

# IS IT GOOD FOR THE JEWS?

*The Crisis of America's  
Israel Lobby*

Stephen Schwartz



Doubleday

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*Dedicated to L.D.<sup>2</sup>  
for their inspiration;  
to the Jewish genius of Larry David;  
and to the “hidden imam”—  
with “memories of grapes and pears”*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Washington-Dubrovnik-Amsterdam-Warsaw-Jerusalem  
2004–2008

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# INTRODUCTION

*A Schande for the Goyim*

“A lobby is like a night flower,” Steven J. Rosen, former policy director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), is reported to have written in an internal memorandum. “It flourishes in the dark and dies in the sun.” Unfortunately, however, Washington is not a nocturnal town. Most business is transacted during the day, and Washingtonians rest at night. Café and bar life is limited even when compared to less important cities such as Frankfurt and Zurich, to say nothing of New York. That and its provincial love of gossip ensure that many significant actions taken in Washington, certainly by institutions and individuals as powerful as AIPAC and Rosen, will inevitably be made public.

The white marble and limestone of official Washington give it the feeling of a holy city, the center of a great empire. There is an implied chastity in the Capitol, the White House, and the Lincoln Memorial, as well as the museums and colleges and religious sites. In its own way there is no city more American, or at least more intellectually self-conscious of its American identity. Even the Pentagon has a uniquely American quality: the first thing a visitor sees on getting past the security checks is a vast shopping mall, offering everything from sports shoes and aspirin to hot lasagna and military badges. This is because, first, there are few businesses in the area around the building, and second, employees, especially senior and middle staff, are expected to remain in the building throughout their workday. For those important enough, meals may be served at their desks.

I had first come to Washington from California in my mid-thirties, during the Reagan era. My stays were brief, however, and I did not make the capital a home until sixteen years later, at the beginning of George W. Bush’s first term. In the meantime I had gone from San Francisco, where I had lived for forty-eight years, to the city of Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and an investigation of Muslim radicalism that would produce my book *The Two Faces of Islam*. But I had also been covering Jewish affairs since 1992 for the *Forward*, formerly a Yiddish daily, reinvented as a national Jewish weekly in English. At the end of 2000 I took a job as Washington bureau chief for the *Forward*.

Like any other sojourner from the hinterlands, in 2000 no less than in 1984, I was dazzled by the imperial gravitas of the Hill and its monumental institutions. But, as with any normal person, it eventually grew familiar. There came a time when visiting the Pentagon for me was interesting mainly

because you could buy terrific ice cream so near the offices I went to. Otherwise it was about as exciting as the police headquarters and bottom-rung courts in the municipal Hall of Justice I had covered as a reporter in San Francisco.

Nevertheless, I always had the sense that federal employment in Washington was a special calling one had, after all, taken an oath before the flag and been sworn in as a U.S. government official. One owed the country something for that privilege. My vision was less that of James Stewart in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* than that of William Holden as a naively liberal newspaperman in the 1950 film *Born Yesterday*.

As summer 2004 drew to a close I traveled from Washington to another beautiful, inspiring, and historic city of white stone, distinguished in the annals of democracy: Dubrovnik in Croatia. In 1777 the illustrious commercial republic on the Adriatic coast, then called Ragusa, had been the first state in the world to acknowledge American independence. I went there to deliver a research paper on local Jewish history. The weather was perfect, and the houses, churches, and palaces of marble and limestone in white Dubrovnik shone in the sun like the most prominent buildings in Washington.

There, walking with a lovely American woman and her little dog, I first received word of the AIPAC-Pentagon spy scandal. It was written up in the *International Herald Tribune* at the end of August. The FBI was investigating a minor Defense Department official, Lawrence Anthony Franklin, age fifty-eight, for handing over secret information to Israel through AIPAC. Young, ebullient AIPAC spokesperson Josh Block hotly denied the accusations. In a situation potentially much worse than the 1985 case of Jonathan J. Pollard, a spy for Israel detected in the civilian ranks of U.S. naval intelligence, “America’s Pro-Israel Lobby,” as AIPAC prefers to be called, would be accused of espionage, having been caught with its hands in the world’s most alluring cookie jar: the Pentagon.

Foreign-policy influence in Washington is always, finally, about the Defense Department and its universe of contracts. This was illustrated when AIPAC lost the 1981 battle over the sale of AWACS planes to the Saudi monarchy and was reinforced when U.S.-Israeli military cooperation resumed with the lifting of U.S. sanctions imposed after Israel’s 1982 incursion into Lebanon. Vendors and lobbyists, representing every industrial, political, and state interest, from Saudi front men recycling their cash and technology offers in cahoots with shady enterprises in Sudan to run-of-the-mill promoters of American corporate giants and think tanks, always buzzed around the building.

Soon Franklin’s fellow targets in the investigation were named. They were AIPAC policy director Steve Rosen and an Iran expert for the organization, Keith Weissman. Rosen and Weissman would be accused of transferring secret information given to them by Franklin, to Israeli embassy political officer Naor Gilon and another Israeli diplomat, Rafi Barak.

I was not particularly close to Rosen, but everybody who covered Jewish Washington as a reporter had met and observed the AIPAC chief commissar, who was in his early sixties, with short gray hair. He resembled the New York banker Felix Rohatyn, but unlike the urbane Manhattanite, his character was crude. AIPAC had once pressured the *Washington Jewish Week* to kill a story about a birthday party for Rosen at the organization’s headquarters, where a stripper performed.

On Middle East policy and its related issues, Rosen was almost comically hard nosed, but he had



the eyes of a shark and conveyed an air of something close to physical intimidation. It was said that his family had been Stalinist Communists, and Rosen himself was tarred with that association, which was generally employed to suggest that he had never lost the ruthlessness characteristic of the Muscovite milieu.

A lunch with Rosen was like meeting with a Balkan secret police official. One sat across the table and waited out the interrogation. I quickly learned from him that AIPAC, the American Jewish Committee (AJC), and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL)—the trifecta of the American Jewish lobbies—hated each other. But the only issues on which the groups seemed to disagree involved turf, personal rivalry, and cultural heritage. AJC came from a German Jewish background, ADL had originated in the period when millions of East European Jews immigrated to this country, and AIPAC prided itself on its homegrown American style. Each represented one of the great eras of Jewish life in America. While the Gentile world, both sophisticated and stupid, views “the Jewish lobby” as a single, homogeneous, and even monolithic body, it is anything but. It lacks the power, no less than the unity of will and vision, that many people ascribe to it. There is no single aim, tradition, or process by which Jewish interests are represented in the United States or through which U.S.-Israeli relations are clarified. Nor is it clear that Israel needs an elaborate American lobby as much as AIPAC needs Israel. Israelis often express contempt for irreligiosity, ultraliberalism, and unreliability among American Jews, and they have the example of American Jewish inefficacy in preventing the Holocaust to remind them that American Jews are involved in something that might best be called “Jewishness lite.” American Jews seem to cleave to Israel as much to overcome long-enduring feelings of guilt over their passivity during the Holocaust as for love of Zion.

I knew Larry Franklin much better, since we had met and spoken a few times. Graying and rumpled with a bushy mustache, Larry was not a typical Beltway policy wonk, although he has a doctorate in Asian affairs, speaks Farsi, and was an Iran desk officer in the Defense Department’s office of Near East and South Asia. Larry is an extremely ordinary Gentile from Philadelphia who started out as a cabdriver and considers himself a street-smart, working-class guy. He made his way up through the armed forces and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) to the Pentagon, where he was a colonel in the Air Force Reserve. He held a Top Secret clearance with access to “Sensitive Compartmented Information” (SCI). SCI includes information of which the unauthorized disclosure could “cause irreparable injury to the United States or be used to advantage by a foreign nation.”

Larry lived with his large family in the West Virginia panhandle community of Kearneysville, which with the expansion of the Washington metro area has become a commuter town. His duties at the Pentagon in 2003 included liaison with the leading Iraqi Shia Muslim clerics in the United States, who, as it happened, were also my close friends. I helped introduce some of them to Larry as the Iraq war approached. They became known as “Shia-cons,” a Shia parallel with the neoconservatives or “neocons,” for their enthusiastic backing of the war against Saddam. Larry, who clearly supported the war in Iraq, if only because it was his job to do so, attended “Shia-con” parleys, held through a grab bag organization called the Universal Muslim Association of America (UMAA), newly minted to represent Shia interests. He spent hours picking the brains of the Shia clerics about the situation in Iraq, to discern who would support U.S. policy and how factions in the U.S. community lined up with those in Iraq itself. Presumably, the information was handed over to his superiors. Later, I spoke to Larry repeatedly about ordinary Pentagon affairs. There was nothing charismatic or commanding

about him. He was a very minor figure in something that would become a major drama.

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Weissman I knew only secondhand. He was academic in background, with Middle East expertise. He had a reputation as an informal, even slightly slovenly person, but cold, and interested only in specific agenda items involving Israel's relations with the eastern Mediterranean countries. He seemed indifferent to anything other than his working tasks and would not volunteer information on those he lobbied, unlike the expansive and manipulative Rosen.

The AIPAC scandal could not have come at a worse time. In 2004, powerful Jews stood accused of subverting the American Republic and, for their selfish goals, driving the country toward war. Descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, adherents of the Hebrew faith and devotees of Old Testament law, they were and are publicly alleged to hold a special loyalty to their own kind, above their American citizenship. While their own coddled offspring would stay far from gunfire and bombs, the Jews and their pawns, it is said, send the children of poor Gentiles to die at the hands of a powerful enemy—whom the Jews, rather than ordinary Americans, have caused to hate America. The so-called tyrants whom Americans are expected to die overthrowing have done America no harm. Indeed, the representatives of the supposed enemy have repeated many times that no conflict between them and America would take place if America were to cease following the counsels and suffering the control of Jewry.

World-famous celebrities, populist politicians, elitist intellectuals, hard-core radical leftists, and disaffected public servants unite to accuse the President of the United States of dishonesty in service to Jewish interests by inventing pretexts to extend American military power overseas. The president is charged by many opinion makers with having broken the law to help the Jewish war-lovers carry out their nefarious scheme. The Jews have fostered a war in the name of democracy when mean economic interest is what really stands behind the carnage, the destruction of families, the shocking atrocities, and the hatred loosed against America by a horrified world. Furthermore, it is said with increasing openness by some, Jews embody values alien to America and have contaminated the country through their control of journalism and popular entertainment. America and its traditional beliefs are perceived as fatally vulnerable to foreign cultural and political infiltration.

The scenario should be familiar to any American, or, for that matter, anybody paying attention anywhere in the world in the year 2006. It is the argument offered in millions of words of news commentary and on the Internet, in almost every language and to followers of every religion, to explain the decision of George W. Bush to intervene in Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein.

The neoconservatives are the main group identified with the Jews in supposedly undermining American constitutional power to launch an armed conflict. They allegedly act in the interest of Israel rather than the United States. The rest of the litany is almost too familiar to enumerate: an unjustified war in Iraq against a ruler who posed no threat, as well as an Arab and Islamic adversary that, it is said, would harbor no grudge against America—rather, would love America—were it not for American support of Israel. But the neoconservatives, one is told, pay no attention to the logic of history or cultures: they are guided by the mysterious writings of a certain Leo Strauss, an obscure

philosopher who mainly taught at the University of Chicago and who is charged with forging a cynical power ideology that inspires the “neocons” to lie for whatever purpose they (in their elite wisdom) consider worthy.

Global stars of music, film, and the literary class have transformed these primitive claims into artifacts of popular culture: a decrepit Mick Jagger sang about a “Sweet Neo Con” in an apparent jab at President Bush and his ally, British prime minister Tony Blair. Leftist actor Tim Robbins produced a vile play, *Embedded*, with a forged quotation attributed to Strauss, according to which the neoconservatives harbor the aim of “controlling the unintelligent majority.” The apparent argument was that Straussians had manipulated America into war in Iraq in the belief that blood would unify Americans behind Bush. The play was staged, appropriately enough, in New York at the Public Theater, the brainchild of avant-garde Jewish theater impresario and ex-Communist Joseph Papp.

In the underside of the culture, Strauss and the neoconservatives have become topics for a series of hysterical, defamatory, shoddy screeds—thirty years after the philosopher died. Contentions by the authors of such works, including the Canadian academic Shadia B. Drury, are so bizarre that one is hard-pressed to respond to them appropriately. Drury’s book *Leo Strauss and the American Right*, published in 1999, declared, “Relying on the conflict between America’s puritanical spirit and her liberal regime, the neoconservative strategy consists in driving a wedge between American democracy and American liberalism.” Thus, as I understand it, for Drury the neoconservative commitment to democracy is really authoritarian manipulation. These conceptions almost exactly reproduce the claims made in the spurious “Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” in which Jews are portrayed as using the masses to suppress the masses.

Electoral rabble-rousers such as Virginia’s Democratic congressman Jim Moran have stated, “If it were not for the strong support of the Jewish community for this war with Iraq, we would not be doing this.” The disgraceful Moran was seconded by South Carolina Democratic senator Ernest C. Hollings, who wrote, “With Iraq no threat, why invade a sovereign country? The answer: President Bush’s policy to secure Israel.” Hollings went on to insist on the floor of the Senate that the Iraq war was begun “to secure our friend, Israel...everybody knows it.” Georgia Democratic congresswoman Cynthia McKinney was particularly egregious, declaring, “What is...disturbing to me is that many pro-Israeli lawmakers sit on the House International Relations Committee despite the obvious conflict of interest that their emotional attachments to Israel cause.... The Israeli occupation of all territories must end, including Congress.” Even former Senator Gary Hart declaimed, “I don’t think there is going to be peace between Israel and the Palestinians so long as we’re in Iraq.”

Bashing the Iraq intervention as a product of the neoconservatives and their Jewish associations is also a well-established habit among elite media commentators. Columnist Robert Novak, a longtime critic of Israel who opposed the first Gulf War, wrote at the end of 2002, “War with Iraq may not be inevitable but is highly probable. That it looks like [Israeli leader Ariel] Sharon’s war disturbs Americans.” Eric Alterman of *The Nation* similarly opined, “[T]he idea of a new war to remove Saddam was partially conceived at the behest of Likud politician Benjamin Netanyahu.” He wrote dismissively of “Jewish hard liners” and added, “What’s more, many of these same Jews joined... what may have been a ruse designed to embroil America in a broad military conflagration that would help smite Israel’s enemies.” Meanwhile, *Doonesbury* comic writer Garry Trudeau, whose strip has not been funny for decades, falsely accused a midlevel Washington policy figure and strong supporter

of Israel, Richard Perle, of responsibility for the invasion of Iraq.

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Western leftists generally have descended into depths of paranoid shrillness not seen since the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination. They repeatedly (and incoherently) charge that Bush and Blair are tools of “big oil” and “Jewish neocons.” In both countries, legal proceedings are demanded against the political leaders who “lied their countries into war.” A former Central Intelligence Agency expert on Osama bin Laden, Michael Scheuer, offered a backhanded “compliment” to Israel on its “ability to control debate in the United States.” This followed a stream of abuse by Scheuer to the effect that Israel’s lobbying of Congress amounted to “a clandestine activity, a covert activity.” Scheuer added, “I just find the whole debate in the United States unbearably restricted with the inability to factually discuss what goes on between our two countries.” Karen Kwiatkowski, a former U.S. Air Force colonel and very, very minor Pentagon official, likewise railed against “high clearances granted to publicly and at times, rabidly, pro-Likud past and present political appointees” among his superiors in the Defense Department.

The neocons, it has been argued, swindled America into combat in Iraq thanks to the machinations of Jewish reporter Judith Miller of the Jewish-owned *New York Times* and by stereotyping of the Muslim enemy in films and on television. Finally, it is asserted by opponents of the Iraq war, foes of the alliance with Israel, and critics of Jewish influence that America must come first. *America first!*

In March 2006, a new Jew-baiting front was opened up in the American discourse when two academics, John J. Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen M. Walt, then–academic dean of Harvard’s prestigious Kennedy School of Government, issued an anti-Semitic manifesto entitled “The Israel Lobby and American Foreign Policy.” Decorated with its Harvard seal of approval, this so-called faculty research working paper was no more a respectable academic product than were the “studies” by ultranationalist professors in Germany in the nineteenth century or in Eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, railing against the Jews.

The professors argued that the Jewish lobby controls—that is, dominates, not merely influences—the American outlook on the Middle East. Their paper was based not on any sort of empirical investigation of political events but on misconstrued media coverage, ridiculous suppositions, and pure fantasy. In their minds, and in their text, Larry Franklin was transformed into “a key Pentagon official,” a description with only one aim: to exaggerate his power and thus further attack the Jews and AIPAC. In the view of Mearsheimer and Walt, all the Jews of a pro-Israel persuasion, including neoconservatives and AIPAC leaders, are members of the same body. This “lobby” even comprises, aside from AIPAC and the Jewish neocons, anyone who shares the views of the neocons, including the Gentile John Bolton and the Arab Shia Fouad Ajami.

Mearsheimer and Walt also regurgitated the shoddiest secondhand clichés about the Muslim world in pursuit of their anti-Jewish crusade. According to them “There is no question, for example, that many al-Qaeda leaders, including bin Laden, are motivated by Israel’s presence in Jerusalem and the plight of the Palestinians.” Only distant commentators with no knowledge whatever of Islamic radicalism could make such an absurd claim. When the Saudi-financed al-Qaeda allied with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to fight in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, where the IMU was wiped out, who among the jihadists thought the combat in Central Asia had anything to do with Jerusalem? Who among the Saudi extremists who have infiltrated the Chechen struggle in Russia

believes that war in the Caucasus has anything to do with Palestine? When Saudi-backed radicals kill in Saudi Arabia itself, the Philippines, and Indonesia, who imagines these actions have anything to do with Israel?

The Mearsheimer-Walt travesty was almost immediately endorsed with great glee by the most corrosively anti-Israel entities in America: the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a Saudi-financed front for the terrorist Hamas movement, plus the U.S. office of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and former Ku Klux Klan promoter David Duke. As it happens, the paper came out within three months of the delivery of a \$20 million gift to Harvard from Saudi prince Alwaleed bin Talal bin Abd al-Aziz al-Sa'ud.

The most prominent victim of this defamatory campaign has been former deputy defense secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz, now president of the World Bank. The *New York Review of Books* contributed to this "debate" by printing a David Levine caricature of Wolfowitz with the unmistakable leer of a literal wolf; the cartoon would not have been out of place in the Nazi *Der Stürmer*.

Remarkably, the American Jewish leadership did not defend Wolfowitz or the younger Washington neoconservatives associated with him, such as William Kristol, editor of the *Weekly Standard*. Wolfowitz and the neocons were frightening to the American Jewish leadership, problem cases creating quicksands in which blame would fall on the Jews for events in which they had played almost no role.

But while the most prominent Jewish leaders in AJC, ADL, and AIPAC acted as if they had never heard of Wolfowitz or the other neoconservatives, Wolfowitz risked becoming an American equivalent of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the victim of infamous Jew-baiters in France. The specter of an American Dreyfus had haunted American Jews for a century. Now it had come shockingly close to reality. Yet a silence like velvet cloaked that particular topic.

If these allegations have become commonplace in America and the world today, they should also be familiar. There is nothing new in this witches' brew of magical thinking, slander, rumor, superstition, prejudice, *lumpen* intellectuality, and demagoguery.

Indeed, the anti-Jewish, antineoconservative, "antiwar" hysteria of the twenty-first century weirdly revives the atmosphere in the United States at the end of the 1930s, with the approach of the Second World War, but in a metastasized, malignant, and more menacing form. Sixty-five years ago it was the Germans who had, according to isolationists, been provoked by the Jews into attacking the Western democracies. Hitler, like bin Laden, had repeatedly offered peace to the West if the democracies would accede to his demand to simply be left alone. Just as it is said today that Saddam posed no threat to the United States, so was it shouted far and wide that the depredations of Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese imperialists were no affair of ours and that the Axis powers had no interest in a war with us. And just as it is repeated that bin Laden and Saddam are natural enemies rather than accomplices, so antiwar propagandists of the late 1930s insisted that Hitler and Mussolini were rivals rather than allies.

Then and now, the Jews were portrayed as rapacious for conflict, destruction, and chaos, whether supposedly following the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” the Talmud, or the polemics of Karl Marx. Like President Bush today, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was said to have violated the law and employed other devious means to satisfy Jewish bloodlust when he provided naval vessels to the embattled British before U.S. entry into the Second World War.

Historical shadows stand behind people such as Mick Jagger as well as Moran, Hollings, McKinney, and Hart when they rain filth on the Jews and Israel. In the 1930s, the hero aviator Charles Lindbergh Jr. lashed out, in a speech in Des Moines on September 11, 1941, at “the British, the Jews, and the Roosevelt administration” for “pressing” the United States to war with Germany. (Perhaps conspiratorialists can find significance in the coincidence of dates.)

Virginia’s Moran had his counterpart then, in the form of Jacob Thorkelson, a Montana Republican who castigated his critics as those “no doubt of the variety which prefers the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion to the Constitution of the United States.” Lindbergh and Thorkelson were united in support of an isolationist movement that called itself “America First.” Meanwhile, in the American literary and artistic elite of the 1930s, distaste for the Jews was almost a given: T. S. Eliot, E. E. Cummings, and Ezra Pound were all notorious for it, and open admirers of Nazism included such individuals as the architect Philip C. Johnson. It is notable, however, that at the time of Lindbergh, Thorkelson, and Pound, few in American journalism would have retailed the sinister commodity today offered by Robert Novak and others like him. This is a point to which we will return: namely, that the crude anti-Jewish prejudice that was largely disreputable to Americans in the era of Hitler was mainstreamed in the United States a half century later, after the commencement of the Iraq war in 2003, with the rise of conspiracy agitation against the neocons.

But there is another difference between the present moment and the beginning of the Second World War. Then, agitators against the Jews were beaten (literally) in the streets of American cities, whereas today the hue and cry against the neoconservatives is barely discussed in the suites of the Jewish domestic and Israel lobbies and is elsewhere a phenomenon nobody wishes to confront.

Thus, the Jewish lobbies—AJC and ADL, as well as AIPAC—responded with further indifference to efforts to sweep the neoconservatives out of public life and into jail, as in the case of I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, former chief of staff to vice president Dick Cheney. (Though it is not often mentioned in press reports, Libby is Jewish.) The silence of the lobbies was a product of timidity rather than guilt when it came to the neocons, because the lobbies had well and truly kept their distance from the latter. But the lobbies also reacted with complete paralysis when AIPAC’s top operative, Steve Rosen, was arrested and charged with breaches of U.S. governmental security.

The AIPAC scandal was what older Jews called “a *schande* for the *goyim*,” that is, a public embarrassment to the Jews that calls attention to a level of power and influence that many Jews recognize exists but which few wish to see exposed to the broader public. Such disclosure is typically considered “bad for the Jews.” Yet far worse for the Jews is the abject failure of will visible among the leaders of the Jewish organizations.

Regarding the neocons, who were not and are not products of the American Jewish community leadership, the latter have failed their first major test of the twenty-first century. When the neocon

embarked on a major attempt to positively transform the Middle East in the direction of capitalism and democracy, the Jewish leadership refused to become significantly involved. This abstention, as I will argue at length, is largely due to the seemingly unbreakable bond between Jews and the Democrats. But the AIPAC controversy was different; there the Israel lobby exposed its incompetence more than its pusillanimity and the burden of its political obligations. The AIPAC scandal could sink the flagship vessel of American Jewish power.

Rosen and Weissman were indicted on charges of conspiracy and overt acts involving transmission of classified information to unauthorized recipients. Rosen faced twenty years' imprisonment and Weissman ten years.

The two had been informed by the FBI of its interest in them from the beginning of August 2001. Questioned by the feds about his relations with Franklin, Rosen lied and denied they existed. The Israeli daily *Haaretz* reported that the FBI was determined to complete a serious investigation of AIPAC, encompassing the overall operations of the lobby and not merely the Franklin case.

But understanding what happened to Franklin was not simple. Franklin pled guilty and received a 12½-year sentence, contingent on his testimony against Rosen and Weissman. Judge T. S. Ellis II, who pronounced sentence, referred to the Franklin matter as “a very odd case.” Franklin testified that while employed in the Pentagon, with access at the highest level of decision making, he had become concerned about events involving Iran and had decided to try contacting the National Security Council via AIPAC. Considering that Franklin's then boss, Donald Rumsfeld, sits on the NSC and is the cabinet's most strident critic of Iran, the story makes no sense. That someone in the security establishment—FBI or CIA, most likely—with an animus toward AIPAC, the neoconservatives, and all other Jews and friends of Jews would seize on a contact between Franklin and Rosen to entrain AIPAC does make sense.

With the speed of an avalanche, the twenty-year career of Steve Rosen, as the private Jewish official with more power on the Hill than any other in Washington history, began collapsing. And AIPAC's castle could crash to the ground with him.

It would be bad enough for Steve Rosen, once known (and feared) universally in Washington, to land behind bars. But the outcome of the Rosen case could also result in AIPAC being ordered to register as a lobby for a foreign government. This would seriously undermine its fund-raising abilities and inexorably reduce it to a body with no more clout than a chamber of commerce for a former Soviet republic. In addition to which, of course, the long-asserted canard of American Jewish “double loyalty” to the United States and Israel could gain widespread credibility.

I intended originally to make this book no more than an accurate account of events I witnessed about which absurd misrepresentations had been made throughout the land and across the globe. But in its writing I developed a thesis: that the question of *who* decides what is good for the Jews is, in the end, more important and compelling than a mere statement of opinion as to *what* is good for the Jews. The good of the American Jewish community has more often been furthered by courageous nonconforming individuals or small groups than by elaborate defense and lobbying organizations and impressive political alliances.

The disastrous AIPAC affair came at the end of a long road marked by one abdication after another by America's top Jewish leadership. Refusal to fight pro-Nazi elements in the streets of New York in the late 1930s, surrender to the political blandishments of a corrupt Democratic Party, obliviousness about the Holocaust, evasion of problems involving Jewish-black relations, disdain for the origins of neoconservatives, incapacity to recognize the horrific danger posed by Saudi Wahhabism (the cult that inspires al-Qaeda), time wasted on exaggerated fears about Christian fundamentalists, anxiety over Jewish and Israeli associations with American policy in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, refusal to defend the younger neoconservatives during the Iraq intervention, diffidence about the Iraq war itself—all led inevitably to lethargy, and AIPAC found itself in serious trouble.

Above all, lost in the imaginary New Deal theme park of Democratic rhetoric, eternally feeling as if they had just got off the boat from Europe and were still huddled on the Lower East Side, the mainstream Jewish leadership simply could not grasp that the initiative in American policies relevant to Jews had been seized by the neoconservative “third force,” representing neither the traditional domestic Jewish defense groups such as AJC and ADL nor the aggressive pro-Israel lobby AIPAC. They were especially disturbed that the neocons had forged a new political alliance with the Republicans. The Jewish leadership that, throughout its universal history, has achieved the most—the American Jews—now finds itself on the edge of an abyss. But the warning signs were always there for those who were willing to do something other than keep their heads down and their actions discreet.

The moment has come for a consequential response to the tidal wave of Jew-baiting lies that has swept across America since the Iraq intervention began.

That is the matter this book will address.



## ★ ASSAULT ON “JEW YORK”

*Jewish Self-Defense Before the Lobby*

He was seventeen, sensitive, with brooding eyes, and wept easily; little more than five feet tall, slender and dark, but handsome. He felt alone, angry, and confused, and outrage overwhelmed him.

He was a Jew. And he had a gun.

Herschel Feibel Grynszpan was born in Hannover, Germany, but held Polish nationality. In 1938, he had undergone three years of chaos. The Nazis were in power, and he was not allowed to become an apprentice or otherwise gain employment. He wanted to go to Palestine but found no way to get there, even after a year spent studying Hebrew. A visa to the Promised Land was refused him. Finally he went to Belgium, then crossed the border to France without authorization.

He was a refugee, an illegal immigrant, non-Christian, unemployed, a troubled youth.

He had an uncle and aunt, Abraham and Clara Grynszpan, in Paris. Abraham Grynszpan was a tailor; the family spoke Yiddish better than French. France was unfriendly to Jews fleeing Germany. Herschel could not obtain legal permission to stay, and eventually the French authorities ordered him deported and began, unsuccessfully, to hunt him down. He hid in an attic. He wrote to American president Franklin D. Roosevelt appealing for help for himself and his family.

Then, late in 1938, came the expulsion of his father, Zindel, along with his mother, sister, and brother, who, having stayed behind in Germany, were dragged from their Hannover home and sent to Poland. The Poles, in a typical fit of anti-Semitism, had threatened to revoke the passports of Polish citizens—mainly Jews—residing in Germany. The Nazis retorted by deporting some 15,000 Jews, including the Grynszpans. The Jewish victims were refused entry into their alleged Polish homeland and massed in misery at the border.

In Paris, the agitated Herschel argued with his aunt and uncle. He had received a note from the German-Polish frontier describing the conditions his family suffered. He had fantasies of joining the French Foreign Legion, but he had probably been refused a visa to Palestine because of bad health, and it was unlikely he would succeed as a soldier of France. He threatened suicide, then slammed the door of his uncle's house and was not seen for a night and a day. He had gone to stay in a hotel on the Left Bank, under the name Alter Heini.

On November 7, 1938, Grynspan went to the German embassy on the rue de Lille and asked to see ambassador Johannes von Welczek. An undersecretary, Ernst vom Rath, was sent to the anteroom to find out what the visitor wanted. Grynspan pulled his gun out and shot at vom Rath repeatedly. Two bullets struck the Nazi diplomat, who later died.

Grynspan was seized by other embassy personnel, but surrendered and laid down his gun. He was turned over to the French police.

He told the press, "Being a Jew is not a crime. I am not a dog. I have a right to live and the Jewish people have the right to live on this earth. Wherever I have gone I have been hunted like a beast."

By a terrible coincidence, the shooting came on the twentieth anniversary of imperial Germany's capitulation to the Allies and the proclamation of the Berlin monarchy's end—which the Nazis and other German anti-Semites blamed on the Jews, who allegedly "stabbed the nation in the back." Nazi leaders ordered that the controlled press in Germany focus on Grynspan's act. The Nazis claimed that Grynspan represented a powerful conspiracy of all the world's Jews against Germany. Newspapers and radio broadcasts in Berlin and every other German city denounced him as a tool of the British "war party," and printed his picture alongside that of Winston Churchill.

On the night of November 9, the Nazis used his reckless protest as a pretext for retaliation. The day would forever be known as "Kristallnacht"—the "night of broken glass." Violence began in the city of Kassel and spread throughout the country, to nearly every town. The windows of almost 10,000 Jewish stores were smashed and their inventory stolen; packs of adults and children followed after and repeated the pillage until the shops were empty. Nazi "wrecking crews" rushed to blow up and set fire to synagogues, destroying as many as 2,000. Firemen put out the flames in the shops but only prevented the fires in houses of worship from spreading to neighboring structures. Some non-Jewish enterprises were devastated as the gangs careened through the cities. American-owned stores, one displaying the Stars and Stripes in its window, were demolished. Foreign diplomats and tourists who tried to observe or photograph the disorder were harassed and arrested. An incident of surrealist madness featured a piano moved to the sidewalk, where the vandals, in jolly German style, entertained the mob by playing popular tunes.

Some in the crowds that watched the attacks were displeased with the violence; some even helped Jews escape. Indeed, foreign newspapers reported that poor and working people were not involved in the crimes. A man in Berlin, in a laborer's outfit, shouted, "Arson is arson!" when he saw a synagogue burning. Uniformed Nazi storm troopers clearly incited the participants, who were then protected by police.

Assaults on Jewish property continued, beginning early the next day, November 10. The *New York Times* described "a wave of destruction, looting, and incendiarism unparalleled in Germany" since the seventeenth century. Insurance companies soon announced they would not compensate Jewish clients for the damages. All over Germany Jews were arrested—in some cases after searches of non-Jewish homes where it was suspected they were sheltered. Thousands were detained in Vienna, recently occupied in the German annexation of Austria; there some committed suicide. Other Jews were badly beaten; almost a hundred were murdered.

Governments and media in the democratic nations denounced German lawlessness. The United States called its ambassador to Berlin home for emergency consultations on the crisis. On November 15, at his 500th press conference, President Franklin D. Roosevelt expressed himself in restrained but pointed language: “The news of the past few days from Germany has deeply shocked public opinion in the United States. Such news from any part of the world would inevitably produce a similar profound reaction among American people in every part of the nation. I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth century civilization.” He went on to announce that the United States would, in case of war, prepare a single “continental” defense “from Canada to Tierra del Fuego.”

The Nazi press replied by denouncing Roosevelt for “imperialism” and war preparations to benefit the armaments industry. The Nazis also complained that America had mistreated its black citizens, and if that equaled or outweighed attacks on German Jews. Germany had begun a campaign in favor of the Palestinian Arabs, and the Nazi papers warned that if Britain’s House of Commons condemned Germany, the latter would respond by publicizing British anti-Arab incidents. Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, sneered that Kristallnacht was obviously spontaneous, because if he and his colleagues had organized it, ten times as many Germans would have joined in and “the results would have been more radical.”

Goebbels concluded by threatening that Nazi treatment of Jews in Germany would depend on the “good behavior” of Jews outside the country. Air Marshal Hermann Goering, the number-two Nazi after Adolf Hitler, announced a fine of \$400 million levied on the German Jews for the assassination in Paris. New legal restrictions on Jews, including curfews and confiscation of radios, soon followed.

Understandably, a Jewish representative inside Germany, whose name has not survived, condemned Grynszpan. Unforgivably, many other Jews around the world saw him as a figure of horror—he had, as was said, justified Nazi cruelties. The World Jewish Congress, never as important as its pretentious title might have indicated, “deplored” Grynszpan’s act before protesting against Nazi “reprisals...after the crime” (i.e., of Grynszpan). A French Jewish newspaper, *L’Univers Israélite*, published a statement addressed to the German diplomat vom Rath’s mother, expressing its “great sorrow” at her son’s death and blaming Kristallnacht on “rabble” rather than the German leaders.

As for the leading American Jewish communal organizations, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and Anti-Defamation League (ADL), they produced no press releases or other emergency statements defending Grynszpan. The American Communist Party, then including a significant Jewish component, treated the events in Germany ambiguously. The *Daily Worker*, New York’s Stalinist sheet, featured a column by Mike Gold, who had become famous with his 1930 novel, *Jews Without Money*, renowned in its time but forgotten today except by sentimental leftist academics. Gold described Grynszpan as “mad with grief and shame.” Shame about what? one might ask.

The Communist paper elsewhere referred to Grynszpan as “grief-crazed” and referred in one brief reportage to Goebbels as a member of “the extreme anti-Semitic wing of Nazism”—as if such distinctions meant anything. The American Communists were anxious to draw attention away from their ratio of Jews, and once the brutalities of Kristallnacht began, they loudly warned that the Nazis were about to turn on Catholics in the same fashion. But Stalin had already begun sending discreet messages to Hitler indicating his interest in a pact, which would be consummated in August 1939.

The *New York Times*, Jewish-owned but sunk in a cowardly attitude of constraint about asserting any Jewish interest, treated Grynspan with barely concealed contempt. The *Times* referred to him as having studied Hebrew but with “no intention of becoming a rabbi,” and later headlined the young man’s description of the shooting as carried out in “a trance.”

The *Times*, it must be said, had not always been so craven; decades before, it had served with outstanding valor in exposing atrocities against the Jewish masses in the Russian empire. But the horrors of tsarism had only temporarily broken through a basic fear of identification with Jewish ambition. That reluctance had transformed the *Times* into a deplorable exemplar of what, in Europe, was known as the *shtadlan* mentality. In the *shtadlan* pattern—deeply rooted in the history and culture of the Old World ghettos—“court Jews” influenced Gentile rulers by deferential influence behind the scenes at the highest level, for whatever ends the Jewish leaders deemed to be good for the community. In the Christian kingdoms, this attitude had a history of alternating achievement with disaster.

Jews could attain great influence in Christian Europe, but narrow access to power and lack of autonomy made whatever security the Jews gained a fragile matter. Jews flourished in Christian Spain and Portugal but were expelled; they were tolerated in Italy, where they could print their holy books but then saw the Talmud burned by order of the Roman Curia; they had exalted financial relations with the rulers of England, France, and the German lands, which did not prevent their eventual banishment. They flooded into Poland, where enlightened, Renaissance-era kings favored them, but this stirred the resentment of the impoverished Christians; frightful outbreaks of violence culminated in the Cossack massacres of 1648, in which hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed.

With the coming of the Christian Reformation to the Netherlands, Amsterdam and other Dutch cities welcomed the Jews and provided a unique example as places where the *shtadlan* strategy was consistently successful. The Dutch Protestants honored the religious tradition and admired the piety of the Jews and were willing to let them live, pray, and work among them largely unmolested. But until the Napoleonic era and the emancipation of Jews by Bonaparte’s armies, Holland was a magnificent exception in Western Europe. Although Jews were permitted to reside in England after the mid-seventeenth century, they did so under numerous legal handicaps and in fear, as they did in the German dominions.

In a situation that would seem ironic to twenty-first-century readers, Jews in the Ottoman Empire and other Muslim lands enjoyed a better civil condition, including the unimpeded right to print their holy books. They paid a tax known as *cizye*, which exempted them from service in Muslim armies but also guaranteed their security. When the Jews were forced out of Spain, they were welcomed in Morocco and Turkey. But the Muslim states in which Jews formed colonies never produced a *shtadlan* tradition. Rather, their rabbinical jurists, alongside Christian clerics and courts, participated in a rational system of community administration. The *hahambashi* or chief rabbi of the Ottoman lands, for example, was a high court official and valued adviser of the Turkish sultans. In contrast, *shtadlan* representatives in the Christian states were episodically appointed and occasionally effective, but their status was always uncertain. Above all, *shtadlan* Jews in Christendom avoided public exposure, which they feared would inevitably excite anti-Jewish prejudice. *Shtadlan* habits were therefore essentially those of meekness and subordination.

Grynspan, after his impetuous act, was an unfortunate victim of such attitudes. As the years went by, the Stalinists who described him as driven insane were habitually echoed by others. No less a figure than Hannah Arendt, author and former lover of the philosopher (and temporary Nazi) Martin Heidegger, described Grynspan as “a psychopath, unable to finish school, who for years had knocked about Paris and Brussels, being expelled from both places.”

Yes, Grynspan had been unable to finish school under the Nazis and had “knocked around” Paris and Brussels—although Arendt made him sound like a Bohemian literary vagabond rather than a Jewish refugee. And yes, he had been ordered expelled from Paris. One wonders where she thought he could have gone. Certainly, he would not have found a place in the exalted company of Heidegger.

Today Jews remain ambivalent about Grynspan; he is still seen by most as a warped and tormented figure whose only significance is that he helped bring about the tragedy of European Jewry—as if the Holocaust would not have occurred if Grynspan had not murdered the Nazi diplomat vom Rath. Of course, if the intention of the Nazis to exterminate all the Jews in the world had been understood at the time, he might have been seen as a hero.

Then again, maybe not. For the treatment of Grynspan by history, including by Jewish chroniclers, raises the issue of Jewish self-defense and the morality to which it must be held. Jews had previously employed violent direct action to protect their communities in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. They would do so again after the foundation of the independent state of Israel. Yet such actions have almost always been greeted with disquiet by Jews and non-Jews alike. Under what circumstances is it permissible for Jews to commit acts of assassination, terror, and even military conquest in the name of self-defense? This would become the great question of the twentieth century for the Jews, and a major challenge for the world—and so it persists.

Of the few people, Jewish or Gentile, who would stand up for Grynspan, one was an American reporter and columnist, Dorothy Thompson. She was married to the Nobel Prize-winning author Sinclair Lewis, and she was the first American journalist to be expelled from Germany by the Nazis in 1934. Thompson, then a special writer for the *Washington Post*, delivered an eloquent speech on the *General Electric Hour*, one of the most popular radio shows in the United States. She declared, “I want to talk about that boy. I feel as though I knew him.” She reminded her listeners of the indignities visited on Jews in Germany, including the humiliation of Jewish schoolchildren, whose “criminal” features were pointed out to their peers by teachers, and she spoke about famous intellectuals who were forced to clean the streets.

Thompson acknowledged that nearly every American newspaper had editorialized against Kristallnacht, their words echoed by prominent politicians including former New York Democrat and governor Al Smith and Thomas E. Dewey, then a candidate for the same post on the Republican ticket. But she went on to demand, “Is there not a higher justice in the case of Herschel Grynspan, 17 years old?” Noting that he would be tried in France and might be executed by guillotine, she asked, “Must the nation whose Zola defended Dreyfus...cut off the head of one more Jew? Who is on trial in this case? I say we are all on trial. I say the Christian world is on trial.... Therefore, we who are not Jewish

must speak, speak our sorrow and indignation and disgust.... If you are not Jewish and you feel as I do  
I ask you to wire or write me in care of this station.”

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The next day Thompson announced she had received 3,000 telegrams of support, with “uncounted thousands of letters, many enclosing money.” She called on “Christians only” to donate, so that the Nazis could not exploit the campaign to carry out further acts of revenge. How could she know the worst was yet to come?

Another protest was raised from Mexico City by a man of Jewish birth who had disclaimed his religious heritage: the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, who also knew the experience of forced exile and cruel treatment—including banishment and murder—of his relatives. His son Lev Sedov, age thirty-one, had been killed in Paris by Stalin’s agents less than a year before, in February 1938.

Trotsky wrote, “The policy of the fascist gangsters directly and sometimes deliberately provoked terrorist acts. What is most astonishing is that so far there has been only one Grynszpan. Undoubtedly the number of such acts will increase.... We Marxists consider the tactic of individual terrorism inexpedient in the tasks of the liberating struggle of the proletariat as well as oppressed nationalities.... But we understand only too clearly the inevitability of such convulsive acts of despair and vengeance. All our emotions, all our sympathies are with the self-sacrificing avengers even though they have been unable to discover the correct road. Our sympathy becomes intensified because Grynszpan is not a political militant but an inexperienced youth, almost a boy, whose only counsel was a feeling of indignation.”

Trotsky observed, “People come cheap who are capable only of fulminating against injustice and bestiality. But those who, like Grynszpan, are able to act as well as conceive, sacrificing their own lives if need be, are the precious leaven of mankind.” He concluded by repeating that individual terrorism could not be substituted for a mass movement, and insisted, “Our open moral solidarity with Grynszpan gives us an added right to say to all the other would-be Grynszpans, to all those capable of self-sacrifice in the struggle against despotism and bestiality: *Seek another road!*” Trotsky’s “critical support” for Grynszpan reflected the Russian revolutionary’s experiences under a dying tsarist despotism, where anti-state terrorism was frequently taken up by Russian and Polish liberal Gentile Muslim warriors were also glorious in their resistance to Russian imperialism, and those who denounced such tactics were often viewed as cowards and traitors to the cause of freedom. But such resistance inspired the activist combat of American Jews against fascist agitators in the 1930s, and guided those influenced by Trotsky in the defense of Jews later in twentieth- and twenty-first-century America.

At the end of November 1938, a Communist-front rally of 20,000 people at Madison Square Garden heard Thompson and more than a dozen other speakers. They mainly condemned the treatment of Jews in Germany, although in the typical fashion of such events, speeches also demanded support for the Spanish Republic (then fighting a civil war against the rightist forces of General Francisco Franco), the end of British rule in Northern Ireland, and fair treatment of African Americans. Thompson repeated her call for Grynszpan’s defense, but otherwise the seventeen-year-old appeared to have been, perhaps conveniently, ignored.

And what of the desperate youth himself?

His ultimate fate is unknown even today. Grynszpan never saw trial. He was held in the French prison of Fresnes until the arrival of German troops in Paris in June 1940, when he was sent south by the Parisian authorities, to a jail in Bourges. On the way he experienced a brief period of freedom when the train he was riding in was attacked by German aircraft. From Bourges, he was kidnapped by the Nazis and transferred to Germany, where he disappeared in the night and fog of the Holocaust. He vanished without trace, although rumors later proliferated describing his survival somewhere in France.

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The specter of Grynszpan briefly haunted the world; like a blazing silhouette, he had in an instant illuminated the deepest contradictions and challenges facing his people and all of oppressed humanity. The slight young man's pistol shots in the German embassy in Paris had led to the obvious question— is it good for the Jews? This query is often uttered by Jews themselves in a spirit of self-conscious irony, but it is neither a matter of humor nor an expression of crass self-interest. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob bear a unique burden. They were chosen among the peoples of the world to receive and preserve divine law, and were then scattered across the globe. They are small in number, never having enjoyed, in two millennia, the immense power of Christian and Muslim rulers, whose religious revelations were in their fundamentals the same as those given to the Jews.

The Jews dedicated themselves to the common welfare of themselves and their Gentile neighbors throughout those many centuries. Usually surviving in closed or excluded communities, they had to often been at risk, if only because they were few. Was it good for them to struggle for universal justice, by which the demands of their sacred history might be honored, even if they remained crushed by their apparently inevitable fate as outsiders to the affairs of the rest of the world? Or should the Jewish people accept their place apart, looking only to their own needs, while surrounded by others? Should they declare that they, like the multitude of Gentile nations, had a particular interest to guard and nurture? And who would decide what was good for the Jews, and how it could be realized?

When Napoleon emancipated the Jews under his rule, they had responded with extraordinary gratitude, even love. As a result, however, Jews were challenged practically with the question: Should they abandon altogether their history as a “stiff-necked” people and assimilate to the point of becoming undistinguishable from their Christian neighbors? The rise of the socialist movement, with its vision of a unified humanity, seemed to demand the dissolution of Jewishness into a common identity. In Germany, England, America, Hungary, and Croatia, a Reform Jewish tradition became dominant, with the same goal, but without renouncing religion: it would let Jews ignore dietary laws, marry whomever they wished, and change their names, without, in some sense, losing their Jewish identity.

But none of these alternatives answered the main question: could Jews defend themselves? Could they take up the sword when threatened?

Only in America would this question never need to be directly posed. Only in America would Jews experience, miraculously, a continuing and permanent liberty and security. “Only in America” also became a Jewish meme, employed to describe the almost dreamlike quality of Jewish life here. What then, would a *shtadlan* outlook be appropriate in these states?

Finally, there was only one answer: if nothing else, Jews, like all humans, have the right to defend themselves. Grynspan had said it in a few words: “I am not a dog.” But the need for self-defense had contradictory effects. It produced armed Jewish fighters against the tyranny of the Russian tsar—but also the creation of *shtadlan*-style “defense” organizations in the United States, beginning in 1900 with the American Jewish Committee. Later, it impelled the heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters of 1943—but, as the Warsaw uprising was drowned in blood and fire, Jews witnessed indecision about the “problem of Jewish refugees” by Democratic politicians in America and similar leaders elsewhere to whom Jews had pledged their political support. Ultimately, Jewish self-defense was embodied in the state of Israel and a lobby in America dedicated to Israel’s survival. Yet when a new terror racked the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century, neither the *shtadlan* organizations, the Democrats, nor America’s pro-Israel lobby was prepared for the challenge.

In 1938, the sadistic spectacle in Germany could, it seemed, be repeated everywhere. Even Trotsky, a passionate internationalist or, better put, a Jewish universalist who considered religious Judaism a reactionary impediment to the progress of the Jewish people, began to sympathize with Zionism after witnessing the atrocities in Germany. It seemed impossible to deny that a separate Jewish state might be the only solution.

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American Jews were never threatened with such an outburst of medieval horrors. Yet neither were they able to feel perfectly at ease. Though it is largely forgotten today, the Great Depression produced its own homegrown fascist movements that targeted Jews as the cause of American social and economic ills. Indeed, as the fascist tide swept over Europe in the thirties, New York seemed, in the minds of many Jews and Gentiles alike, liable to be the next major global city to see multitudes of thugs, shielded by the armed bodies of the state, brutalize a vulnerable people.

The most infamous exponent of this fascist discontent was a Catholic priest with an innovative and popular radio show, Father Charles E. Coughlin, of Royal Oak, Michigan. Coughlin was originally a champion of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. But by the middle 1930s, in imitation of Hitler, Coughlin had combined fascist radicalism and anticapitalism with an old vocabulary of fear, warning of a new world war to promote Jewish “money power.” Coughlin and his admirers had fused with the followers of other Depression-era merchants of panic, including Francis Townsend and Huey P. Long—the latter assassinated in 1935. Coughlin’s followers called for “social justice” in a nation to be cleansed of Jewish influence through a “reorganization” like that of the Nazis. He described Kristallnacht as revenge for Jewish mistreatment of Christians. He and his cohort were also fervent isolationists who stridently demanded that America stay out of foreign entanglements.

Coughlin’s aim was obvious: to guarantee Hitler and his fellow bandits, Mussolini and the Japanese imperialists, a free hand. As the Second World War came closer, Coughlin gained financing from Berlin. He mobilized a paramilitary cadre, the Christian Front. It mainly recruited working-class Irish Americans, who loathed the possibility that the United States might go to war to defend Britain against Germany. Coughlinites, as the fascist rabble became known, grew increasingly militant, the campaign augmented by a more explicitly ethnic movement, the German-American Bund, formed as a legion of uniformed storm troopers.



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