

The American Jew as Journalist

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The subject of the relationship of Jews to journalism is entangled in paradox. Their role in the press has long been an obsession of their enemies, and the vastly disproportionate power that Jews are alleged to wield through the media has long been a staple of the antisemitic imagination. The commitment to this version of bigotry has dwarfed the interest that scholars have shown in this problem, and such disparity merits the slight correction and compensation that this essay offers.

This feature of Judeophobia attains prominence for the first time in a significant way in the squalid and murky origins of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the most ubiquitous of antisemitic documents. This forgery was based on a chapter in the novel *Biarritz* (1868) by Hermann Gödsche entitled, "In the Jewish Cemetery in Prague." This chapter formed the contours of the "Rabbi's Speech" that exposed the methods of the conspiratorial ambition to dominate Christendom and, indeed, the entire planet. "If gold is the first power in this world," Gödsche's rabbi informs his co-conspirators, "the second is undeniably the press. . . . Our people must become the editors of all daily newspapers in all countries. Our possession of gold, our skill in devising means of exploiting mercenary instincts, will make us the arbiters of public opinion and enable us to dominate the masses." With this influence, the rabbi fiendishly predicts: "We shall dictate to the world what it is to have faith in, what it is to honor, and what it is to curse. . . . Once we are absolute masters of the press, we will be able to transform ideas about honor, about virtue, about uprightness of character, we will be able to deal a blow against . . . the family, and we will be able to achieve its disintegration. . . . We shall declare open war on everything that people respect and venerate."¹

This passage from the precursor to the *Protocols* has been quoted at some length because it foreshadowed the conception of Jewish power in and through journalism which was to be repeated for over a century. It is commonly known that antisemitic fears were stirred by the Jewish involvement in finance; it is insufficiently realized how often this phobia was coupled with animus against a Jewish participation in journalism. As a locus of sinister or repellent Jewish influence, the newsroom was second only to the bourse. A little over a century ago, the historian Heinrich von Trietschke warned that "across our Eastern borders there pushes . . . a troop of ambitious, trousers-selling youth, whose children and children's children will someday dominate Germany's exchanges and Germany's press." Nor was the

Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt immune from the impression that Jews exerted special impact upon the “venal” press.²

Our final European example is taken from *Mein Kampf*, whose preface explains that the book’s purpose is to give an account of the Nazi movement and of the political development of its Führer. This is necessary in order “to destroy the foul legends about my person dished up in the Jewish press.” Before even getting to the text itself, the author reveals his paranoia and his rage—but not by alluding to race, or to the dangers of pollution and infection, or to the stock market, or to religion. In his sole reference to Jews in the preface, Hitler mentions only “the Jewish press.” The chapter retracing his steps in becoming an antisemite bristles with memories of the degenerate Jewish journalists who operated as liberals or as Marxists in fin-de-siècle Vienna. “For one Goethe,” the inmate of Landsberg Prison concludes, “nature easily can foist on the world 10,000 of these scribblers who poison men’s souls.”³

In more muted form and with shifting emphases, this theme crossed the Atlantic. Henry Adams was the most impressive historian of the country which both his grandfather and great-grandfather had served as president. But on the subject of one immigrant group, Secretary of State John Hay remarked, Adams was “clean daft. The Jews are all the press, all the cabinets, all the gods and all weather. I was amazed to see so sensible a man so wild.”⁴ The most mischievous and important of American Judeophobes was probably the wealthiest citizen of the world’s wealthiest country as well. More than anyone else, Henry Ford made the *Protocols* internationally famous. They punctuated the editorial policy of the weekly he owned, the *Dearborn Independent*. From 1920 until 1927 antisemitic columns ran in this newspaper, and the series entitled “The International Jew” was later published in book form. The first in the series (22 May 1920) set the tone. After observing the tentacles of Jewish financiers within the American economy, the editorial announced that “Jewish journalists are a large and powerful group here. . . . They absolutely control the circulation of publications throughout the country.” Later, in 1920, Ford’s newspaper warned that from the northeastern section of the United States, “poisonous infections of revolutionary doctrine” were being “spread throughout the country upon the wings of ‘liberal’ publications subsidized by Jewish money.”⁵

One ambition ascribed to Jews in journalism was to implicate the United States in war. This is a theme not readily found in German antisemitism, probably because the United States has been far less hospitable to militarism and also because the American tradition of isolationism was until fairly recently so tenacious. A little-known example of this charge of war-mongering can be located in the writing of H. L. Mencken, an ornament of American letters who was the most inescapable journalist of the 1920s. But during the First World War, Mencken’s opposition to the conflict and to American intervention made him a beleaguered and rather subdued figure. He was no antisemite, and yet he found it necessary to comment in 1922: “Fully four-fifths of all the foreign news that comes to the American newspapers comes through London, and most of the rest is supplied either by Englishmen or by Jews (often American-born) who maintain close relations with the English. . . . I was in Copenhagen and Basel in 1917,” Mencken added, “and found both towns—

each an important source of war news—full of Jews representing American journals as a sideline to more delicate and confidential work for the English department of press propaganda.”⁶ What is peculiar about this appraisal is its direct collision with the assessment of the British ambassador in Washington, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, who wrote on 13 November 1917 that the American Jewish bankers of German ancestry were “toiling in a solid phalanx to compass our destruction. One by one they are getting hold of the principal New York papers . . . and are bringing them over as much as they dare to the German side.” Spring-Rice stressed the power of this lobby so adamantly that he may well have curtailed his own career. His government believed him enough to replace him in Washington with a prominent Jew, Lord Reading (Rufus Isaacs), possibly in the hope of placating the American press.⁷

An even more vigorous opponent of American intervention in the Great War than either Ford or Mencken was a Midwestern congressman, Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr., and in the 1930s his son entered the political cockpit in order to keep the United States out of another European conflict. In a radio speech in Des Moines, Iowa, on 11 September 1941, Lindbergh, Jr., identified “the three most important groups which have been pressing this country toward war . . . the British, the Jewish and the Roosevelt Administration.” Speaking of the Jews, he warned: “Their greatest danger to this country lies in their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio and our government.” Although his own father’s isolationism had been fueled by distrust of Eastern bankers and financiers, Colonel Lindbergh himself underscored Jewish control of what later came to be called the media. He also provided the helpful advice that, by pushing their case for military intervention against Germany, Jews would only encourage antisemitism.⁸

Bigotry that stressed the conspiratorial power of Jewry became inconsistent during the war against Nazism, disreputable after the Holocaust and remorselessly sour after the triumph of a democratic Israel.⁹ In the post-Second World War era such hostility found its most positive reception primarily in the Soviet bloc and in the Arab world—and among their allies. Let two illustrations suffice to indicate the persistence of this aspect of antisemitism. In 1956 public rallies of the Polish Communist party blamed the country’s problems on “the press” and “the race” (the two words rhyme in Polish), neatly updating a familiar combination.¹⁰ And in a 1980 speech before the UN’s General Assembly, the Senegalese delegate who headed the Committee on the Exercise of the Unalienable Rights of the Palestinian People complained that news organizations “dominated by Jews” had neglected or distorted the Palestinian cause. The diplomat referred especially to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the three American national television networks.¹¹

But an accusation that could echo from Eastern Europe to the East River has been picked up by almost no American voices. Almost. When Vice-President Spiro Agnew blasted the liberal slant of the eastern “establishment” press in 1969 (in the same city as Lindbergh’s speech of almost three decades earlier), it was the most vigorous, deliberate assault by a leading official on the press in American political history. Unlike Lindbergh, however, Agnew made no mention whatsoever of Jews. That did not prevent some of his more excitable supporters from drawing certain conclusions from the vice-president’s condemnation of news organizations in which

Jews happened to be prominent, and media figures as well as the American Jewish Committee noticed an increase in antisemitic hate mail. Even as Agnew protested that he was being unfairly smeared for having instigated this vitriolic attack, he told Barbara Walters on NBC's "Today Show" that a "Jewish cabal" exercised mastery of the American media, permitting "Zionist influences" to tilt American policy unduly toward Israel. Agnew repeated this charge in published interviews and even in his novel, *The Canfield Decision* (1976). Two ex-speechwriters for the vice-president, William Safire and Victor Gold, denounced Agnew's remarks, which President Ford called "wrong, both substantially and morally."¹² A recent aspirant for Gerald Ford's former job, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, has also taken notice of Jewish influence on American banks and the media.¹³

This is the time to emphasize again that the subject of Jews and journalism has captivated the adversaries of the Jews far more than it has either Jews themselves or independent scholars. In a biography of Mordecai Noah, the first significant journalist of Jewish origin in the New World, Professor Jonathan D. Sarna states categorically: "There is no history of Jews in American journalism."¹⁴ The researcher is therefore required to begin with specialized monographs such as biographical portraits of individuals appearing in encyclopedias and reference works. One journalist's book, Stephen D. Isaacs's *Jews and American Politics*, does include a chapter speculating on the apparent over-representation of such journalists on the contemporary political landscape. But the topic is not treated in a historical—much less a general scholarly—way. Neither is the over-view on the subject of journalism in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* interpretive: It is primarily biographical in orientation, tracking the careers and achievements of reporters, editors and publishers in various countries—one of whom even became the prophet of the Zionist state. The only scholarly article on the role of Jews in American journalism highlights the criticism that has been voiced concerning the problematic nature of the press itself.¹⁵ The rest is "no comment."

In breaking this silence, a scholar must weigh without apology the validity of the claim of Jewish over-representation in the media. An argument is not *ipso facto* false because it is repeated by African champions of the PLO or by a disgraced vice-president of the United States. The law of averages works in a fashion that allows for the possibility of even an antisemite being correct some of the time. But however exaggerated or unwarranted the beliefs of bigots may prove to be, the conspicuous attractiveness of journalism for many Jews merits analysis and explanation within the context of modern Jewish history.

The raw statistics utterly belie the expectations envisioned in the Prague rabbi's speech quoted above. Nearly eighteen hundred daily newspapers are currently published in the United States. Jews own about fifty, or less than 3 percent, which is the proportion of Jews in the general American population. Even when these particular newspapers' circulation is taken into account (8 percent), it is evident that newspaper publishing is hardly an awesome sign of Jewish entrepreneurship.¹⁶ There are nearly nine thousand radio stations and over six hundred television network affiliates, but no data on the ethnic and religious identification of their owners appear to be extant. According to the only published figures on the percentage of Jews among

American editors and reporters, the 3.3 percent so identified is only slightly above their proportion in the general population.¹⁷

The two most newsworthy American cities do, however, seem to be covered by a large fraction of journalists of Jewish birth. According to a 1976 study, a quarter of the Washington press corps was of Jewish background. A volume on Jewish economic history published a year earlier claims that “it has been estimated that . . . 40 percent of . . . [New York’s] journalists are Jews.” Marcus Arkin fails to disclose the basis of this estimate or even its source. But since New York is the media capital of the country and the most populous urban concentration of Jews on the planet, the proportion of Jews in the general population is more relevant than their percentage in the city itself. Arkin’s estimate is, therefore, almost certainly too high, perhaps much too high.¹⁸

The proportion of Jews among Washington and New York journalists is probably closer to that of post–First World War Germany than post–First World War Hungary. There were 740 editors in responsible positions in Prussia in 1925, of whom 41 (a little more than 5 percent) identified themselves as Jews. By a much more indulgent standard (which would include half-Jews, converts to Christianity and Jews professing no faith whatsoever), 192 Jews toiled among the 3,475 editorial employees in Prussia that year. Hungary, where Hannah Senesh’s father was a successful columnist, is a more striking case. According to official statistics, among 1,214 journalists in the country in 1910, 516 were Jews. In 1920 the number fell to 358 (36 percent) and was a little lower in 1930. Such figures, needless to say, triggered the animosity of Hungary’s antisemitic People’s party.¹⁹

Numbers, of course, do not correlate with influence, nor participation with impact; and the prestige of certain papers cannot be quantified. Here, too, analogues in European history can be found. In the Weimar Republic as earlier in the Second Reich, special distinction was conceded to the Jewish-owned *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the publishing houses of Ullstein and Mosse. And the Jewish editorial control of the *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Vossische Zeitung* typified the Jewish presence across the spectrum of the liberal and leftist press, even though the conservative and right-wing press (dominated by the Hugenberg trust) enjoyed greater circulation. The most prestigious newspaper in Central Europe was undoubtedly Vienna’s *Neue Freie Presse*, which Jews published and wrote feuilletons for. In the remoter provinces of Franz Josef’s empire, some visiting cards contained the following boast below the engraved name of the bearer: “Subscribes to the *Neue Freie Presse*.”²⁰

In the United States, as Agnew’s own partisan speech implied, some news organizations are more respected and important than others. According to one recent survey, the reporters whose beat is Washington, D.C., acknowledge that they are most influenced by: (1) television networks; (2) weekly newsmagazines; (3) the wire services; and (4) four newspapers—the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Star* and the *Wall Street Journal*.²¹

With the exception of the wire services (the Associated Press and the United Press International), these are institutions in which Jews have tended to congregate. A 1979 survey revealed that 27 percent of the employees of the *Times*, the *Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News & World Report*, the three net-

works and the Public Broadcasting System were of Jewish origin. Fifty-eight percent of the producers and editors at ABC were Jews.²² They were conspicuously at the top. The Sulzberger family retains its ownership of the *New York Times*, whose executive editor is A. M. Rosenthal, associate editor is Jack Rosenthal, chief of the editorial page is Max Frankel and metropolitan editor is Sydney Schanberg. Eugene Meyer had bought the *Washington Post* at an auction in 1933; and it was under the leadership of his daughter, Katherine Graham, raised as a Lutheran, and executive editor Benjamin C. Bradlee, a Brahmin, that the newspaper became the chief rival to the *Times*. For the *Post*'s Pulitzer Prize-winning exposure of the Watergate scandal, the two most famous local reporters in history benefited from the support of editors Howard Simons, Harry Rosenfeld and Barry Sussman. Warren Phillips was editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, whose current managing editor is Norman Pearlstine. Marvin Stone was editor of *US News & World Report*, long the extended shadow of David Lawrence; it is now owned by Morton Zuckerman. Edward Kosner was editor of *Newsweek*. The managing editor of *Time* was Henry Anatole Grunwald, who began as the magazine's part-time copyboy. William Paley was chairman of the board of CBS, while Fred Friendly and Richard Salant were presidents of its news division. The Sarnoff family was long dominant at NBC, whose news division was headed by Richard Wald. Leonard Goldenson was president of ABC, while the executive producer of its evening news was Av Westin. The president of the Public Broadcasting System was Lawrence Grossman. The president of National Public Radio has been Frank Mankiewicz, the son of the co-scenarist of Hollywood's most brilliant film, a portrait of a press lord, *Citizen Kane* (1941).

Statistical measurement cannot convey the impact which Jews have exerted upon American journalism. How can the prestige of the *New York Times* be tabulated? In its authoritativeness as the newspaper of record, in its reputation for accuracy and comprehensiveness, the *Times* is in a class by itself. It has a news staff of 550 in New York alone, where its Times Square newsroom covers 1.3 acres. To put on paper "all the news that's fit to print," 6 million trees are chopped down annually. The *Times* Sunday edition typically runs over four hundred pages, printed in enough copies to paper over the island of Manhattan twice.²³ But what does it mean for its editors and reporters to realize that their words will be read and pondered in the White House and in the Kremlin, in City Hall and in the libraries and archives of posterity?

Or how does the scholar measure the impact of Walter Lippmann (1889–1974)? He was probably the most admired American journalist of the twentieth century, and one reputable historian considered him "perhaps the most important [American] political thinker of the twentieth century" as well. Because Lippmann's approach to journalism was interpretative, he made little impression on the process of news gathering. But it was said in Washington during his prime that foreign governments formally accredited their ambassadors to the president and by private letter to Lippmann, who seemed to stride above the etiquette of diplomacy when it suited him. His regular pilgrimages to Europe were so rigorously arranged that, in 1961, Nikita Khrushchev's request to delay Lippmann's Soviet visit by a few days, owing to an unanticipated political crisis, was turned down. The Russian dictator

then rearranged his own plans so that he could meet the American journalist. (The resulting interviews earned Lippmann a second Pulitzer Prize.) Quantification of his stature can sometimes be attempted. When Lippmann spoke at the National Press Club to celebrate his seventieth birthday, more correspondents were in attendance than had come to hear Khrushchev speak in the same room a little earlier.²⁴

Or how is the impact of Herbert Bayard Swope (1882–1958) to be assessed? He won the first Pulitzer Prize for reporting (in 1917) and gained fame as the executive editor of the *New York World* in its heyday, the 1920s (when Lippmann ran the editorial page). He coined the term *op ed page*, a feature for which he was primarily responsible. From a Roosevelt campaign speech of 1932, Swope singled out the phrase *new deal*, thus labeling not only an administration but also an era. When it was over, he coined the phrase *the cold war* (which Lippmann gave currency).²⁵ He instituted the newspaper practice of capitalizing the word *Negro*; and under his direction the *World* won a Pulitzer Prize for a series exposing the Ku Klux Klan. Lord Northcliffe of the *London Daily Mail* considered Swope the finest reporter of his time, so that late in the 1920s, when the promising humorist James Thurber sat down in a speakeasy and was told only later that he had been in the company of Swope, Thurber feigned astonishment. He'd been under the impression that Herbert Bayard Swope was a legend. Swope possessed so much chutzpah, RCA's David Sarnoff once remarked, "if you wanted to meet God, he'd arrange it somehow." Swope was so famous that he became one of the first *Time* magazine-cover subjects; so arrogant that he listed among his favorite books not only the Bible and the *World Almanac* but also any volume containing a reference to himself; so imperious that he could scoop other reporters by dressing exactly like a diplomat and getting a front row seat at the Versailles Peace Conference. The impression he made was so distinctive, effusive and flamboyant that, after deluging a convalescent Ring Lardner with get-well messages, the humorist wired back: "CAN YOU SUGGEST ANY WAY TO END THIS CORRESPONDENCE AMICABLY STOP MY PERSONAL PHYSICIAN SAYS EXCITEMENT OF HEARING FROM YOU DAILY IS BAD FOR ME." Swope's written legacy is surprisingly sparse and unenduring, but his hellzapoppin personality made him into the most formidable newsman of his age.²⁶

Let one other biographical illustration suggest that the elusiveness of measuring the Jewish role in American journalism. If Swope lived the myth of American journalism, Ben Hecht (1894–1964) not only partook of it but also, more than anyone else, created it. It is from Hecht that Americans learned that newspapermen were corrupt, cynical, wenching, dissolute, coarse, drunken rogues, insensitive to anyone's privacy, oblivious to puritanical codes—and therefore having more fun than anyone else. Born on the Lower East Side, Hecht began his professional career in Chicago at the age of sixteen. His first assignment, given to him by the publisher of the *Chicago Journal*, was to write obscene verses for a stag party. Over a decade of such intimacy with the vulgarities of his profession and the raunchiest features of city life gave Hecht material for *1001 Afternoons in Chicago* (1922) and for later autobiographical novels like *Gaily, Gaily* (1963) and his spirited memoir, *A Child of the Century* (1954). But Hecht's greatest achievement as a mythmaker was *The Front Page* (1928), in collaboration with Charles MacArthur.²⁷ This piece of gal-

lows humor, Tom Stoppard's favorite American play, possesses no less than three Hollywood versions, the last directed by the Viennese *bon vivant*, Billy Wilder, who had learned in the pages of Karl Kraus's *Die Fackel*, among other forums, of the pertinence of journalism as a peephole into modern malaise.²⁸ Newspaper experiences were the capital that Hecht drew upon for writing fiction and films, and his recounting became the standard against which the vicissitudes of the profession came to be measured.

Since such examples could be multiplied, the limitations of space make it impossible (as newsboys used to scream) to "read all about it." It is therefore preferable to elucidate such impact rather than merely to illustrate it.

One theory which should not be immediately discounted is that Jews are simply more talented than other peoples. Their gifts could flourish, especially after the walls of medieval ghettos tumbled, after the isolation of the *shetlakh* was punctured, as centuries of frustrated energies seemed to evaporate within a couple of generations. The belief in the superiority of the Jewish "race" was enunciated not only by Disraeli but also by nineteenth-century writers less susceptible to romanticism. Nietzsche, for instance, acknowledged the Jews' "energy and higher intelligence, their accumulated capital of spirit and will, gathered from generation to generation through a long school of suffering." Thus Nietzsche explained their preponderance.²⁹ Mark Twain was impressed by the "marvellous fight in this world" that the Jew had made, "with his hands tied behind him." Immune to the malaise of the late nineteenth century, the Jew was "exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind."³⁰ Exceptional accomplishment was therefore the predicate of exceptional talent, and antisemitism the consequence of envy aroused by "racial" superiority.

But whatever tribute such testimony pays to Jewish self-esteem, it leaves unexplained why Jewish influence is more pronounced in some fields rather than others, why Jews gravitate toward some occupations rather than others. Even if all forms of ethnic and racial discrimination in the United States were to be miraculously obliterated, its occupational structure would probably not reveal a random distribution of minorities. Their experiences and values are hardly identical, and therefore their predispositions and interests can in the aggregate be expected to diverge. Neither talent nor intelligence can be summoned at random to be enlisted and developed whenever a barrier of discrimination is battered down.

And even if there were some way of "proving" the superior mental endowment of the Jewish people, even if the application of its gifts could be sorted out, history would still have to be appealed to in accounting for the special responsiveness of many Jews to opportunities in liberal professions such as journalism. There has to be some sort of "fit" between skill and milieu, between potentiality and circumstance. That is why the *Encyclopedia Judaica* dates the Jewish contribution to European journalism at the beginning of the Emancipation itself, conjecturing that a people already relatively urban and literate found itself "in the right place at the right time." Moreover, the *Encyclopedia* asserts, the "gift of adaptability permitted the Jew to act as an intermediary, the link between the event and the reader, as the journalist has often been called." The press offered "brightness and novelty," an

outlet for people who felt little if any devotion to pre-modern tradition. Also pertinent here are the speculations of sociologist Arthur Ruppin that “city life forces people into intensive interaction, into an exchange of goods and ideas. It demands constant mental alertness. . . . The great mental agility of the Jews . . . enabled them to have a quick grasp and orientation in all things.”³¹

Such comments get us closer to the truth, though they would appear to be more applicable to the nineteenth century than to the twentieth. They are more useful in explaining the initial attraction that journalism might have exerted on the newly emancipated, not why—if anything—the Jewish involvement has persisted without noticeable loss of intensity. By the twentieth century, especially long past its mid-point, the relative historical advantages which literacy and urbanity might have conferred should have become quite marginal. The conjectures of the *Encyclopedia* and of Ruppin undoubtedly apply more directly to Europe than to the United States, which was post-Emancipation from its inception as an independent nation and has posed no official restrictions upon Jews.

Moreover, this theory, like others, suffers from the disadvantage of blurring or ignoring the distinction between journalists themselves and their employers. With some important exceptions, Jews often achieved prominence on the business side before the expressive side. This distinction was put most cogently by A. J. Liebling, who realized early on that he “did not belong to a joyous, improvident professional group including me and [publisher] Roy Howard, but to a section of society including me and any floorwalker at Macy’s. Mr. Howard, even though he asked to be called Roy, belonged in a section that included him and the gent who owned Macy’s. This clarified my thinking about publishers, their common interests and motivations.”³² Liebling himself wrote primarily for the *New Yorker*, where there was publisher Raoul Fleischmann before there was editor William Shawn.

But the persuasiveness of the generalization depends, in part, on what one makes of Joseph Pulitzer (1847–1911), certainly among the most inventive and spectacular figures in fin-de-siècle journalism. The format and style of the two newspapers he owned, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *New York World*, established the rules for layouts, features and photography that newspapers in this century have largely been content to imitate. In the late nineteenth century, as American antisemitism was approaching its peak, Pulitzer bore the handicap of being considered a Jew, without enjoying the spiritual advantages that adherents of Judaism can cultivate. His father was part-Jewish, his mother was a Catholic, he himself was at least nominally an Episcopalian and his children were not raised as Jews. In the haunted, afflicted years of his greatest wealth and fame, Pulitzer employed a series of secretaries to read to him the news that his failing eyesight prohibited him from following. There is some grandeur in his insistence that his secretaries be capable of literate and sparkling conversation. There is none in the advice that the young men were given not to speak to the publisher on the topic of Jews.³³

Adolph S. Ochs (1858–1935), who bought the *New York Times* in 1896, harbored his own sensitivities on the topic. But his identity as a Jew was not in doubt. He married the daughter of the most innovative of nineteenth-century rabbis, Isaac Mayer Wise; and he and his descendants, the Sulzbergers, remained members of the flagship Reform synagogue, Temple Emanu-El. “Religion is all that I stand for as a

Jew,” Ochs announced in 1925. “I know nothing else, no other definition for a Jew except religion.” So constrained a classification exhibited a logic of its own. Faith was so private and minor a feature of family life that his descendants and relatives generally were informed that they were Jewish on the eve of their departure for boarding school. Having severed the bonds of peoplehood, the Sulzberger family through its foundation gave a pittance to Jewish philanthropies: \$1,800 to the UJA in 1973, \$900 the year after the Yom Kippur War.³⁴

But limiting Jewishness to religious belief did not keep the family that has owned the *Times* from realizing that others might be troubled by Jewish “clannishness” and cohesiveness, and therefore much effort was expended to limit the perception of the *Times* as a “Jewish” newspaper. If the business side preceded the expressive and editorial side, that was because it was undoubtedly a matter of *Times* policy. Under Ochs, Arthur Hays Sulzberger and Orville Dryfoos, no Jew rose to the position of managing editor. That barrier was scaled by A. M. Rosenthal, but only after the chief foreign correspondent, Cyrus L. Sulzberger, kept him from covering a UN conference in 1948: “One Jew in Paris is enough.” In 1952, when Daniel Schorr, then a *Times* stringer in the Low Countries, asked for a staff position, C. L. Sulzberger rebuffed him with the observation that “we have too many Jews in Europe.”³⁵ It is commonly believed that Theodore Bernstein, the newspaper’s authority on usage, the “technical genius” of the bullpen, could have risen to the post of managing editor had he been a Gentile. It is also widely assumed that *Times* policy once disguised the given names of Jews, so that bylines were given to A. (for Abraham) M. Rosenthal, A. (for Abraham) H. Raskin et al. The current associate editor, Jacob Rosenthal, forced the *Times* to break its rule against informality; the masthead lists him, rather incongruously, as Jack Rosenthal.³⁶

The history of American journalism cannot exclude Jews whose interest was not in deadlines or headlines but merely in the bottom line. Terms like *brightness and novelty*, or bridging the gap *between the event and the reader* make little sense in evaluating the career of Samuel I. Newhouse (1895–1979). He took charge of his first newspaper, the *Bayonne Times*, at the age of seventeen. By the time of his death, Newhouse owned thirty-one newspapers, seven magazines, six television stations, five radio stations, twenty cable-TV stations and even a wire service. Only two other newspaper chains were larger; none was more profitable. But profit was all that mattered to Newhouse; no publisher was less interested in the editorial policies, which varied, of the newspapers he owned. He didn’t bother reading his own products, preferring the *Times* instead. Newhouse’s credo was simple: “Only a newspaper which is a sound business operation can be a truly free, independent editorial enterprise.” His sons now direct his empire.³⁷ Entrepreneurship having nothing to do with expressiveness has also characterized the careers of Moses Annenberg (1878–1942), the immigrant who founded Triangle Publications (the *Daily Racing Form*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *New York Morning Telegraph*), with his son, Walter, who founded *Seventeen* as well as the magazine with over 17 million readers, the second largest circulation in the United States, *TV Guide*.³⁸ Dorothy Schiff, the former publisher of the *New York Post*, whose grandfather was the venerable communal leader and banker Jacob Schiff, undoubtedly spoke for her peers when she confirmed an axiom that, “once you reach a certain financial level,

people don't think of you as anything but very rich." Unpredictable and frivolous, she ran the *Post* from 1939 till 1976 in a style akin to the last line in *Citizen Kane*: "I think it would be fun to run a newspaper!"³⁹ They belong to the history of American business, not *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*.

Other explanations for the Jewish predilection for journalism also merit scrutiny and criticism. In *Jews and American Politics*, Stephen Isaacs argues that the intellectual and verbal resourcefulness that Jews have historically cherished is rewarded in the mass media.⁴⁰ Since the deities and divinities that peoples worship are clues to their culture, it is no surprise that the Jewish God is something of an intellectual, since the rabbis believed that even He studies the Torah. By now Isaacs's explanation smacks of a commonplace—which does not mean that it is false, only that it is familiar. Truisms are often hard to separate from truths, the matrix of a Jewish occupational proclivity as well as a contrast with other values stressed among Gentiles. If the Jewish encounter with modern society does differ from the experience of others, the explanation may well be connected to alternative beliefs.

But Isaacs's theory is also quite restricted. Almost no publishers or network executives have been intellectuals. The celebrated journalists who grew up ignorant of the Judaic religion and stress upon the Word would make a long list. Nor does the explanation incorporate those journalists whose success has been visual rather than verbal. The most prestigious award of the National Cartoonists Society, for example, is called the "Reuben," in honor of the first president of the society, Rube Goldberg. The most honored of political cartoonist is the *Washington Post*'s Herbert Block ("Herblock"). Al Capp (*né* Caplin) created the Dogpatch of *Li'l Abner*, which was syndicated in five hundred newspapers and has entered the mainstream of popular culture. Verbal resourcefulness had nothing to do with the photo-journalism of Erich Salomon in Germany, Alfred Eisenstaedt in Germany and then with *Life* magazine or Robert and Cornell Capa, Budapest-born brothers whose original name was Friedmann. Probably the most famous shot ever taken by an American photo-journalist was Joe Rosenthal's depiction of the four U.S. Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima—an icon of heroism and patriotism. And since the president of the United States is himself a former sports announcer, it would be patronizing to ignore such figures as Mel Allen and Howard Cosell or Nat Fleischer of *Ring* magazine, whose approach to subjects like the New York Yankees and Muhammad Ali bore little trace of Talmudic learning.

Stephen Isaacs also notes Jewish representation in a field which, "like all forms of mass education, prizes the non-ethnicity of universalism" and especially the ideal of objectivity. Those opting for journalism as a career might therefore hope to be judged by their merit, not their religious or national origin.⁴¹ This generalization is partially valid, for the Jews attracted to it have usually been quite assimilated and deracinated, eager or anxious to blend into civil society. One of the most brilliant editors of the *Neue Freie Presse*, Theodor Herzl, was far down that road himself; and after he had been irrevocably stung by the spectacle of antisemitism, he dreamed of a mass conversion of Jews at St. Stephen's Cathedral.⁴² Perhaps this is not too farfetched a context to discuss the star foreign correspondent of the *New York Daily Tribune* from 1852 till 1862, Karl Marx. His parents having converted, Marx was formally baptized as a Lutheran; and he grew up into an atheist. It is less well known that the only

occupation for which he was ever paid was journalism. When he edited the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx depended on Jewish businessmen in Cologne for support; but his greatest success was writing for the American newspaper edited by Horace Greeley. Marx submitted 350 articles that he himself wrote, plus another dozen in collaboration with F. Engels. The *Tribune's* managing editor, Charles A. Dana, once announced that Marx was “not only one of the most highly valued, but one of the best-paid contributors attached to the journal.” The contributions ceased in 1862, however, when Greeley fired Dana, who had permitted antisemitic material to be published in the *Tribune*. Several articles infected with such material had been submitted by Marx.⁴³

Perhaps the epitome of the “non-ethnicity of universalism” was Lippmann. In the more than 10 million printed words of wisdom and counsel that he imparted in his lifetime, Jews were almost never mentioned. He did write an analysis of anti-semitism for the *American Hebrew* in 1922, blaming the excrescence of bigotry primarily on the vulgarity and ostentatiousness of nouveaux riches Jews themselves. Lippmann claimed that Jews were over-sensitive on the subject of discrimination and urged them to uphold “the classic Greek virtue of moderation.” No one was more anxious to suppress whatever bound him to ancestral custom and belief. He agreed that his alma mater, Harvard College, was correct in imposing a limit on Jewish admissions. More than 15 percent of the student body, Lippmann suspected, would generate a *Kulturkampf*; and his own “sympathies are with the non-Jew. . . . [whose] personal manners and physical habits are, I believe, distinctly superior to the prevailing manners of the Jew.”⁴⁴ From 1933 no column by the most influential pundit of his time mentioned the persecution of Jews in the Third Reich, though two columns in 1938 did suggest that the “surplus” population of Europe should be sent to Africa—the very continent which the Zionists had tumultuously rejected four decades before. During the Holocaust Lippmann wrote nothing about the camps; afterward he wrote nothing either. Though he never converted to any version of Christianity, Lippmann’s efforts to obscure his own origins reached ludicrous proportions. For a book of tributes on his seventieth birthday, a boyhood friend realized that the sage would never speak to him again were the fact of Jewishness—a birth defect—mentioned. (It wasn’t.) Ronald Steel’s excellent biography records the nervousness that one friend experienced in playing Scrabble with Lippmann. She worried that the letters forming the word “Jew” might come up, perhaps upsetting the champion of disinterested reason, the Apollonian savant who wrote in 1915: “Man must be at peace with the sources of his life. If he is ashamed of them, if he is at war with them, they will haunt him forever. They will rob him of the basis of assurance, will leave him an interloper in the world.”⁴⁵

One final case of how fiercely such journalists tried to bleach out their origins is that of A. J. Liebling (1904–63). A crack reporter at the *New York World* under the direction of Swope, he became the inventor of modern criticism of the press and was among the shrewdest monitors of its performance. Liebling bragged that he could “write better than anyone who could write faster, and faster than anyone who could write better.” Both of Lippmann’s wives were Gentiles; so were all three of Liebling’s. Identifying with the Irish toughs among whom he was raised, attending Dartmouth when it was perhaps the most religiously restrictive of Ivy League

colleges, Liebling became a war correspondent for the *New Yorker* and was more pained by the devastation that Nazi Germany was wreaking on France than on European Jewry. His third wife commented: "Even Hitler didn't make him an intensely self-conscious Jew." Liebling once declined to attend a literary salon on Manhattan's Upper West Side because "sheenies who are meanies will be there." He was an eccentric as well as a witty and facile craftsman who suffered the strangest of deaths, because he was a gourmand who became a glutton. Devouring the forbidden foods like lobsters, clams and oysters, Liebling simply ate himself to death.⁴⁶

There are of course exceptions to Isaacs's generalization; a few American journalists did not propel themselves furiously from their Jewish origins for the sake of a neutral or abstract universalism. Although Mordecai Noah (1785–1851) was a "restorationist" rather than a genuine forerunner of Zionism (before the term had been coined), he was an advocate of Jewish rights as well as a skillful, polemical journalist who helped usher in the form of mass communications associated with the liveliness and sensationalism of the penny press.⁴⁷ Ben Hecht, for whom a boat transporting refugees illegally to Palestine was named, was certainly the most fervent Jewish nationalist to emerge from American journalism. He became a leading champion of the Irgun and an indignant critic of David Ben-Gurion. But his blazing opposition to Nazism and commitment to Jewish rights came after his newspaper career was essentially abandoned. Swope's support of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, his presence at the creation of the Overseas News Agency, and his fund raising for the United Jewish Appeal also transpired after he had ceased working for the *World* or any other newspaper. He had nothing to do with the decision of his brother, Gerard, once president of General Electric, to bequeath the bulk of his estate (nearly \$8 million) to Haifa's Technion in 1957.⁴⁸ A younger example of comfort with Jewish identity is Martin Peretz, who edited the campus newspaper at Brandeis University and in 1974 became the editor-in-chief of the *New Republic* (which Lippman had helped to found six decades earlier). Peretz has presumably been responsible for the considerable interest that the magazine has shown in the Middle East, primarily from a Labor Zionist perspective.⁴⁹

If the rarity of such figures tends to corroborate Isaacs's point, an even more striking phenomenon invalidates it. For if objectivity and universalism are supposed to have made the profession so appealing, the influx of Jews to journals of opinion and to partisan organs would not be so large. Neutrality would hardly characterize the *New Republic* from Lippmann and Walter Weyl through Gilbert Harrison to Peretz, nor the *Nation* under Victor Navasky, nor *Dissent* under Irving Howe, Lewis Coser and Michael Walzer, nor the *Progressive* under Morris Rubin, nor *Partisan Review* under Philip Rahv and William Phillips, nor the *New York Review of Books* under Robert Silvers and Barbara Epstein, nor the *Public Interest* under Daniel Bell, Irving Kristol and Nathan Glazer. Norman Cousins, for three decades editor-in-chief of the *Saturday Review*, played an influential role in the genesis of the nuclear test ban treaty of 1963. Having already helped found SANE (Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy), Cousins was asked by President Kennedy to organize a citizens' committee for a nuclear test-ban treaty to press for senatorial ratification. Cousins contributed \$400,000 of his own money in that effort, even selling the

Saturday Review to do so—a triumph of political belief over journalistic professionalism. The Nixon administration’s “enemies list,” which was provided to the Senate’s Watergate investigating committee in 1973, included CBS’s Daniel Schorr (“a real media enemy”) and Marvin Kalb; NBC’s Sander Vanocur; and columnists Sydney Harris, Joseph Kraft, Max Lerner, and Frank Mankiewicz.⁵⁰

The underground press that surfaced in the 1960s made no pretense of reaching for the asymptote of objectivity. A short list of its luminaries would include Paul Krassner (*the Realist*), Marvin Garson (*the Berkeley Barb*), Jeff Shero (*Rat*), Allan Katzman (*East Village Other*), and Jesse Kornbluth and Marshall Bloom of the Liberation News Service. Like other radical journalists, from the dawn of the twentieth century, their writing was a direct extension of their politics and indistinguishable from it (indeed, often a substitute for political action). Consider Trotsky’s remarkable refusal of Lenin’s offer, immediately after the October Revolution of 1917, to head the new revolutionary government. Trotsky, whose nickname was Pero (the Pen), wanted to direct the press instead. Having come from New York earlier that year, where he had made his living as a journalist, Trotsky exhibited an understandable preference.⁵¹

Even the slightest nod in the direction of comparative history would sabotage Isaacs’s stress on the attractiveness of objectivity. American newspapers have generally developed in the direction of defining themselves in terms of the gathering and dissemination of information, as quickly as possible, under the aegis of impartiality. But European newspapers, say, from the Congress of Vienna until the rise of Nazism, operated according to other principles—pronouncing (and therefore forming) opinions, promoting a set of political and cultural attitudes. Such journalism was a forum for the differing *Weltanschauung* of publishers, editors and writers. And yet Jews flourished as fully in such an environment as have journalists of Jewish birth in the United States. It was not because of the allure of objectivity that Herzl won success as a feuilletoniste for the *Neue Freie Presse*, nor Leon Blum as a critic in the French socialist press, nor Arthur Koestler as a correspondent for the Ullstein house in Berlin.

Even within the context of American media, objectivity is not universally prized, quite apart from the growing suspicion that it may be impossible to attain. Lippmann and David Lawrence largely invented the syndicated column of opinion and interpretation.⁵² Its eminent practitioners today include David Broder, Joseph Kraft and Anthony Lewis. The career of William Safire suggests how misleading it would be to remove the study of journalism from cognate fields. Safire began as a public relations counselor (once called press agent), became a speechwriter for Richard Nixon in particular, then a lexicographer, a novelist and primarily a columnist—honored with a Pulitzer Prize—for the *New York Times*, all without breaking stride. Swope saw no conflict between his role as an editor and his services as a publicity hack for Bernard Baruch.⁵³

For in every vocation affecting public opinion and taste, Jews have achieved prominence. Edward L. Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, was one of the two pioneers of public relations. Albert Lasker played a comparably innovative role in advertising. Paul Lazarsfeld, who came to the United States from Vienna in 1935, was (among other accomplishments) a pivotal figure in marketing research. So was

his pupil, Ernest Dichter,⁵⁴ who became a lay analyst in Vienna (with an office across the street from Freud) and later pioneered in motivational research (first for CBS). Samuel Lubell, Louis Harris, David Garth and Daniel Yankelovich have been among the nation's leading pollsters. They are now an obligatory adjunct of politics as well as journalism, yet their vocation does not regard the standard of disinterested objectivity as always relevant to its purposes.

There is another possible explanation for the disproportionate impact that Jews have exerted in the American media. It is advanced tentatively, because it is at best only partly satisfactory, and because it cannot cover all the cases or withstand all objections. No theory on this subject can. But it enjoys the advantage of taking into account the experience of other countries in the Diaspora, and applies especially well to the particularities of the American framework. The speculation allows one to acknowledge the historical singularity of the Jewish people without requiring for its theoretical validity the journalists' knowledge of or fidelity to Judaic tradition and values.

This thesis holds that the press has been a key instrument in the recognition that we inhabit one world—not one village or valley or province or nation. Journalism is not only a bridge between reader and event, as the *Encyclopedia Judaica* avers, but between people and people. And a certain dispersed and vulnerable minority might be especially sensitive to the recalcitrant problems posed by human diversity and plurality. Exile made the Jews aware that the world is larger than parochial and even national boundaries, and some Jews became hopeful that those borders might be transcended. Positioned as outsiders, they were vouchsafed the knowledge of relatives and other co-religionists abroad, were given at least a glimmering sense that there *was* an abroad, a life elsewhere. Jews were therefore responsive to cosmopolitanism, or trans-nationalism, a tendency to see the world as one.

Such a marginal situation and such an international spirit have commonly been appreciated by scholars explaining the Jewish penchant for trade, even though the Biblical Hebrews were not famous for their business acumen. In describing the comparatively large number of Jews working for American newspapers prior to the Civil War, Jonathan Sarna has observed, "journalism . . . permitted the kind of independence and mobility that Jews have often looked for in their occupations. . . . Commerce on a large or small scale," he adds, "depends on information. Jewish merchants, travellers, peddlers and, of course, relatives served as 'reporters' long before the public press had any interest in printing the news." But other scholars have not extended or tested Sarna's claim that "Jews had the kind of cosmopolitan outlook which journalism demands."⁵⁵ Too little curiosity has been piqued by this explanation for the Jewish attraction to journalism.

The cosmopolitan character of mass communications can be verified biographically. The effort to reduce the gaps of time and distance was especially pronounced in the career of Israel Ben Josephat (1816–99), a rabbi's son who was baptized in Berlin in 1844 and moved to London in 1851. He became best known for founding the news agency Reuters, for he eventually became Baron Paul Julius von Reuter. He began with pigeons, then cable and then telegraph—just as he followed political reports with commercial news and then general news. Reuters thus became perhaps the leading international news agency.⁵⁶ The inventor of the press interview, the

prime “pseudo-event,” was Henri Blowitz-Opper (1825–1903). He was born in Bohemia, wrote for Parisian newspapers and became a French citizen, but he achieved widest recognition as a correspondent for *The Times* of London.⁵⁷

It was not necessary however to be an immigrant to seize the possibilities of communicating to newly literate, increasingly enfranchised and empowered masses. Joseph Moses Levy (1812–88) owned and edited the *Sunday Times* for a year; but he is more important for having published, beginning in 1855, London’s first penny morning newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*. Levy simply cut the previous price in half. The *Daily Telegraph* was Liberal until 1879, after which it switched to the Conservatives. Levy’s eldest son, Edward Levy-Lawson, succeeded him, making the paper livelier in its presentation of news and famous for its crusades.⁵⁸ Thus father and son played roughly the same roles in British journalism that were performed by two quite different figures in the United States. The American innovator of the penny press was not a Jew, but he was an immigrant: James Gordon Bennett, a Scotsman. An even more pivotal practitioner of mass journalism was Pulitzer, the immigrant from Hungary. The tableau of his final years—with teams of secretaries reading to Pulitzer his favorite German and French literary works in their original languages—is a sign of how cosmopolitan a figure he cut in American journalism.

Of course, the American case is complicated by the obvious fact that it has been a nation of immigrants; and a thesis that is scientifically elegant would have to demonstrate that immigrant Jews, or immigrants generally, were represented in journalism more fully than in the American populace. Such validation cannot be accomplished, and impressionistic evidence will have to do.

For it is striking that Adolph Ochs of the *Times* and William Paley of CBS were the sons of immigrants; David Sarnoff of RCA/NBC was born in Russia. Lippmann had made many trips to Europe as a child and was attuned to advanced European thinkers like Bergson, Wallas and Freud. Swope, Hecht and Liebling were also the sons of immigrants; and Liebling’s dying words could not be understood because they were delivered in French.⁵⁹ The closest American equivalent of the feuilleton was undoubtedly “Topics of the Times,” whose anonymous but much-admired author was Simeon Strunsky, born in Russia. Even today, long after the era of mass migration of Jews is over, the editorial page of the *Times* is directed by Max Frankel, born in Germany. Abe Rosenthal was born in Canada to immigrants from Russia. Henry Anatole Grunwald, the chief of all Time, Inc., editorial enterprises, was born in Vienna. Luce himself, the co-inventor of the newsmagazine, was born in China to Presbyterian missionary parents; and the Calvinist sobriety and recititude of the *Times*’s James Reston may well have stemmed from his Scottish birthplace. Such biographical data are suggestive.⁶⁰

There is however no philosopher’s stone that can transmute the unstable mixture of competing theories into the purity of a single explanation. Even though monocausality lacks credence, a stress upon the cosmopolitan sympathies of Jews would rectify scholarly neglect.

Complications will continue to bedevil the study of Jews in American journalism. Even though the subject cannot be studied in isolation, confined to the twelve-mile limit of the shores of the United States, it must also be fixed within the compass of a society in which an independent press has flourished and in which the talented, the

ambitious and the lucky could often be handsomely rewarded. Freedom of the press has occupied a central place in the democratic design; and even wayward pressmen could point out that their occupation is one of the few (along with the clergy, firearms production and the liquor business) granted constitutional protection. Jefferson committed the logical flaw of the excluded middle term when he expressed a preference for “newspapers without a government” over “a government without newspapers.”⁶¹ But his extravagant tribute to journalism was to echo for nearly two centuries of the republic, even though individual journalists have been hated and vilified, lost duels, been beaten up and tarred and feathered and murdered. Their power has been respected even when it has not always been exalted. It failed to strike Americans as odd that one of the legendary lawmen of the Old West, “Bat” Masterson (1853–1921), ended up as an editor of the *New York Morning Telegraph*.⁶² It was also natural for the comic-book creators of Superman, Joe Shuster and Jerome Siegel, to provide the man of steel and righteousness with the earth-bound identity of a newspaper reporter, Clark Kent of the *Daily Planet*. Perhaps the most beloved of recent presidents, John F. Kennedy, was first employed as a journalist (the only time he was off the public payroll). Had he lived long enough to retire from the White House, Kennedy had contemplated becoming a publisher. He, too, thought that it would be fun to run a newspaper, like Citizen Kane. (The eponymous film had as its working title *American*.)⁶³ Jews could succeed as journalists, in part, because journalists could succeed in America.

Finally, what will continue to render this topic enigmatic is the larger question of Jewish identity in modern times. Here is not the place to explore the definition of who is a Jew. But it is certainly fair to assert that *at most* only a segment of ethnic identity or religious heritage has ever been implicated in what journalists have done, and therefore the task of determining a distinctive Jewish contribution is complicated when so many Jews have blended so successfully into the structure of social organization. What they have achieved as individual journalists betrays only the most tenuous link to their sensibility as Jews, but that is why a study of their influence and motivations promises to shed further light on the elusive meaning of Jewish modernity in mass society. During a historical period when it is hardly a disability and, indeed, something of an asset to be a Jew in America, journalism is among the indices of full participation in the host society. The press badge is a certificate of “making it.” Far from signifying a cabal or a conspiracy, the Jewish representation in the mass media demonstrates the hospitality of the American environment, the congruence of American values—and the benign challenge that is thereby posed to the singularity and survival of a tiny and ancient people.

Notes

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