered at the Fortieth Anniversary Dinner of the Founding of the Free Synagogue,” 20 April, 1947.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Levy, 346.

⁵⁶ Morgenthau III, 323.

⁵⁷ Levy, 346.

free to make any suggestions that occur to you, and you may be sure that your letters reach me promptly and are given my personal attention. Sincerely, ‘Little Henry.’”⁵⁸ At the end of his time in office, Morgenthau thanked Wise and wrote that “your personal counsel and warm support have always meant much to me.”⁵⁹

By 1945, the letters showed both how Wise claimed Morgenthau for American Jewry and Morgenthau’s growing acceptance of his Jewishness. Wise wrote to Morgenthau that “although you have been a target of attack and abuse, you have stood out as an exemplar of high and dedicated public service.” He then adds, “as a Jew and Jewish teacher, I wish to add that I am unutterably grateful for all that you have been, for the way in which you have borne yourself, for your great loyalty to the Great President, and for the honor you have brought to the record of American Jews.”⁶⁰ Wise has the ability to look back on Morgenthau’s service instead of predicting possible outcomes of a Jewish man serving as Secretary of the Treasury. Not only has Morgenthau not failed American Jews, at this point, the defeat of Nazism in Germany was imminent. American Jews would not be subject to the fascism and Nazism that their European brethren faced.

Even more significant than Wise’s letter to Morgenthau Jr. is his letter to Morgenthau Sr. in 1945 that expressed similar sentiments. In his letter, he writes that “no one could be finer or more helpful or more generous in understanding than your eminent son” and that “no one...has done more to make rescue possible than Henry Jr.” Finally, he adds “with all my soul and on behalf of all our people, I am grateful to Henry for all that he is doing.”⁶¹ As previously stated, the two men had had a falling out decades prior, specifically about disagreements on the proper

⁵⁸ Henry Morgenthau Jr., letter to Stephen S. Wise, 19 Nov. 1935.

⁵⁹ Henry Morgenthau Jr., letter to Stephen S. Wise, 16 July, 1945.

⁶⁰ Stephen Wise, letter to Henry Morgenthau Jr., 15 July, 1945.

⁶¹ Stephen Wise, Letter to Henry Morgenthau Sr., 17 Jan., 1944.

future of Jewish Americans. For Wise, the future of Judaism was a Jewish state in Palestine. For Morgenthau Sr., it was living life as an American. The fact that Wise writes to Morgenthau Sr. “on behalf of all our people” indicates a reconciliation of the disagreements over Zionism between the two men. This is highly representative of the general change in American Jewish opinion towards Zionism as a result of the tumultuous 1930s and 1940s. Henry Morgenthau Jr. was very much in the middle of this transformation, both between his father and Stephen Wise and in a larger Jewish American context.

“The Jews Are Different”

Because of his high rank in the Roosevelt administration and the fact that he was one of the most important Jewish American politicians, Morgenthau received considerable coverage from Jewish American newspapers throughout his time in public life. While not a perfect indicator of public opinion and interests, newspapers produced by and for American Jews from 1934 to 1945 reveal complex and diverse ideas about perceptions of Jewishness by American Jews. These perceptions are especially important in how they pertained to what role, if any, Jews should have in positions of power. These newspapers cannot speak for American Jews as a whole, though they often claimed to do so. However, the authors of these sources are incredibly aware of the deep crises of identity gripping American Jews. Throughout Morgenthau’s tenure as Secretary of the Treasury, newspaper coverage of these issues was as turbulent as Morgenthau’s own personal beliefs and values. This is clear from the type of coverage that Morgenthau received throughout the period.

As the United States edged closer and closer to entering World War II, Americans were emerging from a period of staunch isolationism. As a result, many Americans argued that President Roosevelt’s administration was pushed towards war because of his association with

influential Jews.⁶² These statements were not made in a vacuum and had serious repercussions. Anti-Semitism was prevalent leading up to the war, which was evident in the hundreds of organized groups with anti-Semitic messages and policies that prevented Jewish refugees from reaching safety in the United States in the 1930s.⁶³ Jewish Americans were conscious of these realities, and while many attained high levels of prosperity, like the Morgenthau, this did not mean avoiding prejudice and bigotry inflicted on them by other Americans.

In the summer of 1934, *The American Israelite* published a piece that asked “Should Jews in America Strive for Mediocrity?” The piece was written by Sidney Wallach, a public affairs consultant who, at the time that he wrote his article, was the educational director of the American Jewish Committee.⁶⁴ In light of his role in such a prominent Jewish organization, the title of his article is especially striking, specifically his use of the word “mediocre.” He does not ask if Jews should strive to be out of the public eye or to be private about their accomplishments but questions if they should even strive to be good in anything that they did. To answer this question, author Wallach uses “the case of Morgenthau.”⁶⁵ According to Wallach, “a number of his friends begged him not to accept the post—not to accept it because he was a Jew... What if the monetary policy should fail, they reasoned. Would it not mean that all Jews would be made to suffer?”⁶⁶ The article argues that while the Constitution allows Jews to hold public office, they “must not avail themselves of the Constitutional right to hold office.”⁶⁷ Doing so would only

⁶² Edward S. Shapiro, “World War II and American Jewish Identity,” *Modern Judaism* 10, no. 1 (Feb., 1990), 66.

⁶³ Wyman, 9.

⁶⁴ Sidney Wallach, “Editor and Public-Affairs Aide,” *The New York Times*, 29 June, 1979.

⁶⁵ Sidney Wallach, “Should Jews in America Strive for Mediocrity” *The American Israelite*, June 7, 1934.

⁶⁶ Wallach, “Should Jews in America Strive for Mediocrity.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

cause American Jews to follow in the path of their German brethren. Wallach argues that “the German Jew’s trust in democracy was, it appears, the very thing which turned against him.”⁶⁸

Wallach’s beliefs about German Jewry are consistent with the opinions of other American Jews in this time period. American Jews were aware of the persecution occurring in Nazi Germany throughout the 1930s and knew that German Jewry was not much different than they were as both were “educated, accultured, patriotic, economically successful.”⁶⁹ Leaders like Stephen Wise were critical of German Jews in the early 1930s, claiming that “the German obsession with Aryanism might have been ‘evoked’ by the ‘repudiation’ of Jewishness by German Jews and their espousal of ‘pseudo-Aryanism.’”⁷⁰ Wallach, however, does not argue on behalf of this pseudo-Aryanism but instead would agree that German Jews strove to be more than mediocre. Though the United States was far from a Nazi regime like the one in Germany, it was clear to many American Jews that what happened in Germany could happen in the United States.

Without looking at the source of Wallach’s article, one might think it was written by an anti-Semite. It issues a warning to Jewish Americans to reject the democratic rights they are entitled to or face the consequences in the future. This is, however, written by a Jewish author, for a Jewish newspaper, catering to a Jewish audience. He writes a similar article for the *Jewish Advocate* a month later, titled “The Jewish Citizen in the U.S.: How Will the American Jew Fare Under a Fascist Dictatorship.” In this article, he makes the same argument, this time for Bostonian Jews, again bringing Morgenthau into the fray. Again, Wallach makes the case that

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Gartner, 5.

⁷⁰ Berman, 20.

American Jews seizing power that they are entitled to would be harmful in the long run.⁷¹ It is particularly significant that Wallach publishes an almost identical article in two different Jewish press sources. This is indicative both of his anxiety towards the future of Jewish America as well as his desire to spread the message to as wide of an audience as possible. Additionally, Morgenthau is used as a case study in both articles, and his picture is featured prominently alongside the articles on the news page. In this sense, Wallach arguably sees Morgenthau and his position in the United States government as deeply fearsome.

Other sources that discuss Morgenthau's appointment make efforts to deemphasize his religious background. Instead, "the President was obviously concerned only with merit and not with considerations of race or religion." By not mentioning his Jewish background and in this particular manner, the author draws attention to Morgenthau's Jewishness. This is especially clear because the intended audience is distinctly Jewish and would likely know that Morgenthau was also Jewish. This particular article in the *Jewish Advocate* states that "the Jewish community is proud of the honor that has come to him."⁷² Interestingly enough, many of these sources claim to speak on behalf of Jewish Americans even though they argue different things. For example, while some sources urge that Jews like Morgenthau bring a positive light to American Jewry, others are fearful of the consequences that having a Jew in public office would create for American Jews more generally. These newspaper sources are important for understanding the vast range of opinions of American Jews. As a result, they are representative of the lack of consensus towards many issues by American Jewry.

⁷¹ Sidney Wallach, "The Jewish Citizen in the U.S.: How Will the American Jew Fare Under a Fascist Dictatorship," *Jewish Advocate*, 6 July, 1934.

⁷² "Morgenthau—Secretary of the U.S. Treasury," *Jewish Advocate*, Jan. 5, 1934.

As Morgenthau's time in office progressed along with the United States' involvement in the war, these contradictory messages regarding Morgenthau begin to converge. Through most of the war, Jewish press coverage of Morgenthau mostly concerned his war bond program. They generally speak of Morgenthau in terms of his government role, not in terms of his Jewishness. By 1944, however, the press again picks up on Morgenthau's "Jewish interests,"⁷³ specifically his role in rescuing the Jews of Europe, his plans for post-war Germany, and his surging role in discussions around a Jewish state in Palestine. In his time as Secretary of the Treasury, Morgenthau's relationship to his Jewish background evolved considerably. Parallel to this was a change in how Jewish newspapers talked about Jews in positions of power. While once urging caution, *The Jewish Exponent* published a piece in July of 1945 praising Morgenthau for accomplishing "the greatest job of financing ever undertaken in America or any other nation,"⁷⁴ during the war. The author also writes that Morgenthau possessed "an understanding of Jewish questions transcended that shown by his late father."⁷⁵

This seems to be the case for several reasons. First of all, after over a decade in Roosevelt's administration, Morgenthau Jr. overcame many challenges and ultimately found success. It is also clear that many of the "Jewish issues" that Morgenthau Sr. either disagreed with or refused to acknowledge, such as Zionism, were embraced by the younger Morgenthau.

While news pieces published in the 1930s feared that any criticism of Morgenthau by non-Jews would have dangerous effects for Jewish people as a whole, when Morgenthau's plan for post-war Germany was attacked, authors wrote that critics were simply "soft-hearted, soft-

⁷³ William B. Saphire, "Keeper of America's Purse Strings: The Story of Henry Morgenthau Jr.," *The Jewish Exponent*, July 13, 1945.

⁷⁴ Saphire, "Keeper of America's Purse Strings."

⁷⁵ Ibid.

peace groups”⁷⁶ and that the plan itself was “rational and penetrating and realistic.”⁷⁷

Morgenthau’s book outlining this plan, *Germany is Our Problem*, was advertised extensively in Jewish publications, appearing in *B’nai B’rith* along with the article “Germans Haven’t Changed.”⁷⁸ These newspaper articles focus on Morgenthau’s accomplishments but reveal larger trends about how Jewish Americans saw themselves as citizens in post-war America. The pre-war anxieties surrounding Jews in positions of power are not evident in articles published after the war. Notably, however, this trend in opinion towards the Morgenthau Plan did not encapsulate all Jewish Americans, many of whom found it troubling. Many Jews who were opposed to the plan did so not because they feared anti-Jewish retaliation but because a Morgenthau-envisioned Germany would not have the capability of making financial restitution with the Jews whose lives it had destroyed.⁷⁹

Sources from Jewish authors writing in Jewish publications for an assumed Jewish audience are extremely valuable when looking at discussions of Morgenthau and his prominence in American politics. On the other hand, it is interesting to see what non-Jewish audiences had to say about Morgenthau during this time period, a subject that will be discussed in the next section of this paper. A series of articles from late 1941 and early 1942 in the *Saturday Evening Post*, however, show an interesting cross section of the two types of sources. Even more importantly, the goal of the series is to showcase Jewish writers each of who “writes from a different point of view.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Herbert Seligmann, “The Morgenthau Plan,” *The Jewish Exponent*, Aug. 17, 1945.

⁷⁸ “Germany is Our Problem, by Henry Morgenthau,” *B’nai B’rith*, Nov. 1945.

⁷⁹ Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962*, NYU press 2009.

⁸⁰ Waldo Frank, “The Jews are Different,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 21, 1942.

The first of the opinion pieces, published in December 1941, the day before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, by a Jewish judge named Jerome Frank, makes an argument from the Jewish perspective, for an American audience, for isolationism. Frank argues that “however much I might be anguished at the plight of oppressed peoples in other countries, Jews or gentiles, I did not believe that America should sacrifice its welfare to rescue them.”⁸¹ He continues to speak on behalf of Jewish Americans for this point of view, saying “there are no available statistics, but, judging from my mail, I should say that most American Jews were on the isolationist side of the fence.”⁸² The fact that he claims to speak for many, if not the majority, of American Jews is significant, especially when considering the subsequent responses to his article as well as the fact that his intended readership was a mix of Jews and non-Jews.

In the rest of his article, he speaks to sentiments facing American Jews that many other Jewish authors at the time were discussing. Franks writes that in response to these sentiments, “the majority of American Jews have adopted a ‘hush policy’” and “have feared that any discussion of ‘the Jewish question’ would activate anti-Jewish feeling” in the United States. Frank argues that Jewish Americans have assimilated so entirely that “For these Jews, the essential factor which, throughout history, has made the Jews a distinctive people has evaporated.” Frank’s piece offers many stunning statements about American Jews as a whole, while at the same time attempting to argue that American Jewry, as a cohesive group, does not exist. Frank separates Jewish Americans into either “American Jews” or “Jews in America.” His distinction between the two groups, though complicated, mainly concerns appearances, country of origin, and level of religious devotion. He argues, however, that “Jews in America” and the lack of assimilation that they exhibit, are harmful to Jewish Americans as an entity. While

⁸¹ Jerome Frank, “Red White and Blue Herring,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, Dec. 6, 1941.

⁸² Jerome Frank.

“American Jews” have assimilated entirely, he argues that “Jews in America” have not. They are neither entirely Jewish nor entirely American for this reason. In many ways, his struggle to define, or even describe, Jewish American identity is the norm during this time period.⁸³

Several months later, notably after the United States had officially entered World War II, a Jewish man by the name of Waldo Frank wrote a response to the previous article. Waldo Frank would agree with Jerome Frank’s concept of a “hush policy” for Jews speaking about Jewish issues. He argues that “if the Fascists have drawn rotten herrings across the trail of the truth concerning Jews, the Jews themselves have not been guiltless in spreading the confusion.”⁸⁵ Unlike Jerome Frank, however, he does not praise assimilation. On the contrary, he says, “if in our community there are Jews who openly reveal their differences as a peculiar people, let us not fear them. They belong here by an old right and a deep bond.”⁸⁶ His article is accompanied by pictures of Jews and Jewish practices, perhaps in an attempt to “educate” non-Jews and Jews alike about Jewishness in America. These pictures include a picture of a synagogue cantor and pictures of the tablets of Moses. Interestingly enough, both of the things depicted are parts of Christian religious culture as well, perhaps in an effort to create a bond with Christian readers who are unfamiliar with Judaism.

The third piece in the series by Milton Mayer, titled “The Case Against the Jew,” spoke of the fear permeating Jewish America during World War II. He wrote that “they know that war breeds chauvinism and that chauvinism breeds bigotry... (and) the Jews of America are afraid.”⁸⁷ Mayer argued that Frank’s “American Jew,” or assimilated Jew, could “change his name from

⁸³ Jerome Frank.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Milton Mayer, “The Case Against the Jew,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 28, 1942.

Schönburg to Belmont and nobody would know he was Jewish, but *he* knew it.”⁸⁸ For this reason, Mayer says, “these adjusting Jews tried to shake the symbols of unassimilability from their coattails” and as a result resented American Jews who were unsuccessful in doing so. He writes, “they regretted that Morgenthau was in the cabinet and begged Roosevelt not to put Frankfurter on the Supreme Court.”⁸⁹ Like Waldo Frank’s article, Mayer’s piece is accompanied by pictures of practicing Jews. Unlike the previous article, the pictures in Mayer’s article show Orthodox Jews in different forms of prayer. Though Mayer agrees with the other two authors in that Jews face a troublesome and dangerous time in America, he effectively argues against assimilation. Mayer writes that an “established” Jew is “prepared for suffering because he has something worth suffering for. The Jew in Warsaw was being crucified for something he was. The Jew in America is being crucified for something he isn’t.”⁹⁰ He concludes his article by arguing that assimilating and rebuking Jewishness will not save the Jew and instead that “the Jew will be saved when he saves his own soul.”⁹¹

The anxieties that these authors express, either as their own or on behalf of American Jewry, are often biased by their own personal beliefs, but they are not uncommon for the time period. Many Jewish Americans feared that if Jews like Morgenthau were in positions of power, they might quickly fall victim to the same plights affecting European Jews. At the same time, American Jews had different backgrounds and perspectives with which they processed this fear. As a result, there is no one American Jewish narrative towards American Jewishness nor is there one opinion on Morgenthau and his position in Roosevelt’s cabinet.

⁸⁸ Mayer, “The Case Against the Jew.”

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Non-Jewish Americans and “Cultural Schizophrenia”

The time period covered in this paper contained the most drastic levels of anti-Semitism in American history.⁹² When asked “Do you think Jews have too much power and influence in this country?” 44% of American respondents answered “yes” in 1942. This number rose to 67% in 1945. Leonard Dinnerstein defines American attitudes towards the Jews as a “cultural schizophrenia.”⁹³ He argues that Jews were viewed as both white and also “rejecters of the Savior.”⁹⁴ In the 1930s and 1940s, American intolerance towards Jewish Americans grew. This fact is obvious both in the rise of anti-Semitic incidents during the time period and also in how anti-Semites interacted with Morgenthau and his position in the Roosevelt administration. This is not to say that all non-Jewish Americans were anti-Semitic. Just as it is impossible to define Jewish identity during this time period, defining non-Jewish perceptions of American Jews would be too much of a generalization in whatever direction taken.

Discussions of Jewish people, anti-Semitism, and the destruction of European Jews was relatively common in the mainstream media. There was not, however, any type of campaign to bring awareness to Americans. Even when reports of the mass murders occurring in Europe became known, they either did not report the news or reported them on the inner pages of the newspapers and magazines.⁹⁵ This did not mean that there was not any mainstream coverage of Jewish issues during the time period. One vehement supporter of Jewish Americans (and one who received significant news coverage) was New York Mayor F.H. LaGuardia. A November 1938 *New York Times* article reported “LaGuardia Urges Rescue of Jews,” saying that “No group

⁹² Leonard Dinnerstein, “Antisemitism in Crisis Times in the United States: The 1920s and 1930s,” *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*, ed. by Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 212.

⁹³ Dinnerstein, 213.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Wyman, 19.

of representative citizens can meet today without considering the tragic plight of our fellow-men in Germany.”⁹⁶ Five years after this article, *The New York Times* again reported on LaGuardia, specifically reporting on his stance that “the time was ripe from the standpoint of psychological warfare...to save the Jewish people of Europe from extinction at the hands of Nazi Germany.”⁹⁷

While LaGuardia represents one type of non-Jewish Americans, there also existed a vocal anti-Semitic faction of Americans. Anti-Semitism permeated all levels of American society during this time period, including those active in political life. A 1935 pamphlet titled “Roosevelt’s Supreme Council: An ‘Alien-Star’ Oriental Revolutionary Power in Control of Washington” declares that the Roosevelt Administration is controlled by “America’s Invisible Governors,” a group of six men consisting of Jewish Americans in the Roosevelt administration and “friends of aliens.” Most interesting is the fact that the men and information about them are listed in the shape of the Star of David. The men listed include Felix Frankfurter, “Dictator of the New Deal,” Louis Brandeis, “‘Father’ of the New Deal,” and Henry Morgenthau, “International Banker.” The graphic’s author concludes the pamphlet by asking “When will America again be ruled by Americans for Americans?”⁹⁸ All of these terms are loosely-veiled forms of anti-Semitism and the fact that their names are arranged in the most well-known Jewish symbol is no coincidence. The document’s creator, Robert Edward Edmondson, a well-known anti-Semitic journalist and pamphleteer, produced thousands of anti-Semitic documents in his lifetime. President Roosevelt and his “collective body of ‘International Jewry’”⁹⁹ were often the targets of his attacks.

⁹⁶ “LaGuardia Urges Rescue of Jews,” *The New York Times*, 26 Nov. 1938.

⁹⁷ “LaGuardia Asks Rescue of Europe’s Jews, Bids House Group Time to Move Aid War,” *The New York Times*, 25 Nov. 1943.

⁹⁸ Robert Edward Edmondson “Roosevelt’s Supreme Council: An ‘Alien Star Oriental Revolutionary-Power in Control of Washington,” *Democratic Party, Women’s Division, National Committee Papers*, 1935.

⁹⁹ Fisch, Dov, “The Libel Trial of Robert Edward Edmondson: 1936-1938,” *American Jewish History* 71, no. 1 (Sept. 1981), 82.

Perhaps one of the most well-known anti-Semites of the time period was Father Charles E. Coughlin, a priest well known at the time for his radio broadcasts and influence in regard to American public opinion.¹⁰⁰ Throughout his life, Coughlin denied perpetuating the anti-Semitic tropes that he often spread. Despite his denials, he often targeted Jewish Americans in his radio broadcasts, among them Henry Morgenthau Jr. In 1934, *The Jewish Exponent* published an article by Abba Hillel Silver detailing Father Coughlin's most recent diatribe against Morgenthau and the Treasury's policy on gold—a "circumcised Jewish metal,"¹⁰¹ Silver wrote sarcastically. Silver was a famous American Jewish rabbi and Zionist leader, so his attack on Coughlin was all the more biting. Coughlin's issue with Morgenthau, other than his stance on the use of gold in U.S. Monetary Policy, was the fact that Morgenthau worked in order to please the "gold controllers" and "the financial Dillingers of world control and internationalism,"¹⁰² all poorly disguised insults towards Jews.

Five years later, Coughlin again targeted Morgenthau in his anti-Semitic rants, incorporating Morgenthau into his attack on "international bankers."¹⁰³ Coughlin charged Morgenthau with "having set up a 'financial dictatorship' through the \$2,000,000,000 stabilization fund which...he did not have to report to anyone but President Roosevelt."¹⁰⁴ Morgenthau was just one of Jewish leaders that Coughlin attacked because of his belief that Jews in power were trying to destroy Christian civilization.¹⁰⁵ Coughlin's attacks on Morgenthau are remarkable because of the substantial audience that he had to air his anti-Semitic grievances

¹⁰⁰ Charles Coughlin, an American Catholic priest, was famous worldwide for his radio talks that attracted millions of listeners. Ronald Modras, "Father Coughlin and Anti-Semitism: Fifty Years Later," *Journal of Church and State* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1989), 231.

¹⁰¹ Abba Hillel Silver, "Father Coughlin," *The Jewish Exponent*, May 18, 1934.

¹⁰² Silver.

¹⁰³ "Coughling Attacks Morgenthau as 'Financial Dictator'; Hits Jewish Bankers," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency News*, Feb. 6, 1939.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Modras, 234.

against American Jewry. It is important to note that while Coughlin's radio broadcasts reached millions of Americans, only 6% of Americans listened to him regularly.¹⁰⁶ A 1940 survey revealed, however, that 37% of those who listened agreed with what he said even if they were not regular listeners.¹⁰⁷ It is clear that despite the size of his actual listening audience, Coughlin gave a voice to many of the beliefs, opinions, and prejudices held by other Americans. Many times, this meant airing prejudices towards American Jewry.

Other Americans without the platform that Coughlin had were also able to make their views heard, many times through private letters. From 1941 to 1965, well after Morgenthau retired from public service, Austin J. App wrote dozens of letters to newspapers, government officials, and other private citizens outlining his displeasures throughout what he deemed to be "the Morgenthau Era."¹⁰⁸ At the time, App was a relatively unknown English professor but within years of the end of World War II, became one of the most ardent Holocaust deniers.¹⁰⁹ In 1966, App compiled his letters and published a book "to protest the continuing Morgenthauistic dealing in hate towards things German, to right where possible the monstrous wrongs it has done, and to check the appeasement of Communist imperialism..."¹¹⁰ While App was just one of many Americans who disagreed with Morgenthau's plan for post-war Germany, it quickly became clear that his disagreements with Morgenthau were not on the basis of policy but because Morgenthau stood in contrast to App's "Christian philosophy of society and

¹⁰⁶ Stember, 113.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Austin J. App, *Morgenthau Era Letters* (Philadelphia: Boniface Press, 1966), i.

¹⁰⁹ Many Holocaust deniers attribute their beliefs to App's work from the post-war period. Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust, The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 85-86.

¹¹⁰ App, i.

government.”¹¹¹ Though there is overwhelming evidence beyond these letters of App’s anti-Semitic views, the letters frame his views specifically in an attack on Morgenthau.

As time passed and the letters become more detailed, App’s stances became increasingly anti-Semitic. He wrote directly to Morgenthau in October 1944 on the topic of Morgenthau’s “notorious plan for destroying...Germany so that eighty million people could slowly die of undernourishment without our having to waste poison gas or bullets to kill them off individually.”¹¹² At the point in time in which this letter was written, Morgenthau’s prominence in post-war planning was well-known, which is likely why App’s letters become more and more targeted. App is clearly referring to the ways in which Nazi Germany murdered the Jews of Europe. He quickly connects this claim with Morgenthau’s Jewishness, saying “it seemed to me particularly felicitous that the author of this proposal should be an American of the Jewish persuasion, which has always been accused of holding and practicing the barbarism expressed in the words, ‘eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.’”¹¹³ App not only personally criticizes Morgenthau for being Jewish but makes the claim that Morgenthau is governing and implementing policy on behalf of Jewish—not “American”—interests.

App continued this attack even after the war concluded and Morgenthau no longer served as Secretary of the Treasury. In March 1946, App wrote a letter to the editor of *The American Mercury*, a well-known literary magazine published in New York about an article in which German bishops were criticized for inaction during the Holocaust. In the letter, App criticized the author of the article, saying the bishop should have been criticized for doing nothing about “the Morgenthau Plan which has already killed more German babies than there ever were Jews in

¹¹¹ App, ii.

¹¹² Ibid, 40.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Germany.”¹¹⁴ In reality, the Morgenthau Plan was not implemented, but App’s letters are not generally accurate in terms of factual information. They do, however, give insight into how extremist non-Jewish Americans viewed American Jewry, especially in how he uses Morgenthau as a way to unpack his views on the United States, Germany, and World War II.

While App’s letters began after the United States entered into the war, anti-Semitic views towards Jews and war was not a new phenomenon. In the late 1930s, as the United States inched closer to war, many Americans were under the impression that anti-Nazi and pro-war sentiment in the United States was stirred up by American Jewry.¹¹⁵ Though most Americans would have refused to admit it, their opinion that interventionist policy was Jewish-led was all a part of Hitler’s strategy of “raising the ‘Jewish Question’ in order to cast suspicions on Jews across the world.”¹¹⁶ In App’s letter, Morgenthau became the center of this “Jewish Question.”

While non-Jewish press sources covered Morgenthau in a governmental capacity, they generally do not go out of their way to comment on his Jewish background. An exception to this is an article from *The Washington Post* in 1938 titled “Nazi Press Calls Morgenthau Red War Conspirator.”¹¹⁷ In this article, *The Post* sheds light on the fact that the propaganda arm of the Nazi regime “violently attacked United States Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau as an alleged leader of international Jewish-Bolshevist conspiracy, which is preparing a new war, apparently against Germany.”¹¹⁸ The “Jewish-Bolshevist conspiracy” mentioned in the article is a classic use of anti-Semitic language used in this time period.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 63.

¹¹⁵ Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2013), 145.

¹¹⁶ Breitman and Lichtman, 144.

¹¹⁷ “Nazi Press Calls Morgenthau Red War Conspirator,” *The Washington Post*, Aug. 25, 1938.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

While *The Washington Post*'s coverage of this event is interesting in itself, even more so are the comparisons that can be drawn between Nazi language towards Jews and the words used by Coughlin and other Americans in talking about Morgenthau. Both the Nazi press and anti-Semites in the United States refer to the idea of an "international Jewry" that is both powerful and harmful to non-Jews. These sources are an essential backdrop for the sources produced by American Jewry at this time. Not only do they provide context to the climate that American Jews operated in, they also give insight into how non-Jews perceived American Jewishness before and during World War II.

"There is no other kind of peace except a people's peace."¹¹⁹

In his now infamous book, *The Morgenthau Plan*, Henry Morgenthau Jr. laid out a plan in 1945 for the future of Germany so that the world would not see a repetition of the first half of the twentieth century. He dedicated the book to his sons "with the hope that neither they nor their children will have to fight in another war."¹²⁰ Though the book received considerable backlash, especially from anti-Semites who claimed the plan was a form of retribution driven by Morgenthau's Jewishness, it mentions the word "Jew" only once. It is, according to Morgenthau a plan for the people—whoever "the people" may be.

In many ways, this idea of a "people's peace" is symbolic of Morgenthau's time in government. He walked a fine line between his interests as an American and as an American Jew. Arguably, his attitude towards keeping the peace was his greatest weakness. He is widely criticized for valuing his friendship with President Roosevelt over his righteous anger over the refugee and rescue policy of European Jewry. Morgenthau faced criticism either way. He could not be "too Jewish," but he also could not abandon American and European Jews. His attitude

¹¹⁹ Henry Morgenthau Jr., *Germany is Our Problem*, New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1945.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

towards Jewishness in the earlier part of his life—that it was, above all, a hinderance—manifested itself in many ways. For this reason, Morgenthau is representative not of American Jewry but of the hazards they faced from 1934-1945.

Ironically, Morgenthau left government service in 1945—the year that Jewish historians label as the start of the “Golden Age”¹²¹ for American Jewry. This period saw a decline of anti-Semitism, the peak of Zionist sentiment in America, and a large influx of Jewish survivors of Nazism in Europe to the United States. Morgenthau embarked on a fundraising campaign for a Jewish state in Palestine and embraced his newfound role as a leader in American Jewry. His reputation in non-Jewish circles was not as rosy. In his plan for Germany, Morgenthau wished that “the threat of war be taken away from our backs.”¹²² To let Germany rise for a third time “may well be fatal to civilization.”¹²³ Non-Jews saw this as a plan for “Jewish retribution,” not as a plan for “a people’s peace.”¹²⁵

Regardless of non-Jewish reaction to the Morgenthau Plan, it is clear that life was better for American Jewry in the post-war period than it had been before, generally speaking. It can also be argued that many aspects of the Morgenthau Plan were implemented by the Allied nations, though under a different name. This is not to say that the problems Jewish Americans struggled with from 1934 disappeared with the fall of Nazi Germany. They were, however, better equipped and more united than they had been before. American Jews do not and did not experience the systematic horror that occurred in Nazi Germany during the 1930s and 1940s. They do, however, face instances of implicit and explicit anti-Semitism and discrimination in the

¹²¹ Lucy Dawidowicz, *On Equal Terms: Jew in American, 1881-1981* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 125.

¹²² Morgenthau Jr., 15.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Moreira.

present moment like they did from 1934-1945. For this reason, it is essential not only to understand how non-Jewish Americans perceived American Jewishness but also how Jewish Americans, like Henry Morgenthau Jr., saw themselves in relation to being Jewish.

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