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## **NEWS OF THE HOLOCAUST:**

### **WHY FDR DIDN'T TELL AND THE PRESS DIDN'T ASK**

On December 18, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt held one of his regular, twice-a-week press conferences in the Oval Office. The day before, the Allied governments, including the United States, had issued a declaration confirming that the Germans were “now carrying into effect Hitler’s oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe.” The day of the press conference the announcement was front-page news in many American newspapers. *The New York Times’* story, which ran in one-column in the middle of the page, was typical. “11 Allies Condemn Nazi War on Jews,” its headline read.

Roosevelt would have begun that day as he did almost every day, by reading the *Times* and five other morning newspapers in bed.<sup>1</sup> Even so, during the press conference that morning, the president never mentioned the Allied declaration heralded on the newspapers’ front pages. In fact, Roosevelt started the conference by saying, “I don’t think I have anything.” Nor did any of the 40 or so reporters who crowded into the Oval Office ask him about it. They inquired about a newly issued report on the expansion of Social Security in England, and about the War Labor Board’s jurisdiction over rail union demands for a wage increase. They fired a series of questions at the president about rationing. But the president did not tell of and the press did not ask about the authoritative report that confirmed that two million Jews had been killed and another five million Jews were threatened with extermination.<sup>2</sup>

The don't-tell, don't-ask pattern was repeated during the more than 500 press conferences the president gave during World War II.<sup>3</sup> And it was emblematic of both FDR's and the press' attitude throughout the war toward first the persecution and then the extermination of the Jews. Reliable information about what was happening to Europe's Jews regularly reached the U.S. government as well as other reliable sources and much of it appeared in American newspapers.<sup>4</sup> Except in a few rare instances, the government did not suppress the information in the sense of refusing to release it or explicitly telling the press that it could not publish it, but neither the president nor the press chose to emphasize the news. The president rarely addressed the ongoing annihilation of the Jews in speeches, fireside chats, private conversations, or press conferences. The press published news accounts of the extermination campaign, but almost always in short articles on inside pages.<sup>5</sup> The front-page treatment of the Allies December 1942 statement was the exception that proved the rule; it marked the only time in 1942 that *The New York Times* published news about the extermination campaign on page one. As a result, most Americans, who relied on the mass media for information about the war, did not learn about the Holocaust as it was happening.<sup>6</sup>

This article explores how and why the American public was kept in the dark when both the government and the news media had abundant information about the extermination campaign. The article will proceed in three parts. First, it will explore FDR's relationship with the news media: how his failure to communicate publicly about the Holocaust affected press coverage of the catastrophe, how the press' failure to highlight the news affected the president's approach, and how their interaction reinforced the mutual silence about one of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's defining events. Second, the article

will consider one of the most frequently cited explanations for the president's and the press' decision to de-emphasize the plight of European Jews – the fear of an anti-Semitic backlash on the part of the American public. The article will argue that public opinion was less of a constraint on both the president and the press than has been assumed. Finally, the article will propose an overriding explanation for both the president's and the press' unwillingness to highlight the Holocaust -- the conviction that European Jews were outside their sphere of concern. The president and the press chose not to stress what was happening to the Jews, it will be argued, because it was not happening to them, or to their constituents or readers, or to a group they or (they assumed) their constituents or readers could identify with. This is a particularly interesting and troubling point because many of the most influential people in both the Roosevelt Administration and in the press were themselves Jews.

### ***The President Sets the Agenda for the Press***

Had Roosevelt chosen to highlight the plight of the Jews, there is no question the American press also would have done so. Presidents set the news agenda to a large extent, particularly during wartime. This tendency was even more pronounced in Roosevelt's case because he understood journalists so well and manipulated them so effectively. Columnist Heywood Broun called FDR "the best newspaperman who has ever been president of the United States."<sup>7</sup> His generally good relationship with the press, which were strained but still strong by the end of his presidency, contributed to his effectiveness.<sup>8</sup> As *New York Times* Washington editor Delbert Clark explained in 1941: "The majority [of regular White House correspondents] disagree with [the president] to a

greater or less extent, but they like him, and are in a position to be of great assistance to him in interpreting his policies so long as they can know they are being treated fairly.”<sup>9</sup>

Roosevelt’s media savvy enabled him to determine to a significant degree the issues that would be featured on newspapers’ front pages and that would lead radio broadcasts.<sup>10</sup> “Roosevelt contrived to use the press as a transmission belt for stories, nearly always favorable, that appeared on front pages everywhere in the country and, as he understood, served to overwhelm the adverse editorials in most of the same papers,” John Tebbel and Sarah Miles Watts conclude. “Roosevelt ideas and policies dominated the front pages day after day, to the exasperation of his many enemies.”<sup>11</sup> Roosevelt accomplished this through both his personal efforts and those of members of his administration. The 998 press conferences Roosevelt held during his 12 years in office were among his most effective news management tactics. “Roosevelt determined to use his press conferences to create a supply of news which could [dominate] the front pages of the nation’s press,” writes Graham J. White, who finds that Roosevelt largely succeeded.<sup>12</sup> The president began nearly half the conferences with an opening statement that often became the next day’s major story. He also used reporters’ questions as a springboard to explain in depth administration programs and thus shape the coverage of them. He even planted questions with reporters so he could discuss an issue and yet have it seem as if the topic arose spontaneously.<sup>13</sup> Roosevelt knew that he could transform an inside story into a front page one merely by mentioning it during a news conference.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Roosevelt was able to use his press conferences to steer journalists away from news he did not want reported by dousing rumors, by diverting attention to other subjects, or by discounting an event’s significance.<sup>15</sup>

Along with press conferences, Roosevelt relied upon his famous fireside chats, held a few times a year, and more formal speeches to influence the media's priorities. He made dozens of speeches every year, including the State of the Union and addresses to Congress, about 25 of which were broadcast live and reached a huge audience. Nearly 70 percent of the population, for example, heard a February 1942 Roosevelt speech, which was also widely reported in newspapers.<sup>16</sup>

Roosevelt also used informal contacts with journalists to introduce his ideas. At least once a year, *New York Times* foreign affairs columnist Anne O'Hare McCormick interviewed the president, whose thoughts and feelings appeared in her columns without quotations and with only a suggestion that they were based upon conversations with him.<sup>17</sup> The president also met frequently with magazine writer George Creel, who had headed the U.S. government's propaganda agency during the first world war. The president would dictate paragraphs to Creel, who included them in articles he wrote for *Collier's* and other magazines without alteration or attribution. That way, the president could try to influence public perceptions or test reaction to one of his policies, without taking responsibility for it.<sup>18</sup>

The rest of the administration was almost as adept at press relations as the president.<sup>19</sup> Press Secretary Stephen Early held his own daily press conference as did most of the Cabinet secretaries, although they were under strict instructions from the president not to discuss anything but their own departments. Early, in particular, was good at translating the government's actions into news stories.<sup>20</sup> In addition, all the executive departments, as well as the newly created administrative agencies, had their own public information apparatus. Press relations officers spread messages the

administration wanted disseminated and attempted to stifle those it did not. One tool that the Roosevelt Administration used more effectively than any previous one was the press release. From the State Department to the Civilian Conservation Corps, the government churned out hundreds of thousands of press releases. The National Recovery Administration alone distributed more than 5,200 handouts in a single year.<sup>21</sup> The flood of information helped to inform the public, but it also enabled Roosevelt to control the news agenda.<sup>22</sup> In his 1937 study of the Washington press corps, Leo Rosten concluded that the government releases “succeed in creating the impression, by sheer cumulative effect, that there are no other facts, or no other versions of the facts, than those contained in the press releases.”<sup>23</sup>

The administration used the same strategy for foreign affairs as it did for domestic ones. Government press agents would package and distribute the “facts” concerning the latest foreign crisis and count on the news media to disseminate them to the public.<sup>24</sup> If anything, Roosevelt’s ability to influence the press only increased during the war. As *New York Times* Washington Bureau Chief and columnist Arthur Krock explained: “[E]xcept for headlining and placement of the news within the paper, the news of the war is a government product.”<sup>25</sup>

Yet Roosevelt did not use any of these tactics to turn the press’ attention, and thus the public’s, to the ongoing Holocaust. He never mentioned it in his fireside chats. He did not discuss the extermination campaign in any major speech, except in the most general and vague terms. For example, in July 1942, after the first reports of the Final Solution had surfaced, Roosevelt issued a statement to be read at a Madison Square Garden rally against “Hitler atrocities.” He said that the “American people will hold the

Nazis to 'strict accountability' for their crimes of oppression." But it was not possible to tell from *The New York Times* story about the rally, or from the statement itself, exactly what those crimes were or against whom they were directed.<sup>26</sup> And Roosevelt raised the issue only once during a wartime press conference<sup>27</sup> and, when asked, he often broadened the issue to encompass "starving peoples of occupied countries" or to say that the refugees "are not all Jews by any means."<sup>28</sup> When the War Refugee Board -- a government agency created as a result of intense pressure from Jewish groups and members of Congress -- encouraged the president to issue a statement about the impending annihilation of Hungarian Jews, he did.<sup>29</sup> During a March 24, 1944 press conference, Roosevelt strongly condemned "one of the blackest crimes of all history ... the wholesale systematic murder of the Jews of Europe." It was, however, the last of four announcements he made that day, following statements about the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Philippine independence and the resignation of two relatively low level government appointees. The press' first question concerned a replacement for one of those departing officials, the alien property custodian. There were no questions or further presidential comments about the impending murder of 800,000 Jews.<sup>30</sup> Still the news appeared on many newspapers' front page, including *The New York Times*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. When the president addressed what was happening to the Jews, it commanded the press' attention. He just rarely did.

Others in the Roosevelt Administration were more likely to comment publicly about the Jews' destruction, but they too tended to universalize the victims. Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes, for example, stated in 1943 that the "attack on Jews is an attack on Christianity," and that "behind the phony front of anti-Semitism, Hitler has murdered,

starved, terrorized Poles, Greeks, Serbs, Frenchmen, Norwegians etc. etc.,” as another administration official explained it.<sup>31</sup> During a September 1942 press conference, Secretary of State Cordell Hull condemned the collaborationist Vichy Government’s anti-Jewish measures but only in conjunction with its decision to allow young French men to be sent involuntarily to labor in German factories.<sup>32</sup>

The administration’s vast public information operations did issue hundreds of press releases on the persecution and even extermination of the Jews. For example, between September 10, 1943 and May 1, 1945, the Office of War Information, the government’s chief propaganda agency, produced 86 releases on the plight of Europe’s Jews, including ones on the Rumanian government sending Jews to labor camps and the Gestapo’s arrest of Jewish children hidden by French peasants. But those were just 86 out of a total of 1,445 releases issued by OWI’s News Bureau during that period.<sup>33</sup> And those releases were issued without fanfare, leaving it to the news organizations to use or, more likely, not, without any encouragement from the government.

From the president’s press conferences, speeches, and informal conversations, and from other administrative officials’ comments and news releases, the press would have concluded that the extermination of the Jews was not an important part of the president’s agenda.

### ***The Press Sets the Agenda for the President***

As much as the news media looked to the president to determine what was important, FDR also turned to the press. “The president always paid particularly close attention to the shifting attitudes of opinion makers, especially media figures such as

journalists, editors, and commentators,” explains Steven Casey.<sup>34</sup> In some cases, just one or two journalistic critics could affect Roosevelt’s attitude toward an issue. When the Allies struck a deal that allowed a German collaborator to head the civil administration in North Africa in exchange for a ceasefire, for example, CBS reporter Edward R. Murrow and influential columnist Walter Lippman attacked the arrangement. “[T]he administration’s perception of public opinion was very much shaped by the arguments of these two opinion makers,” Casey concludes. There is even some evidence that the press affected FDR more than the other way round. “Roosevelt reacted to previous coverage in the newspapers more than he influenced subsequent coverage,” concluded a 1995 study that applied agenda setting analysis to Roosevelt’s first seven State of the Union addresses. The study also found that this tendency was more pronounced during Roosevelt’s later years in office.<sup>35</sup>

Roosevelt used a variety of methods to divine media attitudes, which he assumed both reflected and affected public opinion. For starters, he read 11 newspapers a day, six in the morning and five in the evening.<sup>36</sup> Finding that Roosevelt reacted particularly to the news coverage in the newspapers that he read, the agenda setting study speculated that he “may have used the newspapers that he did read regularly as a measure of the importance of individual issues.”<sup>37</sup> Roosevelt did more than skim these papers. His frequent press conference comments on the media’s performance revealed how carefully he read them.<sup>38</sup> *New York Times* columnist Krock considered him “the greatest reader and critic of newspapers who had ever been in the President’s office.”<sup>39</sup> He also relied on journalists’ questions during press conferences to discern what was on their minds and, by extension, the minds of the American people. A contemporary journalist explained

Roosevelt's method: "From the way questions are formulated, from the tone of the interviewers, he senses the mood of the country, the weight of current events, trends, problems – all coming to a head in a few minutes."<sup>40</sup>

In addition, Roosevelt sought out individual journalists. On a typical day, Roosevelt would spend at least four hours conversing with 10 to 15 people, including journalists. He considered these conversations a "public opinion bath."<sup>41</sup> To tap into the nation's sentiment, Roosevelt turned to some of the same journalists who presented his unfiltered views to the public. The *Times*' McCormick, for example, was a "rather frequent luncheon or dinner" guest at the White House and "brought the boss interesting and informative stories," Presidential Secretary Grace Tully recalled. "I am sure the many talks she had with the president were of mutual advantage to both."<sup>42</sup> Roosevelt even figuratively eavesdropped on journalists' dinner-party conversations. Famed lawyer and Roosevelt confidante Morris Ernst regularly hosted parties for opinion makers including journalists such as *New York Herald Tribune* Publisher Helen Reid, *New York Times*' Publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger, former Berlin correspondent and CBS commentator William Shirer, columnist Dorothy Thompson, and author John Gunther. Ernst then reported back to the president what had been said at his dinners in memos entitled "Tidbits." "As with almost every supplier of public opinion, Ernst was a two-way conduit for the President," Richard Steele explains. "His home functioned as both a polling place where influential Americans registered opinions with the White House, and a forum at which official views were casually disseminated."<sup>43</sup> Ernst wrote of an October 1942 soiree: "I think it did both sides of the table more good than innumerable press

conferences.”<sup>44</sup> The President read the memos avidly and responded to all of them. “I love the `tidbits,”” Roosevelt wrote Ernst in April 1943, “be sure to keep them up.”<sup>45</sup>

However much Roosevelt valued the information he gleaned from his own reading, press conferences, private conversations, and snooping, he also demanded a more systematic approach. From the earliest days of his administration, Roosevelt relied upon an elaborate apparatus to monitor the press. Over the years, it went by different names (Division of Press Intelligence, Office of Government Reports, Bureau of Intelligence) and was housed in differed agencies (National Recovery Administration, National Emergency Council, Office of War Information). But the mission remained the same: to determine the issues that were of interest to the press and, as a consequence, of importance to the public. “There is a natural correspondence between the handling of news by editors and popular appraisal of events,” an August 21, 1942 Survey of Intelligence Material explained. “The stories to which newspaper headlines and radio newscasters give prime attention are the stories upon which the public is focused.”<sup>46</sup>

To discover the stories given prime attention, the Division of Press Intelligence from 1933 to 1939 tracked both the news and editorial pages of almost 400 newspapers, at least one newspaper in every American city with a population of 50,000 or more. It then classified and indexed the articles and editorials by issues, tabulated the results and produced a daily “intelligence report.”<sup>47</sup> The president received the report and administration officials could request “intelligence” on a particular issue.<sup>48</sup> The DPI also employed dozens of people in just about every state who filed field reports on local attitudes.<sup>49</sup>

At the beginning of the war in Europe, the press monitoring function switched to the Office of Government Reports and expanded to include magazines and radio newscasts and commentaries as well as more than 400 newspapers. Along with the daily report, OGR also supplied the president with a more useful “Weekly Analysis of Press Reaction” that enabled him to track shifts in opinion on important issues.<sup>50</sup> Many “Weekly Analysis” started by identifying a “news emphasis,” the issues the press highlighted during the previous week. For example, the January 5, 1942 news emphasis stated: “A tough attitude is manifested toward Vichy.”<sup>51</sup> In June 1942, the public information function was consolidated in the Office of War Information. Press monitoring was transferred there, but was then discontinued with the reorganization and defunding of OWI in 1943.<sup>52</sup> The State Department picked up the slack, at least in terms of measuring attitudes toward foreign affairs. It established a Division of Public Studies that tracked editorials and articles in 225 daily newspapers, public opinion agencies, 60 magazines and periodicals, and transcripts of radio comments, among other measures. It then issued reports to policy makers, including a daily summary of opinion sent to 50 State officials.<sup>53</sup>

By the 1940s, the administration’s use of public opinion polling, which will be discussed later, had eclipsed somewhat its reliance upon the press to determine public attitudes. Still, Roosevelt continued to turn to the press to gauge immediate reaction to crises; polling data only reliably measured responses to the same question asked over a period of time.<sup>54</sup> In addition, the administration continued to assume that the public would focus on the issues that the press chose to highlight, and therefore it needed to know what those issues were.

That the extermination of the Jews was not one of those issues Roosevelt would have learned from both his impressionistic and systematic measures of the press. *The New York Times*, the newspaper the president read most faithfully, only published six stories that clearly identified the Jews as subject to unique persecution or extermination on the front page, and the *Times* was more comprehensive in its coverage than the other 10 papers Roosevelt read. During only 12 of the nearly 500 press conferences the president held during the war did journalists ask questions about Jews, even to refer to them obliquely as refugees. And in those instances the journalists allowed Roosevelt to bat away the questions by professing either ignorance or hopelessness – another sign that they did not consider the issue important enough to press the president. On September 11, 1942, for example, the President was asked whether he had seen a report in the morning papers that the Vichy government had offered to send interned Jews to the United States. The president said “no,” and that was the end of it. Asked on November 5, 1943 about “developments with regard to Jewish victims of atrocity or persecutions abroad,” Roosevelt responded that “the whole problem is – the heart’s all right – it’s a question of ways and means.” Again, that ended the discussion.<sup>55</sup> The issue was raised more frequently in 1944 once the War Refugee Board was established, but the questions mostly concerned administrative issues such as who would head the agency.<sup>56</sup> According to Ernst’s “Tidbits,” none of the distinguished journalists invited to his dinner parties raised the issue of the ongoing persecution of the Jews.<sup>57</sup> Ernst himself only seemed to become engaged in the issue with the establishment of the War Refugee Board. He then helped raised private funds for the board, suggested possible candidates to head the agency, and invited the ultimate choice, John Pehle, “to my house, with my gang.” He

later sought guidance from Pehle on how best to convince groups he met with during an April 1944 trip to England that “the War Refugee Board really means business.”<sup>58</sup>

The systematic reports the president received would only have confirmed his informal impressions of press priorities. The Press Intelligence Bulletins, which tracked news articles and editorials in 400 newspapers, were sprinkled with stories about the persecution of the Jews. At certain points, most notably after the November 1938 German pogrom known as Kristallnacht, they formed a critical mass. But mostly, there were a few stories here or there, or a few isolated editorials, but nothing that indicated the treatment of the Jews was an issue the press had decided to focus upon. Not a single weekly analysis found it to be a “news emphasis.”

Interestingly, officials’ ability to detect these stories grew more difficult as the persecution of the Jews grew more intense. Initially, the bulletin was organized around the government agency mentioned in the news article. So most articles about the Jews’ persecution fell under a single category, “State Department, German Affairs and Refugees Committee.” That made it relatively easy to get an overall view of what newspapers had reported concerning European Jews the previous week, even if the events took place in different countries and involved different tactics. In the December 23, 1938 - January 3, 1939 bulletin, for example, a *New York Times* story, “Poles seek speed on exodus of Jews,” fell under the State Department’s German Affairs Committee heading, along with others on the Jews’ treatment in Germany. But by 1942, as Hitler launched the Final Solution, the bulletin had moved to subject rather than agency headings. Because the persecution of the Jews did not get its own subject heading, news articles on that topic were scattered under several categories and mixed in with dozens of other

stories. “Refugee problems,” for example, included articles such as “film to aid China relief.” In the June 3, 1942 bulletin, the heading, “Axis occupied territory,” included 40 articles, encompassing “Atrocities Against Jews Reported in Romania” as well as “Japan to Open Tunnel in Southern Japan” and “3 tell of food situation in Germany.” The June 20, 1942 bulletin lists an article reporting that 60,000 Jews had been slain in Vilna, along with 11 other stories including “Norwegians Compelled to Scrub Streets” and “Dutch Are Disowning Traitors in Family.”<sup>59</sup>

From reading newspapers, fielding questions, conversing with journalists, and analyzing tabulated data, the president would have concluded that the extermination of the Jews was not an important part of the press’s agenda.

### ***The President and the Press Reinforce Each Other’s Agendas***

The government’s and the press’ failure to highlight what was happening to the Jews also tended to reinforce each other. Take, as an example, the critical period of June and July 1942 when the first reports of Germany’s plan to murder all the Jews appeared. In June, the Office of War Information launched a “campaign” to make the murder of 480 residents of Lidice, Czechoslovakia in reprisal for the assassination of an S.S. leader “the one cap-stone incident of the Axis terror and barbarism.” The Lidice campaign was part of a larger administration strategy of emphasizing incidents of civilian revolt followed by German reprisals in occupied Europe.<sup>60</sup> Around the same time, the Bund, a Jewish Socialist group, revealed that that 700,000 Jews had been slaughtered in Poland during the previous year. OWI chose to down play the Bund report, and play up the Lidice massacre. It issued press releases on Lidice, supplied background information kits, and

followed up with calls to reporters and editors.<sup>61</sup> The campaign's success is apparent in the Press Intelligence Bulletins. The June 17, 1942 bulletin records 39 editorials that "express the horror and revulsion of whole civilized world at destruction of entire Czech village of Lidice." The next day's bulletin lists another 54 Lidice editorials.

Administration officials then not only crowed about the success of the campaign, but also used the Lidice press coverage as evidence of the importance of stories of rebellion and reprisal. "Radio, newspapers and magazines have given dramatic emphasis to the campaign of terror and intimidation waged by Germans in Europe's occupied countries," a Survey of Intelligence Material for September 2, 1942 noted. "The story of Lidice was told and re-told."<sup>62</sup> That then encouraged OWI to issue more press releases on German reprisals, which generated more press coverage, which was duly reported in the government's bulletins, starting the cycle all over again. In the meantime, reports of the systematic murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews appeared in a few isolated news stories and editorials, as recorded in the Press Intelligence Bulletins. Typically there was one such news article or editorial in a bulletin -- the *Baltimore Sun's* "Nazis massacred 700,000 Jews in Poland since starting of war" in the July 13, 1942 issue, for example -- amidst dozens of other, unrelated stories under the "Poland" heading. The president and other government officials who relied upon the bulletins to discern media concerns could then conclude that the press was not particularly interested in what was happening to the Jews and they did not have to be either. So they were less inclined to issue press releases on the subject, which led the press to be even less likely to write about it.

Jewish organizations pushing the administration to help their imperiled brethren were not able to puncture this circularity. Consider one example. In the summer of

1943, a World Jewish Congress official, A. Leon Kubowitzki, wanted to get the Office of War Information to change the way it distributed information about what was happening to Europe's Jews, particularly in broadcasts to European countries. "There are only general threats and warnings concerning the atrocities of which the civilian population in general is the victim," he complained, "but the horrible story of the way in which the Jewish population is being exterminated is not being told." When he approached OWI, Kubowitzki was told by sympathetic officials that the agency would not act differently unless the information had first appeared in the American press. One official advised him to make sure important World Jewish Congress reports and releases were "printed in the influential publications of their respective regions." Kubowitzki should bring the resulting clippings to the official, who could use them as leverage to try to change the broadcasts.<sup>63</sup> Without official statements or releases, however, publications did not jump to print the information. The Congress thus had few clippings to deliver, and OWI continued to resist emphasizing the extermination campaigns in its propaganda material.<sup>64</sup>

The president, of course, contributed to this circularity. None of the sources Roosevelt used -- not the newspapers themselves, not reporters' questions at press conferences, not individual journalists' comments, not the dinner-party chatter of journalistic big wigs, and not tabulations of articles and editorials -- would have led the president to conclude that the press considered the extermination of the Jews an important news story. In the absence of pressure from the press, the president felt little obligation to raise the issue himself at press conferences, in fireside chats or speeches, or in back channel conversations with journalists. Consequently, he did not make such

statements, which meant the press was even less likely to report on the news of the Holocaust. The administration then interpreted the subdued coverage as an indication that neither the press nor the public was particularly concerned, reinforcing the wisdom of its silence. Either institution could have broken through. If the president had made strong statements repeatedly about the extermination campaign, the press would have covered it. If the press had raised the issue repeatedly, the president would have been obliged to respond. But neither one did.

### ***Public Opinion's Effect Upon the President***

A common explanation for the mutually reinforcing silence is that both the president and the press feared an anti-Semitic backlash if they highlighted the Jews' persecution. The claim, which is more commonly made in connection with the government than the press, is that the Roosevelt Administration did not do more to emphasize the Jews' plight because it feared an anti-Semitic public would turn against the war if it thought the war was being fought to save the Jews. FDR's reaction to the outcry against Jewish immigration in the 1930s, opinion polling that showed the persistence of anti-Semitism during the war, and the private statements of government officials are pointed to to substantiate this claim.

Each of these factors indeed exerted a pull upon Roosevelt. During the 1930s strong anti-immigrant and isolationist sentiment made it difficult to change immigration quotas to allow more Jews to escape Germany and other parts of the Reich.<sup>65</sup> Polls taken at the time showed large majorities of Americans opposed to allowing Jews into the country, and indicated that many Americans thought Jews were trying to drag America

into war.<sup>66</sup> Responding to public, as well as Congressional sentiment, Roosevelt did not push hard to raise immigration quotas, even though he understood the dangers European Jews faced.<sup>67</sup> Anti-Semitic feelings among the American public seemingly did not abate during the war. Polls showed, for example, that 44 percent of those asked in July 1942 said Jews had too much power and influence in the United States, while 41 percent said they did not.<sup>68</sup> One-third of those asked in December 1943 thought there were too many Jews appointed to government jobs in Washington, while only 18 percent said the number was just right; 46 percent had no opinion.<sup>69</sup> Finally, administration officials believed, as they wrote in internal memos, that government propaganda would not be effective either at home or abroad if it highlighted the Nazis' war on the Jews.<sup>70</sup> Putting these three factors together, scholars have concluded that worries about public opinion discouraged the Roosevelt Administration from highlighting the Jews' plight and from pursuing a more aggressive rescue policy.<sup>71</sup>

Buried within this argument, however, are several assumptions about the public's response to news of the Holocaust. It assumes: first, that Americans who learned Jews were being mass murdered would not be sympathetic because of their innate anti-Semitism; second, that Americans who learned Jews were being mass murdered would then conclude that the United States was fighting the war in order to save the Jews; and, finally, that Americans who suspected the war was being fought to save the Jews would turn against the war. Along with some logical leaps that will be discussed later, there is a key problem with the conclusion that the administration shaped its public relations strategy based on this assessment of public sentiment. It presumes either an administration that was unsophisticated in identifying, monitoring and influencing public

opinion and therefore did not try to determine the accuracy of these assumptions. As will be discussed in detail below, this clearly was not the case. Or it presumes an administration that in fact determined the American public held these views and that they could not be changed easily. But there is little evidence to support the latter presumption. Americans may indeed have held these views. Administration officials may even have believed that Americans held these views. What is clear, however, is that the administration did not test any of these assumptions. It did next to nothing to determine how the American public felt about the extermination of Europe's Jews or the United States' policies toward them. What is also clear is that had the administration wanted to act to rescue Jews but feared a negative response, it would have attempted to measure public attitudes. The fact that it did not suggests that something other than worries about a public backlash shaped the administration's attitude.

Scholars who have studied Roosevelt and public opinion have disagreed about the extent to which FDR led or followed the American people, but they have agreed on public opinion's central role in his approach to governing. "As perhaps no other political leader of his time, FDR was concerned with public opinion and confident of his ability to reach and mold it," Richard W. Steele explains. "Propaganda – that is, the more or less systematic effort to shape mass attitudes on controversial issues – was not something that had to be sold to FDR or imposed on him by wily or cynical media advisors. The disposition to form public opinion and a keen sense of how this might be done were integral parts of his political outlook."<sup>72</sup> FDR could boast relatively accurately to a newspaper editors' group that he was "more closely in touch with public opinion in the United States than any individual in this room."<sup>73</sup>

During his first two terms, with public opinion polling in its infancy, Roosevelt relied mostly on his own receptors and the Division of Press Intelligence.<sup>74</sup> By the 1940s, FDR had overcome his initial wariness to become a devotee of polling.<sup>75</sup> As he did in monitoring the press, Roosevelt established an elaborate apparatus to test public opinion. The Bureau of Intelligence, which took over the function of the Division of Press Intelligence, began to use surveys of the public as well as tabulations of the press to determine “the basic attitudes of the American people toward the war.” Its 126 employees monitored the effectiveness of the administration’s information campaigns, examined public attitudes on specific issues over time, and contrasted the opinions of the general public with those of specific groups to measure the intensity with which opinions were held and thus the likelihood they were susceptible to change. For these surveys, the National Opinion Research center interviewed as few as 3,500 individuals and as many as 7,000 to discover the “intensity and qualifications with which people hold opinions” and to gain “some insight into their reasoning.”<sup>76</sup> The bureau then provided 15 to 20 pages of analysis, which Roosevelt often read and relied on in developing policies.<sup>77</sup> FDR’s sophisticated understanding of public opinion, for example, enabled him to hold to his “Germany first” position even though two-thirds of the public wanted him to concentrate on Japan in the wake of Pearl Harbor. From the public opinion data, Roosevelt was “aware that such views were not held with any intensity,” Steven Casey concludes.<sup>78</sup>

Beginning in 1940, Roosevelt used an outside pollster as well as the in-house intelligence agency. With funding from a Roosevelt supporter rather than the government, Hadley Cantril of the Office of Public Opinion Research at Princeton University conducted regular polls for the president. They became FDR’s “most

important source of information on public attitudes.”<sup>79</sup> Cantril funneled the results to presidential assistant David Niles “who got everything to the President without change or editing,” the pollster later recalled. “Roosevelt regarded the reports sent him the way a general would regard information turned in by his intelligence services as he planned the strategy of a campaign.”<sup>80</sup> After Pearl Harbor, Cantril also frequently visited the president at the White House.<sup>81</sup>

Roosevelt used Cantril’s polls and the Bureau of Intelligence’s reports to ensure that he did not get too far ahead of public opinion and to learn the right message to use to pull it along.<sup>82</sup> “[Roosevelt’s] principal interest in assessing public attitudes was to determine their potential impact on national policy and politics,” Richard Steele contends. “He saw public attitudes not as a mandate for initiatives generated outside the White House, but as potential obstacles to courses he had already decided upon.”<sup>83</sup> So on March 1, 1944, for example, presidential assistant Niles informed Cantril “the President was concerned about the effect that further bombing of Rome might have on Catholic morale and support for the war effort.” Cantril then conducted a poll that asked: “If our military leaders believe it will be necessary to bomb Rome but take every precaution to avoid damage to its religious shrines, would you approve or disapprove of this decision?” Of those polled, 66 percent of Catholics and 81 percent of Protestants supported bombing. “[O]verwhelming majorities of Catholics and Protestants would approve a decision to bomb Rome if military leaders thought it essential,” Cantril reported to the president. Two days later, on March 3, 1944, Rome was heavily bombed.<sup>84</sup> As this example indicates, the pollsters’ reports to the president not only described public opinion but also contained advice on how worrisome public attitudes might be altered.<sup>85</sup>

In the case of bombing Rome, the pollsters' assumption was that military necessity was the key to public support. Throughout the war, the administration polled on hundreds of subjects, including the internment of Japanese-Americans, the "Negro question," and even whether Jews should settle in Palestine.<sup>86</sup> With one exception, which will be discussed in detail later, the administration did not poll on Americans' attitudes toward Germany's treatment of the Jews.

Polls did touch on American anti-Semitism and a few even correlated views on anti-Semitism with support for the war. These polls, however, did not establish a strong correlation. A Bureau of Intelligence survey in June 1942 found that among those surveyed who had misgivings about the war effort, 15 percent in the rural south "spontaneously made some comment indicating that they blamed some of their present troubles on the Jews." But that was the highest number making such comments -- only 4 percent of those interviewed in five cities and only 2 percent of those interviewed in the rural Midwest expressed such anti-Semitism. And anti-British and anti-labor sentiments dwarfed anti-Semitic concerns throughout the country: 40 percent of those in the cities and 48 percent in the rural Midwest cited anti-British feelings, and 29 percent in the cities and 52 percent in the Midwest cited anti-labor grievances.<sup>87</sup> During the war, only three polls directly addressed the Holocaust, and they were not commissioned by the administration.<sup>88</sup> And all three asked about Americans' knowledge of German atrocities, not their attitudes toward them, and only one specifically mentioned the killing of Jews.<sup>89</sup>

Despite the absence of data, there was a feeling among some American officials that emphasizing the mass murder of Jews would not be effective propaganda. Upon hearing that the State Department had confirmed the "impending Nazi extermination of

the Jews,” OWI official Leo Rosten told a colleague that the agency’s strategy should be to “urge that other groups – Poles, Serbs, Czechs, etc. – participate in any further information on Nazi treatment.” Otherwise, the story would be “confused and misleading if it appears to be simply affecting the Jewish people.”<sup>90</sup>

But this administration attitude seemed something more akin to a hunch than a well-founded, solidly grounded rationale, and significantly, not all administration members held it, such as the Treasury officials who eventually persuaded Roosevelt to create the War Refugee Board. If anything, the public opinion research the administration and others did do belied the assumption that Americans were deeply anti-Semitic and would not be sympathetic to the Jews’ fate. Polling showed that American anti-Semitism was broad but shallow, focused on Jewish power within the United States but not likely to translate into a movement against the Jews.<sup>91</sup> Asked in 1938 and again in 1939, for example, whether they could support a campaign against the Jews in this country, only 12 percent of those surveyed in three separate polls said yes.<sup>92</sup> Polls also revealed intense opposition to Germany’s anti-Semitic policies. During the winter of 1938-39, 94 percent of those polled said they strongly disapproved of Nazis’ treatment of the Jews. Once the United States went to war, those attitudes only strengthened. “In the end, the United States’ entry into the war placed the nation squarely on the side of Hitler’s victims and among the avowed opponents of anti-Semitism,” Charles Stember concludes.<sup>93</sup> The claim here is not that these polls can be taken as decisive proof that Americans who learned of the extermination campaign would have been sympathetic; besides being infrequent, imprecise and not necessarily accurate, the polls did not directly

address that issue. The contention is not that Americans would have been sympathetic, but that the administration did not have much of a basis for believing they would not be.

It is even less likely that any anti-Semitic feelings Americans did harbor would have led them to oppose the war. Except for the poll cited previously, the administration did not measure how anti-Semitism affected attitudes toward the war, which in and of itself indicates a lack of concern about its impact. No polls asked whether Americans, who had learned of the extermination campaign, concluded the war was being fought to save the Jews. The administration was, however, constantly testing general support for the war. What administration officials found and reported to the president was that isolationism was on the wane, even before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Public opinion polling showed that, as did the administration's monitoring of press reaction.<sup>94</sup> In April 1941, for example, presidential assistant Lowell Mellett told Roosevelt that a South Dakota newspaper editor reported that the editorial heads of every South Dakota daily newspaper "with one exception ... are ready to back the Administration's foreign policy 100 percent, and oppose the position of the isolationists. ... South Dakota has heretofore been regarded about the most isolationist of all states."<sup>95</sup> If isolationist sentiment had waned once the European war started, it plummeted after Pearl Harbor, as both polling and intelligence reports and weekly press summaries showed.<sup>96</sup> Alan Barth of the Bureau of Intelligence concluded that isolationism "was the initial casualty of the war."<sup>97</sup> By the time the United States engaged Germany directly with the landing in North Africa in November 1942, FDR was informed that "even die-hard `Roosevelt haters' now suddenly appreciated the war's significance."<sup>98</sup> Surveys also indicated that the American public had a firm grasp of why the country was at war. The American

Council of Public Affairs, made up of distinguished academics, concluded in January 1943 that the war's support was based on detailed information that led to an understanding of the "fundamental issues of the war."<sup>99</sup>

That is not to say Roosevelt ceased worrying about public support. "[W]hat frequently struck FDR was not the high levels of support for the war, but the constant mutterings of discontent, the lack of awareness of the true nature of the enemy, and the sometimes half-hearted support for his administration's policies," Casey concludes.<sup>100</sup> The administration's attitude, starting with FDR, however, was to tackle the concerns, not simply allow them to fester, particularly if the opposition targeted "helpless racial and religious minorities. ... Propaganda can best be combatted[sic] by counter-propaganda."<sup>101</sup> The administration, for example, took on one anti-Semitic charge -- that American Jews shirked military duty -- by encouraging the press to publish stories about Jewish military heroes.<sup>102</sup>

Had the administration wanted to change the public perception, had it wanted to awaken Americans to the ongoing extermination campaign, had it wanted to implement policies to help European Jews, it would have launched a public relations campaign. It would have used its vast polling apparatus to determine what the public actually believed, how deeply the belief was held, whether it could be changed, and what it would take to change it. The best evidence that had the administration wanted to implement a different policy toward the Jews it would have done all those things is that the one time it wanted to, it did.

In 1944 a *New York Post* columnist broached the idea of creating a limited number of "free ports" in the United States that would admit Jewish refugees outside of

regular immigration channels and allow them to stay for the duration of the war.

Officials of the newly created War Refugee Board embraced the idea. Rather than just instituting the proposal, the administration began laying the groundwork for public acceptance, perhaps edged along by information in one of Morris Ernst "Tidbits." On April 14, 1944, Ernst reported the "rumor" that Roosevelt's expected Republican opponent in the November election, New York Gov. Thomas Dewey, was "likely to come out with a declaration for the temporary admission to the United States of up to 100,000 refugees. ... [A]s I know there is considerable thinking around you in favor of temporary refugee admittance, you ought to have your boys beat Tom to the gun."<sup>103</sup>

The administration first asked Hadley Cantril to poll on the question. He found 70 percent willing to support the proposal; 23 percent opposed; and 7 percent had no opinion.<sup>104</sup> The administration next "floated" the idea at a press conference with WRB officials. A question was planted with a journalist, who elicited the response that such a proposal was under consideration. As desired, this comment provoked news stories, including front-page articles in the April 19, 1944 *New York Times* and *New York Herald Tribune*. That in turn led to editorials and other commentaries in scores of newspapers. The administration monitored the reaction, concluding "that no opposition to the proposal has been voiced by members of Congress or by the public." The lack of opposition then paved the way for the president to comment directly.<sup>105</sup> He did, during a May 30, 1944 press conference in response to a reporter's question. (It could not be determined whether the administration planted the question.) The president said he "liked the idea," though he added that it was not necessary to "decide that we have to have a free port right here in the United States." At his next conference, on June 2, 1944, a journalist asked the

president to clarify “some considerable confusion” that arose over his previous answer. Was he suggesting that refugees could go to the United States as well as other nations, or just to other countries? The President’s long and still rather convoluted answer – the most sustained discussion of a Jewish issue at any Roosevelt press conference -- suggested that he meant both other countries and the United States. During a press conference seven days later, which also happened to be three days after D-Day, the president announced that his administration would go ahead with the free ports.<sup>106</sup> Once a plan for rescuing Jews became a priority, it could even be announced in the midst of what, after Pearl Harbor, was the biggest news of the war. A month and a half later, Roosevelt provided the specifics: 1,000 refugees would be housed in Fort Ontario, N.Y. until the war’s end. In making the announcement, the president countered objections Cantril had found in polling on the issue, namely the public’s fears about too many foreigners in the country, and its uncertainty about the cost of the proposal.<sup>107</sup>

It seems logical to conclude that had Roosevelt wanted to adopt other policies to help the Jews, but feared an anti-Semitic backlash, he would have at the least monitored, measured, and perhaps mollified the public reaction. But the record reveals no such efforts, which suggests that his concerns about public opinion were at the best vague and unsubstantiated and at, the worst, did not exist at all.

### ***Public Opinion’s Effect Upon the Press***

If the administration worried that emphasizing what was happening to the Jews would undermine the war effort, then journalists feared highlighting the Jews’ plight would undermine their efforts to attract and sustain an audience. Journalists do not have

the same obligations as government officials to consider public opinion in shaping their policies,<sup>108</sup> but they do nonetheless. In fact, anticipating public reaction is built into the very idea of news judgment. Journalists consider events closer to their audience, either geographically or emotionally, to be more newsworthy than those that are more distant. With no European Jews and few American Jews among their readers or viewers, journalists presumably concluded that their audience was not interested in the Jews' fate and therefore the Holocaust was not worthy of front-page coverage. As the *Washington Post's* managing editor told a group of Jews who pled with him to pay more attention to the Final Solution: "[S]uch important and decisive things are going on, things that will shape the future of the whole world," an October 12, 1944 memo records Alexander Jones as saying, "and he is being bothered and annoyed with such unimportant, irrelevant matters as ours."<sup>109</sup>

As was the case with the administration's position, however, this was more of a constraint that journalists assumed existed, than one that they actually encountered. In fact, the basis for the press' belief that their audience would not be interested was even more tenuous than the government's. If the government's attempts to measure public attitudes in a systematic way were imprecise and imperfect, the press' were nonexistent. It did not conduct independent polling or sponsor focus groups. Journalists just assumed their audience was not interested in the Jews and went from there.

Journalists also were partly responsible for their audience's interest – or lack thereof. "Since 'giving the public what it wants' is, more properly, 'giving the public what we have taught it to want' or 'what we *say* the public wants,'" Leo Rosten wrote in a 1937 study of Washington correspondents that he conducted before joining the OWI,

“this defense may be open to skepticism.”<sup>110</sup> *New York Times* Sunday Editor Lester Markel echoed that view in an article about public opinion and foreign policy. “[T]he press has great power, either because of achievement in providing information and opinion or because of failure in neglecting to supply proper information or in furnishing misinformation and so inciting prejudice,” he wrote. “Day-by-day access to the public, the massive and unceasing roar of the printing machines, the steady riveting of repetition, make the press, at most times, the most potent of the opinion forces.”<sup>111</sup> The claim that the press merely gives the public what it wants is inevitably circular, Martin Kriesberg contends. “If the American press is asked why, with its multiple information channels and its mass coverage, it has not contributed more to popular education in foreign affairs, the first answer is that people are not interested,” Kriesberg explains. “Thus we seem to be caught in a vicious circle. Newspapers do not emphasize foreign affairs because people are not interested, and the people are not interested because they do not find much foreign affairs in their papers.”<sup>112</sup> The same can be said of news of the Holocaust: journalists did not feature it prominently because they assumed Americans were not interested in European Jews, and Americans were not interested in European Jews because journalists did not feature news about them prominently.

As with the administration’s concerns about public opinion, the argument here is not that the press was necessarily wrong in its judgment about the public reaction to front-page Holocaust news. The public might have been more likely to stop reading a newspaper than start caring about an imperiled minority. The point is that the press did not really know and therefore was projecting its own concerns more than reflecting those

of the public. Public opinion constrained journalists' reporting on the Holocaust only to the extent that they allowed it to.

### ***Why the President and the Press Did Not Highlight Holocaust News***

The president and the press allowed themselves to be hemmed in by unsubstantiated perceptions of public opinion because helping European Jews was neither one's priority. Rather than wanting to highlight the Final Solution but declining to do so because of fears of alienating the American public, neither the president nor the press particularly wanted to. They therefore did not attempt to either corroborate or contradict such perceptions. In this, they were similar to the U.S. military. In *The "Jewish Threat: Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army*, Joseph Bendersky considers the military's response to proposals to rescue Jews and faults the army, not for inaccurate calculations of the military costs, but for its unwillingness to even undertake such calculations.<sup>113</sup> So why did neither the president nor the press make the plight of European Jewry a higher priority?

Most scholarly attention has focused on Roosevelt's seeming indifference within the context of his failure to support policies designed to rescue Jews. For some scholars the rescue options are the beginning and end of the discussion. They argue that the reason Roosevelt did very little to help European Jews is that very little could be done. With the Jews trapped behind enemy lines and the Germans determined to kill them, the Allies were helpless to save most, maybe even all, European Jews.<sup>114</sup> Whatever the merits of this claim – and it has been hotly contested – it still seems to beg the question. If the president were determined to try to save Jews, even given the military and political

limitations, he would have explored the possibilities exhaustively before concluding that nothing could be done. Yet, there is little evidence to indicate that Roosevelt expressed much interest in the Jews' fate, strove hard to find solutions, or felt stymied by the lack of options.<sup>115</sup> FDR's callousness was not born of the harsh realities of the Jews' plight but preceded it. So it may be true that very little could have been done to save the Jews and yet also be true that Roosevelt did not try because he did not care.

Psychological motivations and political calculations likely shaped Roosevelt's attitude. To some scholars, including Rafael Medoff in this volume, Roosevelt's class-bound anti-Semitism explains his lack of empathy for the suffering Jews. Others argue that, whatever his feelings about Jews, the beleaguered wartime president simply could not physically or psychologically assume the additional burden of trying to save an imperiled minority. Outside forces did little to make Roosevelt feel as if he had to take up that burden, most scholars agree. The fact that American Jews were only a tiny part of the electorate and already safely in the president's camp meant that he did not have to cater to them, as he did Catholics or even German Americans.<sup>116</sup> American Jewish groups' disunity and disorganization prevented them from being able to launch an effective drive to alter the president's political calculations.<sup>117</sup> Roosevelt's many Jewish advisors, who might have been able to persuade him to focus on the problem including Felix Frankfurter, Samuel Rosenman, Ben Cohen, David Niles, and Morris Ernst, were largely silent.<sup>118</sup> Finally, as has been seen, the press' failure to highlight the Holocaust kept it from becoming an issue the president felt obligated to address.

Taken together, a compelling portrait of Roosevelt emerges from these explanations. Facing an overwhelming number of intractable problems, the president

was unwilling to go out of his way to take on another one if he did not have to. His private attitude toward Jews and his calculations of their political power convinced him he did not have to. Sustained public attention on the Jews' plight, however, could have threatened this equilibrium. The best way for the president to avoid having to entertain rescue options, or at least acknowledge there was nothing he could do, was to keep the issue off the press' and public's radar. The media-savvy Roosevelt knew his silence could help accomplish that. So he did not raise the annihilation of the Jews during press conferences and parried the press' feeble inquiries. He did not address it in major speeches, or suggest to journalists that they make it a priority. Only late in the war, when Congressmen, Jewish organizations, and a few administration officials finally mustered the moral and political clout to force the issue, did Roosevelt respond and create the War Refugee Board.<sup>119</sup> For the war's first four years, however, the president had no reason to tell.<sup>120</sup>

And journalists were not inclined to ask. With a few exceptions -- mostly liberal and Jewish publications and commentators -- the press concluded that the Holocaust was not an important story. Unlike government officials, journalists do not typically leave an extensive record of their decision making, so some speculation about their motivations is required. Some of the more commonly offered explanations for the press' failure to highlight the Holocaust, however, do not hold up on careful scrutiny. There was enough credible information about what was happening to the Jews, and it was considered reliable enough, for journalists to more consistently place the story on newspapers' front pages or have it lead radio broadcasts. Correspondents in the field mostly dispelled concerns that the news was similar to World War I's exaggerated atrocity stories.<sup>121</sup>

Although military news dominated newspapers' front pages, it did not literally crowd out news of the Holocaust. *The New York Times*, for example, typically ran 12 to 15 stories on its front page, about half of which were devoted to foreign news. It would have been possible to run a front-page Holocaust story every day and still have had plenty of room to chronicle the war's progress.<sup>122</sup>

The most likely explanation for the press' indifference is a variant of the argument that the public's anti-Semitism constrained the press. Although journalists did not necessarily have corroboration – and unlike the administration would not have been expected to seek it -- they probably did downplay the Holocaust because they assumed their audience was not interested. Journalists based that belief on the further assumption that Americans would not be interested in what has happening to European Jews when their sons were dying in a foreign war. European Jews were considered so alien that most Americans could not identify with them and their suffering. An element of anti-Semitism crept into the press' calculation, particularly the assumption that Western Europe an Jews were significantly different than North American Christians. Newspapers did not exhibit a similar reluctance to feature slaughtered non-Jewish Europeans on their front pages. The murder of partisans and non-Jewish civilians frequently appeared on page one, even though the numbers involved were a tiny fraction of the number of Jews being killed. *The New York Times* even ran more front-page stories about Nazi oppression of Christians than it did about the extermination of the Jews. (Not surprisingly, the press paid more attention to atrocities involving Americans; consider the all-out press coverage of the Bataan death marches a year and a half after

they occurred and the focus on Americans in stories about the liberation of concentration camps at the end of the war.)

The press' lack of concern about Jewish Europeans in particular seemed to stem both from its reading of the American public and the projection of its own prejudices onto the audience. News organizations were often reluctant to hire and promote Jews. They seemed particularly hesitant to help European immigrants, as Harvard professor Carl Friedrich discovered when he tried to persuade journalism schools and publishers to re-train refugees to work as journalists in the United States.<sup>123</sup> A survey taken after the war indicates that the press may have been more likely than other groups to perceive anti-Semitism as a powerful force. The Truman Administration convened panels of opinion leaders, including clergy, small businessmen, housewives, and editors, to determine attitudes toward immigration. It found the editors to be the "least likely of any panel to report unqualified approval," not because they or their newspapers opposed immigration but because of their perceptions of "public opinion as they have observed it." Of those who opposed greater immigration, almost two-fifths indicated that that point of view was "equated with or conditioned by feelings against Jews."<sup>124</sup>

The press' anti-Semitism was probably no more virulent than the public's and no more likely to lead to a complete lack of sympathy for the unparalleled agony of Europe's Jews. But the news value of proximity, the idea that the audience only cared about people they could immediately identify with, made it just a little too easy for journalists to discount the importance of the Holocaust without careful scrutiny of their own and their audience's prejudices. Raymond Arthur Davis, who reported from Eastern Europe in 1944 and 1945, described the attitude of American journalists: "Editors cabled

from oh-so-gentle America: ‘Our readers are tired of horror stories. Cable only those of death rolls unusually large or deaths themselves unusually gruesome. Such stories could always be written on the basis of the experiences of the Jews. But, alas, the editors then cabled: ‘Jewish atrocity stories are not acceptable news material.’ Ah America, America!’<sup>125</sup> The news value of proximity as a first order determination of newsworthiness also too easily freed journalists of the obligation to figure out if, and then how, they could make their audience care about a group for whom it might not automatically have sympathy. This proved to be not just a moral failure but a journalistic one as well. Journalists’ blithe assumptions about their audience’s interests prevented them from recognizing one of the twentieth century’s most important news stories.

Some journalists should have been able to get past the assumption that what was happening to European Jews was happening to an “other,” to a group different in fundamental ways from them and their audience. Several of the nation’s most influential journalists – *New York Times* publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger, *New York Times* Washington Bureau Chief and columnist Arthur Krock, *Washington Post* publisher Eugene Meyer, and columnist Walter Lippman, among others – were themselves Jews. In the case of the *Times* and other New York City newspapers, they counted many first- and-second generation European Jews with close ties to those being slaughtered among their audience. But Jewish journalists at mainstream news organizations were so determined not to be identified as Jews (Krock and Lippmann) or not to be seen as taking particular actions because they were Jews (Sulzberger and Meyer), that they too downplayed the significance of the Holocaust. If anything, they went even farther than their non-Jewish colleagues so as to avoid the appearance of special pleading. *The New*

*York Herald Tribune*, which was owned by non-Jews, for example, featured more front-page stories about the Holocaust than did the Jewish-owned *Times*.

As with their fellow non-Jewish journalists, the Jewish journalists' decision to minimize the Final Solution resulted from their reading of public attitudes and the projection of their own fears. They assumed readers would discount the value of stories about Jews found in a "Jewish newspaper" and they feared a backlash against themselves and their news organizations. But as *Nation* editor Oswald Garrison Villard wrote of *The New York Times* in 1944: "If there ever was a case where the Times should have risen superior to fear of consequences it is this. For never were human beings more entitled to be defended and championed by a great organ of public opinion; certainly never have men and women anywhere been tortured and slaughtered in such numbers with less reason."<sup>126</sup> The failure of these journalists in particular had repercussions beyond their own newspapers. Walter Lippman almost single-handedly created an uproar over the Roosevelt's position on Vichy control in North Africa and he was one of the behind-the-scene forces that elevated the Lidice massacre to "the one cap-stone incident of the Axis terror and barbarism."<sup>127</sup> Yet, he wrote not a word about the Holocaust during any wartime column or even afterward when the death camps were liberated.<sup>128</sup> Other journalists looked to the *Times* for guidance on most stories, particularly those involving foreign affairs and even more so those involving Jews. After much thought about "why a story like this did not get played by the establishment press," liberal journalist Max Lerner concluded that "one answer . . . is the hypersensitivity of *The New York Times* because of its Jewish ownership."<sup>129</sup> Jewish journalists' sensitivity over their own

ethnicity and position in American society kept them from asserting that Americans of all backgrounds should care about an attempt to annihilate an entire people.

The result was that the press, like the president, did not highlight the Holocaust, despite credible, detailed information about the Germans' war on the Jews that was available to both of them. And the public, who received only sporadic, incomplete news about an event whose significance would reverberate into the next century, was done a disservice.

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<sup>1</sup> David Brinkley, *Washington Goes to War*, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 174.

<sup>2</sup> *Complete Presidential Press Conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, (New York, De Capo Press, 1972), Vol. 20:304-8. Most scholars consider the Allied governments' statement to be the first official confirmation of the Final Solution. David Engel, *Facing a Holocaust: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1943-1945*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Roosevelt's record before the war was no better. From the time he took office in March 1933, which coincided with Hitler's rise to power, until 1938, the president only discussed the issue once during the 430 press conferences he held. On March 24, 1933 a journalist asked whether any organizations had asked him to act in connection with the "reported persecution of the Jews over in Germany by the Hitler government." Roosevelt said "a good many of these have come in," and they "were all sent to the Secretary of State." There was no follow-up. In 1938, a few questions popped up about the Jews, which the president dismissed cursorily. For example, on September 2, a journalist asked whether the president had a comment on Italy's order expelling 22,000 Jews. The president's reply was "no" and that was it. See also March 25 and August 23 press conferences. During Kristallnacht and in its wake, journalists asked the president about the German Jews during seven press conferences. See November 11, 15, 18, 22, 25, and December 6 and 9. The president had only one substantive comment -- to announce that the Labor Department would consider extending visitors' visas for German and Austrian refugees "who are not all Jews by any means," the president explained. Otherwise, the president deflected the questions. *Complete Presidential Press Conferences*, Vol. 20: 52-7; Vol. 11: 248-9; Vol. 12: 41, 69, 224, 228-9, 238-41, 247, 257, 280-1, 286.

<sup>4</sup> Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust*, (New York, The Free Press, 1986); and David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*, (New York, Pantheon, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> *The New York Times'* coverage illustrates this point. From September 1939 through May 1945, the *Times* published 1,186 stories about what was happening to the Jews of Europe, or an average of 17 stories a month. But the story of the Holocaust -- meaning articles that focused on the discrimination, deportation, and destruction of the Jews -- made the *Times* front page only 26 times, and only in six of those stories were Jews identified as the primary victims. Never did front-page stories appear back to back, nor did one follow another over a span of a few days. And not once did the story lead the paper, meaning appear in the right-hand column reserved for the day's most important news -- not even when the concentration camps were liberated at the end of the war. See Laurel Leff, *Buried by The Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper* (Cambridge University Press, April 2005) for a detailed discussion of the *Times* coverage.

<sup>6</sup> As will be discussed later, the few opinion polls conducted showed that Americans knew the Germans were killing hundreds of thousands of people but did not realize that they were trying to annihilate the Jews.

<sup>7</sup> James E. Pollard, *The Presidents and the Press*, (New York, Macmillan Company, 1947), 781. Other contemporary journalists were just as praiseworthy. Delbert Clark, *Washington Dateline*, (New York, Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1941), 89-90, a *New York Times* Washington editor, described Roosevelt as

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a “master” in “the technical routine of press relations.” Clark explained that “[h]e knows how to time an announcement to get the best position in the papers, and has been known to hold a story up for a day because some other extremely important event was then commanding the front pages. And on the other hand, he has been known to put out a big story in time to blanket a Congressional development unfavorable to him, perhaps to the extent of pushing it entirely off the front page.”

<sup>8</sup> Graham White, *FDR and the Press*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1979), 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Washington Dateline*, 78-9.

<sup>10</sup> William L. Rivers, *The Opinionmakers*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1965); Richard W. Steele, *Propaganda in an Open Society: The Roosevelt Administration and the Media, 1933-1941*, (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1985), 9; Betty Houchin Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1990), 236-7.

<sup>11</sup> *The Press and the Presidency: From George Washington to Ronald Reagan*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985), 438, 444. See also White, *FDR and the Press*, 20-4.

<sup>12</sup> *FDR and the Press*, 23-4.

<sup>13</sup> Elmer Cornwell Jr., *Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1966), 156-7.

<sup>14</sup> As one example, Roosevelt noted that a 1940 Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. report appeared on the financial page, which only “a very, very small percentage of the population ever reads.” Roosevelt then said “the only way of bringing it to their attention is for the President to say something about it in his Press Conference.” Pollard, *The Presidents and the Press*, 823.

<sup>15</sup> Steele, *Propaganda in an Open Society*, 37, White, *FDR and the Press*, 22, Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 237.

<sup>16</sup> Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War Against Nazi Germany*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001), 69.

<sup>17</sup> Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 63.

<sup>18</sup> Tebbel and Watts, *The Press and the Presidency*, 443. That does not mean the press did exactly what the president wanted. Although most reporters went along because “it was certainly easier to accept than to challenge the official version of events,” not all did. Richard W. Steele, “News of the ‘Good War’: World War II News Management,” *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (Winter 1985), 707-16, 783, 713. Despite FDR’s skill at setting the agenda, Steele argues “the press never would totally ‘get in line.’ ... Journalists were many, and their attitudes on national affairs varied widely. They were also part of a tradition that, though often honored in the breach, nonetheless valued independent political judgment and criticism.” “The Great Debate: Roosevelt, the Media, and the Coming of the War, 1940-1941,” *The Journal of American History* 71:1 (June 1984), 69-92, 87.

<sup>19</sup> Casey concludes in *Cautious Crusade*, xx, that “although the president never explicitly controlled the output of other executive departments and agencies, there was nevertheless an impressive degree of tacit cooperation in the government’s output.”

<sup>20</sup> Clark, *Washington Dateline*, 125., 137-9; James Reston, “The Number One Voice,” in Lester Markel, ed., *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1949), 69.

<sup>21</sup> White, *FDR and the Press*, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Krock, “The Press and Government,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 180 (July 1935):162-7, 164.

<sup>23</sup> *The Washington Correspondents*, (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), 77. See also White, *FDR and the Press*, 33-4, and Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 93.

<sup>24</sup> Steele, *The Journal of American History*, 70.

<sup>25</sup> Jordan Braverman, *To Hasten the Homecoming: How Americans Fought World War II Through the Media*, (Lanham, Madison Books, 1996), 37. See also Steele, *Journalism Quarterly* 708; and Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 93.

<sup>26</sup> *The New York Times*, July 22, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> The president also issued a statement during an August 21, 1942 press conference condemning the “barbaric crimes against ... civilian population that are being committed in Occupied countries.” But the statement deliberately did not mention Jews, nor did the ensuing press coverage. See *The New York Times*, August 22, 1942, p. 1. That omission led A. Leon Kubowitzki, an official with the World Jewish Congress, to lament: “I just read the text of a Statement, made today by Roosevelt on the atrocities. I am afraid it

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won't help us. There is not a word about the Jews, nor a word about the deportations." Kubowitzki to Wise, etc., August 21, 1942, MSS 361/D97/1, American Jewish Archives.

<sup>28</sup> *Complete Presidential Press Conferences*, Vol. 23: 122.

<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Roosevelt had objected to the War Refugee Board's draft of the statement because it put "too much emphasis on the Jewish situation." He moved the reference to Jews from the first to the fourth paragraph, and he insisted that the release should be "only a statement" not a declaration. Stettinius to Early, March 8, 1944, Palestine Statehood Committee Papers, Yale University. Pehle memorandum, March 9, 1944, War Refugee Board Papers, Box 33, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

<sup>30</sup> *Complete Presidential Press Conferences*, Vol. 23: 109 -118.

<sup>31</sup> Rosten to Drew, March 15, 1943, and Rosten to Farbstein, February 16, 1943, RG208/75/233, National Archives.

<sup>32</sup> See *The New York Times* September 16, 1942, p. 1. Interestingly when Hull focused solely on the Jews' plight a month later on October 31, the *Times* reported the story on page five.

<sup>33</sup> Office of War Information News Bureau Production Report, #1580, February 8, 1944, #1648, no date, #1848, June 6, 1944, Box 1, National Archives. The Foreign News Bureau also occasionally included items about Jews in its "Inside the Axis" release that was sent to newspapers and radio stations. Office of War Information, Foreign News Bureau, News, RG 208/2854, National Archives.

<sup>34</sup> *Cautious Crusade*, 16. See also Richard W. Steele, "The Pulse of the People: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Gauging of American Public Opinion," *Journal of Contemporary History* 9:4 (October 1974): 195-216, 196.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas J. Johnson, Wayne Wanta, John T. Byrd, and Cindy Lee, "Exploring FDR's Relationship with the Press: A Historical Agenda-Setting Study," *Political Communication* 12 (1995): 157-72, 167.

<sup>36</sup> Roosevelt read: the *New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post*, *Washington Times-Herald*, *Washington Evening Star*, *Washington Daily News*, *New York World-Telegram*, *New York Journal American* and *New York Sun*. Grace Tully, *F.D.R. My Boss*, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 76.

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, Wanta, Byrd and Lee, *Political Communication*, 167.

<sup>38</sup> White, *FDR and the Press*, 133; and Pollard, *The Presidents and the Press*, 777.

<sup>39</sup> White, *FDR and the Press*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 21. See also Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 17.

<sup>42</sup> *F.D.R. My Boss*, 291. FDRL: Day by Day, The Pare Lorentz Chronology, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, indicates that McCormick visited the White House for private meetings nine times during the war.

<sup>43</sup> *Journal of Contemporary History*, 201, 43.

<sup>44</sup> Ernst to FDR, October 9, 1942, President Secretary's File, Box 132, Morris Ernst Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

<sup>45</sup> Roosevelt to Ernst, April 7, 1943, *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> No. 36, President Secretary's File, Box 155, Office of War Information Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

<sup>47</sup> The issue tabulations were incredibly detailed, noting, for example, not "a single editorial favorable to the proposed tax on coconut oil." Early to Roosevelt, April 19, 1934, Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers, Official File 1275, Box 1, Folder, Division of Press Intelligence, 1933-34. There are even tabulations of "Roosevelt Human Interest Stories," such as one noting a *New York Times* editorial praising the "zest with which [the president] swims in the White House pool" and enjoys movies. Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers, Official File 1275, Box 1, Folder, Division of Press Intelligence, Jan. – July 1935.

<sup>48</sup> One official, for example, asked for all the editorials on whether the Civilian Conversation Corps should be made permanent and received 39 editorials in response, broken down by their position on the question. McKinney to Early, November 11, 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers, Official File 1275, Box 1, Folder, Division of Press Intelligence, August – December 1935.

<sup>49</sup> Steele, *Propaganda in an Open Society*, 15.

<sup>50</sup> White, *FDR and the Press*, 79-86. See also Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 17, and Steele, *Propaganda in an Open Society*, 99.

<sup>51</sup> Barth to Kane, January 5, 1942, President Secretary's File, Box 145, Office of Facts and Figures Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

<sup>52</sup> Steele, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 205, and White, *FDR and the Press*, 79.

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- <sup>53</sup> W. Phillips Davison, "More Than Diplomacy," in Markel, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, 124–8.
- <sup>54</sup> Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 215–6.
- <sup>55</sup> See also October 27, 1939, December 12, 1939, June 5, 1940, August 2, 1940, and August 9, 1940, *Complete Presidential Press Conferences*, Vol. 14: 258, 360; Vol. 15: 495–6; Vol. 16: 90–1, 108; Vol. 20: 90; Vol. 22: 19, Vol. 23: 121..
- <sup>56</sup> See February 4, March 28, May 30, June 2, 9, 1944, *Complete Presidential Press Conferences*, Vol. 23: 21; Vol. 23: 120–21; 203, 212–14, 233–4.
- <sup>57</sup> See President's Secretary File, Box 132, Morris Ernst Folder.
- <sup>58</sup> Ernst to FDR, February 28, 1944, *Ibid.*; Ernst to FDR, January 27, 1944, President's Secretary File, Box 173, War Refugee Board Folder; Ernst to FDR, February 16, 1944, President's Secretary File, Box 132, Morris Ernst Folder; Pehle to Ernst, April 11, 1944, War Refugee Board Papers, Box 7, Morris Ernst Folder.
- <sup>59</sup> Press Intelligence Bulletins, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.
- <sup>60</sup> Although FDR's role in directing the propaganda strategy on atrocities could not be determined, he often got involved in publicity decisions. "No matter what the OWI or any agency did, Roosevelt had his own ideas about how to generate an image and release information," writes Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 161. "During the periods of greatest crisis, FDR ... took a hand in particular publicity efforts. ... In critiquing OWI publications, the president would recommend changes."
- <sup>61</sup> Office of War Information, Office of Facts and Figures, File of Director 1941–1942, Lidice Mass Murder Campaign, National Archives.
- <sup>62</sup> Survey of Intelligence Material, September 2, 1942, President Secretary's File, Box 155, Office of War Information Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.
- <sup>63</sup> Kubowitzki to Schultz, August 24, 1943, MSS361/D97/3, American Jewish Archives.
- <sup>64</sup> See, for example, Davis to Pehle, September 7, 1944, Pehle to Davis. September 12, 1944, War Refugee Board Papers, Box 33, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.
- <sup>65</sup> Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), 168; Sheldon Neuringer, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and Refuge for Victims of Nazism, 1933–1941," in Herbert D. Rosenbaum and Elizabeth Bartelme, eds., *Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Man, the Myth, the Era 1882–1945*, (New York, Greenwood Press, 1987), 85–100.
- <sup>66</sup> See Hadley Cantril, *Public Opinion 1935–1946*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1951), 1150, and Charles H. Stember, *Jews in the Mind of America*, (New York, Basic Books Inc., 1966), 142.
- <sup>67</sup> William L. O'Neill, *Democracy at War: America's Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II*, (New York, The Free Press, 1993), 226–7.
- <sup>68</sup> Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 383.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.
- <sup>70</sup> See Chapter 8, "The Semitic Question Should Be Avoided": German Atrocities and U.S. Government Propaganda," in Leff, *Buried by The Times*.
- <sup>71</sup> Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry 1933–1945*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987), 171; J.J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment*, (Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. 1996), 116–7; Monty Noam Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1983), 296.
- <sup>72</sup> *Propaganda in an Open Society*, 5.
- <sup>73</sup> Brinkley, *Washington Goes to War*, 171.
- <sup>74</sup> Steele, *Propaganda in an Open Society*, 61–5, argues that the popularity of polling, combined with the growing role of radio, diminished newspapers' influence at the White House in the 1940s. Steele, however, seems to overstate the impact. It is unlikely that the shift would occur quite that quickly. In addition, it overlooks newspapers' agenda-setting function that continued to affect both radio and public opinion.
- <sup>75</sup> Roosevelt had particular misgivings about the Gallup poll because George Gallup was a Republican supporter, (Steele, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 208) and because he tended to ask, what FDR's press advisor Lowell Mellett described as "have you stopped beating your wife?" questions. Mellett to Roosevelt, January 6, 1941, Lowell Mellett Papers, Box 5, White House Correspondence 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. See also Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 18; Steele, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 206; and Pollard, *The Presidents and the Press*, 784. Even given his newfound reliance on polling, the president

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continued to turn to the press to determine the issues important to the American people. In fact, the administration often polled on questions raised in the press. Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 222.

<sup>76</sup> Alan Barth, "The Bureau of Intelligence," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1943): 66-76, 67, 70, 71.

<sup>77</sup> Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 19.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>79</sup> Steele, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 208.

<sup>80</sup> Hadley Cantril, *The Human Dimension: Experiences in Policy Research* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1967), 40-1.

<sup>81</sup> Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 220.

<sup>82</sup> Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 218-9.

<sup>83</sup> Steele, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 215.

<sup>84</sup> Cantril, *The Human Dimension*, 53-4. Earlier in the war, the administration had also been concerned about American Catholics' reaction to U.S. support for the Soviet Union in the wake of the Nazi invasion. Cantril found that, like the large majority of Americans, Catholics wanted Russia to defeat Germany. Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 220.

<sup>85</sup> Harvard government professor Carl J. Friedrich explained in a 1943 article how such attitudes could be altered. "Any public policy calling for action on the part of a number of people should be considered a battle which can be won only if advance preparations are made to prepare the people involved for the actions to be taken by them. This calls for 1) research to determine whether there are any prejudices, ignorance, or other grounds obstructing the likelihood of such action being taken when requested; 2) channeling out of information in such amounts as will overcome these obstructions; 3) further research to determine whether the information is being absorbed and is having the desired effect; 4) announcing the policy in such a manner as to anticipate the major obstructions by high-lighting[sic] the information previously broadcast." Friedrich even used an example of overcoming rumors that Jews were evading the draft to illustrate how informational policies should work. "Issues of Informational Strategy," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 7:1 (Spring 1943) 77-89, 83.

<sup>86</sup> See Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 380-1, 385-6.

<sup>87</sup> Survey of Intelligence Materials, June 17, 1942, Office of Facts and Figures, President Secretary's File, Box 155, Office of War Information Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

<sup>88</sup> No such polls were found in, for example, the President Secretary's File, Box 157, Public Opinion Polls Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, and none were published in Cantril, *Public Opinion*. It may be that such polls were taken and have not yet been discovered. An OWI official told World Jewish Congress leaders he met with in December 1942 that Gallup polls indicated "the impression on the average American" is seven times stronger if German atrocities are "not exclusively Jewish." Joint Report, Submitted to the Meeting of the Planning Committee, December 17, 1942, MSS/361/D92/2, American Jewish Archives. But no such polls were found in Rosten's OWI files. RG208/75/232, RG208/75/233, National Archives.

<sup>89</sup> A 1943 Gallup poll asked: "It is said that 2 million Jews have been killed in Europe since the war began - - Do you think that is true or just a rumor?" Forty-eight percent of those asked said they thought it was true, while 28 percent said it was a rumor, and 24 percent had no opinion. Another Gallup poll, taken in 1944, asked: "Do you believe the stories that the Germans have murdered many people in concentration camps?" Seventy-six percent of respondents replied "yes," 12 percent said "no" and 12 percent had no opinion. By May 2, 1945, another poll found that the percentage of Americans believing the "Germans have killed many people in concentration camps or let them starve to death" rose slightly to 84 percent. Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 383, 1070-1,

<sup>90</sup> Rosten to Arthur Sweetzer, December 1, 1942, RG208/75/233, National Archives. Before joining OWI, Rosten had published *The Washington Correspondents*, a major study of capital journalists. He later wrote popular books on the Yiddish language.

<sup>91</sup> Stember, *Jews in the Mind of America*, 215.

<sup>92</sup> Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 382. "Asked in March 1944 if anti-Semitism was on the rise, [the ACLU's] Roger Baldwin commented that 'it would be more accurate to say that the awareness of anti-Semitism and its dangers have increased, but not the evidence of it.' He went on [to] declare that the fascistic agitators were not to be taken seriously. 'They have never had any influence except in very limited circles and

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attracted no support by the powerful interests which, in the vent of a crisis, might lead the country towards fascism.” Richard Steele, *Free Speech in the Good War*, New York: St. Martin’s Press (1999), 146.

<sup>93</sup> *Jews in the Mind of America*, 110.

<sup>94</sup> Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 25, 28; White, *FDR and the Press*, 72, 87.

<sup>95</sup> Mellett to Roosevelt, April 28, 1941, Lowell Mellett Papers, Box 5, White House Correspondence 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, Survey of Intelligence Material, No. 12, President Secretary’s File, Box 155, Office of War Information Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. See also White, *FDR and the Press*, 88-9

<sup>97</sup> Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 47.

<sup>98</sup> Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 96.

<sup>99</sup> Cowles to Deputies, Bureau Chief of OWI Domestic Branch, January 18, 1943, RG 208/75/232, National Archives.

<sup>100</sup> *Cautious Crusade*, xviii., 214. See also Joseph Cardello, “The First Link: Toward the End of Isolationism,” in Rosenbaum and Bartelme, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 167-90.

<sup>101</sup> Survey of Intelligence Material, No.18, April 15, 1942, President’s Secretary’s File, Box 155, Office of War Information Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

<sup>102</sup> Rosten to Luce, March 19, 1943; Rosten to Cowles, April 14, 1943, RG208/75/232; Rosten to O’Connor, January 9, 1943, RG208/75/233, National Archives.

<sup>103</sup> Ernst to Roosevelt, April 14, 1944, President Secretary’s File, Box 132, Ernst Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

<sup>104</sup> Respondents were asked: “It has been proposed that our government offer now[sic] temporary protection and refuge to those people in Europe who have been persecuted by the Nazis but have escaped, and are now homeless, and could save themselves by coming here. The plan proposes that these people would be kept in special camps in this country for the duration of the war. They would not be allowed to have jobs outside the camps. When the war is over, they would all be returned to their native lands. Would you approve or disapprove of this plan?” Cantril to Niles, April 14, 1944, David Niles Papers, Box 25, Brandeis University. The question itself indicates that at least some members of the administration were less interested in a neutral reading of public opinion and more interested in using public support to bolster a previously chosen policy. In fact, this seemed to be a classic example of how those within the administration used polling data to further a “liberal-international” agenda. “During the war, the President’s concern for national unity tended to mute his leadership in politically sensitive areas, and in more than one instance those who supplied him with information used opinion reports to encourage the President to more forceful and outspoken support of liberal goals.” Steele *Journal of Contemporary History*, 212.

<sup>105</sup> Pehle to Roosevelt, May 18, 1944, President Secretary’s File, Box 132, Ernst Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

<sup>106</sup> *Complete Presidential Press Conferences*, Vol. 23: 203, 212-4, 233-34.

<sup>107</sup> Cantril to Niles, April 14, 1944, Samuel Rosenman Papers, Box 14, Princeton Public Opinion Polls Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

<sup>108</sup> Frank Luther Mott, “Newspapers in Presidential Campaigns,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 8 (Fall 1944), 348-67, 361.

<sup>109</sup> Palestine Statehood Committee Papers, Reel #1, Yale University.

<sup>110</sup> *The Washington Correspondents*, 268.

<sup>111</sup> “Opinion – A Neglected Instrument,” in Markel, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, 20.

<sup>112</sup> “Dark Areas of Ignorance,” *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>113</sup> (New York, Basic Books, 2000), 347.

<sup>114</sup> Frank W. Brecher, *Reluctant Ally: United States Foreign Policy Toward Jews From Wilson to Roosevelt* (New York, Greenwood Press, 1991), 95 –117; William J. Vanden Heuvel “America and the Holocaust,” *American Heritage* (July/August 1999): 35- 52.

<sup>115</sup> Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, (New York, Holocaust Library, 1980); Saul Friedman, *No Haven for the Oppressed: United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees, 1938-1945*, (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1973); Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981); Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable*, and Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*.

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<sup>116</sup> Henry L. Feingold, "Who Shall Bear Guilt for the Holocaust: The Human Dilemma," *American Jewish History* (March 1979) 261-82. It is striking that in conducting routine polling on religious questions, the administration's pollsters categorized the responses of Protestants and Catholic but not Jews.

<sup>117</sup> See Aaron Berman, *Nazism, the Jews and American Zionism, 1933-1948*, (Detroit, Wayne State University, 1990); Seymour Maxwell Finger, *American Jewry During the Holocaust*, (New York, Holmes & Meier Publishers Inc., 1984); Haskell Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers? The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust, 1938-1944*, (New York, Vintage, 1985); and Rafael Medoff, *The Deafening Silence*, (New York, Shapolsky Publishers, 1987).

<sup>118</sup> See Henry Feingold, "'Courage First and Intelligence Second': The American Secular Elite, Roosevelt and the Failure to Rescue," *American Jewish History* 72 (June 1983). As Feingold and others have argued, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. was an important exception.

<sup>119</sup> See in particular, Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue*, and Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable*.

<sup>120</sup> Ironically, this conviction on FDR's part, which was shared by key people in the State Department and OWI, hobbled the administration in carrying out one of its propaganda goals. To maintain its policy of going after Germany first, even in the wake of Pearl Harbor, the administration through OWI launched a "nature of the enemy" campaign to inform the American public of German brutality. But the administration deliberately avoided the most extreme example of that – the extermination of the Jews. That means that later in the war, when the administration had decided to push for Germany's unconditional surrender, it had a hard time convincing the American public of the need for such a harsh policy. Years of emphasizing a distinction between the Nazi regime and the German people and of focusing on distinct German atrocities, such as Lidice, rather than the systemic effort to eradicate the Jews, made it hard to change public opinion which had consistently maintained a more sympathetic view of the German people than of their leaders. "As late as May 30, 1944, the OWI reported that on the whole the majority attitude toward the German people is still one of generosity." Casey explains. "In large part, of course, these benign attitudes were a product of the administration's own efforts." Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 132-61.

<sup>121</sup> *New York Times* stories frequently included statements, such as the following in Moscow correspondent Ralph Parker's March 13 1942, p. 8 article: "Since World War I[,] stories of child victims of German brutality have been received with a certain skepticism. What [your correspondent saw at a Moscow hospital] and what the children told him convinced him that there had been no exaggeration by the Russians about German behavior on their territory." This was even the contemporaneous academic understanding. See Vernon McKenzie, "Atrocities in World War II – What We can Believe," *Journalism Quarterly* 19 (September 1942): 268-76.

<sup>122</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the reasons for press coverage of the Holocaust, see Leff, *Buried by The Times*, the Introduction and Conclusion in particular.

<sup>123</sup> See Carl J. Friedrich Papers, HUG(FP)17.31, Box 1, 2, Harvard University Archives.

<sup>124</sup> "Opinions about Immigration," Preliminary Report, October 21, 1946, Correspondence Panels, GIS, Bureau of the Budget, David Niles Papers, Brandeis University.

<sup>125</sup> *Odyssey Through Hell*, (New York, L. B. Fischer, 1946), 11.

<sup>126</sup> *The Disappearing Daily: Chapters in American Newspaper Evolution*, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), 86.

<sup>127</sup> Office of War Information, Office of Facts and Figures, File of Director 1941-1942, Lidice Mass Murder Campaign, National Archives.

<sup>128</sup> Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*, (Boston, Atlantic-Little Brown, 1980), 373.

<sup>129</sup> David S. Wyman and Rafael Medoff, *A Race Against Death: Peter Bergson, America, and the Holocaust*, (New York, The New Press, 2002), 75. See also Leff, *Buried by The Times*, and Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, 323.