

A Light Unto the Nation: 3 Jewish-American Responses to the Holocaust

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Introduction

וְאַתְּנָהּ לְבְרִית עָם--לְּוֹר וְיִם

I made you for a people's covenant, for a light unto nations. – Isaiah 42:6

The Holocaust was an event of unprecedented complexity. The challenge of reconstructing and understanding everything that was happening in Europe, the United States, and within the governments and religious communities during that time cannot be understated. That it reached the scope and magnitude it did leads to two possible conclusions: that it was unavoidable or that the other governments of the world did not do enough to stop, or at least mitigate it. There has been a great deal of scholarship on the failure of the American Government to intervene on behalf of European Jewry; the efforts the American Jewish community made to persuade their government are also well catalogued.¹ No shortage of volumes have examined those failings, pondered the consequences, and passed judgment on the actors.

While there is significant scholarship on the governmental response, there is less scholarship on individual and private attempts at intervention and rescue. The larger stories have been analyzed and reconsidered numerous times, at the academic expense of the other efforts. That the scholarship has focused almost entirely on the large, official,

¹ Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939–1945* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981); Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Garland Pub., 1989).

and formal undertakings (and their failures), oftentimes gives the impression that the organized Jewish community's efforts were largely ineffective and, in some of the instances, inadequate. Even in attempting to reconstruct some aspects of the American Jewish response, historians noted that "the story of Jewish efforts at self-help has not yet been told."² In the years following Bauer's statement, efforts have been made to give more attention to these stories, which had been previously glossed over by history, lost, or ignored, the past decade having "witnessed a surge of new scholarship concerning the responses of the American government, and American Jewry, to the Holocaust."³

As large-scale efforts and governmental actions failed to come to fruition, individual attempts at relief and resistance continued. These undertakings met with varying degrees of success, but their impact is more than just the immediate result of their efforts. This thesis seeks to examine three such efforts, one of an organization, one from a grassroots campaign, and another as an account of rescue. These accounts, collected from the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio, demonstrate that individual American Jews did respond, albeit with less fanfare or notoriety as the stalwarts and giants of the community and government.

The chapters of this thesis focus on different types of active responses to the Holocaust. While some of the subjects have been the focus of scholarly study, they have generally appeared as a part of a larger work. None of them have been explored as a means of examining the modes of response to the destruction of European Jewry. The first chapter focuses on Bertha Corets, a key participant in the anti-Nazi boycott of the

² Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, 13.

³ Rafael Medoff, "American Responses to the Holocaust: New Research, New Controversies," *American Jewish History* vol. 100 no. 3, July 2016, 379.

1930s. Her work was that of a large organization, but one that aimed at combating the Nazis not through force, but economic power.⁴ The second chapter is the account of the Student Seminary Committee to Save European Jewry. This collection of students organized a grassroots campaign to protest and to raise awareness about the destruction of European Jewry and their work continues to stand as a model for motivated and eager social activists.⁵ The final chapter, focusing on Rena Rohrheimer, is a story of rescue. Rohrheimer did the difficult and important work of saving and attempting to save lives from Nazi-dominated Europe. Her story has previously not been told.⁶

Looking at small-scale actors and individual agents helps to expand the understanding of this chapter of history. It adds to the record of the victims, the survivors and the people who attempted to save lives. In examining their ideas, actions, methods, and their results, we come away with a richer, more nuanced, and detailed understanding of what the American Jewish community did during this time, examining what efforts were made and what impact it had.

That many of these small stories have not been told suggests there may be far more instances of individual efforts made on behalf of European Jewry. Even for those engaged in rescue and intervention, other actors may have gone unnoticed, leading those who were active to believe theirs to be more isolated efforts than they truly were.

⁴ Previous works have examined the boycott itself, the boycott as a part of a larger political action, and as historical exemplar in an examination of boycotts, respectively. Richard A. Hawkins, "Hitler's Bitterest Foe": Samuel Untermyer and the Boycott of Nazi Germany, 1933–1938, *American Jewish History* 93 No. 1 (March 2007); Edwin Black, *The Transfer Agreement: The Dramatic Story of the Pact Between the Third Reich and Jewish Palestine* (New York: Brookline Books, 1999); Monroe Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts: Effecting Change Through the Marketplace and the Media*, (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁵ Almost entirely authored by one person, previous studies of this effort came as a part of telling an untold story. Rafael Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: The Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 2010).

⁶ Only a brief mentions in contemporary newspaper and a single student essay have recounted Rena Rohrheimer's efforts. Rena Rohrheimer: Local Hero, SC-14915, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

This thesis seeks to closely examine the works of three individuals. First is Bertha Corets, who helped organize and manage large-scale boycotts of German-made goods. Second, The Seminary Student Committee to Save European Jewry was an attempt to raise awareness and organize on behalf of European Jews. Finally, Rena Rohrheimer was a woman who acted on her own to save European Jews. Their work was at times a part of large organizations and efforts, other times smaller groups looking to have an impact on a wider audience, and other times were wholly individual endeavors. Each one had its own challenges and struggles, and each its own successes. The measure of success varied widely as well.

Bertha Corets

Bertha Vera (Levine) Corets (1897-1973), was a leading figure in the anti-Nazi boycott movement. Her efforts helped to organize and facilitate massive campaigns researching and petitioning businesses to end the import and sale of Nazi-made goods. She was personally responsible for both research into where German goods were sold and for organizing efforts to boycott merchants and stores who continue to supply them to consumers.

Corets was born to an immigrant family in Troy, New York. She attended school until the 10th grade when she left to help with her father's dry goods business. During WWI she worked for the United States War Production Board. After the war, she went to work for the United States Shipping Board (USSB), rising to the position of chief stenographer. While working for the USSB, she met Mark Corets, a WWI veteran and Chief Petty Officer in the United States Navy. The two were married in 1925. That same

year, they also opened a haberdashery: Mark Corets Men's Shop. The couple had two sons, Myron L. (b. 1929) and Ellis H. (b. 1931).

Also during the post war period, Corets began her activism, participating in local efforts to pass and ratify the 19th Amendment. Success there inspired her to return to school. Despite working full time, she enrolled in evening school and in just seven months, completed four years of high school (she was named class Valedictorian).

Together with her husband, Corets helped found the Throggs Neck Jewish Center. When the Center struggled to pay its mortgage during the Depression, it faced the prospect of losing its building. Corets initiated a bond issue for the members of the congregation, which helped in averting the crisis. This was not to be her only involvement in activism.

When Hitler rose to power in 1933, a number of groups in America responded to the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses by boycotting German businesses. Corets joined one such organization: the American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights (later renamed the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League [ANL] and served as secretary under Samuel Untermyer, (1858-1940), a prominent attorney, Jewish leader, and champion of Jewish rights. Untermyer founded the ANL in 1933 and served as president for many years. Other groups also instituted boycotts. One small but significant effort was on behalf of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (JWV).⁷

⁷ American Jewish Archives, "A Finding Aid to the Bertha V. Corets Papers" <http://collections.americanjewisharchives.org/ms/ms0307/ms0307.html> (accessed 9 October 2017). For a history of the ANL, see Moshe Gottlieb, "The anti-Nazi boycott movement in the American Jewish community," PhD Dissertation, (University of Michigan, 1967). For a history of the JWV, see Michelle Spivak, *Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A.: One Hundred Years of Service, Vol. 1* (New York: Turner, 1996); Jewish Virtual Library, "Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV)," <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-war-veterans-of-the-u-s-a-jwv>; Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, "Jewish War Veterans Timeline," http://www.jwv.org/images/uploads/JWV_History_Timeline.pdf.

During her life, Corets would come to serve other causes, but the work she did for the boycott was one of her most significant achievements. Corets dedicated years to the effort and countless hours of work. Although she was just one person in a nationwide campaign, her contributions would further the cause considerably, and she left her mark in a number of places.

The Seminary Student Committee to Save European Jewry (1942-1943)

The Seminary Student Committee was a group of three students at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), the primary seminary for Conservative Judaism in the United States. Noah Golinkin, Jerome Lipnick, and Moshe Bertram “Buddy” Sachs organized a campaign to raise awareness and intervene on behalf of European Jewry. The students would organize a conference, write a number of significant articles, and push for a national awareness campaign. The seminary students directed their activism towards members of the religious communities as a means of reaching governments and the United Nations.⁸ They also enlisted the involvement of students from other seminaries. Additionally, they found an ally in the Synagogue Council of America (SCA) and earn praise and support from Jewish leaders and institutions throughout the country.

Noah Golinkin (1913-2000), was the son of Rabbi Mordechai Ya’akov Golinkin, who was the Av Bet Din of Zhitomir, Ukraine. Golinkin’s family fled the White Russians

⁸ Although the United Nations did not formally come into existence until 1945, United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt coined the term in 1942 when representatives of 26 nations pledged to fight together against the Axis powers. While some people made contemporary references to the United Nations, they were actually referring to the League of Nations. Because the UN was, without question, the official successor to the League, for the sake of clarity, references will consistently refer to the UN. United Nations, “History of the United Nations,” <http://www.un.org/en/sections/history/history-united-nations/> (accessed 4 April 2018).

following the Petlyura Massacres in Zhitomir. As an adult, Golinkin recalled having heard shots fired and people being killed in their courtyard. The family escaped and hid in a town called Lishtin (Lishchin), “where they hid in a dark room and were told not to cough or sneeze lest they be detected by the pogromists.”⁹ From there, the family went to Zvil, just across the Russian border, then to Rovne, Poland, and then to Vilna.

Despite antisemitism and persecution, Golinkin studied law at Stefan Batory University of Vilna. But he knew he could not remain in Europe. Seeking a visa for entry into the United States, Golinkin wrote to Yeshiva College in 1937, asking to be enrolled as a full-time student. Through the efforts of a man in Danzig named Schiffman and Schiffman’s American relative Mrs. Schulsinger (a national board member of Hadassah), they convinced Yeshiva’s president, Dr. Bernard Revel, (1885-1940) to offer Golinkin admission to the school. Once in the United States, Golinkin, along with Mrs. Schulsinger, arranged for an Orthodox congregation to draw up a spurious contract that invited Golinkin’s father to serve as their rabbi.¹⁰ In 1942, he began his studies at JTS.¹¹

Jerome Lipnick (1918-1977), grew up in Baltimore, Maryland to a Russian mother and American born father.¹² Both of Lipnick’s parents were active in their congregation and sent him to attend Hebrew School after public school.¹³ Lipnick earned degrees from Baltimore City College, Baltimore Hebrew College and Teachers Training School, and Johns Hopkins University. As a student, in both high school and at the

⁹ Rafael Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust* 123.

¹⁰ Ibid., 124.

¹¹ Ibid., 27.

¹² Ibid., 28.

¹³ “Jerome Lipnick: 1918-1977 A Brother’s Tribute.” (In *From Where I Stand: From the Writings of Jerome Lipnick* (St. Louis: Rabbi Lipnick Education and Charity Foundation, 1986), 7.

Baltimore Hebrew College, he wrote for the student publications.¹⁴ He also earned a teaching certificate from Baltimore Hebrew College.¹⁵ Having been involved in Jewish activities and institutions throughout his life, he applied for admission to the JTS. He began at the Rabbinical School in 1940.

Moshe Bertram “Buddy” Sachs (1920-2009) also grew up in Baltimore. He was the son of a Lithuanian-born father and U.S. born mother.¹⁶ As a youth, he attended a progressive Hebrew school, and was involved in a Zionist youth group.¹⁷ Like Lipnick, he studied at Baltimore Hebrew College. He earned his Bachelor’s degree from the University of Maryland.¹⁸ Judaism, which had run through his life growing up, led him to enroll as a student at JTS.¹⁹

At JTS, the three students met Rabbi Max Gruenewald (1899-1992), who had come to the school as a refugee scholar. He had seen first-hand, what was happening to the Jewish people in Europe. Gruenewald educated them on the realities and horrors ongoing there. Affected and horrified at the events in Europe, they took up the cause of the European Jews. The plight of their brothers and sisters abroad was a frequent topic of conversation among the three, with discussions and debates often running long into the night. In their late night discussions, they made their first attempt at organizing by creating the “European Committee of the Student Body of the Jewish Theological Seminary.”²⁰ Before reaching out to Jewish leadership and engaging in their broader

¹⁴ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁵ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 28.

¹⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁷ Jerin Zumberg, “Veterans: Rabbi Moshe Sachs,” *The Jerusalem Post* (18 September 2008).

¹⁸ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 28.

¹⁹ Zumberg, “Veterans: Rabbi Moshe Sachs.”

²⁰ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 28.

campaign of awareness and activism, they began by pressing their fellow students between classes and asking for a few extra prayers during services.²¹ Later, with the help of a few other students, they worked to raise awareness about the crisis facing European Jews.

The campaigns the seminary students led offered an alternative to the status quo of the Jewish community and its leadership. Their outreach efforts succeeded in involving students and youthful activists from a range of backgrounds of faith. They managed to challenge the establishment, raise awareness, and break new ground in relations between faith communities and between religious leadership and laity. It was also a first step in a long journey for each of them. Well after their work for European Jewry was done, the seminary students continued their activism, each in his own way.

Rena Rohrheimer

Rena Rohrheimer (1883-1967), was a Philadelphia school teacher. She had no Jewish institutional or activist affiliations herself, yet became deeply involved with the Jewish community in Europe. While on sabbatical there, she helped a number of Jews escape the Holocaust. She worked on her own, without outside assistance or support.

Rohrheimer was born in Kankakee Illinois. She was a secretary for the author, Dr. Lucy Langdon Williams Wilson.²² Wilson was an inspiration to Rohrheimer, who recalled that “she spurred me on.”²³ Studying as a night student at a different school every summer, Rohrheimer earned a degree. Eventually, she came to teach at William

²¹ Ibid., 29.

²² Cecelia G. Reinheimer, “Intimate Interviews With Interesting Jewish Women,” MS 161/box 1/folder 7.

²³ Ibid.

Penn High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Despite working as a teacher, her real passion was “social work, especially foreign relief.”²⁴

Rohrheimer also became interested in foreign affairs. She traveled extensively, giving her first-hand knowledge of international matters. She shared these experiences with her students; Rohrheimer’s classrooms were full of posters from her travel.

While on sabbatical, Rohrheimer traveled through Palestine and other parts of the region, touring educational facilities. Although her original reason for travel was leisure, she got involved with the desperate plight of European Jews, attempting to save people’s lives. Rohrheimer began working to save her family and help them escape from Europe during the Holocaust. Eventually, Rohrheimer came to the aid of people beyond her family, taking up the cases of students and scholars. When her work was done, by her count, she single-handedly saved eight people from Germany.²⁵

While three examples of individual and small-scale efforts to intervene on behalf of a beleaguered and panicked European Jewry prior to and during the Holocaust are far from authoritative, in studying them, patterns do emerge. The way that they approached the problem, the way they dealt with a problem of unprecedented scale, the difficulty of managing a catastrophe, the help or hindrance of the Jewish establishment, and the unfortunate reality that each one fell short, all represent commonalities and differences in their efforts.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

A Variety of Approaches

The subjects of this thesis used a variety of approaches in their attempts to intervene during this unprecedented and overwhelming crisis. For all of them, it was to some extent, personal. All of them were Jewish and had at least a religious or ethnic connection to European Jewry. But this was not a guarantee for participation. The seminary students and Rohrheimer noted great apathy among their co-religionists. Corets encountered this as well, even facing opposition to her cause from other Jews.²⁶ Still, a personal connection to the people made their efforts more urgent – a tactic Rohrheimer used to try to motivate her relatives to help. For her, the connection was imperative – she only began her efforts because it was her relatives who needed help. As motivated as she was, she found it hard or even refused to help some people with whom she had less of a connection.

Similarly, the seminary students were motivated by personal connections. Noah Golinkin escaped not Nazi horrors, but massacres and pogroms in Poland, and each day perused the newspapers for news from his native Poland.²⁷ In addition, Max Gruenewald, a German refugee scholar was assigned to room with Moshe Sachs. Their conversations impressed upon the seminary students the need to help.²⁸ Gruenewald (1899-1992), would go on to serve as a rabbi and scholar and as international president of the Leo Baeck Institute.²⁹ As information about the situation in Europe poured in, they

²⁶ Arthur L. Manchee to Bertha Corets, 8 October 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio; “Macy Action on Boycott Hailed Here,” *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 19 March 1934; Richard A. Hawkins, “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe”: Samuel Untermyer and the Boycott of Nazi Germany, 1933–1938, *American Jewish History* 93 No. 1 (March 2007): 28.

²⁷ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 2.

²⁸ Mishaël Tziyon, “A Letter from Rabbi Moshe “Buddy” Sachs, in Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 129.

²⁹ “Max Gruenewald, 93, A Rabbinical Scholar,” *The New York Times* (29 December 1992).

apprehended the enormity of the crisis. “The trio were driven by an overwhelming sense that the response of the American Jewish community to the catastrophe in Europe lacked urgency and direction.”³⁰ Despite their motivation, they could not get any meaningful or lasting participation from other Jews, many of whom undoubtedly had connections to Europe. Even at JTS, which hosted refugee scholars, the commitment of the student body was only temporary. Sometimes, a personal connection was not enough.

For Corets, her connection to the Jewish people came through the organization she served. She and her husband did have deep connections to the community – having formed congregations and organizations. But their efforts came not through personal connections to people in Europe as much as they did organizational efforts. They were true to the cause. The Corets’ were very involved with the JWV, who carried out much of the boycott. Even within those organizations, though, the commitment to the Jewish people was evident, Vice President Cohen admonishing, “Any Jew buying one penny’s worth of merchandise made in Germany is a traitor to his people.”³¹ The focus was different too. While some subjects (or targets) of the boycott were individuals, it was as a business or a company.

How they connected to the crisis was one aspect of their work. The nature of their efforts was another. Corets’ approach was advocacy. She tried to affect economic change. Instead of personal appeals to individuals or efforts on behalf of small groups, she and the other members of the boycott set their sights on changing German behavior. The seminary students tried to raise awareness and ultimately hoped to influence the United States government and the United Nations. They worked with other seminarians and

³⁰ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 27.

³¹ Black, *The Transfer Agreement*, 14.

ultimately the Synagogue Council of America as a bridge to influencing the government. Rohrheimer's approach was direct action. She worked with the people she tried to save. Her scope was the most modest, one person at a time, but also yielded the most tangible results, and possibly the most significant.

Emergency of Unprecedented Scale

Despite the horror and tragedy, involvement and intervention was not so easy. The enormity of the Holocaust exceeded all understanding. Despite a complex and challenging history, the scope and depth of the Holocaust was beyond anything that came before. It was also had impact throughout the world, as the persecution covered an entire continent and the war engulfed the entire world. As a result, the conventional wisdom as to how to handle a crisis was of no help. Attempts to intervene and alleviate the suffering faced apathy, denial, politics, failures of will and resolve, and a host of other challenges. Each one of these had to be addressed in order to take meaningful action.

People did not want to get involved. Whether it was denial, apathy, or selfishness, people did not contribute as much as they could have. Even those deeply involved, like Rohrheimer, could have done more. She herself took personal time, but it did come at the expense of those she was trying to help. At the same time, she saw how little other people were doing, and spoke out a number of times about it. The students also saw apathy and selfishness. Wise himself refused their proposals for his own reasons, whether sound or not. Their fellow students were also lacking in their response. Corets addressed apathy head-on. She was constantly recruiting new members for the boycott. At the same time, her work put her in touch with many people who were not interested in a boycott. Some,

like the corporate executives at Macy's, remained disinterested, while she managed to persuade many others to act.

The apathy and selfishness hit Rohrheimer particularly hard. She made herself sick with work and worry for people she barely knew, while others could not be bothered, even for their own families. Far more people could have helped, whether at Rohrheimer's request or on their own.

The seminary students faced the apathy head-on. They penned their manifest in response to what they perceived as an inadequate attitude. Later commentaries from participants in the Conference would chastise their fellow students for failing to maintain their activism or outrage. And the students would change tactics several times, each new activity a response to the failure of the previous one to yield the intended results, each one falling off due to lack of participation. At times it was their fellow students, at times it was the leadership, and other times, the laity.

Faced with these simultaneous challenges, each of the individuals addressed them in different ways. For Corets, the primary challenges were economic. Support for the boycott grew after its initial problems. Even though the boycott never won the full support of the Jewish community (The American Jewish Committee never signed on³²), the organizations that did take part, needed little authorization to do so. She also faced significant opposition from within. In-fighting and refusals to cooperate hampered the boycott and frustrated Corets.

The seminary students had to invent their own way of doing things. They faced opposition from the Jewish establishment and apathy and denial from the rest of the

³² Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts*, 134.

community. As a result, they had to innovate. And they did. Their outreach to the Christian seminaries was novel. As was their attempt, for the first time, to “give Jewish college students a significant role in the shaping of Jewish communal opinion and policy.”³³ The Golinkin-Lipnick-Sachs committee thus represented a “significant innovation at the seminary.”³⁴ In addition, it was not only important to work with in the formal Jewish community but with non-observant Jews, unaffiliated Jews, and Gentiles. They pioneered this work and although it did not have the outcome they hoped, it served as a model for them and others. Nor could they likely have succeeded where others more experienced, influential, and powerful did not. Having only a fraction of the impact as those others could have – which themselves may have had no more efficacy than theirs, they were up against impossible odds. The Students’ efforts may have had a lasting and significant impact for other emergencies, but his was different. Unlike anything that had come before it, even an endeavor such as theirs, which itself had never been done before, required more than they (or possibly anyone) could have provided.

Rohrheimer faced down bureaucracies, apathy, and finite resources. She was not uneducated, but had no experience with immigration or diplomacy. She quickly had to master navigating the immigration process while learning to marshal her resources. During her work, she managed to enlist the help of a number of people. Some were more helpful than others - a fact that she noted, and was more aware of given how much she understood of the situation. Because she knew how dire it was, she reacted to other people’s disinterest and apathy, willing to put much more of her money and energies on the line, as limited as they were at times. It was not completely a solo effort, but despite

³³ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 36.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

having some assistance, she was still the driving force behind the initiative. Rohrheimer was also outside of America. She did all of her work abroad, navigating foreign languages and cultures as well. All of this was against the backdrop of the unprecedented brutality of the Hitler regime on the eve of the Holocaust. Her efforts, as Herculean as they were sometimes, were even more miraculous given the time in which she did them.

For all of these people, their will was not in question. While others may have not felt their urgency, they did not want for ambition and gave of themselves – everything they had. Their successes and failures must be examined against the backdrop of the incomprehensible scope of the tragedy.

Managing a Catastrophe

Given the nature of the disaster, eventually, all three subjects ran into complexities. There was not just one challenge facing any one of them, and at times, they had to negotiate how to resolve them. While they all encountered these complications, they all responded differently.

Corets came up against the in-fighting, the prejudice and sexism, and the resistance from within the business community. Fortunately, she had the backing of her organizations. Much of the time, she spoke not as a lone individual, but as a member or representative of the ANL or JWV. Still, those behaviors within the organizations hampered their efforts as well as hers. It is impossible to tell how much more successful she or the boycott could have been if there had been more consensus. She also ran into sexism. Her confrontations with some of the leadership did not end her effort, but was another element of the lack of cooperation that held the movement back.

The seminary students found that it was hard to sell their ideas and when they did, it did not mean that they would be implemented. The cold reception from Rabbi Wise was their first disappointment. From there, they struck out on their own and found a sympathetic ear in their colleagues from other seminaries. But while they shared zeal for the cause, the seminary students found that their own enthusiasm and engagement outpaced even the most ardent of the Conference attendees. After that, they found success in influencing the SCA, but saw little implementation.

Rohrheimer ran into many problems, including lack of funds, lack of will, and an increasingly difficult bureaucracy. She also had health problems. Despite these setbacks, she managed to do a great deal. All of her work was against an increasingly desperate situation in Europe. She contended with the changing circumstances both diplomatically and politically. She managed all of this.

All of them were ill-prepared to face these situations. Each of them approached the catastrophe differently. Each worked in a different area. Each had a different goal. Still, there were commonalities between them.

Ultimately, spontaneity was one of the most important virtues for all of them. They worked without a script or blueprint, and also without a net. Rohrheimer was constantly reevaluating, relearning, and rethinking her strategies. As laws seemed to change overnight, she could never get too comfortable or reliant on any one strategy or solution. The Students also continued to reinvent their efforts, from appealing to the authority in Rabbi Wise, to reaching out to peers, to taking their message to the people, to attempts to mobilize and mount an effort to succeed where their first option failed. And

Corets was constantly taking on new roles, adding to her activities and the activities of the Veterans and the League.

They were also all incredibly driven, devoting significant amounts of time and energy to their causes. Each faced the frustration of others who were not similarly motivated or dedicated. They proceeded as they thought best, making the most of an impossible situation.

Response to Calamity

All three subjects acted in response to the calamity. None of them stopped the Holocaust or drastically changed the world. Despite successes and progress that they did make, they all still fell short. They did far more than those who did nothing, but each of these three case studies fell short in the final analysis. Each one did as he or she thought best. While for lone actors, this meant a free hand (within their own limits and the limits of law, finance, and power), for those in organizations, it meant often clashing with others, equally motivated, but differing in strategic vision.

For Corets and the other leaders of the boycott, there was plenty of disagreement as to how to proceed. Setting aside even the question of the utility or wisdom of the boycott, there were countless strategic and logistical decisions and differences of opinion. Corets herself faced opposition to her tactics on several occasions. One such instance was over the “Franklin Prophecy,” a forged document purporting to be an excerpt from the journal of Charles Pinckney of South Carolina that falsely claimed Benjamin Franklin had made antisemitic remarks during the Constitutional Convention.³⁵ Corets suggested

³⁵ “7 Scholars Refute Franklin Anti-semitism Allegation,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (3 January 1939).

fighting via a proof-text. She looked to publish the canard along with Franklin's actual words, and the corroborating statement of an expert, refuting the journal entry. Corets' suggestion was rejected: "My suggestion was not taken up with the remarks that Jews do not fight that way."³⁶ Her superiors were no less motivated to counteract propaganda but vehemently disagreed as to how to do so. The same was true for picketing, which the JWV endorsed, but she did not.³⁷

The seminary students also found that collaborating was difficult and often counter-productive. From their initial meeting with Rabbi Wise, they understood how hard it was to get a consensus and participation from others who did not share their vision. No extant records of their internal process exist, but likely they had disagreements themselves, before finding a compromise that they then executed. Even when they managed to organize the conference, strong personalities and differences of opinion tended to moderate their program. The Zionism issue, resulting in speakers both pro and anti-Zionist, was an example of one such conflict.³⁸

Rohrheimer worked alone, but she, too, saw her own limitations. She did come to realize the potential of organizational efforts. Organizations were the best equipped to save people, and that "trying to get anyone out of Germany now singlehanded is a great problem. If I could arrange to get them out en masse, through some organization, it would be better."³⁹ What an organization offered was money. As much as she begged, cajoled,

³⁶ Bertha Corets to Falk Harmel, 12 August 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 8.

³⁷ Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts*, 258, citing Gottlieb, "The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the United States: An Ideological and Sociological Appreciation," *Jewish Social Studies*, 35, no. 3/4 (July-October, 1973): 223.

³⁸ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 45.

³⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Bertha Solis-Cohen, 21 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

and implored, she could only provide what other people pledged. She herself was working (although on sabbatical at that time), living abroad, and “under tremendous medical expense.”⁴⁰ Organizations had more resources. The cost of entry to Swiss refugee camps was \$2,500.00 a couple.⁴¹ She did not have those funds, which is why she turned to others who might know of organizations or institutions that did.⁴²

Once she started looking to organizations, she encountered the same frustrations as Corets and the seminary students. She saw how two equally motivated individuals might not agree and how working around that took some work. She also discovered that with an organization, she was not in charge and had to go with what its collective leadership decided to do. Also, many of the organizations were not particularly interested in individual cases. She reached out to David J. Galter, editor of *The Jewish Exponent*, who offered the sort of assessment that was typical from institutions. He told her, “I do not wish to offer advice at this distance but it seems futile for us here to try to handle individual cases.”⁴³ While he did point out they were raising money, they could not use any of their institutional strength or organizational heft to save specific individuals or even specific groups of people.

All of these individuals found ways to help their Jewish brothers and sisters in Europe. Their diverse backgrounds led them in different directions of activism and advocacy, but they were all compelled by a common goal: saving lives. Both their methods and their results varied, as did the obstacles they faced. Admittedly, these

⁴⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Alice Goldsmith, 24 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

⁴¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Amelia Koch and Gusta Schultz, 24 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

⁴² Rena Rohrheimer to Alice Goldsmith, 24 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

⁴³ Rena Rohrheimer to David J. Galter, 5 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

profiles are essentially case studies – a small sample of the types of individual intervention initiatives undertaken during the 1930s. As examples, these three profiles contribute to our understanding of the small-scale rescue efforts that were taken up by American Jews as awareness of the dimensions of this crisis became increasingly apparent.

These efforts offer a means of both resistance and response to tragedies and challenges of unimaginable proportions. Despite its power and resources, the United States was paralyzed with fear, indecision, and apathy, these responses within the Jewish community, suggest that something could be done. In a time of incredible darkness, these actions offered hope and light, to the nation.

Chapter 1: Bertha V. Corets and the Anti-Nazi Boycott

“All women are naturally sympathetic with Anti-Nazi and Anti-Fascist activities. Whatever their creeds or social attitudes, the degradation of women under Fascism has roused them to resentment.”¹

Origins of the Boycott

Just days after taking power in 1933, the Nazis boycotted Jewish-owned businesses.² The boycott earned a sharp rebuke from the American Jewish community.



“How dare the Germans, any part of the world, demand not only special privileges, but even equal rights, when they have proven themselves incapable of recognizing the human rights of minorities living within their borders’?”³

In the wake of this boycott, the American Jewish Committee, B’nai B’rith, and the American Jewish Congress came together to determine a course of action and a response.⁴ Despite the urgency of the situation and their best efforts, they were unable to devise a plan. The smaller-sized Jewish organizations had more flexibility and were resolute in their decision to take action.⁵ For them, the issue was whether or not to create a boycott.⁶ Already, some “traditional leftist magazines, *The Nation* and *The New*

¹ Memorandum to Women’s Divisions, 17 December 1942, Bertha V. Corets Papers, 1930-1965, MS 307/box 1/folder 12, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio. Unless otherwise specified, all archival material comes from the American Jewish Archives.

² Gottlieb, “The anti-Nazi boycott movement in the American Jewish community,” 9-10. While a boycott was organized against Woolworth’s in the United States, ironically, a similar protest occurred in Germany, where the company later fired all Jewish employees and got the “Adefa Zeichen”, a seal for companies who were “pure Aryan.” Black, *The Transfer Agreement*, 11.

³ Bertha Corets to National Ladies’ Auxiliary Jewish War Veterans of the United States, 5 July 1938, Bertha V. Corets Papers, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

⁴ Black, *The Transfer Agreement*, 10.

⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶ Ibid.

Republic called for an embargo, an official boycott, or a diplomatic break with Germany.”⁷ The Jewish community was split; only some small Jewish organizations favored a boycott of German goods.

One organization in favor of a boycott was the Jewish War Veterans of the United States (JWV). When the JWV’s Commander-in-Chief, J. George Fredman announced the boycott, urging other organizations to join, not all were so enthusiastic. Fredman, (1895-1958) a New Jersey lawyer and veteran, was chosen as Commander-in-Chief of the Jewish War Veterans in 1932.⁸ Judge Joseph M. Proskauer, (1877-1971)⁹ representing the American Jewish Committee, angrily denounced the proceedings and charged Fredman with “causing more trouble for the Jews in Germany by unintelligent action.”¹⁰ He warned prominent lawyer, Samuel Untermyer, “I can conceive of nothing that would more foment anti-Semitism here in this country than an organized boycott.”¹¹ Author William Orbach noted that it rejecting a boycott, “The basic assumption was that Jews are now, as they have always been, powerless; gentiles are all potentially anti-Semitic and too much visibility will only wake the sleeping dragon.”¹²

⁷ Melissa Kravetz, “Giving Youth a Voice: U.S. Student Perceptions of Adolph Hitler, 1933-1939,” Senior Honor’s Thesis, (UCSB, 2003), citing Oswald G. Villard, “Issues and Men,” *The Nation*, 26 November 1938, 567; “Refugees and Economics,” *The Nation*, 10 December 1938, 609-610; “An Embargo on German Goods,” *The New Republic*, 30 November 1938, 83-84, quoted in Michael Zalampas, *Adolf Hitler and The Third Reich in American Magazines, 1923-1939* (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 168.

⁸ JTA 7 September 1932, “Fredman Chosen Head of Jewish War Veterans.”

⁹ Proskauer, a judge, philanthropist, and activist, served in the New York Supreme Court, as advisor to the United Nations, where he helped secure the adoption of the human rights provisions in its charter, and was president of the American Jewish Committee, the Young Men’s Hebrew Association of New York, and at the time of his death, Honorary President of the American Jewish Committee. Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 13 September 1971, “Judge Joseph M. Proskauer Dies at 94.”

¹⁰ Black, *The Transfer Agreement*, 14.

¹¹ Moshe Gottlieb, “The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the American Jewish Community,” 82-83.

¹² William Orbach, “Shattering the Shackles of Powerlessness: The Debate Surrounding the Anti-Nazi Boycott of 1933-41,” *Modern Judaism* 2, no. 2 (May 1982): 155.

The sides could not resolve whether to boycott or not. Deadlocked and exhausted, the press having gone home long before, in the early hours of March 19, 1933, one of the participants moved to end the stalemate.¹³ He moved for a “vigorous” boycott of German goods, services, and shipping lines.¹⁴ Unanimously, the vote carried.

Considering the inaction and perceived docility on all sides, it is significant that “the Jewish War Veterans were the very first, anywhere in the world, to declare openly their organized resistance to the Nazi regime.”¹⁵ Jewish militant action stands out “in an era distinguished by appeasement.”¹⁶ The Veterans sensed the necessity of taking action. “We must smash all Nazi meetings now, later it will be too late. The Boycott is most important as Congress does not help us, the American Bankers have millions of dollars invested in Germany and that’s more important to them than the Jewish blood that’s being shed. Germany has boycotted us long before we ever started.”¹⁷ For an organization chartered with a mission “to combat the sources of bigotry and darkness; wherever originating and whatever their target; to uphold the fair name of the Jew and fight his battle wherever unjustly assailed,”¹⁸ organizing a boycott seemed like a natural step.

The infighting and indecision of the groups regarding the usefulness or wisdom of the boycott was still unresolved. In addition, the means of boycott, how far to go and how hard to push was a factor, even for the boycott’s proponents. The Ladies Auxiliary of the

¹³ Black, *The Transfer Agreement*, 11.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 23 May 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

¹⁸ Black, *The Transfer Agreement*, 11; Jewish War Veterans, “Mission,” http://www.jwv.org/about_us/mission (accessed 2 October 2017).

Jewish War Veterans was no exception, testing the waters of how much it would do. “Like other peace groups, Jewish women’s organizations walked a fine line between demanding action against Hitler and denouncing the possibility of war.”¹⁹

The disunity among the groups might have continued were it not for Stephen S. Wise. Initially, Wise had opposed the boycott as it was contrary to his personal pacifist philosophy,²⁰ and he was reluctant to boycott because he saw it as an economic weapon.²¹

Despite his opposition, Wise offered to draft a new protest resolution, although the eventual wording was the same. While the American Jewish Congress did not declare a boycott, Wise believed one, multi-organizational boycott would be forthcoming, “the final non-violent weapon.”²² Wise “sought to be both outsider and insider...He also distrusted any movement not controlled by his congress.”²³

Even if they could not officially support the boycott, many active members from other organizations backed it. Not one day later, when a waiter served W.W. Cohen, vice-president of the American Jewish Congress, a Bavarian beer, he refused it with a loud “No!”²⁴ After demanding the check, he proceeded immediately to a JWV boycott rally and admonished the crowd, “Any Jew buying one penny’s worth of merchandise made in

¹⁹ Melissa R. Klapper, “‘Those by Whose Side We Have Labored’: American Jewish Women and the Peace Movement Between the Wars,” *The Journal of American History* 97, no. 2 (December 2010): 653.

²⁰ Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts*, 138, citing Moshe Gottlieb, “The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the American Jewish Community,” 441.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Black, *The Transfer Agreement*, 14.

²³ Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2013), 57.

²⁴ Black, *The Transfer Agreement*, 14.

Germany is a traitor to his people.”²⁵ He declared that an attack on German pocketbooks was the only means of resistance.²⁶

While the American Jewish Congress remained uncommitted, other organizations contributed to the boycott. A few days later, *The New York Times*’ headlines read: “PROTEST ON HITLER GROWING IN AMERICA” and that the “BOYCOTT MOVE SPREADS. Merchants Cancelling Orders for German Goods.”²⁷ The movement was not unified, but it was growing.

Other groups also followed suit. Within months, the American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights (ALDJR) announced a boycott. Unlike already established organizations such as the Jewish War Veterans, the ALDJR was founded solely for purposes of boycott.²⁸ The group, founded by a Yiddish journalist, changed its name in order to reach a wider demographic. To appeal to a wider audience ALDJR renamed itself the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League to Champion Human Rights (ANL). The ANL would come to be one of the leading organizations in the boycott.²⁹

There was some consolidation of the boycott efforts. The Jewish War Veterans did form cooperative relationships with the ANL and the American Jewish Congress’ Joint Boycott Council.³⁰ It was not an easy alliance. The Jewish War Veterans issued a “History of the Boycott,” which detailed, among other things, the participation of various

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 20, citing “Protest on Hitler Growing in Nation,” *The New York Times* (23 March 1933).

²⁸ Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 90.

²⁹ The Joint Boycott Council was a partnership of the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee. Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts*, 134.

³⁰ Ibid., 135.

groups in the boycott. They lauded Untermeyer and the League for their participation.

After that,

[o]ther organizations then followed. It was not until August, 1933, however, that the American Jewish Congress officially declared itself in favor of the boycott – almost five months after we had started – and what valuable time was wasted in the interim – what a, tremendous foot-hold Nazism had been able to gain in the meantime, and what suffering our unfortunate German brethren had to endure during these five months while these organizations were deliberating, pussy-footing and making up their minds, the worst part of it was, that envious of the continuing spotlight the boycott had brought to J. W. V., these organizations were actually condemning the boycott, and criticising [*sic*] J. W. V. To-day, THEY ‘claim credit’ for the boycott.³¹

The ANL was also enacting a boycott. Despite their differences and the gulf in willingness to boycott, they shared some ideas with the JWV. The ANL assumed similar tactics, dividing their territories into districts and working within their communities. They also all used women as their primary labor force. A movement based in shopping and “as local organizers of the anti-Nazi boycott, they harnessed their consumer knowledge to transform popular buying and selling practices and used familiar roles as shoppers and homemakers as a base from which to expand their communal influence.”³²

Many rabbinic leaders also voiced their support for the boycott. Abba Hillel Silver provided the slogan for the League, declaring, “...the boycott gives us a chance to fight back, and to fight back so that we can see the visible effect of our blows . . . this is war; this is a substitute for war; this is a moral substitute for war. That is what boycott is.”³³

³¹ History of the Boycott, Undated, MS 307/box 1/folder 13.

³² Rona Sheramy, “‘There Are Times When Silence is a Sin’”: The Women’s Division of the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement. *American Jewish History*, 89 No. 1 (March 2001): 111.

³³ Minutes of the National Boycott Conference, Archives of the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, New York, p. 25.

The Bronx women's division of the organization held its first "monster rally" November 29, 1933.³⁴ "The purpose was to acquaint the ladies with the conditions which confront all the Jewish people as well as all the women in Hitler's Germany today, and to unite in protest against these atrocities through a well-organized boycott of all German made merchandise and all German ships until such time as Hitler will see fit to set the clock forward again to 1933."³⁵

From an early stage of the Hitler regime, a number of Jewish Americans were inspired to act. Bertha Corets was one of them. She had been an advocate in the



community before, developing a bond issue to provide relief for members of her congregation after the 1929 stock market crash. She joined the ANL and served as secretary under Samuel Untermeyer. Given her familiarity with the boycott, it was then no shock when she continued boycott work with the Jewish War Veterans. Her husband Mark formed a post in the Bronx in 1936 and the next year, she was appointed Boycott

Chairman of the JWV New York State Department Ladies Auxiliary. By the end of the war she would serve as National Boycott Chairman of the JWV Ladies Auxiliary and National Boycott Chairman for the national organization.³⁶

³⁴ American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights, Minutes, 29 November 1933, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ American Jewish Archives, "A Finding Aid to the Bertha V. Corets Papers"
<http://collections.americanjewisharchives.org/ms/ms0307/ms0307.html> (accessed 9 October 2017).

When Corets joined the boycott, the ANL was in its infancy. She was present from that first rally. It set the tone for the organization's efforts and activities. A number of speakers addressed the assembly. Among them was keynote speaker, Rebecca Kohut (1864-1951), the author, educator and community leader who served as director of the Columbia Grammar School, president of the World Congress of Jewish Women, and helped lead the American Women's Association, the Vocational Service for Juniors, and the Bureau of Jewish Social Research.³⁷ Her speech emphasized the "brotherhood" and unity of the Jewish race. She reminded her listeners that "when a Jew is scratched on the other side of the ocean, the hearts of his brother Jews here bleed."³⁸ She also argued "that the only effective weapon with which to strike Hitler is the pocket book, the boycott."³⁹ To do this, the ANL needed to be organized against Nazism, which was already present in the United States. Twenty five women paid the \$1.00 dues that day and joined in the ANL.⁴⁰

At their meetings, the women discussed growing Nazi threats at home and abroad and how to address them. Corets made a motion to appoint committees to approach various organizations and spread the ANL's mission.⁴¹ Chairlady Mrs. Louis Myers urged the women to present the ANL's "purpose and ambitions" to their respective organizations as committees of one.⁴² Corets empowered the women to be active participants in the boycott – checking in their local stores for German goods. Stores

³⁷ Jack Riemer, "Kohut," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), 1150.

³⁸ American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights, Minutes, 29 November 1933, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 17 January 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

⁴² Ibid.

found to be carrying German products were then told of the potential boycott, offered alternatives, and if they refused to alter their practices, were boycotted.

Corets was not the only motivated member of the organization. Emma Leon Gottheil (1862-1947) was another individual.⁴³ Gottheil reported to the women of her exchanges with French Jewesses and their interest in what American Jews were doing. When Gottheil returned from France, she found the Federation of Jewish Women's Organizations refused to participate in the boycott.⁴⁴ Gottheil "became very agitated and called shame, shame, shame on these women present and absent who dared to affix dissenting views, she almost shouted 'we should have no honor if we did not fight for the Cause.'"⁴⁵ Gottheil continued, "In working for the boycott we are defending our honor and we are helping Germany because of the thousands there who dare not open their mouths."⁴⁶ Corets shared these sentiments and added her own conclusion, that "no one who had been present could leave the assembly without feeling inspired by the sincerity, burning enthusiasm and splendid showing of these loyal Jewish women."⁴⁷

⁴³Gottheil married Professor Richard Gottheil and soon began lecturing at Columbia University, translating French works, and making the acquaintance of important New York writers. She became involved with the Young Women's Hebrew Association and the Nation Council of Jewish Women. Along with her husband she was a delegate of the Federation of American Zionists at the Second Zionist Congress, 1898, where Herzl asked her to translate his messages for the delegates. She would also become a founding member of Hadassah, which was named for her mother. Center for Israel Education, "Emma Gottheil Passes Away," <https://israeled.org/emma-gotthiel-passes-away/> (Accessed 29 October 2017).

⁴⁴ After a "sharp debate" delegates from the Federation would eventually endorse the boycott. Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 30 January 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

⁴⁵ Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 29 January 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 6 November 1935, MS 307/box 1/folder 12. Mahoney, President of the Amateur Athletic Union, pointing participating in the Olympics would be an endorsement of Hitler's Reich, as Hitler had already broken Olympic rules forbidding racial and religious discrimination. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "The Movement to Boycott the Berlin Olympics of 1936," <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007087> (accessed 16 September 2017).

Corets was not opposed to joining up the different boycott movements, including the ANL, JWV, and the American Jewish Congress. Separate letters came to Corets about meetings. The letter she received from the League urged her, personally, to come to the meeting, as they were considering joining with the Joint Boycott Council.⁴⁸ She saw the amalgamation as a good thing, hopefully doing “away with all the petty bickering and criticism, and really mean the beginning of an intensified boycott.”⁴⁹ Despite the need for a more unified movement, she also admitted that the Veterans could not join a larger group in a boycott effort if it meant losing their identity. She did believe, though, that they could “secure their moral support towards a unification movement.”⁵⁰ Nor were all non-Jewish organizations afraid or unwilling to help the boycott movement. The American Federation of Labor was one willing partner. The League was excited for the prospect of this powerful partner.⁵¹

When the AFL contacted Corets through the JWV, their letters demonstrate how seriously they were willing to talk about antisemitism and the plight of the Jews; the President, William Green, boasted that they were the first great institution to form a boycott. The AFL organized a boycott in 1938, when they called for chapters to organize, but Corets and the Ladies’ Auxiliary had been doing so for nearly a decade.⁵² Still, Corets responded enthusiastically to Green’s letter and speeches. She also had an eye on recruiting and expanding her operation, and asked him for the addresses of his affiliates, hoping to make contact with local branches.⁵³

⁴⁸ Dr. S. William Kalb to Bertha Corets, 25 November 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

⁴⁹ Bertha Corets to J. George Fredman, 26 November 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 23 July 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

⁵² Radio Address, American Federation of Labor, 19 November 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

⁵³ Bertha Corets to William Green, 2 February 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

The relationship with the AFL almost ended before it could get off the ground.. Many of the unions who received materials from the JWV were quick to use them and even publicize the boycott. But despite the unions' willingness to cooperate, many of the JWV posts did not make copies of the materials or send letters to the local unions.⁵⁴ Fortunately, Corets corresponded with the AFL herself, and they sent her a list of affiliated unions.⁵⁵ In this case, it was not a matter of opposition to the boycott, but a lack of will within the ranks of the JWV.

Corets also did what she could to foster cooperation. As much influence as she and her organization had, Corets recognized that inter-organizational collaboration would only strengthen the cause. She reached out to the *Journal of Commerce*, who had reported on the Joint Boycott Council to do just this. She praised them for their reporting on the boycott in general and on the books that the Auxiliary compiled on the pharmaceutical industry. A significant number of medications and drugs came from Germany, and finding substitutes along with a boycott of the German-made ones had widespread implications. Many of the recipients of the pamphlet were grateful for it. She asked that they not only credit them for first distributing it but to note that the information was subsequently made available to all boycott organizations, societies, etc.”⁵⁶ Whether there was unity or not, whether her workforce was engaged or not, Corets was determined to make as much progress as she could through boycott.

⁵⁴ Boycott Program for March 1939, 20 February 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

⁵⁵ William Green to Bertha Corets, 2 March 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 7.

⁵⁶ Bertha Corets to *The Journal of Commerce*, 19 January 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

Boycott Business

Nathaniel Nathan, treasurer for the ANL, encapsulated the spirit of the boycott. He saw it as a “contagion” that “MUST” be spread.⁵⁷ In an economic movement, he was uniquely situated to appreciate the impact it could have: “financial cooperation from people of all faiths, individually and in groups or organizations, faiths and all creeds—stamp out the dragon of Hitler-hate and preserve our democratic country, if not for our own sakes, then for the sake of our own children, - the coming generation.”⁵⁸ Corets reached out to the J WV Auxiliary for the first time as National Boycott Chairman on November 24, 1937. She spoke with enthusiasm, citing past victories and focusing on current campaigns.⁵⁹ She reminded the Presidents, who would inspire their own chapters, that “ENCOURAGEMENT is the important word.”⁶⁰ The boycott was starting to have an impact and she made sure to note that

[t]here have been many times when we could not truthfully send such a message, but today the results of our years of work are beginning to bear fruit. The fruit is the measure of courtesy and cooperation we receive when we call upon outstanding firms to discontinue the purchase of Nazi made merchandise, ships and services, and in this connection we expect some important names to disappear shortly from our boycott list.⁶¹

Throughout the boycott, Corets managed the research and implementation of the boycott’s various initiatives vis-à-vis a range of products and stores. As the J WV found German goods for sale, she approached stores about discontinuing the sale of those products. Much of the work she did herself, calling and writing to companies to

⁵⁷ Report of Treasurer Nathaniel Nathan, 29 September 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Bertha Corets to All Presidents, Boycott Chairmen, 24 November 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

investigate their involvement with Germany. She was among those who determined which companies could be given a “clean bill of health.”⁶²

Some campaigns targeted specific products or companies. One of the most time-consuming campaigns for Corets was Wear Right Gloves. That the gloves were manufactured in Germany first came to her attention in 1934, when she was with the League.⁶³ It then became her first campaign as National Boycott Chairman. Not all companies were willing to take them off the shelves. Bloomingdales dug in their heels and refused to budge. In addition to insisting that they had “not handled German merchandise since the advent of the Nazi regime” the company subsequently maintained that they sold these gloves in response to customer demand— a demand, they insisted, that was “was known to all of the organizations who are interested in this problem.”⁶⁴ The campaign called for a lot of work, requiring members to “examine carefully every glove purchase, visit your neighborhood stores, department stores, etc. where gloves are sold and acquaint them with our attitude.”⁶⁵ Corets recognized how big a task this was and listed herself as a resource should a store be too large or difficult for the members to handle alone. To further encourage the women, Corets could point to some of the successful campaigns. She quoted the letter from R.H. Macy & Co. that had indicated their capitulation on the boycott issue. They contacted her in October 1937 to essentially ask the League to drop its opposition to the company. They referred specifically to the boycott as the catalyst for acquiring (nearly) all of their products from non-German

⁶² Bertha Corets to Research Department, 28 October 1936, MS 307/box 1/folder 1.

⁶³ American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights, Minutes, 2 May 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

⁶⁴ Sidney Reisman to Pauline H. Woolf, 17 March 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 3.

⁶⁵ Bertha Corets to All Presidents, Boycott Chairmen, 24 November 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2.

sources and for closing their Berlin office three years before.⁶⁶ “The consumer boycott of German merchandise has been so wide-spread and effective that we have found it necessary to secure merchandise to which there is no resistance.”⁶⁷

Despite Macy’s request for clemency, it was still premature to declare a boycott victory in this particular battle. The influential department store continued to sell Wear Right Gloves. Macy’s insisted that Wear Right was an American brand. As such, they argued that “were we to take the stand to refrain from buying from houses such as this, we would add to the already critical unemployment situation which now exists in our own country.”⁶⁸ Although they remained intransigent, other stores were not as resolute. Alexander’s Department Stores was much more accommodating and pledged to change its practices, even at some cost to the company.⁶⁹

Some boycotted products could not be easily replaced or taken out of circulation. For example, Alexander’s either discontinued selling items or sold them drastically below value, just to get rid of them.⁷⁰ Another example was that of Black Knight China, a particularly popular line of dinnerware, made in Germany. Since much of the china had already been purchased, a boycott did nothing for the items already in homes. Moreover, they needed replace broken dishes so that their set was usable. Corets enlisted the women of the movement to help with the boycott even when they were not shopping. Social functions and obligations presented the women with another opportunity to

⁶⁶ Arthur L. Manchec to Bertha Corets, 8 October 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2. The letter was addressed to Mr. B.V. Corets.

⁶⁷ Bertha Corets to All Presidents, Boycott Chairmen, 24 November 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2.

⁶⁸ Sidney Reisman to Pauline H. Woolf, 17 March 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 3.

⁶⁹ M. M. Kaplan to Bertha Corets, 23 March 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 3.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

continue the campaign. Corets implored them, “Please make a habit when attending banquets, to look at the markings of the dishes from which you are served...BLACK KNIGHT CHINA IS MADE IN GERMANY.”⁷¹ What to do once they found the china, though, was a different problem.

Hotels, restaurants, and other users of the china would not replace it so easily. In hopes of finding a solution, Corets sought out the American Potters Association. She thought that if she could persuade the American Pottery industry to increase production of American-made pottery, this effort would result in a corresponding decline in the desirability of German-made china.⁷² Unsurprisingly, the American Potters Association was wholeheartedly in agreement and directed her to the Made in America Movement and the Made in America Club, Inc.⁷³ The Club wrote to Corets and her organization, asking what they could do for her, with of course, a pamphlet about the Club and a request for a pledge.⁷⁴ Corets also asked if the Potters would be able to compel American manufacturers to put “made in the U.S.A.” on their products and, if this could be done, did the association believe it would be helpful.⁷⁵

Some industries provided reasonable alternatives to avoid being boycotted. This saved them from both negative publicity and economic loss. This was a frequent topic of conversation between Corets and Fredman - some industries find a way to replace German goods. One industry that did so was the bead industry. While the bead industry relied heavily on German and Czechoslovakian products, one manufacturer managed to

⁷¹ Memo N.H.Q #37, Bertha Corets to National Ladies' Auxiliary, Jewish War Veterans of the US, 4 February 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 3.

⁷² Bertha Corets to United States Potters Association, 9 November 1938, Bertha V. Corets Papers MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

⁷³ Chas. F. Goodwin to Bertha Corets, 16 November 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

⁷⁴ F.X.A. Eble to Bertha Corets, 21 November 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

⁷⁵ Bertha Corets to Chas. F. Goodwin, 21 February 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

find suitable replacements. Fredman took note of this. He also noted that other manufacturers had not replaced the objectionable goods. He urged Corets to try to meet with them to both find the firms who were not boycotting German goods, and to find out who the replacement manufacturers were.⁷⁶ It is clear that Corets' knowledge of the boycott, and her skills as a diplomat served the cause and furthered the boycott of German goods.

Many firms reported happily or at least satisfactorily that they were complying with the boycott. The case of Fels & Co. was one such story. The JWV had come to believe that the firm came under new management and that it was doing business with German companies. When Corets investigated, she learned that not only had the leadership remained consistent but Mr. Fels, the company's president, was Jewish and committed to Jewish causes and opposition to the Nazis.⁷⁷

Some successes were not as complete as they appeared to be. The R.H. Macy & Co. contacted Corets in October 1937 to essentially ask for the League to drop its opposition to the company. Although the Wear Right Gloves matter had not been resolved, the JWV believe that Macy's had otherwise complied with the boycott. In fact, the company referred specifically to the boycott as the catalyst for acquiring (nearly) all of their products from non-German sources and for closing their Berlin office three years before.⁷⁸ Macy's further equivocated, maintaining that they did "not consider it good wisdom for a department store to engage in boycotts."⁷⁹ Demonstrating a fundamental

⁷⁶ J. George Fredman to Bertha Corets, 13 June 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 8.

⁷⁷ Joseph Jacobs to Bertha Corets, 13 December 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

⁷⁸ Arthur L. Manchee to Bertha Corets, 8 October 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2. The letter was addressed to Mr. B.V. Corets.

⁷⁹ American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights, Minutes, 11 April 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

misunderstanding of both boycotts and capitalism, Macy's suggested that eliminating German goods was unnecessary because consumers could simply refuse to buy certain goods. Why Macy's would stock goods that would not sell, or what it intended to do with the goods the people refused to buy, was unclear. Still, Macy's did attempt to find replacement goods not made in Germany. The success was measured though, as members reported seeing Macy's continue to stock German goods. As a result, members were "requested to be vigilant when visiting these stores, even tho [*sic*] they have joined the boycott."⁸⁰ Although Macy's would not fully participate in the boycott, some of its employees felt that it should. One anonymous whistleblower informed a representative of the League that despite the company's assurances, Macy's was still stocking German curtain rods.⁸¹ Despite favorable headlines and assurances to the contrary, Macy's never fully complied with the boycott.⁸²

Macy's was unwilling to comply with a boycott of German goods. For Macy's and others, the loss would have been significant. Untermeyer found similar reluctance in the major New York newspaper publishers, who refused to publish his attacks on Macy's, their biggest advertiser.⁸³ Another unlikely source was The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which had begun to purchase German-made reproductions of famous works of art. Such a decision was reported in the *New York Times* and cited economics as a factor. J. George Fredman contacted the museum to confirm the story and was met with fierce opposition.

⁸⁰ American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights, Minutes, 4 April 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

⁸¹ American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights, Minutes, 16 October 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

⁸² Arthur L. Manchec to Bertha Corets, 8 October 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2; "Macy Action on Boycott Hailed Here," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 19 March 1934; Richard A. Hawkins, "Hitler's Bitterest Foe": Samuel Untermeyer and the Boycott of Nazi Germany, 1933–1938, *American Jewish History* 93, no. 1 (March 2007): 28.

⁸³ Hawkins, "Hitler's Bitterest Foe."

The president of the Board of Trustees for the museum, Mr. George Blumenthal, refused to even write back, instead calling the Chairman's office, and insisting that such letters do more harm than good and such acts "will bring about the same condition that is in Germany."⁸⁴ Fredman relayed this exchange to Corets, noting that Blumenthal was "insulted, apparently by our request."⁸⁵ What aroused this sentiment, one could only speculate, but Fredman offered this assessment: "I understand that he is Jewish and very wealthy. The typical German-Jewish type." If Mr. Blumenthal disliked the letter, Corets' suggestion to Fredman would have been even less favorable: a picket. He believed a few pickets, with signs, would do much to make their point. In particular, "intellectuals and artists, etc., are sympathetic and I am sure that two pickets with signs would be of a means to gain proper results."⁸⁶ He then asked Corets whether she could provide the people necessary for the job.

Corets was not as "keen about the idea of picketing the museum."⁸⁷ Corets found another way to influence them. Confessing her own ignorance in the matter, she reached out to an acquaintance of hers, Bernard S. Myers, a professor of art history at New York University.⁸⁸ She was also reluctant to step outside of the economic arena and take on activities like sports and arts.⁸⁹ She believed that asking to meet with a representative from the museum would be the best course of action. She also took up the assignment of

⁸⁴ J. George Fredman to Bertha Corets, 30 December 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Bertha Corets to J. George Fredman, 6 January 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

⁸⁸ MS 307/box 1/folder 5. In her letter, she mentions Professor Myers along with a co-author of one of his books, Dr. Harry Elmer Barnes, who would later gain some notoriety as a revisionist and Holocaust denier.

⁸⁹ Bertha Corets to J. George Fredman, 6 January 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

trying to find American artists and companies who could produce suitable alternatives to the German-made postcards of famous paintings, being sold at the museum.⁹⁰

The JWV did use picketing, “the harshest and most problematic, but also the most effective measure in pressuring the boycott offender into submission.”⁹¹ The ANL remained opposed to picketing on principle because Untermeyer saw it as “illegal and contrary to the best traditions of American institutions.”⁹² The American Jewish Congress’ Boycott Committee resisted picketing until it “reached a stage” where letters were being mostly ignored. Some of the picketers had to be bailed out on charges of disorderly conduct or disturbing the peace, but largely went unmolested, likely thanks to Mayor LaGuardia, who was an Honorary President of the League.⁹³

Another firm who did not want to comply with the boycott was G.E. Stechert, a large book dealer in New York. With additional branches in Leipzig, London, and Paris, he chafed at the notion of boycotting Germany. He dismissed the very idea of a boycott and the letter that introduced it as “uncalled for.”⁹⁴ He refused to stop supplying German books while there was still a demand. In his mind, a boycott made no sense while the two countries still have diplomatic relations, scoffing at the thought of it as “absolutely ridiculous.”⁹⁵ Further, he attempted to parry any insinuation of antisemitism by pointing out that his firm stocks “Jewish books from Palestine and also books from Russia.”⁹⁶ He

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts*, 258, citing Moshe Gottlieb, “The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the United States: An Ideological and Sociological Appreciation,” *Jewish Social Studies*, 35, No. 3/4 (Jul. - Oct., 1973), 223.

⁹² Ibid., fn. 9.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ G.E. Stechert to Bertha Corets, 9 February 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

then threw up his hands and went on the offensive, telling Corets: “Your position does not even make any sense and we are writing to the state Department protesting against your letter.”⁹⁷ Stechert filed complaints about the letter with the General Jewish Council, the Secretary of State, and other government officials.⁹⁸ Before Fredman forwarded the letter to Corets, he wrote on it, “What happened here?”⁹⁹ He thought that if anyone could sort it out and mitigate the situation, it was Corets.¹⁰⁰

Other companies took an approach between outright refusal and total compliance with the boycott. Upon contacting Abbott Laboratories about the pamphlet Corets compiled on German pharmaceuticals and about the boycott, the response was mixed. They looked favorably upon the pamphlet in general, but believed that the majority of physicians, trained in the United States, already knew the American equivalents and that the current politics would push them towards the American goods and that the situation would “more or less automatically adjust itself.”¹⁰¹

The drug issue continued to be one of great interest. Corets acknowledged both the time that had been put into it and the yield. The work done by the group not only furthered the boycott but educated the physicians in the industry.¹⁰² At the same time, both Corets and Fredman were concerned with the pamphlet’s publication. They wanted the JWV to have its name on the pamphlet and debated the best way to accomplish this. At the same time, the ANL was also working on a similar pamphlet.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ J. George Fredman to Bertha Corets, 20 February 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

⁹⁹ G.E. Stechert to Bertha Corets, 9 February 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

¹⁰⁰ J. George Fredman to Bertha Corets, 20 February 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

¹⁰¹ Richard Lucke, M.D. to Bertha Corets, 2 February 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

¹⁰² Bertha Corets to J. George Fredman, 11 March 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 7.

¹⁰³ J. George Fredman to Bertha Corets, March 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 7.

While the ANL set its sights on companies doing international trade, not all of the work involved multinationals or million dollar interests. Some businesses were much smaller, and faced more immediate and dire consequences from even a small boycott. A glove company, Max Mayer & Co., responded to its inclusion on a list of firms that did business with German companies, as “unfair and an injustice.”¹⁰⁴ Not only had the firm continued to do business with German suppliers, it often altered its products to appear as though they were American goods.¹⁰⁵

At the same time, despite being a national organization, the ANL relied on small-scale efforts from its members to fund its boycott and further its work. The various sources of revenue throughout the boycott suggest the involvement of the members and the tenacity of the organizers. Local chapters organized events and fundraisers, far from the large-scale efforts of the national office. For example, a 1936 bridge fundraiser managed to yield \$133.45, which would be equivalent to nearly \$2,400.00 in 2017.¹⁰⁶ In 1938, the main source of income came from their sales of men’s felt hats, donated by the members. Corets urged members to send any saleable hats to headquarters. Each would be sold for ten cents.¹⁰⁷ There also came to be a large list of items for purchase, in support of the organization, from stationery and placards to capes, caps, and armbands.¹⁰⁸

In December of 1935, Mrs. Harris, the National Chairman surprised the women with a visit¹⁰⁹ and told the members “that the League has eliminated all things except

¹⁰⁴ Mark Corets to Max Mayer & Co., Inc., 27 August 1936, MS 307/box 1/folder 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Account for Card Party, 21 May 1936, MS 307/box 1/folder 1.; <https://data.bls.gov/>

¹⁰⁷ Bertha Corets to Sisters, 5 July 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

¹⁰⁸ Price List of Supplies, National Ladies’ Auxiliary, Jewish War Veterans of the United States, 7 November, 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

¹⁰⁹ Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 4 December 1935, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

work on the boycott and they will do nothing else that will cause them to deviate in the slightest.”¹¹⁰ To accomplish this new goal, the women would be “publicizing the good points of the Jews, collecting information where Anti-Semitism is practiced and developing ways and means to counteract it.”¹¹¹ In October of 1936, the ANL expanded its focus. “In addition to spreading the boycott, which has always been the sole purpose of our existence, we have an additional program, that of fighting Anti-Semitism in the United States.”¹¹²

Along with the expanding scope of the ANL’s activities, the JWV also widened its focus. With the advance of the German army in 1938, the organization felt it had no choice “after the armed invasion and rape of Austria, Americans have no further alternative. While we have no quarrel with either the Austrian or German people, we cannot stand idly by while the Nazi fanatics who now rule both these countries, ruin every vestige of civilization. The Boycott is the American individual’s form of protest.”¹¹³

As the boycott campaign intensified, so did the pressure from the leadership. In March of 1939, the rhetoric increased. “Hitler is desperate. The Boycott is more important now than ever in its history. Let’s all get together and devise some means of stopping every possible source in the United States for German goods.”¹¹⁴

Communications from Fredman took on an increased urgency. He called for every single

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 1 October 1936, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

¹¹² Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 1 October 1936, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

¹¹³ Important Boycott Notice, Jewish War Veterans, 15 March 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

¹¹⁴ J. George Fredman to Commanders and Presidents, Boycott Chairmen and Officers, 20 March 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 7.

member to attend the next meeting. He was unequivocal: “this is an emergency call. Do not fail to attend.”¹¹⁵ In his following communication, he reiterated the need for every member to attend.¹¹⁶

Corets also corresponded with a number of government officials. One such exchange was about travel. She wrote to Cordell Hull about using American ships, and received a reply saying that United States employees and officers always traveled on American ships as available.¹¹⁷ In response, she approached the Jewish War Veterans with an idea. She came to realize that she could approach the travel issue through “a splendid program for our organization in the line of patriotic publicity.”¹¹⁸ Although notable personalities such as Florence Jaffrey Harriman United States Minister to Norway, United States Navy Commander Charles H. Rosendahl, and Charles Lindbergh, were travelling on German boats, the government looked the other ways, as these people traveled through personal means. Just as Corets raised awareness of German-made goods, she proposed a similar campaign “to make the American people conscious of the importance of traveling and shipping on American Ships.”¹¹⁹ In her estimation, it was “a patriotic American move, an effort to help overcome the economic depression by stimulating travel and shipping on American ships. At the Women’s Patriotic Conference on National Defense, the Auxiliary presented a resolution to this effect, which was

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ J. George Fredman to Comrade, 23 March 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 7.

¹¹⁷ Letter to Cordell Hull, MS 307/box 1/folder 3.

¹¹⁸ Bertha Corets to Harry H. Schaffer, 30 June 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 3.

¹¹⁹ Bertha Corets to Harry H. Schaffer, 30 June 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 3.

accepted unanimously. Later, Corets would contact the media about this event, pointing to the wide variety of groups that signed on.¹²⁰

As the campaign to “Travel and Ship American,”¹²¹ continued, she alerted members to the existence of a number of German passenger ships, in use by American tourists.¹²² In pursuit of this project, she reached out to others, including Admiral Emory S. Lands, of the American Maritime Commission.¹²³ She wanted to connect the JWV to the civilian mariners of the Merchant Marine, and sought his advice before bringing it to the JWV. Such move demonstrates her level of planning and organization – she leveraged her position as a part of the JWV and the successes of her organization, to reach out to the Admiral, whose advice would in turn, help her with the Veterans. The JWV’s support of the Merchant Marine would increase the JWV’s visibility and increase the likelihood of the success of the boycott. Interested in what Corets was proposing, Admiral Lands sent her a copy of his speech before the Fourteenth Women’s Patriotic Conference on National Defense.¹²⁴ There, he spoke directly to the issue of American ships, although he demanded less than Corets, suggesting the “various organizations look to ways and means during the coming months of promoting the patronage, wherever possible, of American-flag ships. When you travel, travel under the American flag. Urge that shippers

¹²⁰ Bertha Corets to N.Y. World-Telegram, 14 March 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 7, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio; Bertha Corets to N.Y. Times, 14 March 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 7.

¹²¹ Bertha Corets to National Ladies’ Auxiliary Jewish War Veterans of the United States, 5 July 1938, Bertha V. Corets Papers MS 307/box 1/folder 4, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio; Bertha Corets to Admiral Emory S. Lands, 23 January 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

¹²² Bertha Corets to National Ladies’ Auxiliary Jewish War Veterans of the United States, 5 July 1938, Bertha V. Corets Papers MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

¹²³ Bertha Corets to Admiral Emory S. Lands, 23 January 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

¹²⁴ Robert W. Horton to Bertha Corets, 27 January 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

transport their cargoes under the same flag.”¹²⁵ Thanks to these efforts, the Merchant Marines surpassed German shippers and German shipping overall, reduced.¹²⁶

Corets truly believed in her cause, and she fought hard for it. Her communication with the women of the JWV Ladies’ Auxiliary was unequivocal in its import: “The Jews in Germany are in a trap and slowly being driven to suicide or slow starvation.”¹²⁷ She continued, “anyone knowing these facts and buying German goods is a traitor to the whole Jewish race.”¹²⁸ As much as she worked to reinforce the significance of what the JWV did among the membership, she knew that others would take convincing as well. “I think the importance of our work should be clear to everyone and wo [*sic*] women doing most of the purchasing for the family, have the main job.”¹²⁹

As important as the work was, Corets recognized it would take more than boycotting stores to dissuade the Nazis from intensifying their anti-Jewish initiatives. As members of the community and the primary shoppers and consumers, women were uniquely situated to recognize suspicious behavior. Corets charged the women with an additional task, that of reporting to her any Nazi activities in their neighborhoods.¹³⁰

Corets also worked to oppose antisemitism and Nazi activities in the United States. The JWV was deeply involved in fighting the Nazi activities of the German-American Bund. J. George Fredman wrote to the chapters about a bill to outlaw certain

¹²⁵ Address by Rear Admiral Emory S. Land, Retired, Chairman, United States Maritime Commission, Before the Fourteenth Women’s Patriotic Conference on National Defense, at the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C., 26 January 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

¹²⁶ Bertha Corets to Auxiliary Presidents and Boycott Chairmen, 5 May 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 8.

¹²⁷ Bertha Corets to All Ladies’ Auxiliary Boycott Chairmen, 10 September 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2.

¹²⁸ Bertha Corets to All Ladies’ Auxiliary Boycott Chairmen, 10 September 1937, Bertha V. Corets paper, MS 307/box 1/folder 2.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

military and para-military organizations.¹³¹ Corets spent time investigating and writing about the dangers of these organizations. She visited a Nazi Camp Siegfried in Yaphank, New York.¹³² There, she spotted a “shocking” sign, absurdly demanding equal rights for German Americans, which she recognized as “the same tactics of the Sudeten party in Czechoslovakia.”¹³³ She saw the irony in Germans demanding equal rights, while trampling the rights of others so viciously. Following her visit, she attended a debate between Fritz Kuhn, (1896-1951) “Hitler’s imitator in America,”¹³⁴ leader of the German-American Bund, and Congressman Samuel Dickstein. Kuhn’s “bellicose statements and elaborate fanfare, she wrote, [was] engag[ing] the public’s imagination at the time Hitler was becoming the central figure in world events.”¹³⁵ Opposite Kuhn was Congressman Samuel Dickstein (1885-1954), a representative from New York. Not one to remain silent or avoid trouble, Corets pressed Kuhn on the sign she saw at Yaphank. Kuhn answered with “evasion” and Corets saw some of the Bund’s “moronic followers shake their heads in agreement and say Ja, Ja.”¹³⁶ She faulted *The New York Times* as

¹³¹ J. George Fredman to Commanders, Department of New York Jewish War Veterans of The United States, 12 May 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 8.

¹³² Bertha Corets to the National Ladies’ Auxiliary, Jewish War Veterans of the United States, 5 July 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4. Camp Siegfried was a summer camp for children to learn Nazi ideology. Tzachi Yoked, “It Looks Like Any Sleepy American Suburb, but It Has a Dark Nazi History,” *Haaretz*, 8 June 2017.

¹³³ Ibid.; The Sudeten Party was a pro-Nazi party in Czechoslovakia, aimed at breaking up the country and joining the Third Reich. Josef Pfitzner, “Sudeten German History,” in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770–1945: Texts and Commentaries, Volume Three/2*, eds. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górný and Vangelis Kechriotis (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 7.

¹³⁴ Sander A. Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States: 1924-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 21.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁶ Debate between Fritz Kuhn and Congressman Dickstein, 25 September 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4. Kuhn had accused Dickstein of being a spy for the Soviet Union. At the time, Dickstein was not, but would eventually become one. Peter Duffy, “The Congressman Who Spied for Russia: The strange case of Samuel Dickstein,” *Politico Magazine*, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/10/samuel-dickstein-congressman-russian-spy-111641> (accessed 7 October 2017).

being negligent for failing to report on her question and that of another person who questioned Kuhn as to why his supposedly American organization prohibited membership for those with “colored or Jewish blood.”¹³⁷

One of Corets’ main activities was ensuring that she had enough information about a business to wage an effective campaign. Corets wrote to the notorious antisemitic preacher, Rev. Father Coughlin. Coughlin, (1891-1979) was known as “The Radio Priest,” and his broadcasts – full of antisemitism and hate – reached millions of people.¹³⁸ She asked him for copies of his most recent speeches. Corets’ plan was not to distribute his message, but to bring it to the other women and discuss how to deal with it.¹³⁹ There is no record of whether or not Father Coughlin fulfilled her request.

Corets was not opposed to physical action, particularly when it came to protesting discriminatory activities in the United States. In order to counter the dissemination of Father Coughlin’s periodical, “Social Justice,” she and other members “sold pro-American pamphlets on the streets of New York to offset the sale” of the anti-Semitic periodical.¹⁴⁰ When Nazis tried to march in her city, Corets pledged to face danger personally, “if it becomes necessary, to prevent this demonstration of Nazi activity in New York City.”¹⁴¹ She also contacted Malvina Freeman, National President of the National Ladies’ Auxiliary, about getting New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia to oppose the Nazi parade. If he would not, Corets planned to be there herself, along with “wives,

¹³⁷ Debate between Fritz Kuhn and Congressman Dickstein, 25 September 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4; Bertha Corets to City Editor, *New York Times*, 18 October 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

¹³⁸ Breitman, *FDR and the Jews*, 85-86.

¹³⁹ Bertha Corets to Rev. Father Coughlin, 3 February 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

¹⁴⁰ “Briefs,” *The Jewish War Veteran* (June 1939): 18.

¹⁴¹ Bertha Corets to Malvina Freeman, Undated, MS 307/box 1/folder 9.

sisters, mothers, widows and daughters of veterans who gave service to our beloved country when these sacred principles were in danger.”¹⁴²

Other issues of how Jews appeared or presented themselves arose. In anticipation of participating in the German Exposition held at New York’s Grand Central Palace,¹⁴³ Corets was aware of what it might mean to have a Jewish presence there. She suggested dropping the word Jewish from the Joint Boycott Council’s name and not boycotting in the name of the Jewish War Veterans. She also broached the subject of joining the JWV with the with the Council for this activity. The idea was not met with any enthusiasm. J. George Fredman, National Boycott Chairman, instead suggested adding diversity in the form of other groups, rather than downplaying. He did not think taking the word “Jewish” out would fool anyone.¹⁴⁴ He believed that people knew who the Joint Boycott Council was and seeing Jewish faces would be a further giveaway. Instead, he proposed including “some Irish Catholics, some good protestants, some Czecho-slovaks, some husky union people.”¹⁴⁵

Corets' work also focused on international efforts as the boycott movement expanded globally. If she could not get the full cooperation of American organizations, looking abroad might offer some assistance. She reached out to like-minded people in England to see if they could set up an exchange of information.¹⁴⁶ The British boycott

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ The annual German Exposition and Christmas Market at Grand Central Palace was aimed at increasing cooperation and understanding between Germany and the United States. Leader of the German-American Bund, Fritz Kuhn, declared that “Buy Gentile” was the ideal motto for Christmas. Anti-Nazi groups including the Joint Boycott Council, picketed the Exposition. “German Exposition is Picketed Here: Anti-Nazis March Outside Hall as Kuhn Urges ‘Buy Gentile,’,” *The New York Times*, 16 December 1938.

¹⁴⁴ Memo from J. George Fredman to Bertha Corets, 29 November 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Bertha Corets to Labor Publications Department, 9 November 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

movement was a good model for her. Similar to the American situation, it lacked the support of key religious leadership (the Board of Deputies of British Jews) but still managed to devise some amount of an organized effort.¹⁴⁷ The boycott became a fully international affair with the establishment of a world-wide boycott organization in Geneva, in 1934.¹⁴⁸ The global movement ultimately involved boycotts in England, France, Romania, Greece, Latvia, Poland Yugoslavia, Egypt, Palestine, Morocco, and a number of South American countries.¹⁴⁹

All Due Respect

Corets did more than just organize and delegate. As a leader, her voice was respected and well-regarded, and she was remarkably successful in her endeavors. To some, Corets' abilities were noteworthy. As one of her colleagues wrote: "You are the only one who holds their attention no matter what you talk about."¹⁵⁰

Abe Cohen, Convention Chairman, had a great deal of respect for Corets. The J WV took on a project of purchasing an ambulance for the Finnish government, whose suffering people were in critical need of additional medical equipment.¹⁵¹ The J WV struggled to get the funds, so Cohen turned to Corets for help. He told her, "I am making

¹⁴⁷ Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 95.

¹⁴⁸ Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press: 1970), 11.

¹⁴⁹ Monroe Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts: Effecting Change Through the Marketplace and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 133; the ANL claimed in its literature that it had branches in Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Holland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Morocco, Norway, Palestine, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Uruguay, Venezuela, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Great Britain, South Africa, and the United States. "The League – What Is It and What It Does," Date unknown, MS 307/box 1/folder 15; Yahil, *The Holocaust*, 95.

¹⁵⁰ Gertrude S. Cohen to Bertha Corets, 7 January 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁵¹ "American Gift That Will Go on Mercy Mission in Finland," *The New York Times* (21 February 1940): 7.

this personal appeal to you knowing that, if you will turn on your personality and make this a pet hobby, the goal of \$3,000 with which to purchase this ambulance will be attained so much easier.”¹⁵² The JWV managed to raise the funds and purchased the ambulance to much praise and acclaim, presenting it to Finnish Consul General Kaarlo Kuusamo and New York’s Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who was in attendance.¹⁵³

George Fredman also appreciated Corets’s abilities. On occasion, he enlisted her personally for important projects. One instance was when he was convening a meeting to address problems with the Christian Front.¹⁵⁴ He sent out a letter to all Commanders in the metropolitan New York area, but he added a personal appeal to hers, reiterating how important it was for her, in particular, to attend.¹⁵⁵

The JWV’s journal, *The Jewish Veteran*, also took note of Corets’ work and did what it could to assist her efforts. In regards to her work on the pharmaceutical pamphlet that listed all of the German-made drugs, the journal lauded her efforts in distributing it and encouraged all Boycott groups to order copies and distribute them. Of even greater importance, though, were the funds that such orders would bring, “we cannot expect our Boycott Chairman to work without funds.”¹⁵⁶ The article went on to urge supporters to send their contributions to Corets.

Many in the movement expressed their appreciation for Corets’ work. Alice R. Gilman, President of the Ladies’ Auxiliary in Massachusetts wrote Corets personally, thanking her for her work. Ms. Gilman thanked her for her efforts on the boycott and

¹⁵² Abe Cohen to Bertha Corets, 5 January 1940, MS 307/box 1/folder 9.

¹⁵³ “American Gift That Will Go on Mercy Mission in Finland,” *The New York Times*: 7.

¹⁵⁴ The Christian Front was Father Charles Coughlin’s pro-Nazi organization that encouraged Americans to boycott Jewish Merchants. Nazi Sympathizers, *The Home Front Encyclopedia: United States, Britain, and Canada in World Wars I and II*, ed. James Ciment (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 966.

¹⁵⁵ J. George Fredman to Bertha Corets, 28 July 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 8.

¹⁵⁶ Malvina V. Freeman, “National President’s Message,” *The Jewish Veteran* (February 1939): 15.

noted that even just the pharmaceutical list itself “electrified” the audiences of ten or so gatherings. Her audiences included the Auxiliaries, Hadassah, Zionists, Council of Jewish Women, and other groups.

Not everyone respected Corets’ abilities. Dr. B. Dubovsky, Temporary Chairman of the ANL’s Board of Directors, questioned how Corets could serve more than one organization at once. Upon learning that she was a part of the Research Department for the Jewish War Veterans and for the League, he was skeptical of her ability to serve both committees.¹⁵⁷ While the purposes of research for both organizations were in concert with one another, it seemed implausible to some that she could effectively serve both masters.

The leadership of the Jewish War Veterans was no more immune to underestimating Corets than the League. In August, 1937, Edgar H. Burman, Acting Chairman of the National Executive Boycott Committee for the Jewish War Veterans of the United States asked Corets to serve as Chairman of the Boycott Exhibit at the JWV’s annual convention. She accepted the position and undertook the job of collecting materials for the display at the JWV’s annual meeting, the National Encampment, which consisted of compiling documents of the Nazi menace, drawn from the League, the Joint Boycott Council, the American Jewish Committee, and asked that everyone provide any materials they had compiled. Burman couched his request in complimentary language and urged Corets to participate. The response she received from some of the people she reached out to was tremendous. After the convention, she wrote to the League, expressing her gratitude for the cooperation and support they gave her at the Convention. She was

¹⁵⁷ Dr. B. Dubovsky to Bertha Corets, 16 June 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 3.

pleased with the promised placement of the booth and for the research assistance.¹⁵⁸ As well as it had gone though, Corets felt disrespected. She wrote to Mr. Burman and conveyed her disappointment in the JWV. Not only had it failed to reimburse her for expenses, but the booth itself was damaged during the convention. Materials had been taken and others destroyed. “Altho [*sic*] you promised me ‘plenty of cooperation’ I really received none, but I took it all good naturedly and did the best I could. But I must say, this unnecessarily unpleasant experience has lessened considerably my enthusiasm to work with the Veterans.”¹⁵⁹ Not only did she handle the slight with professionalism, she continued working for the cause. The unfortunate events and lack of support at the Convention did not end the relationship between Corets and the JWV. Nor did it end her relationship with Burman. Her colleagues encouraged her to continue her efforts: “don’t let Ed stop you, tell him you are the LADIES National Boycott Chairman, and you abiding by their wishes.”¹⁶⁰ She did not stop.

If she did not receive the respect she deserved, Corets was not above recognizing her own work. As the secretary of her League chapter, she recorded what happened at each meeting. She recounted her own participation with the honor she believed due. “The report of the League’s conference at the Commodore, prepared by Mrs. Corets was read at this time. It was very interesting and the members were well pleased. An enthusiastic vote of thanks was given Mrs. Corets for her work.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Bertha Corets to Edgar Burman, 28 September 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Betty Lazarus to Bertha Corets, 1 November 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2.

¹⁶¹ Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 11 February 1936, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

As in demand and as devoted as she was, Corets was no pushover. She could be demanding. She did not mince words, particularly with her Auxiliaries.¹⁶² Members who did not report or demonstrate progress, received letters suggesting they were “not properly supporting the organization” when they overlooked keeping in touch with the National Boycott Department.¹⁶³

Despite a few detractors, Corets’ efforts earned her more than flattery. She became known as one of the most reliable members of the organization. When a number of the chapters were delinquent in their dues, Abe Cohen forwarded the list to Corets, even though she was not in charge of the fund.¹⁶⁴ Alice Gilman, Corets’ colleague and the President of the Ladies’ Auxiliary in Massachusetts, expressed her gratitude for Corets’ work, and then Corets recruited her for more work. Recognizing that the Massachusetts group had a great many contacts, Corets enlisted her to help strengthen the organization’s efforts. She revealed the broader strategy: that each organization be represented by an accredited delegate, so each one would be formally present for each of the boycott conferences. The more delegates present from more organizations she argued, the more widely “programs will be taken up by as many women as possible, at one time”¹⁶⁵ [Emphasis in original]. Corets was ever mindful: “please impress upon your Auxiliaries that I am very serious when I give them an assignment and I am keeping a close watch throughout the Organization on how women take up their Boycott work.”¹⁶⁶ She expected that the women would do their work properly, as well. She advised them,

¹⁶² Bertha Corets to Sisters of Ladies’ Auxiliary, 29 April 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Bertha Corets to Abe Cohen, 15 February 1940, MS 307/box 1/folder 9.

¹⁶⁵ Alice Gilman to Bertha Corets, 9 November 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2.

¹⁶⁶ Bertha Corets to Alice Gilman, 12 November 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2.

“Create as much sales resistance as you can, but always do it in a ladylike manner, with courtesy, and asking for cooperation.”¹⁶⁷

Other organizations wanted to work with Corets and as a result, the JWV. The Bronx Interfaith Council of the National Conference of Christians and Jews wanted her to join their ranks, and invited her to their meetings.¹⁶⁸ She asked the US Committee for the Care of European children if they were going to turn their attention to all European children. She reiterated that she represented an organization that cared very much about these children.¹⁶⁹ The response from the Committee was positive. In fact, the Committee enlisted her, hoping to find more sponsors and homes for the displaced children.¹⁷⁰

Her influence, as well as her reputation, was widespread. Other people came to her for advice, assistance, or with other needs. When the ANL was looking to swell its ranks, they came to her. Corets suggested to Gerhard Schroeder, a secretary of the ANL, some people he could recruit.¹⁷¹ Schroeder did reach out to them.¹⁷²

The Effectiveness of the Boycott

Corets had little patience for underperforming chapters. She admonished them for falling short:

I do not want you to think of me as a ‘scolding teacher’. In undertaking this work, I am trying to do everything possible to arouse our people to this menace that is working so efficiently against us; that has so much

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Albert H. Henderson to Bertha Corets, 17 February 1941, MS 307/box 1/folder 9.

¹⁶⁹ Bertha Corets to the United States Committee for the Care of European Children, 13 August 1940, MS 307/box 1/folder 9.

¹⁷⁰ Mary T. Denman to Bertha Corets, 26 August 1940, MS 307/box 1/folder 9.

¹⁷¹ Gerhard Schroeder to Bertha Corets, 3 December 1942, MS 307/box 1/folder 9.

¹⁷² Gerhard Schroeder to Dorothy Lehman, 3 December 1942, MS 307/box 1/ folder 9.

money at its command, and is so thoroughly directed. We must awaken ourselves to this menace, and become more efficient ourselves.¹⁷³

How efficient was the boycott? With no diplomatic or military options available, boycott was “a final avenue of response.”¹⁷⁴ For Samuel Untermyer, it was “not simply the most effective means of protest, but the only means.”¹⁷⁵ Ultimately, it had an impact.

According to historian Aaron Berman, “American Jews and Zionists were able to develop a dramatic method of striking a blow against Hitler. Among the first anti-Semitic acts of the new Nazi state was to declare a nationwide boycott of Jewish businesses. Jewish communities in Europe and North America reacted to the Nazi attack swiftly and organized a counterboycott of German imports. The American boycott was particularly effective and militant.”¹⁷⁶

Boycotts were a powerful tool. The Germans, in particular, knew how devastating they could be. For Jews, who were politically and militarily limited, boycott was “the one weapon Jews had [that] was the one weapon Hitler feared.”¹⁷⁷ And his fear became reality as the boycott took its toll. Hitler even appealed to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, asking him to intervene on behalf of German exports.¹⁷⁸ He addressed his comments both to the American President and to the Reichstag. In his speech, Hitler referred to the “unbearable burden” of the “wild boycott of agitation against other countries and their goods and so practically to eliminate them from the market.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ Bertha Corets to Womens Auxiliary, 29 April 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁷⁴ Haskel Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers?* (New York: Hartman House, 1985), 75.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁷⁶ Aaron Berman, *Nazism, the Jews, and American Zionism: 1933-1948* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 37-38.

¹⁷⁷ Black, *The Transfer Agreement*, 33.

¹⁷⁸ Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts*, 137.

¹⁷⁹ Gottlieb, “The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the American Jewish Community,” 441.

Despite these dramatic turns, many Jewish American leaders continued to doubt the power of the boycott or its ultimate effect and consequences. Stephen S. Wise doubted both the efficacy and morality of the boycott. As a pacifist, he had initially rejected the boycott because it was “an economic weapon” but came to terms with it in its rejection of Nazism.¹⁸⁰ He went so far as to say that his “faith in the common people, if it could be deepened, has been deepened by the rightness of the mass reaction to Hitlerism primarily among the Jews, secondarily among all people....we cannot with self-respect continue to have dealings with that country which has decided we are outside the pale of decency.”¹⁸¹

The boycott lasted until the entrance of the United States into the War in 1941.¹⁸² The boycott did have an economic impact as early as 1938. That year, *The Journal of Commerce* announced, “RECORD DIP NOTED IN GERMAN TRADE.”¹⁸³ Although *The New York Times* had published an article to the contrary, when made aware of the discrepancy two days later, offered a correction: “REICH EXPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CUT - 1938 TOTAL LIKELY TO BE LOWEST SINCE 1919 INSTEAD OF HIGH.”¹⁸⁴ Similar reporting came out of Germany, which were well-received by the participants in the boycott: “They admit losing 60% of their foreign trade, so we can readily see that we have not worked in vain.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts*, 138.

¹⁸¹ Gottlieb, “The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the American Jewish Community,” 441-42.

¹⁸² Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 48.

¹⁸³ Bertha Corets to B’nai B’rith, 2 December 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.; <https://www.historiography-project.com/lindsey/nyt/1938/11.php> 6/13/2017

¹⁸⁵ Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 23 May 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

Later scholars viewed the boycott with admiration. One scholar, Moshe Gottlieb, concluded that “this movement and this initiative will be considered one of the greatest accomplishments of our generation in its struggle for human rights at the freedom of nations.”¹⁸⁶ Under the purely economic measures of both United States and German authorities, the boycott itself was a success – in its limited purpose. The intent was to hurt Germany economically. For the first six years of the boycott, German imports dropped. According to the report from Research Division Chairman, Sydney Hollander, German imports were valued at \$75,571,644.00 in 1932, when the boycott began. Imports declined every year through 1937, when the figure reached only \$55,586,302.00.¹⁸⁷ “There can be no denying...that the boycott hurt Germany.”¹⁸⁸

Aside from financial and trade losses, the impact could be inferred in actual decisions coming out of Germany. The boycott was enough of a threat to warrant the involvement of German spies. On at least two occasions, German secret agents gained access to Untermeyer. At least one of these agents was armed, infiltrating Untermeyer’s “inner circle to gain intelligence on the progress of the boycott from the lawyer himself.”¹⁸⁹

The boycott inspired other efforts against the Nazis. Inspired by the ANL, in 1938, the American League for Peace and Democracy staged a rally in Elizabeth, NJ,

¹⁸⁶ Moshe Gottlieb, *American Anti-Nazi Resistance, 1933-1941: An Historical Analysis*, (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1982), 349.

¹⁸⁷ Report of Sydney Hollander, Chairman Research Division, Meeting of Actions Committee: Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League of New Jersey, 29 September 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

¹⁸⁸ Gottlieb, *American Anti-Nazi Resistance*, 344.

¹⁸⁹ Richard A. Hawkins, “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe”: Samuel Untermeyer and the Boycott of Nazi Germany, 1933–1938, *American Jewish History* 93 No. 1 (March 2007): 44.

attended by over 5,000 people.¹⁹⁰ Hitler was forced to mortgage his shipping industry for more than \$100,000,000.00 because of the boycott and the difficulty in moving German goods. “It was necessary for Hitler to put the German people in pawn in order to raise money for armament purposes.”¹⁹¹ Although the Germans managed to maintain economic independence throughout the war, confidence was high. among the leadership of the JWV. J. George Fredman, National Commander of the JWV argued for the effectiveness of the boycott and its effect on the German economy, namely that it put it in a “precarious condition.”¹⁹² He also pointed out it was more effective than the army.¹⁹³

Corets and other Auxiliary leaders were even more enthusiastic about the effects of the boycott. The message to the women was clear, they needed to continue their efforts. “Germany is a militaristic people the only way to react is to boycott. Germany is trembling today and so we must use our weapon to the fullest extent. Fight Hitlerism until it is destroyed.”¹⁹⁴ They believed that economic warfare was the way to do just that.

Other leaders saw the success and as the boycott wore on, advocated for enlarging its scope. Dr. Robert Rosen, Third Vice-President of the Jewish War Veterans, suggested widening the boycott to include goods made in Italy, Poland, and other countries. He saw little value in the slogan and campaign “For Humanity’s sake do not buy Nazi Goods.”¹⁹⁵ A more effective campaign, he suggested, would be to “Buy American Made Goods.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ Report of Michael Alenick, President, Meeting of Actions Committee: Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League of New Jersey, 29 September 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

¹⁹¹ Address of S. William Kalb, Acting President, Meeting of Actions Committee: Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League of New Jersey, 29 September 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

¹⁹² Memo from J. George Fredman to Bertha Corets, 19 October 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

¹⁹³ Ibid. The boycott unintentionally cause harm to the southern US cotton industry. They sold to Germany, who would in turn, manufacture shirts for sale in the United States. A boycott meant German bought less cotton. Adam Bernhard to Southern Merchandise Co., 7 February 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

¹⁹⁴ Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 23 May 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

¹⁹⁵ Dr. Robert Rosen to Bertha Corets, 8 October 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Corets also pushed to get more people involved in more activities. She “hoped that every [local chapter of the JWV] will follow custom of the past years and have a speaker address each congregation in the community, and stress the importance not only of continuing the Boycott of Nazi goods and services, but in these times of crisis to intensify the boycott, so as to strangle Nazi economics. With war clouds hanging so low it is more important than ever to stop the Nazi fanatics.”¹⁹⁷

The organizers did manage to get other groups to participate. They focused on the common causes and threats to communities like the Catholics.¹⁹⁸ The boycott also reached out to other faith communities.¹⁹⁹ President of the New Jersey chapter, Michael G. Alenick, noted in his report that “a veritable flood of literature has been mailed from this office to ministers and preachers of all Faiths in order to acquaint them with the truth of what is going on in this country and particularly what inroads that the Nazis and Nazi inspired press have made.”²⁰⁰ Alenick further reported that the Episcopal Church saw great promise in the boycott. Methodist Episcopal Bishop Francis J. McConnell (1871–1953), felt certain that “a determined boycott of German products by the United States and France and a positive refusal to sell products to Germany would stop Adolf Hitler.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Bertha Corets to Auxiliary Presidents and Past Commanders, Jewish War Veterans of the United States, 20 September 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

¹⁹⁸ Memo to Bertha Corets, 19 October 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

¹⁹⁹ Report of Chairman, Paterson Unit, Meeting of Actions Committee: Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League of New Jersey, 29 September 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

²⁰⁰ Report of Michael Alenick, President, Meeting of Actions Committee: Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League of New Jersey, 29 September 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

²⁰¹ Address of S. William Kalb, Acting President, Meeting of Actions Committee: Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League of New Jersey, 29 September 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

The large, national efforts relied on the smaller, local ones. Corets argued that “success of all anti-Nazi activity depends upon the willingness of the various large and small groups to concentrate their activities and to work according to a common plan.”²⁰² To do this it often required personal and small-scale activities. Each branch needed members and Corets reached out to the leaders of individual groups, often with a few names, hoping to bring new members on board, even if it was one person at a time.²⁰³ The branches would also respond to individuals, answering inquiries about companies and firms. Bertha Corets was a knowledgeable and reliable resource in these matters.²⁰⁴

The German government offered assistance in relocating Jews, in exchange for an end to the boycott.²⁰⁵ The ANL’s leadership swiftly denounced this “refugee ransom plan.”²⁰⁶ To reiterate the League’s position, Dr. William Kalb²⁰⁷ wired the American Embassy in Berlin, Germany to inform them that they were “unalterably opposed to any plan placing premium on despoliation, expropriation, deportation [of] German minorities.”²⁰⁸ Further, should the plan be implemented, the ANL and others would “continue all boycott activities with increased vigor.”²⁰⁹ Kalb and the ANL believed they had scored a victory. This encouraged the members of the ANL to fight harder in the face of increasing opposition.

²⁰² Bertha Corets to Dr. Boris E. Nelson, 4 March 1937, MS 307/box 1/folder 2.

²⁰³ Bertha Corets to Themy Grossman, 10 November 1936, MS 307/box 1/folder 1.

²⁰⁴ Bertha Corets to Mrs. Harris, 8 July 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 4.

²⁰⁵ News from the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, 19 January 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ S. William Kalb (1897-1992), was a physician and WWI veteran who led the Newark Division of the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, participating in a number of their campaigns and speaking nationally about the boycott. Warren Grover, *Nazis in Newark* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 115-124.

²⁰⁸ News from the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, 19 January 1939, MS 307/box 1/folder 6.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

Not everyone was in favor of a boycott, even though Hitler's own accounting revealed that the boycott had an economic impact.²¹⁰ The danger to the Germans even if "in time, the Germans stopped viewing a boycott of their goods and services as the most serious threat."²¹¹ Author and historian of boycotts, Monroe Friedman, argues that the boycott "may have succeeded more in its value-expressive goals than in its instrumental goals."²¹² While it did not stop Hitler, it managed to strike a painful blow. This was a group unable to register or lodge any other complaint, one incapable of mounting an independent physical attack. For "American Jews and others to express their sense of moral indignation and outrage at the actions of the Nazis" was no small feat and in the only volley in some of the theaters of the war.²¹³

At times, Corets was disenchanted and disheartened. She wrote to a colleague, "I am becoming very discouraged and feel that most of the work in our organization is talk and swaggering bravery within our own midst. If we are right and innocent, we must smash the lies that bind us in a ghetto and ring of persecution."²¹⁴

The J WV might not necessarily have found more success had it been able to unite all of the organizations. "Unsuccessful attempts were made to unify the disparate boycott organizations, but a lack of cohesion did not seem to handicap the boycott's effectiveness. After concerted pressure, Macy's, Gimbels, Sears and Roebuck, and Woolworth's agreed to comply with the boycotters' demands and pledged not to stock or

²¹⁰ Monroe Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts: Effecting Change Through the Marketplace and the Media*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 137, citing Gottlieb 1967.

²¹¹ Yahil, *The Holocaust*, 97.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Bertha Corets to Falk Harmel, 12 August 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 8.

sell German-produced merchandise.”²¹⁵ The boycott in the United States was also far more active than it was in other countries, despite the lack of consensus or support.²¹⁶

Much of the impact and effectiveness of the boycott was beyond measure. The infighting and disunity between the groups certainly hampered the effort. Roosevelt reported to Untermyer, regarding a more definite stand against Germany’s policies, that he “did not intend to take such action under any circumstances partly, because the American Jewish community was itself divided.”²¹⁷ While there was never a consensus among American Jews, they did find manage to make significant strides in spite of the division. “While failing to bring an end to Hitler’s antisemitic campaign, the anti-Nazi boycott movement...is still regarded as one of the most significant examples of American Jewish mobilization on behalf of European Jewry.”²¹⁸ Despite being an economic weapon, the impact was far beyond that, it empowered the American Jewish community. “Although the anti Nazi boycott movement did not achieve its primary aim of undermining Hitler, it facilitated a significant accomplishment by serving as a transformative moment in participants’ political and Jewish consciousness.”²¹⁹

The boycott was a massive undertaking, and Corets played a significant role. Not only were her organizational and administrative skills imperative for managing so much of the boycott’s activities, but she was personally involved with people researching, writing, and implementing the boycott. She was instrumental in collecting and publishing

²¹⁵ Berman, *Nazism, the Jews, and American Zionism*, 38.

²¹⁶ Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts*, 133.

²¹⁷ Richard A. Hawkins, “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe”: Samuel Untermyer and the Boycott of Nazi Germany, 1933–1938, *American Jewish History* 93 No. 1 (March 2007): 42.

²¹⁸ Rona Sheramy, “There Are Times When Silence is a Sin”: The Women’s Division of the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement. *American Jewish History*, 89 No. 1 (March 2001): 105.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

the pamphlet on German pharmaceutical products – a document that found audiences throughout the country, various organizations who shared an interest in the boycott.

At a time when women's leadership roles were drastically limited, she held a number of key positions, in both women's and men's organizations. She went from serving as National Boycott Chairman of the JWV Ladies Auxiliary and Boycott Chairman of the JWV New York State Department Ladies Auxiliary to the National Boycott Chairman for the men's organization. Informally, she also earned the respect of her peers, the women of the auxiliaries, and many of the people with whom she worked.

Chapter 2: The Seminary Student Committee to Save European Jewry (1942-1943)

“Create in us, O God, a new heart responsive to the agony of our people, the suffering remnants of Israel: May we know no rest ‘til we have stretched out our hands to them in help.”¹

Origins of Dissent

As news from Europe about the Nazi murders of Jews began to reach America, reactions were less than decisive. Those who did not reject the accounts of the atrocities outright as propaganda or enter into complete denial, were generally beset by disinterest or a lack of concern. Three students at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Noah Golinkin, Jerome Lipnick, and Moshe “Buddy” Sachs, did not share that outlook. They reacted with horror, and “mounting anxiety.”² It is possible to say that the students’ sharp reaction to the rise of Hitlerism was more a reaction to the malaise and apathy of the American Jewish community than it was to the tragedy itself.³ They looked, as many did, to their rabbis and mentors, only to be disappointed with the lack of encouragement for their own efforts.⁴ As leaders, the rabbis failed to pay proper heed for “themselves and their communities to the demands of the hour.”⁵ Based on sermon summaries in *The New York Times*, less than 10% of sermons delivered focused on the European Situation.⁶ There had been some response, notably a day of prayer, held December 2, 1942. But the effort was

¹ Noah Golinkin, “Home Prayer to be Recited Daily After the Main Meal,” *Prayers for the SCA Sefira Campaign*, April 19, 1943.

² Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 3.

³ Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers’ Keepers?*, 128.

⁴ Rozenblit, *Tradition Renewed*, 289.

⁵ Noah Golinkin, Jerome Lipnick, N. Bertram Sachs, “Retribution Is Not Enough,” *The Reconstructionist* IX, no. 2 (5 March 1943): 19; Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War: 1800-2001* (Liverpool: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 47.

⁶ Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers’ Keepers?*, 129.

largely a failure, a fact not lost on the JTS students.⁷ To them, attending rallies and fasting were not enough.⁸

Convinced that something had to be done for European Jewry, the JTS students formed the Student Seminary Committee to Save European Jewry (SSC). The move made by the JTS students was a challenge to the “conventional wisdom.”⁹ of the Jewish community. Starting with a meeting with Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, in December of 1942, the SSC would undertake a series of actions aimed at clergy and lay leadership, congregants, and interfaith audiences in an effort to intervene on behalf of their brothers and sisters in Europe. The SSC took a number of additional steps: following the meeting with Rabbi Wise, the JTS students hosted two Interseminary Conferences, the first of which convened on February 22, 1943. The JTS students then published an article in the journal *The Reconstructionist* in March 1943, dealing with the same issues as the conferences. In coordination with the Synagogue Council of America (SCA), the JTS students outlined a six-week mourning period for April-May of 1943. Following this, the students organized a Program of Action. They also intensified their efforts to influence the American Jewish Conference’s agenda on the rescue of European Jews. The JTS students penned a response to Breckinridge Long and his testimony regarding the Bermuda Conference. Also, the students appealed personally to many of the top leaders of American Jewry.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 135; Noah Golinkin to Haskel Lookstein, 1986, SC-13803.

⁸ Jeffrey S. Gurock, “Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010,” in *City of Promises: A History of the Jews of New York*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 79.

⁹ Rafael Medoff, “American Jewish Responses to Nazism and the Holocaust,” in *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 302.

¹⁰ Steps Taken, Date Unknown, SC-13803.

The Meeting with Stephen S. Wise

On November 24, 1942, Stephen Wise organized a major news conference to release the contents of the Riegner Telegram, which outlined the Nazi atrocities and extermination plans. At the conference, Wise also revealed that two million Jews had already been murdered. *The New York Times* ran an article the next day, albeit on page ten. The paper did confirm what Wise said regarding the death camps, confirmed by the State Department.¹¹ Following Wise's news conference and the *Times* article, the three students from JTS asked for a meeting with Rabbi Wise. Wise granted a meeting to students from seminaries representing the three main branches of Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox.¹² By approaching Wise with delegations from all of the main branches, the students hoped to signal to Wise that there was a consensus among students regarding their desire to act and to underscore the need for all American Jews to react and respond to the news from Europe.¹³ In addition to Lipnick and Golinkin from JTS, Herbert Weiner of JIR,¹⁴ Irwin Gordon, student-body vice-president, came from Yeshiva College. The second students from JIR and YC are unknown.¹⁵

The students arrived at Wise's office with more than words. They had an ambitious plan and a memo. They offered Rabbi Wise this statement: "Students of the above schools are aroused by the gravity of the European catastrophe and volunteer their

¹¹ Berman, *Nazism, the Jews, and American Zionism*, 100.

¹² Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 32.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Rabbi Herbert Weiner (1919-2013), helped found Congregation Har-El in Jerusalem and served as the administrator for Hebrew Union College's Jerusalem campus. Tom Guntherz, "A 'powerful speaker, gracious teacher,'" *The New York Times*, 12 June 2013.

¹⁵ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 32-33.

services to do whatever may possibly be done to help.”¹⁶ Rather than simply place a list of willing volunteers at the Rabbi’s feet, the students questioned what was being done,

- a. To stop the killings in occupied Europe.
- b. Evacuate Jews from occupied Europe and places in Europe in imminent danger of invasion.
- c. Facilitate immigration of refugees to--- Sweden, Turkey, Switzerland, Virgin Islands, Alaska, U.S.A., Palestine, or other countries.
- d. Arouse public opinion to action.
 - (1) Press, radio
 - (2) Churches, universities, etc.
 - (3) American Congress¹⁷

Even without hearing what was to be done in these areas, the students were ready to help.

They also offered several suggestions as to what role they might play in helping to change and elevate public opinion:

- a. Activate alumni of our institutions to organize Jewish and interfaith meetings for protest and petition to higher churchmen, public officials, Congressmen, etc.
- b. Acquaint non-Jewish seminaries with the facts in order to get a joint proclamation of protest and specific demands.
- c. Acquaint faculties and student bodies of universities and colleges with the situation in order to get public action.
- d. Form and emergency general Jewish youth council to consider youth action.
- e. Present our own views and demands to influential Jewish organizations e.g. American Jewish Congress.¹⁸

During the meeting, Wise repeated the information that he had shared in

November and pointed to the upcoming fast and meeting with FDR. Wise then alluded to steps he and other Jewish leaders planned, but refused to reveal any details.¹⁹ He assured them that “things were being done”²⁰

¹⁶ Memorandum for Dr. Stephen S. Wise, 17 December 1942, SC-13803, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. 33.

²⁰ Steps Taken, Date Unknown, SC-13803.

Lipnick had been designated as the speaker, he “had the gift of gab” and, unlike his classmate Noah Golinkin, he “didn’t have an accent.”²¹ After Wise explained his position, the students offered their ideas but were met with hostility. When Lipnick mentioned the need to evacuate Jews from Poland, Wise took offense.²² Wise protested, “We don’t evacuate human beings, we evacuate cattle,” and then accused Lipnick of emulating Jabotinsky.²³ “Wise’s visceral reaction to an idea that reminded him of Jabotinsky who was already dead” strained any further discussions.²⁴ Wise also rejected the topic of Alaska and the Virgin Islands acting as safe-havens for the Jews, Alaska “too cold” and the Islands “too hot,” respectively.²⁵

What the students proposed was something much bigger than anything that existed at the time. What they brought to Wise was “a broad college campus-based protest movement,”²⁶ that would also involve non-Jewish seminaries, alumni, and eventually laity and politicians.²⁷ In his book about the students, historian Raphael Medoff noted that such a plan was “a novel idea, ambitious in scope and entirely unprecedented in American Jewish life.”²⁸ It gave “Jewish college students a significant role in the shaping of Jewish communal opinion and policy” for the first time.²⁹ This was a tremendous effort for a group of students who were “long on idealism, creativity, and

²¹ Raphael Medoff interview with Noah Golinkin, 9 May 1996.

²² Ibid.

²³ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 33.

²⁴ Noah Golinkin to Haskel Lookstein, 1986, SC-13803.

²⁵ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 33.

²⁶ Ibid., 35.

²⁷ Memorandum for Dr. Stephen S. Wise, 17 December 1942, SC-13803.

²⁸ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 36.

²⁹ Ibid.

dedication, short on funds and office equipment.”³⁰ They also faced criticism and opposition from their fellow students, “who did not give them the support that they deserved.”³¹ When the students met with Rabbi Wise, he did not give them the support or guidance that they sought. Much of what the students recalled years later was the feeling of rejection. David Golinkin, wounded by the attack recalled, “Wise told us that as a veteran Jewish leader, he knew best what methods of protest should be organized.”³² Sachs’ reaction was one of frustration and disappointment. He was shocked at “Wise’s refusal to rock the boat.”³³ Golinkin’s son, Noah, described it harshly: “Wise turned them down cold. He insisted that a bunch of students couldn’t possibly know better than he, a venerated Jewish leader, how to respond to the Holocaust.”³⁴

Although they did not get the encouragement they sought, the students remained inspired and motivated. Wise may have been preaching patience to them, but they felt that they “couldn’t be patient at a time like that.”³⁵ From that point forward they were determined to address apathy and inaction in the community, unsatisfied with religious leaders, lay leaders, and members of the community who they felt were not doing enough on behalf of their people.³⁶

³⁰ Ibid., 29. Lipnick’s roommate, Moshe Goldblum, acted as their typist as he happened to own a typewriter.

³¹ Rabbi Wilfred Shuchat, “Rabbi Jerome Lipnick z”l,” *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly XXXIX* (1977), 115.

³² Ibid., 37.

³³ Email with Noam Zion, 4 April 2018.

³⁴ Rafael Medoff, “FDR, Bergson and the Holocaust – on stage,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 April 2009.

³⁵ Rafael Medoff, “A Student Who Cried Out Against the Shoah,” *Ha’aretz* 14 August 2009.

³⁶ Rafael Medoff, “American Jewish Responses to Nazism and the Holocaust,” in *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 302.

The Conference

After the meeting with Rabbi Wise, the JTS students forged ahead without his support. As it happened, the first step was not an internal effort, but in fact an attempt at outreach. Their first move, per item III. b. of their memorandum, was to “Acquaint non-Jewish seminaries with the facts in order to get a joint proclamation of protest and specific demands.”³⁷

The JTS students sought an alliance at Union Theological Seminary, which was located across the street from JTS.³⁸ Late in December 1942, they sat down with J. Herbert Brautigam, Jr., then student president at UTS and proposed the idea of an inter-seminary conference, one dedicated to the situation of European Jewry. He immediately agreed to their proposal.³⁹ The collaborative nature of the event was evident from the start, with each school sharing hosting duties, and each responsible for finding speakers among their co-religionists. Brautigam also contacted other Christian seminaries and convinced them to participate.⁴⁰ The one sticking point actually centered around Palestine, the students from UTS demanding a speaker from the American Council for Judaism, a Reform-based group opposed to Zionism. Golinkin eventually agreed to a compromise, whereby the conference would include a pro-Zionist member of the JTS faculty.⁴¹

³⁷ Note, Memorandum for Dr. Stephen Wise, 17 December 1942, SC-13803.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Rabbi David Golinkin, “Responsa in a Moment,” *Moment Magazine*, April 2011.

⁴¹ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 45.

JTS faculty agreed to participate and the school was willing to host the event. JTS President Cyrus Adler (1863-1940), shared some of the students' concern over the inaction regarding European Jewry.⁴² He was deeply "distressed by the unwillingness of the powers to raise their voices in effective protest, and by the barring of so many doors to those who could escape."⁴³ Adler "did all he could personally and through the Jewish Theological Seminary and Dropsie College, to aid and help the resettle individual Jewish refugees from Nazi Europe."⁴⁴

In 1940, Rabbi Dr. Louis Finkelstein (1895-1991), replaced Adler as president and shifted the school's focus to building up American Judaism. Finkelstein believed that would be "the best response to Nazism."⁴⁵ As a result, it allowed business to go on as usual on campus. Only later would many students question the lack of outrage and action.⁴⁶ This was no anomaly, "the reality was that at JTS, as in much of the American Jewish community, the events in Europe, even when fully known, often did not intrude on daily life. The Golinkin-Lipnick-Sachs committee thus represented a significant

⁴² Adler was an educator, religious leader and scholar. He was the first American Ph.D. in Semitics from Johns Hopkins, a founder of the Jewish Welfare Board, one of the editors of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, and on the translation committee for the Jewish Publication Society's English version of the Hebrew Bible. He also participated in the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, was president of Dropsie College, and Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Abraham A. Neuman, *Cyrus Adler: A Biographical Sketch* (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1942).

⁴³ Louis Finkelstein, Preface to Robinson, *Cyrus Adler: Selected Letters*, Ira Robinson, ed. (Philadelphia: 1985), I:xxii.

⁴⁴ David G. Dalin, "Cyrus Adler and the Rescue of Jewish Refugee Scholars," *American Jewish History*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (March 1989): 362. Despite Adler's willingness to help, the administration at JTS did not. The school refused to "ease its rigorous employment criteria such as perfect fluency in English, which made it hard for some German Jewish scholars to qualify for positions on the Seminary's faculty." Also, "the Seminary declined to relax its admissions standards for Jewish students from Germany, and thus only a small number of them were able to use admission to the Seminary as a means of escaping the Nazis." Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 45, citing Marsha L. Rozenblit, "The Seminary during the Holocaust Years," *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary – Volume I: The Making of an Institution of Higher Learning*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, (New York, 1997), 273-308.

⁴⁵ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 45.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

innovation at the seminary.”⁴⁷ Other seminaries were no different, not becoming interested until after the JTS led inter-seminary conference.⁴⁸

The attitude at the Seminary was conflicted. Rabbi J. Leonard Azneer⁴⁹ remembered that “The ache of the holocaust was constant,” but response was not.⁵⁰ They had great participation in mass protest; “nearly all the students joined in the mass demonstrations protesting the Holocaust at Madison Square Garden.”⁵¹ Other activities though, were more sparsely attended as many students, faculty, and board members believed that “the strength of Judaism lay in its commitment to study and to its idealism” and instead of encouraging action, “urged the graduates to become models of true Judaism, leading Israel to ever higher levels of perfection.”⁵² The Seminary remained “a center of dispassionate scholarship.”⁵³ As passionate and informed as Adler was, “he nevertheless neither responded to direct appeals to participate in protest actions...nor involved the Seminary in any public activity about the Holocaust.”⁵⁴ Whatever zeal there was for the cause, the school did nothing to foster it.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁸ “Student Leaders Act,” *The Commentator*, 4 March 1943.

⁴⁹ J. Leonard Azneer (1921-2011), ordained in 1945 by JTS.

⁵⁰ Rozenblit, “The Seminary during the Holocaust Years,” 289, citing Letter to author, 10 November 1994.

⁵¹ Ibid. See also David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

24-25, 87-92.

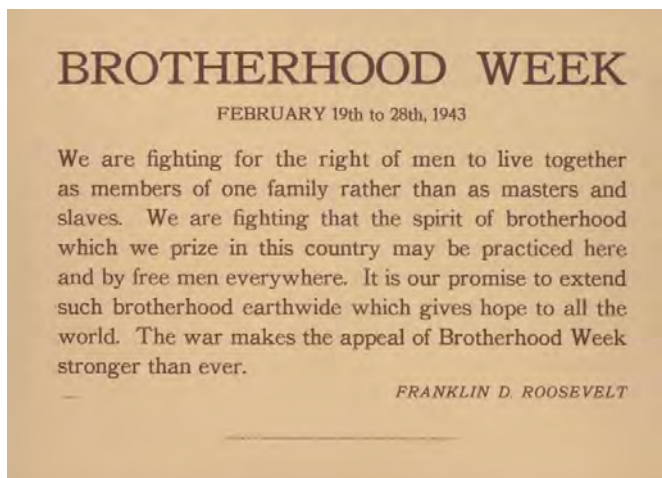
⁵² Rozenblit, “The Seminary during the Holocaust Years,” 288. See also Ratner Center, IC/53/65.

⁵³ Ibid., 287. See Finkelstein to Eli Ginzberg, son of faculty member Louis Ginzberg, 30 April 1945, Ratner Center, IC/47/48.

⁵⁴ Rozenblit, “The Seminary during the Holocaust Years,” 289.



Not all students remained silent and inactive. The three JTS students attended a massive rally at Madison Square Garden in March 1934. A sold-out crowd of 20,000 people saw the debut of *We Will Never Die*, a musical stage performance aimed at raising awareness about the plight of European Jews, organized by Peter Bergson's "Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe."⁵⁵



Ultimately, an estimated 100,000 people saw the pageant, with many more hearing it on the radio or seeing newsreel footage or newspaper articles.⁵⁶ Inspired and motivated by the rally, and dissatisfied with the subsequent lack of further progress,

Golinkin, Lipnick, and Sachs continued their work.⁵⁷ The "Inter-Seminary Conference of

⁵⁵ Peter Bergson (1915-2001), also known as Hillel Kook, came to the United States in 1940 to help set up an army of Jewish soldiers to fight against Hitler. With news of the Nazi atrocities, Bergson turned his attention towards fundraising and publicity aimed at saving Jews. Along with writer Ben Hecht, he set up the "Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe." Together, they organized rallies, pageants, and protest marches. Bergson's efforts also included controversial newspaper advertisements, including one that offered: "For sale to humanity: 70,000 Rumanian Jews, Guaranteed Human beings at \$50 a Piece." Stephanie Flanders, "Peter Bergson, Who Helped European Jews, Dies at 86," *The New York Times*, 20 August 2001.

⁵⁶ "The We Will Never Die Pageant," <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007036> (accessed 4 April 2018).

⁵⁷ David S. Wyman and Rafael Medoff, *A Race Against Death: Peter Bergson, America, and the Holocaust* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 34.

the Plight of European Jewry Today” began February 22, 1943 and was set to coincide with National Brotherhood Week, sponsored by the National Conference for Christians and Jews.⁵⁸ As many as 167 students may have attended the conference, according to the UTS student president Brautigam.⁵⁹ In attendance at the conference were students from The Biblical Seminary in New York, Union Theological Seminary, Berkeley Theological Seminary, Drew Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, General Theological Seminary, Moravian Seminary, New Brunswick Seminary, Yeshiva College, St. Vladimir’s Theological Seminary, Jewish Theological Seminary Yale Divinity School, and the Jewish Institute of Religion.⁶⁰

The leadership of the conference believed it was their “sacred obligation to call upon the American public to be informed of the grave danger which threatens the people of Europe, and the Jewish people in particular.”⁶¹ Jewish news agencies carried coverage of the event and were well aware of what it aimed to do. The press release for the conference described it as a meeting of “theological students of all denominations to consider plans for the salvation of European Jewry.”⁶² Further, they understood the growing clamor for action, noting that the conference, “which is in line with the increased agitation in religious circles both here and abroad for the amelioration of the lot of European Jewry, will discuss the challenge to religious humanity of Nazi Germany and will weigh proposals for aiding the Jewish victims of persecution.”⁶³ Additionally, The

⁵⁸ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 46.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, fn 120.

⁶⁰ Report of the Resolutions Committee, 22 February 1943, SC-13803.

⁶¹ Report of the Resolutions Committee, 22 February 1943, SC-13803.

⁶² “Synagogues and Churches Join in Celebrating Brotherhood Week Throughout Country,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Vol. X. No. 40, 17 February 1943.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Jewish Telegraphic Agency lauded the students not only for their program, but for the “outstanding religious leaders and men of affairs who will address the Conference.”⁶⁴

The conference opened at JTS with Brautigam speaking during the morning session, which was devoted to “The Problem.”⁶⁵ Following Brautigam was Rabbi Philip Bernstein (1901-1985) from the Jewish Welfare Board. During World War II, Bernstein served the United States Army Commanders as their official Adviser on Jewish Affairs.⁶⁶ His topic at the conference was “Hitler’s Policy of Extermination.”⁶⁷ Bernstein presented an analysis consistent with what the JTS students had been advocating, namely taking “immediate steps to save lives.”⁶⁸ He also suggested the necessity of “a more permanent solution to the problem of European Jewry,”⁶⁹ a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The second speaker of the morning was Varian Fry (1907-1967) of the Foreign Policy Association. Fry, who just a few years earlier personally rescued refugees from Vichy, France, in defiance of the State Department.⁷⁰ Fry spoke about “What Can Be Done.” He offered solutions including punishment for the Germans, modifying the Allied blockade, for the United States to offer asylum to Jewish refugees.⁷¹

After lunch, the conference resumed at UTS, for a series of lectures under the heading, “The Experts Speak.”⁷² The first such expert was Dr. Henry Smith Leiper

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Inter-Seminary Conference Schedule, 22 February 1943, SC-13803.

⁶⁶ After the war, Bernstein would help relocate over 200,000 displaced Jews. He also served as President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and chairman of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. “Rabbi Phillip Bernstein: Helped Displaced Jews,” *The New York Times* (21 December 1985).

⁶⁷ Inter-Seminary Conference Schedule, 22 February 1943, SC-13803.

⁶⁸ Digest of speeches delivered at the Interseminary Conference, 22 February 1943, Seminary Student Committee to Save European Jewry collection, 1943, SC-13803.

⁶⁹ Ibid.; Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 47.

⁷⁰ Varian Fry, *Assignment Rescue* (New York: Four Winds Press, 1968).

⁷¹ Digest of speeches delivered at the Interseminary Conference, 22 February 1943, Seminary Student Committee to Save European Jewry collection, 1943, SC-13803.

⁷² Inter-Seminary Conference Schedule, 22 February 1943, SC-13803.

(1891-1975), the American representative for the World Council of Churches. His topic was “The European Church,”⁷³ and the role of the church as finding its “soul” in taking a vigorous stand in defense of the Jews.”⁷⁴ In his appeal to the Christian students in attendance, he reminded them that “In America it is the duty of the Church to abandon its complacency and urge that aid be granted European Jewry now, and mould public opinion in that direction.”⁷⁵ Following Dr. Leiper was the lecture, “Providing Food” presented by Howard Kershner of the American Friends Service Committee.⁷⁶ Kershner focused on the need to get food to the refugees in Europe. Next, providing a survey on the status of Jewish refugees in a number of countries, as well as avenues for rescue was George Warren, secretary of the President’s Advisory Committee on Political Refugees.⁷⁷ The final speaker of the day was Dr. Willard Johnson, the assistant to the president of the National Conference of Christians and Jews.⁷⁸ Dr. Johnson’s topic was “What the Church and Synagogue Should Do” and he spoke of the importance of congenial relations among religions.⁷⁹

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Digest of speeches delivered at the Interseminary Conference, 22 February 1943, SC-13803.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Inter-Seminary Conference Schedule, 22 February 1943, SC-13803.

⁷⁷ Digest of speeches delivered at the Interseminary Conference, 22 February 1943, SC-13803; Bernard F. Stanton, *George Warren: Farm Economist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

The Advisory Committee included Rabbi Wise, among others, and was formed immediately after the Anschluss, the Nazi annexation of Austria in 1938, in an attempt to deal with the European refugee problem. While its formation reassured participants that the financing of refugee migration would continue to be borne by private organizations and not nations, it may have been “essentially for show; like the conference, they were intended to keep rescue activists quiet, rather than actually help any Jew.” Robert A. Rosenbaum, *Waking to Danger: Americans and Nazi Germany, 1933-1941* (California: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2010), 51; Yad Vashem, “Franklin Delano Roosevelt” *Yad Vashem*, http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205834.pdf (accessed 17 March 2018); Memorandum, War Refugee Board, 22 March 1944, President’s Advisory Committee on Refugees, Folder 1, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York; “Henry Morgenthau,” *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, eds. Robert Rozett and Shmuel Spector (New York: Routledge, 2000), 323.

⁷⁸ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 48.

⁷⁹ Inter-Seminary Conference Schedule, 22 February 1943, SC-13803.

In the second session of the afternoon, the speakers devoted their remarks to “Palestine as an Immediate Refuge.”⁸⁰ Professor Robert Gordis from JTS and West End Synagogue’s Rabbi Hyman Schachtel presented contrasting opinions.⁸¹ Schachtel represented the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, while Gordis presented the pro-Zionist position.⁸² The two were there as part of the bargain struck with UTS, but the JTS students “hoped to keep key Jewish differences over Zionism out of the conference, lest they distract from the focus on rescue.”⁸³ Schachtel agreed not to mention the Council, but upon taking the podium, quickly identified himself as a member. At that point, Gordis interrupted to “declare that just as the Holy Roman Empire was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire, the American Council for Judaism was ‘neither American nor representative of Judaism.’”⁸⁴ Despite this disagreement, the two were in accord as to Palestine’s importance for refuge seeking Jews. Schachtel acknowledged the points of tension and commonality, admitting that they differed in how Palestine should be governed, but that “there is no difference in opinion among Jews on the subject of Palestine as a place of refuge.”⁸⁵ The speakers had a profound, if not unintended effect on the listeners, one Christian student describing Gordis’ speech as “like Isaiah” while Schachtel “spoke like Jesus.”⁸⁶

To conclude the conference, Dr. Finkelstein spoke. In his remarks, he recognized the gravity of the situation, if not its urgency. He admitted that “all of us have had a share...for those past ten years we failed to recognize the real menace of Hitler, and we

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 48.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., quoting Moshe Goldblum interview with Rafael Medoff, 29 February 1996.

⁸⁵ Noah Golinkin interview with Rafael Medoff, 28 February 1996.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

did nothing at all to combat him. For this failure we should all feel a deep sense of guilt.” Although he had not encouraged them initially, the students noticed Dr. Finkelstein’s change of heart and willingness to participate in the conference.

Finkelstein lauded the interfaith efforts at the conference as a means to “break down this isolationism” that was “responsible for so much of our woe – and so much of the Jewish woe.”⁸⁷ He saw the conference as a significant step in breaking free from isolationism, but offered little hope for the imperiled European Jews. He continued to look inward at the Jewish community, alongside other American religious communities, rather than at the Jewish community abroad. The JTS students did not disagree, but had been searching for answers and action. It was their aim “not to take comfort in generalities about world brotherhood, but rather to focus attention on concrete steps to alleviate the plight of European Jewry.”⁸⁸ The students “better appreciated the nature and dimensions of the crisis”⁸⁹ than a Jewish establishment that either failed to grasp the enormity of the crisis or refused to act. Motivated and inspired, the students found the languid approach of the Jewish establishment to be frustrating, if not disappointing.

The Students convened the conference to reject the status quo and offer solutions. The participants in the conference were motivated both by religious conviction and by virtue of their role as religious leaders and members of the church. The ideals of justice and right were bigger than just their denominations – ones called upon for all Americans to heed. They were “acting in accordance with the highest principles of mercy, compassion and justice,” and so too must all Americans, urge “that immediate aid be

⁸⁷ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 51.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁹ Rabbi Prof. David Ellenson, “Lessons For Jewish Leaders,” in Ibid., 149.

granted to these unfortunates so they, too, may continue to live on this Earth which God has given to us all.”⁹⁰ To accomplish this and serve their duty as Americans, they called for the opening of borders of the lands of the United Nations to refugees.⁹¹ They felt that America, in particular, had a role to play in influencing the rest of the world and that it should accept refugees immediately in order to set an example.⁹² Both America and the United Nations had the obligation and ability to negotiate. The Committee outlined their expectations for diplomatic relations:

- a) With the German government, through neutral governments, to exert every possible effort to release Jews and political prisoners from occupied Europe;
- b) With the Balkan powers, Hungary, Roumania, and Bulgaria, to try to persuade these leaders to release their Jewish populations;
- c) With Denmark, to seek to release the Jewish population there which is threatened with imminent Nazi persecution;
- d) With Spain, to seek to free those detained in prisons and concentration camps to reach Palestine, America, and other lands of greater safety and opportunity.⁹³

While they made this plea, they also included a provision “to prevent the infiltration of Axis spies, even to the establishing of internment camps for the refugees.”⁹⁴ Still, the committed participants did so only to help encourage the admission of refugees and qualified their concession with the caveat, “we do not believe that the possibility of sabotage can be used as an excuse condemning many thousands of people to remain under threat of death by starvation or slaughter.”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Report of the Resolutions Committee, 22 February 1943, SC-13803.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

The students also recognized the role of their religious institutions, and that it was “the duty of the Church and the Synagogue, and their leaders, to try to mold the opinion of America so that all may realize the religious importance of such action as we shall describe.”⁹⁶ To do so, they called for publicity to be widespread “among churches and synagogues from the pulpit and through the religious press.”⁹⁷

In anticipation of further action, they established a “temporary Post-conference Committee to be appointed by the conference chairman for the implementation of these resolutions.”⁹⁸ They also established a permanent “Interseminary Conference of Christian and Jewish Seminaries” to meet regarding issues they faced together.⁹⁹ The Committee also pledged to work with the National Conference of Christians and Jews. The only other notable stipulation was that they reserved for the Conference Committee the right to determine the size and membership of the Interseminary Conference Committee.¹⁰⁰

Even the most sympathetic of institutions and editorials responded to the Students’ daring and daunting proposals cautiously or with measured consideration. In sharp contrast, the next month in his own school’s journal, Brautigam reported them as “conservative.”¹⁰¹ Either way, what was truly necessary was action. Brautigam echoed the intensity and immediacy that his Jewish colleagues at JTS had expressed. Despite the positive responses and reception of the conference, he was not convinced of its success. “Can we say that the conference, or the mass meeting were in fact successful?”¹⁰² He

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ J. Herbert Brautigam, Jr. “On Implementing Brotherhood,” *The Union Review* IV, no. 2 (March 1943): 1.

¹⁰² Ibid.

wrote critically of the students for having returned to their normal routines. Not only that, but the dedication and determination they showed at the conference, was not realized in action. He asked, “In the three weeks since, *what have we done?*”¹⁰³ (Emphasis in original)

Brautigam again spoke of the responsibility that he and his colleagues shared. He also acknowledged something that his inter-faith partners had begun to suspect, that the United States Government could not be relied on. This was uncharted territory, even for the socially conscious among them. “We usually begin our campaigns by besieging Congress, and end them there, thus absolving ourselves.” He then noted that speaker after speaker at the conference called the plain truth to their attention: “that public opinion in the United States is not willing to support a program of action for the relief of Europe’s Jews, particularly one that involves any changes in our immigration policy.”¹⁰⁴

Brautigam saw other problems as barriers as well. He argued that “in our own country anti-semitism is increasing, an index of social unrest, and the churches have no recourse except to deplore it.”¹⁰⁵

Brautigam was not content to merely recapitulate his arguments in the journal. He also took to the page to spread the message even further, giving the entire faculty and student body – not just those who attended the conference – his message. Even a few weeks removed from the conference, what he hoped most to say was the most urgent, “this is a matter of life and death. It is literally a matter of hours and days.”¹⁰⁶ And he challenged his colleagues – ministers, preachers, teachers, and leaders, reminding them of

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

both the urgency and their threatened common values. “Can the Church speak forth in any but hollow tones of moral generalities, or can it make demands on the conscience and opinion of America that will make it possible to help those of our spiritual community who suffer?”¹⁰⁷

The Response From Yeshiva College

The response from Yeshiva College, another seminary in attendance, also suggested the students’ message had an impact, at least in the short term. Just two days after the conclusion of the conference, Irwin Gordon who had attended there and the meeting with Wise, convened an assembly of over 300 students from Yeshiva College and its high school counterpart, the Talmudical Academy.¹⁰⁸ The atmosphere on campus had not been one of activism, and “throughout the 1930s, students and administrators at Yeshiva College avidly protested any talk of war.”¹⁰⁹

The tone and the discussion changed after the conference. Following the conference, the students held at least two rallies.¹¹⁰ The college’s newspaper, *The Commentator*, put out a special issue focused on the European situation. The cover had a drawing of a hand, emerging from turbulent waters and a quote from the Psalms, “Out of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 59.

¹⁰⁹ ““Upon Seeing The Destruction of My People’: The Commentator on March 4, 1943,” *The Commentator* 7 November 2013.

¹¹⁰ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 59.

the Depths Have I Cried Unto Thee, O Lord!”¹¹¹ Alongside the masthead, in Hebrew, was a quotation from Lamentations, “A stream of water runs from my eyes upon seeing the destruction of the daughter of my people.”¹¹² The headline of the next page read, “Students Condemn Nazi Atrocities; Demand Action.”¹¹³ The article accompanying it spelled out a resolution from Yeshiva College and Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary protesting the UN’s silence.¹¹⁴ The same page also featured an article that described the steps students had already taken. This included mention that “a delegation of students represented the College at an inter-seminary conference.”¹¹⁵ They described the conference’s goal as “to discuss fully the plight of the Jew.”¹¹⁶ It also mentioned the plan of action, adopting a resolution “condemning the atrocities and urging the lowering of the barriers to immigration to Palestine.”¹¹⁷



¹¹¹ *The Commentator* XVII, no. 3, 4 March 1943; Psalms CXXX:I.

¹¹² Lamentations 3:48.

¹¹³ “Students Condemn Nazi Atrocities; Demand Action,” *The Commentator* XVII, no. 3, (4 March 1943).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The newspaper reported on more than the conference. Students, alumni, and faculty of the college and seminary gathered in an overflowing assembly February 23, 1943.¹¹⁸ There, the people registered their outrage and “a vigorous protest was lodged against the United Nations’ silence in the face of ‘the brutal obliteration of a whole people.’” They also directed a resolution against the United States government and urged Palestine serve as a haven for refugee Jews.¹¹⁹

Despite having gotten cooperation from other seminaries, Jewish and gentile, the rest of the American Jewish world was mired in conflict, “consumed by disagreements rooted in theology, politics, or competition for supporters.”¹²⁰ To the JTS students, this disunity was “sickening.”¹²¹

A month after the conference, the Committee redoubled its efforts. In its newsletter, *The Challenge*, they encouraged the participants of the conference to remain focused on the situation in Europe. They also called attention to how little the government had done. It was no coincidence that their resolutions failed to see immediate results. The government was unmoved, they wrote, and would “only act if it knows that these resolutions are written down upon the wills of the vast American public who are really interested in saving those of our spiritual community who are destined for death.”¹²²

They hoped to continue their work. “The Inter-Seminary Conference is not over yet. It shall not be over until we have succeeded in salvaging at least one life from the

¹¹⁸ “Resolution Urges United Nations Lend Succor to Jews,” *The Commentator* XVII, no. 3, 4 March 1943.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 56.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “THE CONFERENCE IS NOT OVER,” *The Challenge*, March 1943, SC-13803.

slaughter house which is Europe.”¹²³ But to do that, they acknowledged that they would have to extend the challenge “to each of the members of our congregations, to our communities, to our neighbors, and to our friends; and we must not cease from our God given task until there is sent abroad in this land an ever swelling chorus of ‘We are our brother’s keeper.’”¹²⁴

The Reconstructionist

Despite favorable accounts in the media, even after the conference (or maybe reinforced by it) the pushback from the Jewish leaders was still the prevailing attitude. Even the unprecedented interfaith gathering did not change their minds. Despite the JTS students’ efforts and the cooperation enlisted from other institutions, the students continued to feel that more needed to be done.

What the JTS students did was write an article in response to a promise by the United Nations to seek retribution for the lost Jewish lives. The article was posted in *The Reconstructionist*, the journal founded by Mordecai Kaplan and dedicated to analyzing contemporary issues through a “progressive Jewish perspective.”¹²⁵ The journal was popular among JTS students and its editors had previously taken to its pages to speak out about Europe.¹²⁶ One article, “Fasting Is Not Enough” caught Noah Golinkin’s attention, and echoed his (and the other two students’) concerns. Like the students, the editors were dissatisfied, questioning the effectiveness of Jews fasting in protest, but unaccompanied

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Richard Hirsh, “American Jewish Life since 1935: A Reconstructionist Perspective,” *The Reconstructionist*, Vol. 70, No. 1, Fall 2005, 6.

¹²⁶ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 30.

by action.¹²⁷ The students' article said, ““retribution is not enough. Taking revenge on the Germans won't help if there are no Jews left in Europe.””¹²⁸

They included, in a stark illustration, the crux of the problem. They asked the reader to imagine the deaths of every Jew in “Boston, Cincinnati, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, Cleveland, St. Louis, Los Angeles, and Detroit.”¹²⁹ They noted that nearly twice this number had already perished. Astonishingly, they pointed to the community's failure to sense this enormity, and argued that “This failure is perhaps the greatest part of the tragedy.”¹³⁰ They mentioned this shameful inaction, asking where the leadership of the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform movements had been, along with the Jewish organizations, none having “undertaken to awaken the conscience of the American people.”¹³¹

The article was aimed at the American Jewish public, although that readership of the journal was limited. They appealed to their readers not simply as American Jews, but “Jews who live in the staid serenity of America.”¹³² Including themselves in the complacent set, they placed and took blame for failing “to grasp the immensity of the tragedy which has befallen our people.”¹³³

The authors believed that it was their “sacred duty to call upon the United Nations, and in particular upon our own country, to come to the aid of European Jewry

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ “Retribution is Not Enough,” *Schechter Institute Faculty Forum*, Vol. 7, No. 7, April 2009.

¹²⁹ Noah Golinkin, Jerome Lipnick, N. Bertram Sachs, “Retribution Is Not Enough,” *The Reconstructionist* IX, no. 2 (5 March 1943): 19.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

now; and never for a moment must we relax our efforts until that help comes!”¹³⁴

(Emphasis in original) They cited articles in *The Nation* and *The New Republic* as the only publications to have offered plans for the rescue and relief of European Jewry, even including American Jewish publications.¹³⁵ Their conclusion at facing such facts was clear: “Most of us...have already given up European Jewry in our hearts; others have acquiesced in their hopelessness; and those who have not, have chosen the solutions which offer the least difficulties—and the least results.”

To accomplish their goals, the students directed much of their attention towards the United Nations. They called for the Jewish community to put pressure on the UN to encourage neutral countries like Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey to take in refugees.¹³⁶ They also advocated putting pressure on the UN to get the British to open Palestine’s borders to Jewish refugees, as they would not become permanent residents in their haven countries, but would go to Palestine after the war.¹³⁷ They also took aim at the UN blockade in favor of allowing food to reach starving Jewish populations. They also called for a Jewish army, consisting of stateless and Palestinian Jews. They also looked to the UN as a way to turn the tide of opinion, looking to pressure the UN to publicize news of the atrocities. By leaflets and radio, the UN could “arouse local populations in opposition to these mass murders.”¹³⁸

The authors recognized that these goals were ambitious. What they needed was “mass action on a nation-wide scale, mass action that involves bucking the people and the

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 20.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

American government.”¹³⁹ They were not speaking just to the religious establishment or the clergy, reminding the reader, “bucking injustice is our religious duty!”¹⁴⁰ The authors put their faith in the synagogue and its leaders. The synagogue being “the one institution in American Jewish life which can reach the greatest number of Jews.”¹⁴¹ While they believed the synagogue should be leading the effort, it was not to be there alone. They called on “all Jewish organizations of whatever character [to] participate in this program designed (a) to make Jews and non-Jews aware of the policy of extermination; (b) to move them and the duly constituted bodies which represent them, both as Americans and as Jews, to present uniform demands to the United Nations to save as many lives as possible now.”¹⁴²

The students made their pitch. Congregational rabbis and synagogues, along with local Jewish organizations, not the national leaders of the Jewish establishment, would do the work. First, they called for a “Save European Jewry Now” week throughout the country observed by all Jews (affiliated or not) and featuring special programs and services designed to spur interest in helping immediately.¹⁴³ During the week, they outlined replacing the usual activities with special programming aimed at exploring how to save Jews. They also called for a Shiva Day (and whatever similar activities Reform congregations would do), in all synagogues on a Sunday to encourage maximum participation. Noting the lack of success from the December 2, 1942 day of mourning,

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

they suggested praying for a purpose, “to call for concrete assistance from the United Nations and from our own country in particular.”¹⁴⁴

The other point in the article was outreach and interfaith work. They were appealing to Jews as a world body. And they called for were interfaith meetings. The authors wanted one meeting in each city, multiple meetings, in large cities. There, they would make “uniform demands for action” from the United Nations, and unlike the activities solely within the Jewish community, to the US government as well.¹⁴⁵ In those same cities, there should be an “Emergency Committee for European Jewry.”¹⁴⁶

Although formed at the same time as Peter Bergson’s “Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe,” there is no indication that the groups were connected formally. These would be the groups that organize, petition, and raise awareness, using “all the means of publicity available—radio, press, film advertisements, etc., to arouse public opinion to demand speedy action.”¹⁴⁷ These too, would be reaching interfaith audiences, approaching “every type of Gentile and non-sectarian organization—political, religious, humanitarian, and social—and urge them to lend their support.”¹⁴⁸ This was the way to reach the United Nations and Congress, which the article said here “must be induced to take a stand.”¹⁴⁹

While they did not provide anything more than a broad outline of who should be involved and specified that “a central steering committee should conduct negotiations,”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

they did include some specific instructions. As they had suggested how congregations should take up the campaign, they also offered some more specific rituals. Not only should the congregations observe the practices that they outlined in the article but the synagogues should “work incessantly until help is offered European Jewry.”¹⁵¹ That meant instituting a uniform prayer and subsequent minute of silence anytime ten Jews gathered. (The instance of ten Jews is significant as a minyan, but here makes no distinction between men and women as there was no halakhic requirement for the prayers they suggested.) Such gatherings were any of Jewish content, “parties, weddings, meetings, etc., until the end of the war.”¹⁵² They also made a recommendation that a second Kaddish be added for the entire congregation to recite until the end of the war. The idea behind this was “to mourn those Jews who have no one left to mourn for them, and we would always remind ourselves of our obligations to those Jews in Europe who still live.”¹⁵³

The students concluded the article by returning to the immediacy of the problem. They pointed to the 5 million Jews still in danger. They closed with a damning accusation of responsibility, charging the reader in Hebrew and translated into English, “when the final tabulation of those murdered has been published will American Jewry be able to say: ‘*Yadenu lo shafku et hadam hazeh*’ (Our hands have not shed the blood)?”¹⁵⁴

As a preface to the article, the editors of the journal noted that “there may be disagreement as to some of the methods proposed by this committee, but its

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

recommendations certainly merit public discussion that may lead to action.”¹⁵⁵ This was some of the most direct acknowledgement of the students’ efforts, even in its measured language. Despite participation in the conference from JTS faculty, the school never publicly commented on the article or on the conference. In the same issue of *The Reconstructionist*, the editors lauded the student group and its efforts. In the same issue as “Retribution is not Enough.” They praised the students’ efforts but fell short of a full endorsement. While they urged doing “everything humanly possible” and taking immediate action, the editors also expressed their fear that “it may not be feasible to carry through the whole program outlined by the Seminary students.”¹⁵⁶ The editors reiterated their measured support in the introduction to the article.¹⁵⁷

The Reconstructionist article was the students’ formal argument for action on behalf of European Jewry. The students spoke to directly to those voices and challenged them.¹⁵⁸ They argued, “Nothing must stand in the way of organized united action on the part of all American Jews to save European Jewry.”¹⁵⁹

Sefira Campaign

After the conference and the article in *The Reconstructionist*, the students turned their attention to the Synagogue Council of America (SCA). They sent the SCA a memorandum that followed the 7-point program for synagogues, as outlined in the

¹⁵⁵ Editor’s note, “Retribution Is Not Enough,” *The Reconstructionist* IX, no. 2 (5 March 1943): 19

¹⁵⁶ “SAVE EUROPEAN JEWRY NOW!,” *the Reconstructionist*, 5 March 1943, “THE CONFERENCE IS NOT OVER,” *The Challenge*, 5 March 1943, SC-13803.

¹⁵⁷ Editors’ Note, “Retribution is Not Enough,” *The Reconstructionist*, 5 March 1943, SC-13803.

¹⁵⁸ Richard Hirsh, “American Jewish Life since 1935: A Reconstructionist Perspective,” *The Reconstructionist*, Vol. 70, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 8.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

Reconstructionist article.¹⁶⁰ The SCA took the memorandum seriously. They scheduled a meeting before the end of March 1943. The president of the SCA, Dr. Israel Goldstein, urged Lipnick and Golinkin to attend.¹⁶¹

The students were present at the meeting, the first time they were included in the work of the establishment. And they were not silent participants, either. At their urging, the SCA established a committee dedicated to publicizing the humanitarian crisis in Europe. The SCA also heeded the students' suggestion of a campaign. They accepted, almost verbatim, 1-4 of the terms of the resolution (intercession by the UN, opening up of Palestine, the establishment of sanctuaries in neutral territories, and a system of feeding the victims).¹⁶² The one-week period that the SCA suggested initially, grew to a six-week campaign, at the student's suggestion.¹⁶³ The campaign coincided with Sefira, the traditional Jewish mourning period that takes place between Passover and Shavuot. As a part of the campaign, Noah Golinkin designed an armband for protesters to wear during demonstrations, three decades before similar armbands appeared in Vietnam protests.¹⁶⁴

The SCA¹⁶⁵ issued statements on the "Period of Mourning and Intercession" proclamation for the Sefirah Period of 5703 (1943).¹⁶⁶ The SCA's Committee for Emergency Intercession declared:

The sword of extermination is being wielded mercilessly over our people in Nazi-held Europe. Every voice which escapes through the wall of that vast tear and blood-drenched prison echoes the death cry of tortured massacred, despoiled, humiliated, and enslaved Jews.

¹⁶⁰ Note, "Tell Them That We Are All Dying," Seminary Student Committee to Save European Jewry Collection, 1943, SC-13803.

¹⁶¹ Israel Goldstein to Jerome Lipnick, 25 March 1943, SC-13803.

¹⁶² Note, "Tell Them That We Are All Dying," SC-13803.

¹⁶³ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 68.

¹⁶⁴ Medoff, "American Jewish Responses to Nazism and the Holocaust," *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, 302.

¹⁶⁵ Notes, Undated, SC-13803.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

‘Tell them that we are all dying’ was the most recent message smuggled out of the Polish ghetto. ‘Let them rescue all those who will still be alive when the report reaches them’.

What is our response to this cry? Most of us have realized our helplessness as individuals to awaken the consciousness of America and the United Nations to the stake of humanity in the fate of European Jewry, and we have hoped and striven for a united and untiring outcry that would stir them to taking immediate measures of rescue and relief.

While attempting to arouse the religious and humanitarian conscience of the Christian world, it is of utmost importance that we awaken the religious spirit of our people to respond to this greatest calamity that has fallen upon our brethren.

Penitence, prayer and charity remove the evil decree, ‘*Utshiva uthfila utzdaka maavirin eth roa hazzera*’ – To translate this sacred doctrine into concrete and meaningful action the Synagogue Council of America is summoning all the religious leaders of American Jewry.¹⁶⁷

The Sefira campaign involved a number of special events. Synagogues were directed to hold a special Memorial Service on the last day of Passover to usher in the mourning period.¹⁶⁸ Following this was a week, “observed in the tradition of Shivah.”¹⁶⁹ The culmination would be the Day of Intercession, May 2. The SCA also asked synagogues to participate in the Period of Mourning and Intercession by conducting memorial services. They asked the participants to “observe Mondays and Thursdays as partial fast days, to limit occasions of amusement, and to make extra contributions to the United Jewish Appeal, which is engaged in rescue work for European Jews.”¹⁷⁰ Also, the SCA called for people at home and in public meetings to recite special prayers and observe moments of silence.¹⁷¹ In addition, leading rabbis were to hold organized religious gatherings throughout the country.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ SCA Press Release, 9 April 1943, SC-13803.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

Noah Golinkin wrote a prayer entitled, “Prayer before moment of silence.” The SCA included it in the materials it provided congregations for observing the Mourning Period. They specified that it should be used at meetings during the Period of Mourning and Intercession, to be followed by a moment of silence.¹⁷³ The prayer was in Hebrew and in English.¹⁷⁴

On the same day as the Day of Intercession, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America would observe a “Day of Compassion of the Jewish Victims of Nazi Barbarism.”¹⁷⁵ Adopted a few weeks earlier, the Federal Council of Churches urged “the Christian people throughout the country to give their moral support to whatever measure affords promise of rescuing European Jews.”¹⁷⁶ The Church Council went beyond its own member churches and appealed to the government to consider rescue plans for Europe’s Jews. They also announced that they were presenting rescue plans to the government. The SCA also scheduled special events, including an interfaith gathering on May 2. The event was to feature prominent Christians and Jews and would be broadcast nationwide.¹⁷⁷

On paper, the SCA’s response was encouraging. Goldstein appreciated more than just the \$10 donation the students included. He recognized the “the gift of time, thought

¹⁷³ Prayer to be Used at Meetings During the Period of Mourning and Intercession, 2 May 1943, SC-13803.

¹⁷⁴ The materials they provided indicated that they arranged the prayer, while another copy of the prayer includes a handwritten note that Noah Golinkin wrote the prayer. Note, SC-13803.

“The idea of a uniform prayer – to be recited at all public gatherings was projected in item 6 of the *Reconstructionist* article.” The prayer was also published in *Ha Doar Magazine*. Note, Prayer to Be Use at Meetings During the Period of Mourning and Intercession, SC-13803.

A year later, on April 19, 1944, the SCA introduced a Special Memorial Service. In that service, some of the prayers from the Period of Mourning were repeated. Special Memorial Service for April 19, 1944, 19 April 1944, SC-13803.

¹⁷⁵ SCA Press Release, 9 April 1943, SC-13803.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

and energy which the Seminary group has given to the project in which the Synagogue Council is now engaged. It is a source of great inspiration to the older colleagues to see the Student body so deeply concerned with the tragic plight of our people.”¹⁷⁸ Noah Golinkin reflected that in reality, the SCA only implemented the prayers “under the persistent prodding of our JTS committee.”

The Committee for Emergency Intercession of the SCA sent to its members, information on services and prayers for the special observances.¹⁷⁹ They also included a leaflet from the National Conference of Christians and Jews. The members were encouraged to distribute them among Christian friends and directed where they could obtain more leaflets.¹⁸⁰ This collaboration between Christians and Jews was significant, demonstrating how Jewish clergy could influence their gentile counterparts who would in turn reach out to their congregations.

The students also notified the members that some of the congregations in the eastern United States planned to drape black cloth over their Arks and light special candles at services, in memory of the victims.¹⁸¹ In their letter, the students also included an appeal to values of *pikuach nefesh*¹⁸² and *pidyon shevuyim*,¹⁸³ encouraging a public relations campaign. The students also provided a detailed list of “Things To Be Done” that covered publicity for the Period of Mourning and Intercession, organizing committees within synagogues, letter writing, interfaith work, and grassroots

¹⁷⁸ Dr. Israel Goldstein to Jerome Lipnick, 19 April 1943, SC-13803.

¹⁷⁹ Rabbi Ahron Opher to Synagogue Council of America members, 19 April 1943, SC-13803.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² This phrase refers to the principle in Jewish law asserting that the preservation of human life overrides virtually any other religious consideration.

¹⁸³ This phrase alludes to the religious obligation in Jewish law to bring about the release of a fellow Jew who has been captured by slave dealers or robbers, or imprisoned unjustly by the authorities.

organizing.¹⁸⁴ The last suggestion was adopting the symbol of mourning and being ready to explain its meaning to non-Jews.¹⁸⁵

In addition to all of the measures taken by the SCA, the seminary students worked to reinforce those actions and turn “the Joint Emergency Committee into an effective instrument of urgent activities.”¹⁸⁶ The students submitted “A Program of Action” to the Joint Emergency Committee. Their proof-text was from Maimonides:

“כל רגע שמאחר לפדות השבויים, היכא דאפשר להקדים, הוי כאילו שופך דמים”

“When one delays even a moment in redeeming captives—[wherever] it is possible to hasten—he is considered as one who spills blood.”¹⁸⁷ They then pointed to the Bermuda Conference¹⁸⁸ as “sad proof that our State Department is not yet ready to do everything possible to save European Jewry.”¹⁸⁹ The students proposed something to take the place of government intervention. They argued that “only a program of public enlightenment, unprecedented in Jewish history, can force the hand of our government. The spending of hundreds of thousands of dollars and the utilizing of the full-time energy of thousands of communal leaders and workers throughout the nation is the only answer worthy of American Jewry.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Note on SCA activities, 1995, SC-13803.

¹⁸⁷ A PROGRAM OF ACTION, 25 April 1943, SC-13803., citing Gitin 45.

¹⁸⁸ The Bermuda Conference was a meeting held April 19-30, 1943 to address the problem of Jewish Refugees. Delegates from the United States and the British Commonwealth met to discuss possible solutions but avoided referring to the Jews as the major victims of Nazi atrocities. The Conference was derided as “a hoax and a mockery by a number of its critics [and] denounced publicly by American Jewish leaders, organizations and publications.” Bermuda Conference, *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* edited by Walter Laqueur and Judith Tydor Baumel, associate editor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001): 76.

¹⁸⁹ A PROGRAM OF ACTION, 25 April 1943, SC-13803.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

The special services, memorials, armbands, and the mourning period were not enough. The students believed that this was only a piecemeal plan. They were looking for unified action, “a comprehensive program designed to place the full weight of the American Jewish community and the humanitarian forces within this country squarely behind” their plan of action¹⁹¹ (Emphasis in original) The students then followed up with suggestions as to fully implementing their plan, dividing the work into national activities and local activities.¹⁹²

The national activities included coordination with organizations that were “political, religious, labor and fraternal.”¹⁹³ The students urged using these organizations to take advantage of their members, means of communication, and their presence on local levels.¹⁹⁴ They also called for radio broadcasts featuring Hollywood names, those that carry an audience.¹⁹⁵ An attempt to involve these organizations may have fallen on deaf ears considering “the extreme caution which characterized and constrained the efforts of the Jewish organizations closest to the film industry.”¹⁹⁶ There were also “fears of exacerbating American antisemitism and of lending credence to the claim that Jews were warmongers.”¹⁹⁷ This concern “led several Jewish organizations to try to police the public image of Jews by attempting to exert control over cinematic representations of Jews and Jewish issues.”¹⁹⁸ They advocated for full-page newspaper advertisements. The

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Felicia Herman, “Hollywood, Nazism, and the Jews, 1933-41,” *American Jewish History*, Vol. 89 No. 1 (March 2001), 62-63.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

students also called for a march on Washington that would include Christians and Jews from every state, visiting their representatives and urging rescue. They envisioned that “a steady stream of literature [pouring] into the Senate and House Office Buildings.”¹⁹⁹ There was also a call for an unprecedented emergency conference of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Rabbis.²⁰⁰

Their suggestions for local initiatives were no less comprehensive. Every city was urged to have a Local Emergency Committee, with corresponding groups in every organization, including Temple Sisterhoods, youth movements, and local chapters of national organizations like B’nai B’rith.²⁰¹ It was not unfamiliar territory for synagogues, charities, and other organizations to be coordinating efforts for publicity or fundraising. With that in mind, the students suggested that “a campaign operated with all the thoroughness and machinery of a Welfare Fund drive should be established in every community urging that letters be written to the White House, the State Department, and Congress.”²⁰² The effort itself was to look like a campaign, with “special rallies, telephone squads, canvassers, and the like.”²⁰³ They also advocated for interfaith work on a local level, including “every type of Christian and Non-sectarian organization—political, religious, social, labor, fraternal, and civic.”²⁰⁴

Reaction to the Program of Action was positive. Judge Joseph Proskauer, a member of the Executive Committee of the American Jewish Committee promised to

¹⁹⁹ A PROGRAM OF ACTION, 25 April 1943, SC-13803.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

bring the Program of Action to the Joint Emergency Committee's attention.²⁰⁵ When asked for about a plan for the JEC, he told Jacob Pat (1890-1966) of the Jewish Labor Committee that he could not think of a single thing that they could do.²⁰⁶ He was still not willing to challenge the status quo.

The American Jewish Congress sent a message from Rabbi Wise, pledging action after bringing it to the Joint Emergency Committee.²⁰⁷ Rabbi James G. Heller (1892-1971),²⁰⁸ President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis expressed his willingness to participate and consider the students' plan, should the Joint Emergency Committee hold a meeting.²⁰⁹ The Zionist Organization of America's (ZOA) publication *The New Palestine* looked at the proposal with "considerable interest."²¹⁰ Journalist and Editor of *The New Palestine* and the director of ZOA Education Department, Carl Alpert (1913-2005),²¹¹ hoped the document, which he described as "statesmanlike" would "receive the attention it deserves in the circles of the 'mighty.'"²¹² Alpert also predicted

²⁰⁵ When asked for about a plan for the JEC, he told Jacob Pat (1890-1966) of the Jewish Labor Committee that he could not think of a single thing that they could do. He was still not willing to challenge the status quo. Joseph M. Proskauer to Jerome Lipnick, Esq., 26 April 1943, SC-13803. The American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs (AECZA), on which he sat, was a broad coalition of 24 major Jewish organizations, including the American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith, Jewish Labor Committee American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs, Synagogue Council of America, Union of Orthodox Rabbis of America, and Agudath Israel of America. Laurel Leff, *Buried by The Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 193; Berman, *Nazism, the Jews, and American Zionism*, 76.

²⁰⁶ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 85; "Jacob Pat, Author and Leader of Jewish Labor Committee Dead; Was 75," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin* (27 April 1966): 4.

²⁰⁷ Leona Schwartz to Jerome Lipnick, 27 April 1943, SC-13803.

²⁰⁸ *Reform Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook*, eds. Kerry M. Olitzky, Lance J. Sussman, Malcolm H. Stern (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 85.

²⁰⁹ James M. Heller to Jerome Lipnick, 27 April 1943, SC-13803.

²¹⁰ Carl Alpert to Noah Golinkin, 28 April 1943, SC-13803.

²¹¹ *The Jewish News of Northern California*, 27 May 2005, "Carl Alpert, syndicated columnist, dies at 92."

²¹² *Ibid.*

that the program would “create a stir” if followed.²¹³ He was so taken with the tone and scope of the proposal he concluded by saying:

When I note the progressiveness, the imagination, and the energetic spirit displayed in your memorandum I feel that perhaps it would not be such a bad idea if all leaders of American Jewry were to abdicate and a committee of students from the respective Rabbinical seminaries were to take over for a period of six months.²¹⁴

The letter from the United States Senate also praised the students’ efforts and pledged support to “any feasible plan that may be devised to soften the sorrows of these oppressed people.”²¹⁵

Other organizations offered more than praise. Hadassah was very interested in what the students were doing and the thought they put into the problems. Hadassah indicated that it needed the students’ help and suggested the possibility of meeting to discuss the proposal. In another act of sincerity and interest, Hadassah’s national president – Tamar de Sola Pool (1890-1981) – asked for additional copies to send to other committees.²¹⁶

Despite the praise, acceptance, and planning, the SCA’s plan, even filtered through the SCA, was not implemented in a large number of congregations. Despite some significant press coverage, institutional support, and a seemingly motivated demographic, the overwhelming majority of rabbis, congregations, and even newspapers did not take up the charge.²¹⁷ “Religious antipathies” stood in the way of much progress and participation in the Sefira observances and other planned events.²¹⁸ The theological differences

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Senator to Jerome Lipnick, 3 May 1943, SC-13803.

²¹⁶ Tamar de Sola Pool to Jerome Lipnick, 3 May 1943, SC-13803.

²¹⁷ Noah Golinkin to Haskel Lookstein, SC-13803.

²¹⁸ Gurock, “Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010,” 82.

between the groups hindered cooperation and progress. They prevented the Orthodox from assenting “to the proclamation of the *Sefira* days as a period of mourning and to the summoning of a rabbinical convocation” if they would be forced to share pulpits with and worship alongside Conservative and Reform rabbis.²¹⁹ The implementation of the SCA’s period of mourning was not as widespread as it could have been, and there was a great deal of politicking that went into getting the rallies together.²²⁰ The Orthodox organization Agudah was only satisfied enough with the concessions to participate in a large rally, provided they call it a “Protest und Treuer Versammlung” (“Protest and Faithful Assembly”) and that Reform rabbis not appear in gowns.²²¹ The rally did take place, May 24, 1943. Not only did it bring together between 300 and 400 rabbis, it garnered the attention of media outlets from *The New York Times* to newspapers throughout the Americas.²²² Most importantly, “hundreds of thousands of newspaper readers learned about the slaughter of the Jews in Europe and the protest by American rabbis.”²²³ It also meant a great deal to the rabbinic community, “the value of such a gathering in keeping public opinion sensitive to the Jewish tragedy and to the urgent need for rescue, cannot be overstated.”²²⁴

Internal struggles cannot be blamed fully for the failure to strengthen or widen support for protests and demonstrations. The enormity of the situation still presented “a

²¹⁹ Ibid., citing, Haskel Lookstein, “May 1943: The Prayer Service That Almost Wasn’t.” sermon delivered at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun, April 18, 2009.

²²⁰ Rabbi Dr. Haskel Lookstein, “The Rally That Almost Wasn’t,” in Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*,

²²¹ Rabbi Ahron Opher to Dr. Stephen S. Wise, 18 May 1943, Ahron Opher Papers, MS 694/Box 3/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

²²² Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 146.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Rabbi Ahron Opher to Dr. Stephen S. Wise, 25 May 1943, MS 694/Box 3/folder 16.

key stumbling block to galvanizing continuous community engagement.”²²⁵ This attitude was why Wise’s news of the Riegner Telegram was so significant. Before their campaign and conferences, the three JTS students began at school. They provided an insert to be included in morning prayers at school and recited extra Psalms on Shabbat.²²⁶ Not satisfied there, they used every waking moment to either plan and prepare, or approach fellow students with news from Europe.²²⁷ When the December 2, 1942 fast-day was announced, it was this same group of students who encouraged their fellow students to take part and to donate to relief funds.²²⁸ At the Seminary they also organized a memorial service for the Jewish victims of the Nazis. Both students and faculty attended.²²⁹ But even at JTS, where the students would organize the Committee, many students “did not really know about the mass murder until after the war.”²³⁰ At Yeshiva College, the administration adhered to the spirit of the campaign, suspending certain festivities.²³¹ The students, however, carried on as normal, running public parties on Purim and Chanukah.²³² If they and colleagues at Yeshiva, both as committed to the fate of world Jewry as anyone, “neither responded to direct appeals to participate in protest actions...nor involved the Seminary in any public activity about the Holocaust,”²³³ there was little of hope for action elsewhere.

²²⁵ Gurock, “Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010,” 81.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, citing Marsha L. Rozenblit, “The Seminary during the Holocaust Years,” *Tradition Renewed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, vol. 2 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1997), 289.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

The JTS students also spent their time going from one New York office to another, meeting with Jewish leaders individually.²³⁴ Sachs recalled that “Sometimes the reaction to our work was at least positive, but on most occasions our cause was pushed away as we were told America must win the war against the Nazis before it can take any position. Our response was if we don’t act now there won’t be any Jewish community left to save.”²³⁵ These efforts did not add up to enough for the three JTS students. As reflected in their response to the editorial, “Fasting Is Not Enough,” which questioned the usefulness of the December 2 fast-day, they were looking to contribute more.²³⁶

Looking to increase their influence, Jerome Lipnick wrote to Breckenridge Long, asking for an account of the accomplishments of the Bermuda Conference. Citing “secrecy” along with “military necessity and the desire not to prejudice the interests of the refugees on whose behalf the Conference was held,” Long refused to disclose any more to the students than had been released.²³⁷ The students took this at less than face value.

The JTS students drafted a detailed response and refutation to his claims. They believed as later historians would, that the Conference was “largely cosmetic”²³⁸ and a move on the part of the Allies “to appear to be concerned about the refugees without taking concrete steps to alleviate the Jews’ plight.”²³⁹ Something that was increasingly

²³⁴ Mishael Tziyon, “A Letter from Rabbi Moshe “Buddy” Sachs, in Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 129.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 20.

²³⁷ Breckenridge Long to Jerome Lipnick, 14 May 1943, Noah Golinkin Papers, SC-13803, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC; SC-13803.

²³⁸ Breitman, *FDR and the Jews*, 319.

²³⁹ Medoff, “American Jewish Responses to Nazism and the Holocaust,” *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, 303. See also Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press: 1970), 208-247.

apparent to the JTS students was that the Conference was “a subterfuge based on lies: an Anglo-American conference on ‘refugees’ (not Jews, God forbid) met in Bermuda, as far as possible from prying eyes....”²⁴⁰ What did reach the public was a press release that the JTS students found hardly credible. Historian Yehuda Bauer explained “that participants reached the conclusion that nothing should or could be done was no accident, considering who the participants were.”²⁴¹ Bauer further argued “that conclusion was kept secret, supposedly for weighty security reasons, while statements were made that momentous decisions to help Jewish and other refugees had been taken—that was a web of lies to maintain the cover-up.”²⁴² The critical review of Long’s document revealed the tenor of the Conference and its conclusions. They quoted American politician Dean Alfange (1897-1989), who pointed to bureaucracy as the reason for the United States’ “disgraceful failure” to respond promptly and “unsparingly accused the American government and the Allies of sabotaging all effective rescue of European Jewry, thereby encouraging the Nazis to continue their annihilation campaign with unremitting fury.”²⁴³ They also noted the incompleteness of this assessment.²⁴⁴ The students took this truth and revealed a fundamental hypocrisy of the conference: the unwillingness and “refusal of the State Department to recognize the real problem. The Jews were singled out by Hitler for special treatment. They are not killed as Polish or Belgian citizens but as Jews. The result is that millions of Jews have perished while the sufferers of other nations count

²⁴⁰ Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 221.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Analysis of Breckenridge Long’s Testimony, May 1943, SC-13803; Monty Noam Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1988), 137.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

only in the thousands. Certainly then, the Jews should be singled out for special rescue efforts by the Allies.”²⁴⁵ The American government was unlikely to come to the same conclusion or act on behalf of European Jews because “as far as our State Department is concerned ‘there has been an indisposition to accept the thought that the American Government ought to specialize in Jews.’”²⁴⁶

The students also rejected Long’s idea that the Jews could survive without representation, either through a commission or a government in exile. They pointed out that unlike “other conquered peoples” the Jews of Europe had no government in exile.²⁴⁷ Nor were they comfortable speaking for the Jews of Europe, “just as a Polish Government in exile...does not speak for the Poles of America but for the Poles of Europe.”²⁴⁸

Their analysis also balked at the claim that the State Department “exploited every possibility to help.”²⁴⁹ They cited the response to the deportation of the Jews in Denmark as a repudiation of Long’s claim. While the United States Government did help rescue them, it was only after Sweden acted, a fact omitted from his report.²⁵⁰ Long’s report also made claims about the filling of immigration quotas. The students’ response was to point out that while certain quotas may have been filled, “in no year since 1933 has the American quota been filled.”²⁵¹ At a maximum, 18.3% of the quota was filled, and from 1942-43, the United States filled less than 6% of its immigration quota.²⁵² They also

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

suggested a balance between welcoming immigrants and the realities of doing so, pointing out that “no attempt has ever been made to merge national quotas in order to utilize unexpired visas.”²⁵³ Long had also claimed that the screening of candidates for admission to the United States would have caused long delays. The proposed solution was as simple as it was fitting, “keeping people in Ellis Island and screening them there.”²⁵⁴

The participants of the Bermuda Conference also rejected the plan of action that had been proposed at the March 1, 1943 Madison Square Garden rally. The JTS students were incredulous that Long rejected that idea, claiming they could not deal with the enemy, but believed that Hitler would cooperate with an investigation of German atrocities.²⁵⁵ And the proposed idea that 100,000 children could be taken out of Axis territory, fed, and then returned, was pure fantasy.²⁵⁶ “It is quite obvious that not a single Jewish child will ever be affected by such a program.”²⁵⁷

Their conclusion was certain. It was apparent that “Bermuda accomplished next to nothing. Months elapsed before and after the conference without action...There are no branch offices on the scenes of possible action.”²⁵⁸ There was no plan and those ideas that were suggested were impossible. With no relief coming from Long or the United States government, the JTS students moved to continue their campaign through the SCA.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. After the United States’ entry into the war, Ellis Island was used as a detention center for alien enemies and others who were considered inadmissible. When the Island could no longer accommodate the number of people there, immigration services were transferred to Manhattan. The Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island Foundation, Inc., “A Timeline of Ellis Island,” <https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/ellis-timeline#1900> (accessed 4 September 2017).

²⁵⁵ Analysis of Breckenridge Long’s Testimony, May 1943, SC-13803.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ <https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/ellis-timeline#1900> (accessed 4 September 2017).

²⁵⁸ Analysis of Breckenridge Long’s Testimony, May 1943, SC-13803.

The students also tried to influence the agenda of the American Jewish Conference on European Rescue.²⁵⁹ They submitted to the Conference a document entitled, “Pardon Our Intruding.”²⁶⁰ In the document, the students reached out to the Executive Committee of the Conference to deliver their message. They offered the testimony of an unnamed Polish Jew, speaking about the Warsaw Ghetto:²⁶¹

Jewish leaders abroad won’t be interested. At eleven in the morning, you will begin telling them about the anguish of the Jews of Poland, but at one o’clock they will ask you to halt the narrative so they can have lunch.... They will go on lunching at the regular hour at their favorite restaurant. So they cannot understand what is happening in Poland.²⁶²

The students pointed out that the author of the letter would never hear of the conference, as the Ghetto had been liquidated and he had been killed. There were others though, “thousands of Jews in Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and even Poland, who, though living in constant danger of death, are sustained by the hope that their brothers abroad are using every device to effect [sic] their rescue.”²⁶³ That device, according to the students, “could only mean a large-scale attempt on the part of all Jews of America to urge their government to do what it failed to do at Bermuda.”²⁶⁴ But that was not the agenda for the Conference and the students took them to task.

According to the official program of the Conference, it was set to deal specifically with two issues. The first was the rights and status of Jews in the post-war world. The second, was the rights of Jews regarding Palestine.²⁶⁵ This was unacceptable to the

²⁵⁹ Note, Undated, SC-13803.

²⁶⁰ Pardon Our Intruding, 1943, SC-13803.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

students. They were incredulous and asked, “How can the Conference discuss the rights and status of Jews in the post-war world – we are sure the Jews of Poland would ask – when there may not be any post-war Jews?”²⁶⁶ Instead, the Students offered a different item to top the Conference’s agenda: “how to move the United Nations to save the remaining Jews of Europe.”²⁶⁷ It was imperative, they said, that this be the top priority.

They also hoped the Conference would succeed where the Joint Emergency Committee for European Jewish Affairs²⁶⁸ had failed for so long. They argued that the Conference “must utilize all the resources – financial, political, and moral – of the various national organizations which compose it, to influence our government to act immediately.”²⁶⁹ And for this, too, the students offered a strategy, to organize “a permanent agency to initiate and direct a program of activities dealing with this specific problem.”²⁷⁰ They closed as they began, with the Polish spokesman. But instead of offering his dire prognostication, they challenged the Conference to prove him wrong – “American Jewry cannot be out to lunch in the hour of crisis! THE AMERICAN JEWISH CONFERENCE MUST SEE TO THAT!”²⁷¹

Having had the experience of being brushed off in the past, and the determination to follow through, the JTS students needed to push their agenda even more. They stationed themselves outside the conference and continued to distribute leaflets with their

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Comprised of leading Jewish organizations in the United States, the Joint Emergency Committee for European Jewish Affairs was created to act on behalf of Jews in occupied Europe. JTA Daily News Bulletin, Joint Emergency Committee for European Jewish Affairs Dissolved, 7 November 1943, <https://www.jta.org/1943/11/07/archive/joint-emergency-committee-for-european-jewish-affairs-dissolved> (accessed 29 April 2018).

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

statement. They urged the delegates to turn their attention to the rescue of the European Jews.²⁷² This would be their last attempt, as a group, to make a difference.

The End of the Committee

After the conference, the students' efforts together soon came to a close. The JTS students dispersed about the country.²⁷³ Their advocacy had also run its course. Bigger, louder voices like the Bergson Group had emerged, and the JTS students could hardly vie for support.²⁷⁴

They had been told to let the experts handle the situation. Instead of remaining idle, they reached out to those around them and engaged people, many of whom had not previously been involved. They built bridges with interfaith community. They even managed to influence the establishment to speak to the wider Jewish community with a multi-week campaign. Where they did not manage to go was to the White House and Congress, affecting change and influencing policy. Noah Golinkin reflected on this barrier as beyond their scope. "We were not in a position to lobby Congress or meet with senior government officials. That was the Bergson Group's role."²⁷⁵ While their work on the European Committee came to an end, their work as rabbis did not. Each of them continued their struggle for human rights, world Jewry, and the values in which they believed so wholeheartedly.

²⁷² Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 89.

²⁷³ Mishael Tziyon, "A Letter from Rabbi Moshe "Buddy" Sachs, in Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 131.

²⁷⁴ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 96.

²⁷⁵ Raphael Medoff interview with Noah Golinkin, 9 May 1996.

Impact

That the memory of the conference, the Committee, and even the issues they raised, faded so quickly, constituted a heavy burden for not just the organizers, but for all of the students who believed that they had failed to make meaningful progress in spurring activism on behalf of an embattled European Jewry. Even at JTS, the story of this notable student initiative was largely unknown for decades. In 33 years of teaching at JTS, Professor David Roskies had never heard of those students or their contribution. Most of the seminaries involved in the conference have no record, official or otherwise, that marks their students' participation.

Their pleas did not fall only on deaf ears. They did win the attention of the SCA. The SCA and other organizations were acting and providing some of institutional support and actions that the students had been hoping for, with the mourning period and large-scale rallies. The SCA even took some of the JTS students' proposals and incorporated them into the period of mourning. Also, whether they gave him credit or not, they took Noah Golinkin's original prayers.

The feeling of failure lingered for the JTS students. Following the publication of Haskel Lookstein's book, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers?* Golinkin sent a copy to Moshe Sachs with the inscription, "You and Jerry Lipnick and I tried to be our Brothers' Keepers. We didn't succeed, but we tried."²⁷⁶ "Rabbi Golinkin's response was that what hurt them the most in those years was the feeling and the conviction that after it was all over, not a single Jewish life was saved as a result of this super-human effort. This hurt

²⁷⁶ Email from Noam Zion to David Golinkin, 12 August 2009.

lingered on through the years.”²⁷⁷ Golinkin’s son, Cantor Abe Golinkin, gave his father more credit, writing that “the JTS Student Committee helped to elevate the cause of Holocaust rescue onto the national agenda of the American Jewish community.”²⁷⁸

Sachs was as hard on himself as Golinkin. His grandson recalls seeing him crying “because they didn’t do enough.”²⁷⁹ He also reflected on his grandfather’s life, and noted that like Golinkin and Lipnick, he spent it “trying to make up for what they felt was their responsibility or what they tried to do and failed.”²⁸⁰ The hurt from the meeting with Wise also lingered. Sachs saw it as failing in a different way. “The American leadership did not sense our dread and did not respond with appropriate desperation.”²⁸¹ Even the JTS students themselves did not react until Rabbi Max Gruenewald (1899-1992),²⁸² a refugee scholar, was assigned as Sachs’ roommate and impressed upon him the gravity of the situation.

Jerome Lipnick wrote to his younger brother, Bernard, just weeks after the publication of “Retribution is Not Enough.” He enclosed a black ribbon, but told his brother, “it’s not for mourning – don’t be afraid. It’s for protest against those who permit the Jews to die today without anyone lifting a hand to help.”²⁸³ If that was his intention, his goal, then the thousands of people who heard his message, the people who did

²⁷⁷ Rabbi Wilfred Shuchat, “Rabbi Jerome Lipnick z”l,” *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly XXXIX* (1977), 115-16.

²⁷⁸ Cantor Abe Golinkin, “Vision, Activism, and Courage: Indispensable Attributes of the JTS Students, in Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 137.

²⁷⁹ Mishael Tziyon, “A Letter from Rabbi Moshe “Buddy” Sachs, in Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 129.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² “Max Gruenewald, 93, A Rabbinical Scholar,” *The New York Times* (29 December 1992).

²⁸³ Rabbi Jonathan Lipnick, “Jerome Lipnick’s Two Black Ribbons,” in Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 133.

whatever they could as a result, whether it was effective or not, made his venture a success. Still, he would have liked more. He told his brother, “you can’t just be a complainer, a beefer, you have to destroy what stands in the way.”²⁸⁴

They may have been idealistic. Lipnick recounts a story about trying to get pins for the ribbons the SSC promoted. “Several of us at the Seminary conceived a grandiose idea that if every Jew in America would wear a black ribbon on his lapel we could arouse American public opinion to the immediacy of rescuing the remnants of European Jewry from slaughter by Hitler.”²⁸⁵ He thought the idea “would sweep the country and once America was alerted, who could stand in the way of saving this beleaguered group of men and women.”²⁸⁶ They sought out ribbons and pins, fighting wartime scarcity. They managed to find ribbons and enough pins, but not the people to wear them.²⁸⁷ Lipnick kept the box of pins, which served as a reminder, but also a *tochacha*, a rebuke. “Each pin was a dagger to pierce our hearts and to mark our failure for by this time the statistics of those who had perished in Europe were made known to us. Six million.”²⁸⁸ Even in retrospect, Lipnick saw it as an opportunity squandered. He lamented, “had we succeeded we could have aroused public opinion. It might have made a world of difference.”²⁸⁹

As frustrated as the JTS students were, and despite how little they believed they accomplished, they at least made an effort. Other students did not fare so well, regretting their relative indifference and subsequent inaction based on their belief “that a stronger

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 134.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

American Judaism provided the best antidote to Nazism and the best insurance for the continued survival of Judaism and the Jewish people in the face of the Nazi slaughter of European Jewry.”²⁹⁰ Zionist students felt similarly over their decision that “a Jewish homeland would best ensure Jewish continuity.”²⁹¹ Whether the opportunities would have yielded results is impossible to know, but at times, the response was less than sympathetic. One student came to regret getting married during that time, and failing to “give a second thought to the appropriateness of a celebration on the day when thousands of Jews were being murdered.”²⁹² Others recognized the missed opportunities, “wondering why Seminary students and faculty did not arrange hunger strikes, chain themselves to the White House, or at least stand sobbing at street corners and subway entrances.”²⁹³ Their reactions were consistent with their “fundamental convictions and commitments at that time” and more critically, “reflected that of the American Jewry they so eagerly sought to lead.”²⁹⁴

Even with these shortcomings of their campaign, future generations of activists can learn from the JTS students. Golinkin’s son, Abe, identified three attributes that spurred them on. Each one has remained a virtue of activists, particularly student activists. The first is vision. The JTS students saw what few others did, the situation of European Jewry. And they saw what needed to be done and how they would do it. They

²⁹⁰ Marsha L. Rozenblit, “The Seminary during the Holocaust Years,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of The Jewish Theological Seminary*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Inc., 1997), 298.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid., citing Letter to Rozenblit, 2 November 1994.

²⁹³ Ibid., citing Letter to Rozenblit, 7 November 1994.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 298.

also had “activism in their blood.”²⁹⁵ Each one came with his own history and commitment to social action, and each one remained dedicated throughout his career. This heritage enabled them to bring the challenge of their “Program of Action” to the American Jewish community, even if it necessitated, “the persistent prodding of the powers-that-be.”²⁹⁶ Finally, they had courage – facing off against the leaders of the Jewish establishment, their own teachers, and mentors. “They were a group of students in their twenties who had the *chutzpah* to tell it like it is. If the emperor had no clothes, they were not afraid to say so to his face.”²⁹⁷

Their actions were novel: bold moves, interfaith work, and advocacy. They knew something the old guard did not, not until very late, that “they would have to start using language and tactics that were out of the ordinary. They would have to put aside old ways of thinking and find appropriate ways to respond to the tragedy.”²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Cantor Abe Golinkin, “Vision, Activism, and Courage: Indispensable Attributes of the JTS Students, in Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 138.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 147.

Chapter 3: Rena Rohrheimer

“I think it would be interesting to write a paper including everything that has occurred about my own relatives in leaving or being taken out of Germany.”¹

Travel Abroad

Before she ever saved any lives, Rena Rohrheimer was a teacher from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She began her professional career as the secretary for the



author, Dr. Lucy Langdon Williams Wilson (1864-1937).² “She spurred me on,” Rohrheimer recalled of her inspiration, Wilson.³ Rohrheimer earned her degree as a night student, studying at a different school every summer. Eventually she came to teach at William Penn High School but her real passion was “social work, especially foreign relief.”⁴ She was also interested in

global affairs, her interest and understanding of international matters deriving from her

¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 2 June 1939, Rena M. Rohrheimer Papers. 1935-1950, MS 161/box 1/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

² Cecelia G. Reinheimer, “Intimate Interviews With Interesting Jewish Women,” MS 161/box 1/folder 7; Cecelia G. Reinheimer, “Intimate Interviews With Interesting Jewish Women,” *The Jewish Exponent* (7 March 1941). Williams Wilson authored a number of books for elementary schools, including: *Handbook of domestic science and household arts for use in elementary schools*, *Nature study in elementary schools*, and *United States history in elementary schools*. The Online Books Page, “Lucy Langdon Williams Wilson,”

<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupname?key=Wilson%2C%20Lucy%20Langdon%20Williams%2C%201864-1937> (accessed 4 May 2018).

³ Reinheimer, “Intimate Interviews,” MS 161/box 1/folder 7.

⁴ Ibid.

extensive foreign travel. Rohrheimer's classrooms were full of posters from her time abroad, "everywhere except China and Japan."⁵

Her activism began during a sabbatical in 1939. "It started out to be a pleasure trip and ended by being one of service."⁶ She had family in Germany and was looking to visit them, but it became too dangerous for them to remain. Instead, she labored "to bring them across the border into freedom."⁷ When she was interviewed in 1941, she asserted that she had taken 8 persons (including a number of her relatives) out of Germany "single-handed."⁸

Other people took note of her activism. In 1941, *The Jewish Exponent* chronicled her life, including her work for refugees. Its author noted that she "gives of herself to the cause of the oppressed...One of her most precious possessions is a tortoise shell compact given her by an Austrian woman—wife of a former ambassador to Ethiopia—in appreciation for aid given in getting political refugees out of Prague."⁹ Despite the favorable outcome, Rohrheimer was still saddened by the situation. She predicted, "I'll never forget the sadness on the faces of those people."¹⁰

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

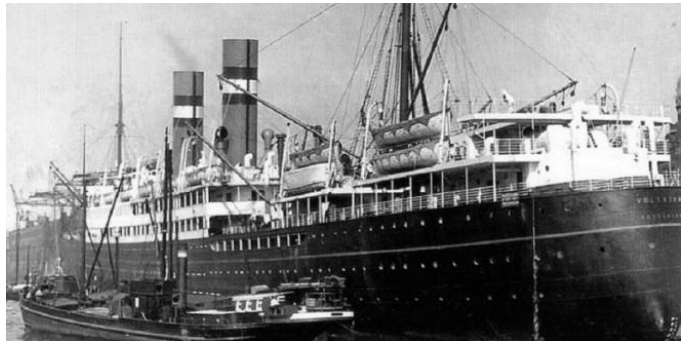
⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Grete Oppenheimer

Rohrheimer first took up the case of her relatives, the Oppenheims. Rohrheimer and Grete Oppenheimer were cousins. The Oppenheims had hoped to leave as a family in 1938 and registered with the American Consul in Stuttgart, but they were one of over 31,000 names and not optimistic.¹¹ The Oppenheims sent their eldest son, Ernst, to the United States, in hopes that he would be able to sponsor passage for the rest of the family.¹² Grete reached out to Rohrheimer to ensure Ernst's safe passage. He had passage booked on the Volendam of the Holland-America line and was scheduled to depart from Rotterdam.¹³ Grete turned to Rohrheimer in need of a personal representative to vouch for Ernst at the dock in New York.¹⁴ Rohrheimer was happy to help.



Not only did she know which ship it was (Grete had been unsure of the name), but she reached out to family members to make sure someone met Ernst and the ship when it arrived.¹⁵ She assured Oppenheimer that Ernst “will be met by many people in New York, so do not worry about that at all.”¹⁶

Rohrheimer also requested the vital information on the Oppenheimer family. She requested names, birthdates, and any other information that Oppenheimer might think

¹¹ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 14 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹² Ruth David, *Child of Our Time: A Young Girl's Flight from the Holocaust* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2003), 12.

¹³ SS Volendam, 31 July 1947 Anefo van Hof, The Dutch National Archives, The Hague, Fotocollectie Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau (ANEFO), 1945-1989.

¹⁴ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 22 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁵ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 23 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁶ Ibid.

would be important for her to know. And she suggested she send the letter express, as Rohrheimer was “anxious” to have it as soon as possible.¹⁷ Rohrheimer began working to secure escape for all of the Oppenheimer children: Hannah, Ruth, Michael, and Feodor (Feo).

The family still planned to meet up with the Oppenheimer’s other son, Werner, in Argentina, but as conditions there changed and the government seemed less disposed to immigrants, the Oppenheimers again looked to the United States. As Ernst prepared to leave for America, Grete raised the issue of the entire family coming, should Argentina fall through.¹⁸ Matters became more complicated with the arrest and internment of Grete’s husband Moritz and Ernst in a Concentration Camp.¹⁹ Rohrheimer abruptly switched her focus and devoted her time and attention to winning their release. She wrote to the American Consul in Stuttgart to see if he could help.²⁰ She would contact two more consuls in her efforts to intervene.²¹ None said that they could help. Fortunately, both Ernst and Moritz were eventually released.

Grete was afraid of the Nazi threat and was looking for a way out, any way out. She also requested that Rohrheimer find out about the possibility of living in Switzerland, as difficult as that was to arrange.²² That Rohrheimer was willing to help the Oppenheimers was not a given. They had also reached out to Morris’ sister, Guttan (Gutta) Rubel, who also lived in the United States.²³ “We also beg you, to help us to

¹⁷ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 7 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to American Consul Stuttgart, 16 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Gusta Schultz, Bertha Solis-Cohen, and Ruga Marks, 24 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²² Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 7 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

²³ Guttan Rubel to Grete and Morris Oppenheimer, 6 January 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

come to U.S.A.”²⁴ Oppenheimer was not sure what needed to be done so she suggested Rohrheimer and Rubel work together. Oppenheimer laid her concerns out plainly “I fear only, that many years will pass until we can emigrate on an affidavit that is now given.”²⁵ While Rubel was reluctant or unwilling to help much beyond swearing out an affidavit, Rohrheimer was more amenable and had a few ideas of her own.

Rohrheimer believed that the United States was still the best option for the family.²⁶ She suggested the National Farm School in Philadelphia²⁷ might be a good fit for Ernst upon his arrival. Rohrheimer asked one of her well-connected friends if she knew “anyone influential who could get him into the farm school.”²⁸ She appealed to another relative about getting him a place there because she could not while she was abroad.²⁹ She also did get together with Rubel to see how many affidavits she was willing to sign. Not content with those procedures alone, Rohrheimer also pledged to look into some other institutions to see whether they could also bring the children over.³⁰ Rohrheimer was also less than optimistic about Rubel’s affidavits. While Rubel did sign them, she feared that because “the children are refugees and have little jobs and the affidavits are very, very weak, indeed.”³¹ In light of this, she considered asking someone else to swear out a stronger affidavit.³²

²⁴ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 7 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Rohrheimer is referring to the National Farm School, founded by Joseph Krauskopf, one of the first four ordenees of Hebrew Union College. The School was an “American institution having for its object the training of Jewish lads in practical and scientific agriculture.” “National Farm School,” in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Cyrus Adler (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906), 187-88.

²⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Bertha Solis-Cohen, Undated, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Lionel Friedman, 16 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 10 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

³¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, Undated, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

³² Ibid.

Following up on her concern that the procedures she and Oppenheimer were following would not work, Rohrheimer turned to a more powerful ally. She wrote on behalf of the Oppenheimers to Lord Harry Snell (1865-1944), a British aristocrat, politician, campaigner, Member of Parliament a dissenting member of the Shaw Commission, a British inquiry into the causes of the Arab riots in Palestine in the 1920s.³³ He served in the British government under Ramsay MacDonald and Winston Churchill. He was the Labour Party's leader in the House of Lords in the late 1930s.³⁴ Rohrheimer and Snell met while attending a party in New York.³⁵ She proposed placing the children in the Cleveland Jewish Orphan Asylum (of which her ancestor Jacob Rohrheimer was a founder),³⁶ but needed to get the children first to England. For that, she needed Lord Snell.³⁷ He wrote back that he would take up the matter with the Quakers of London, known for their tolerance, compassion, and social activism. She was so desperate she wrote to her contacts in England that she would personally guarantee the children. She knew it was only a first step and that they would likely not be able to enter the United States for five years. This meant supporting them in England for that time. Considering this possibility, she offered to go to England herself to see what could be done. The severity of the situation prompted her to act: "I am terribly nervous about anyone remaining in Germany because things look very dark there again. I read today that emigration had practically been stopped there so I suppose that something is brewing

³³ Jewish Virtual Library, "The Shaw Commission," <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-shaw-commission> (accessed 4 May 2018).

³⁴ David G. Dalin and John F. Rothman, *Icon of Evil: Hitler's Mufti and the Rise of Radical Islam* (New York: Random House, 2008), 178, n.67.

³⁵ Rena Rohrheimer to Lord Snell, 14 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

³⁶ Ibid.; Gary E. Polster, "To Love Work and Dislike Being Idle: Origin and Aims of the Cleveland Jewish Orphan Asylum, 1868-1878," *American Jewish Archives* 39 no. 2 (Nov. 1987): 133.

³⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Lord Snell, 15 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

again.”³⁸ Another letter went to Rev. Michael Adler, (1868-1944) a British Rabbi who led London’s Central Synagogue as well as serving as one of the few British Jewish Chaplains in WWI and authoring a siddur for Jewish soldiers and numerous books about English Jews.³⁹ Rohrheimer asked him for help and again offered to come to England personally, if it would expedite action for her family.⁴⁰ She never returned with that purpose.

Rohrheimer also reached out to Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver in Cleveland.⁴¹ Silver (1893-1963) was the leader of Cleveland’s influential Congregation Tifereth Israel and a leading Zionist, serving as chairman of the United Palestine Appeal and United Jewish Appeal.⁴² She asked him for his advice. Knowing that there was a large orphanage in Cleveland, she asked him if it would be possible to place the children there until the parents could be brought to the United States.⁴³ It is unknown if Silver replied.

As conditions worsened in Europe, the Oppenheimers decided to send their younger children to safety.⁴⁴ Rohrheimer worked to secure safe passage for both Hannah Oppenheimer and her sister, Ruth. In Rohrheimer’s mind, Hannah’s escape was more pressing. At 14, Hannah was unable to continue her studies, so Rohrheimer wanted to get her out first. She wrote to Grete in 1939 with a plan to place them both in England.⁴⁵ For the younger Ruth who was still in school, Rohrheimer proposed housing her with a friend

³⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Unknown, Undated, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

³⁹ Cecil Roth, “Adler, Michael,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Cecil Roth, Geoffrey Wigoder (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 283.

⁴⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Rev. Michael Adler, 22 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

⁴¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Abba Hillel Silver, 3 January 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

⁴² Leon I. Feuer, “Silver, Abba Hillel,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Cecil Roth, Geoffrey Wigoder (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 1543.

⁴³ Rena Rohrheimer to Abba Hillel Silver, 3 January 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

⁴⁴ David, *Child of Our Time*, 13.

⁴⁵ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 16 February 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

in England who ran a school. This friend was “willing to have Ruth live in her home and go to her school.”⁴⁶ The only drawback was that the town had no other Jews and no synagogue. Rohrheimer asked Grete whether she would be willing to place her daughter in such conditions. She knew that there were many obstacles still to overcome, but wanted to offer this possibility for getting the children out of Germany.⁴⁷

The concern was well-placed. Grete was worried about Ruth in such an environment. She admitted, “I fear a little, that she could feel strange under those circumstances. Hannah would be accustomed easily at a new place, she has been absent from home many times, but Ruth [would not].”⁴⁸ This was not the only consideration though, as “Hannah is still more pious and Jewish than Ruth.”⁴⁹ After a pogrom left their home in tatters, Hannah blamed herself and swore off eating meat, believing that “God has punished us for eating meat that is not kosher.”⁵⁰ Grete could not make a decision then, wanting to consult with her husband, Morris, and busy dealing with illnesses in the house. Grete had different concerns for another son, Michael’s, placement. When Rohrheimer suggested a school in England, she refused, saying “no, that school is for the wealthy.”⁵¹

In less than two weeks’ time, Grete gave Rohrheimer an answer about the possibility of housing the children with gentiles. “Don’t trouble yourself about the responsibility in planning for our children,”⁵² she wrote. “I do not fear at all that the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Anna Schwab, 5 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

⁵¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, Undated, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

⁵² Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 28 Feb 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

children do not feel well in these homes, and I know that the people there take care of them very well.”⁵³ Also, she trusted Rohrheimer, “I have confidence that you...find out the right way.”⁵⁴

Rohrheimer was also concerned with the expense of bringing a child out of Germany. Grete could not afford the amount Hannah needed.⁵⁵ But Rohrheimer would reassure her that she need not worry about the expenses.⁵⁶ The back and forth continued, Grete telling her, that she worried “nevertheless...”⁵⁷ Even without helping at her own personal expense, Grete thanked Rohrheimer for doing “more than anyone would have done.”⁵⁸

Rohrheimer began working primarily on Hannah’s case. To help Hannah escape, Rohrheimer began working with Joseph Silkin, an English solicitor, and father of the poet, Jon Silkin.⁵⁹ By the time they got in contact, Hannah was in a Jewish Orphanage in Mannheim, Germany.⁶⁰ Rohrheimer was trying to secure funds from the United States that would allow Hannah to stay in the orphanage a second year.⁶¹ Silkin had been in contact with the Inter-Aid Committee for Children from Germany and Austria (Oxford Branch) and Rohrheimer was anxious to see what progress they were making.⁶²

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 4 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁵⁷ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 9 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 28 February 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio; George Stade and Karen Karbiener, *Encyclopedia of British Writers, 1800 to the Present, Volume 2* (New York: DWJ Books, 2009), 442.

⁶⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 28 February 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

What Silkin learned from the Committee was more labyrinthine and clandestine than they had imagined. First, they would not speak with him over the phone; all inquiries had to be in writing.⁶³ The second thing he learned was of even more importance: they had changed their policies and now required that children have “a guarantee and bankers’ references by the person or persons who are to take in the child.”⁶⁴ By the time he wrote the letter, Silkin had already reached out to Rohrheimer’s contacts to secure the guarantee. The price had also gone up. If Rohrheimer wanted to sponsor the girl, she had to cover not only the costs already accounted for, but the cost of bringing her to the United States, as well.⁶⁵

Rohrheimer was frustrated, but undeterred. She moved ahead with the plans, in spite of the unfortunate reality that “the rules seems [sic] to change very rapidly within the walls of the Inter-Aid Committee.”⁶⁶ While the rules were changing, it appeared that not everyone understood those changes. Rohrheimer attempted to mediate the efforts between Silkin and a Miss Storr, a Quaker woman who ran the hostel where they hoped to place Oppenheimer.⁶⁷ If Storr was merely engaged in setting up the hostel, she would not assume responsibility for the children placed there, meaning the Committee or Silkin’s organization still needed to take responsibility for the children, Oppenheimer concluded.⁶⁸ The one piece of positive progress was that the hostel was approved and the Inter-Aid Committee would place a child there.⁶⁹

⁶³ Joseph Silkin to Rena Rohrheimer, 2 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 11 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

⁶⁷ David, *Child of Our Time*, 67.

⁶⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 28 February 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Grete received a letter from the German Jewish Aid Committee with the same information as one from Mrs. Anna Schwab to Rohrheimer.⁷⁰ Schwab, who had been helping refugees since WWI,⁷¹ asked Rohrheimer to consult with the Jewish Colonisation Association in Paris in regards to another one of the Oppenheimer children, Werner.⁷² At the Committee and Rohrheimer's urging, The School House, operating in Suffolk, England, offered to take Hannah and Ruth, at least temporarily.⁷³ Everyone was also interested in keeping the girls together, "as they could comfort each other when feeling lonely and homesick."⁷⁴ The same woman who offered housing for Hannah and Ruth also asked about Michael and Feodor. Although she had no place for them at that time, she promised to try to find someone who would take them.⁷⁵

With this as a possibility, Rohrheimer put Grete in touch with Joseph Silkin of Herne Hill. He ran a hostel where she hoped to place Hannah.⁷⁶ At the hostel, there would be "10 or 12 Jewish children all between the ages of 14 and 17."⁷⁷ Rohrheimer went to London to make arrangements with a number of organizations to get the Oppenheimer children out of Germany.⁷⁸ Silkin and Rohrheimer expected that there would be a guarantee from Mrs. Adele M. Gerstley (1886-1973), a wealthy Londoner who had helped found the Gertsely-Hoare Hospital for Officers.⁷⁹ She was also to give

⁷⁰ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 28 February 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁷¹ Julius Carlebach, *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991), 548.

⁷² Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 28 February 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁷³ Muriel Nutt to Rena Rohrheimer, 30 January 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 4 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, July 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

⁷⁹ Come Step Back in Time, "Alfred Henry Foster," <https://comestepbackintime.wordpress.com/tag/mary-hinton-actress/> (accessed 26 March 2018).

Silkin a payment for the hostel and the Herne Hill Trade School where Hannah would live.⁸⁰ It was also important for her to note that the Home would observe the dietary laws, as “Hannah would want.”⁸¹

If Hannah and Ruth could not remain together, Rohrheimer hoped to place Ruth with a different institution. For her, there was “a new hostel where there are to be about 20 little girls.”⁸² Despite the hostel being closed to new admissions, Rohrheimer’s friend was keeping a slot open for Ruth. “She will not take anyone, as she said that the only little girl she would take was ‘my little girl.’”⁸³ Even Rohrheimer thought this was incredible, remarking that she doubted “whether there are many Jewish people who would have done such a thing for a person she had known for such a short time.”⁸⁴

These developments filled the Oppenheimers with optimism. Grete wrote back to Rohrheimer, “now we have so much hope that we get Hannah and Ruth out of Germany and we are sure they will be in good hands.”⁸⁵ She was hopeful about Mr. Silkin’s home, as was Hannah, who “danced and jumped”⁸⁶ upon hearing the good news. She still worried about Ruth and placing her in “alien circumstances” though, even as enthusiastic as the woman in Ipswich was.⁸⁷

Rohrheimer inquired as to any progress with Anna Schwab of the German Jewish Aid Committee. She assured Grete that Schwab “is a very reliable person and I am sure that she will keep her promise with me about having Ruth put in the Hostel at

⁸⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 4 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 9 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Newcastle.”⁸⁸ When next they spoke, Rohrheimer updated Grete on all the other options that she had been exploring. The plan for Ruth to go to Newcastle was the most settled.⁸⁹ The letter Rohrheimer had received from Schwab was encouraging and indicated that “she would do everything she could.”⁹⁰ Rohrheimer predicted that “things will soon adjust themselves for you.”⁹¹

Working with Woburn House German Jewish Aid Committee, Rohrheimer secured for Ruth a place in a Newcastle hostel. Schwab contacted Grete in March of 1939.⁹² Grete relayed the good news to Rohrheimer. She quoted to her the message from Schwab: “we will immediately apply for her (Ruth) to come over to this country and we hope she will be here before long.”⁹³ In June 1939, they planned to send daughter Ruth to England.⁹⁴ She was to emigrate via the Kindertransport, provided her parents could secure a guarantee for her.⁹⁵

By then, Rohrheimer’s primary concern was with getting the children out of Germany, however she managed to do it.⁹⁶ She was willing to send Hannah to Newcastle if she was unable to resolve things with Silkin.⁹⁷ Securing the 11 pounds for Hannah was still an issue and Rohrheimer learned from the German Jewish Aid Committee that there were no more vacancies in Newcastle with Ruth.⁹⁸

⁸⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 12 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁸⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 26 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 26 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁹² Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 17 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁹³ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 9 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

⁹⁴ David, *Child of Our Time*, 49.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 11 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Anna Schwab to Rena Rohrheimer, 5 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

Silkin was waiting for the 11 pounds. He contacted Rohrheimer on a number of occasions, telling her that all was set as soon as he received the money.⁹⁹ A short time later, Rohrheimer received word that Silkin could make the guarantee for Hannah in London at the hostel and in a trade school in the Herne Hill neighborhood.¹⁰⁰ She was personally willing to guarantee the yearly charge to keep Hannah there.¹⁰¹ She was also committed to paying Hannah's passage on a ship bound for the United States. "I wish that we could purchase it at once and that I could take her over with me...when I expect to sail back on the Queen Mary."¹⁰² Despite her eagerness to help, she recognized that there were still many obstacles in the way, most significantly, that they had yet to get Hannah safely to England. Hannah was overjoyed at the prospect of going to England, dancing and jumping for joy when she heard the news.¹⁰³

Despite Schwab's assurances, Rohrheimer, like Grete, was still examining other options. Rohrheimer asked if England would be preferable to Argentina. She asked that Grete let her know if they were headed to Argentina so she could tell Schwab and free up the space for someone else.¹⁰⁴ In her postscript, Rohrheimer provided specific, pragmatic instructions. While Ruth's future looked more certain, Hannah's was not. Rohrheimer asked for a decision on Hannah and urged her to "give this very careful consideration and

⁹⁹ Joseph Silkin to Rena Rohrheimer, 3 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 1; Joseph Silkin to Rena Rohrheimer, 2 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

¹⁰⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 15 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5; Rena Rohrheimer to Cecelia Razovsky, 14 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

¹⁰¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 15 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

do not consider the money. Consider only Hannah's welfare. If she goes to England now, she can always leave there and go with you later to Argentine [sic] should you go."¹⁰⁵

The Argentina option began to look more and more likely.¹⁰⁶ Grete reported "a great joy: we have received our 'llamadas'!"¹⁰⁷ The Argentinian officials came through with "nearly a miracle"¹⁰⁸ in opening a pathway to them applying for legal entrance.¹⁰⁹ The consul could still deny her a visa and other requirements stood in the way but receipt of the llamadas was a critical step.¹¹⁰ She knew this as well, noting that "there are many difficulties to be vanquished till we shall have all our papers of this country here."¹¹¹ Just as important, was her other observation: "we have hope that all will be good."¹¹²

Rohrheimer also managed to arrange accommodations for Hannah in the United States. She included an excerpt from the letter to demonstrate to Silkin how much she had confirmed. Hannah (and possibly other children) would stay with Rubel, Grete's sister-in-law, in New York City.¹¹³ Rubel may have expected that Grete would be able to come to America as well, "we will be very glad to have the children in our care and supply financial assistance to them until such time as you can get your visa and come to America."¹¹⁴ Knowing that the process was complicated and exacting, she offered her

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 18 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.; Spanish for "calls," llamadas were a limited but legal means of entry into Argentina in the 1930s. Jorge Ruschin, "The German-Jewish community in Argentina," <http://blankgenealogy.com/histories/Location%20histories/South%20America/The%20German-Jewish%20Community%20in%20Argentina.pdf> (accessed 4 May 2018).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Leo Senkman, "Attitudes of the Jewish Community in Buenos Aires towards Holocaust Survivors, 1945-49," in *Holocaust Survivors: Resettlement, Memories, Identities*, eds. Dalia Ofer, Francoise S. Ouzan, Judy Tydor Baumel-Schwartz (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 263.

¹¹¹ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 18 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Guttan Rubel to Grete and Morris Oppenheimer, 6 January 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹¹⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 15 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

hope “that this will be a satisfactory guarantee for consideration and acceptance both by the American authorities dealing with the transfer of the children on this side and by all the authorities dealing with the transfer on the other side. If further documents are needed for the children we shall be glad to supply them.”¹¹⁵

As much as Rohrheimer managed to arrange, the bureaucracies and governments complicated things even further. When Silken replied to her letter he informed her that there was a new obstacle, as “the regulations appear to be changing almost daily.”¹¹⁶ Among the changes was the introduction of an additional regulation, which required a deposit of 50 pounds for each child under the age of 12 as security.¹¹⁷ This meant that Rohrheimer was going to have to raise additional funds. Adding to the complications, Storr, the proprietor of the Herne Hill, London hostel lost the forms she had been given, requiring Rohrheimer to replace them.¹¹⁸

Silkin’s letter was “a great shock” to Rohrheimer, who thought that the arrangement was “pretty well understood.”¹¹⁹ As she read the situation, she was to be the guarantor of the 11 pounds a year and the cost of a steamship ticket to America. She also understood that Silkin was to arrange that ticket, bringing Oppenheimer from Germany to England. Once there, Silkin would also see to her settling in the hostel to which Silkin was “so vitally interested.”¹²⁰ Just to be certain, she repeated to him the latest requirements, the 50 pounds deposit at the Home Office.¹²¹ She was not mistaken,

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Joseph Silkin to Rena Rohrheimer, 28 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 14 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

although Silkin noted that the required cash deposit had not been required when he placed the other girls in his Home. Assuming that she, or someone on her behalf could supply the funds, Silkin was ready to accept Hannah.¹²²

The changes came as a challenge as well as a shock to Rohrheimer. As a schoolteacher on sabbatical, she did not have the funds to pay for Hannah, a fact she communicated to Anna Schwab of the German Jewish Aid Committee.¹²³ Rohrheimer assured Silkin that he could rely on her guarantee and need not fear losing his own money.¹²⁴ For the sole purpose of sending him money for refugees, Rohrheimer set up a bank account in London.¹²⁵ Any legwork that needed to be done, she was willing to do, in order “to arrange with [Silkin’s] Committee to put the machinery in operation for the removal of Hannah.”¹²⁶ She then asked him to use any influence he had “to start ‘the ball rolling’ in behalf of this child who is without any education now while we are waiting for some word.”¹²⁷ She also kindly asked Silkin whether he could actually help, or if she needed to “try other channels.”¹²⁸

Rohrheimer communicated these newly arisen issues to Grete.¹²⁹ She urged her to speak with Silkin directly.¹³⁰ At the same time, Rohrheimer would contact him also planned to speak with an organization in New York as to whether they could come up with the additional deposit that was need in order to guarantee a space in the hostel for

¹²² Joseph Silkin to Rena Rohrheimer, 21 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

¹²³ Rena Rohrheimer to Anna Schwab, 5 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

¹²⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 14 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 14 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 14 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Hannah.¹³¹ She also asked about Argentina and encouraged Grete to keep investigating the possibility of going there. In addition to these two possible safe havens, Rohrheimer also asked whether Grete might want to send Hannah to Palestine.¹³² Rohrheimer had contacts there who were going to try to begin laying the groundwork in case they wanted to explore that option, too.¹³³ Rohrheimer also inquired about Feodor, the Oppenheimer's youngest. Rohrheimer mentioned that she had a friend who might take Feodor. This friend had a similarly aged daughter named Lillian, and had already become excited over the prospect. "Lillian thought she was going to have a little playmate when she saw her picture and heard all about her."¹³⁴ Rohrheimer thought enough of the match to send along the picture and information. But the catch there was that this was a Catholic family and Rohrheimer again assumed that it "would not be suitable as a background" for the child.¹³⁵

At this time, the glimmer of hope that Grete had for Argentina grew brighter. The "llamadas"¹³⁶ she had been sending to Paris got through and she hoped that it would open a path to South America. In response, she asked Rohrheimer to hold off on making any payments or planning to bring Hannah to Palestine or Feodor to England.¹³⁷ Grete was optimistic enough to ask Rohrheimer to wait a few weeks to see if immigrating to Argentina would work out. If did, she and Moritz could go with Hannah and Feodor.¹³⁸

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 27 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Despite her hope, Grete continued to make arrangements for an escape to England. She still planned to send the forms to Silkin, “so that nothing is neglected when we cannot immigrate to Argentina.”¹³⁹ Oppenheimer was realistic enough to maintain ties with Silkin, even while another plan seemed likely to succeed. She was even less certain about Feodor’s chances of escape. Feodor, who would have a place to go, should Grete accept, was not to leave her. Even thinking of the well-meaning strangers who would take Feodor in, Grete still could not commit. Her ambivalence was obvious, even to her. “We think also that Feo is still a little young to give her to other people. I fear she will forget us, if she feels well.”¹⁴⁰ Although that was how she felt, she suspected it was not the best way to evaluate the situation. She speculated, “perhaps this reasoning is egotism, and it is better not to care whether the child will forget us, where she feels really well?”¹⁴¹ She hoped for a resolution, rather than having to make that tough choice. She wrote that her hope was “that we can emigrate together and that all questions will be solved.” It was also increasingly apparent to her that “emigration was necessary and is necessary and will be necessary...under these new circumstances.”¹⁴²

A complication arose in the plan to go to South America. Grete had not heard from her son Werner in Argentina for six weeks, leaving her understandably “anxious and troubled.” However, Grete did have some positive news to share with Rohrheimer. A month earlier Schwab at Woburn House in England had written her to tell her that she would immediately apply for Ruth to come and hoped to see her soon.”¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Still fearful that her efforts would come to nothing, Rohrheimer sought additional help in securing funds and guarantees for Hannah Oppenheimer.¹⁴⁴ She approached her friend, Cecilia Razovsky (1891-1968), who was the Secretary and Executive Director of the National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees and Emigrants Coming From Germany.¹⁴⁵ She asked Razovsky and her Committee if they could possibly “guarantee [Hannah’s] guarantee”¹⁴⁶ in order to get her safely to England. Rohrheimer further assured Razovsky (as she had Silkin) that the Oppenheims had family members in the New York City area who would house and care for her once she could be taken to the United States.¹⁴⁷ Hannah’s eldest brother, Ernst, was living in New York City, employed, and ready to welcome his sister and any other family members who could escape Europe.¹⁴⁸ She also reached out again to Schwab, looking to determine whether Hannah would be better off in a hostel or a trade school.¹⁴⁹

The correspondence between Rohrheimer and Silkin continued. He wrote informing her that the forms and photographs were all in order. The 50 pounds had been secured and Silkin expected to receive it in a few days.¹⁵⁰ Only the 11 pound fee and assurance of an annual payment remained.¹⁵¹ Silkin was ready to send the application as soon as he heard from Grete. Rohrheimer relayed this message and awaited Grete’s instructions; she was ready to send the money immediately if Grete was willing to send

¹⁴⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Cecelia Razovsky, 14 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

¹⁴⁵ Rena Rohrheimer to Cecelia Razovsky, 21 March 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

¹⁴⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Cecelia Razovsky, 14 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.; Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 14 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

¹⁴⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Cecelia Razovsky, 14 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

¹⁴⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Anna Schwab, 1 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

¹⁵⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 12 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Hannah to England.¹⁵² The plan continued as intended. Rohrheimer made a payment of 11 pounds to Silkin on June 16, 1939. It secured for Hannah passage from Mannheim, Germany to London and residence at the Herne Hill Hostel.¹⁵³

Still, Rohrheimer worked on other options for the Oppenheimers. Rohrheimer travelled to Palestine and while she was there, she met with Henrietta Szold (1860-1945), the founder and first president of Hadassah and leader of Youth Aliyah, an organization designed to bring German children to Palestine.¹⁵⁴ The two worked, for a time, to get the Oppenheimer children to Palestine.¹⁵⁵ Szold suggested she contact the Judische Jugendhilfe, (Aid to Jewish Youth) which was organized to lobby the Mandatory government in Palestine to provide certificates for German youth to emigrate there.¹⁵⁶ Rohrheimer was certain to mention in her letter that Hannah was a Zionist. Szold also advised Rohrheimer to “get the children out of Germany as quickly as possible.”¹⁵⁷ Szold put Rohrheimer in touch with Sidonie Wronsky (1883-1947), the author and founder of Palestine’s first school for social workers, someone with whom she had collaborated on various social work activities.¹⁵⁸ Wronsky promised Rohrheimer that she would send the necessary forms for immigrating to Palestine.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 16 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

¹⁵⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 12 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3. Rohrheimer also lent her copy of *Mein Kampf* to Szold’s sister, who then went to visit Szold. Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 29 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2; Gladys Rosen, “Henrietta Szold,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Cecil Roth, Geoffrey Wigoder (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1971), 666-67.

¹⁵⁵ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 2 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

¹⁵⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Judische Jugendhilfe, 30 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 1; Erica B. Simmons, *Hadassah and the Zionist Project* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 118.

¹⁵⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 2 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

¹⁵⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 26 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3; Joseph Neipris, “Wronsky, Siddy,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Cecil Roth, Geoffrey Wigoder (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1971), 674.

¹⁵⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 26 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

As this was unfolding, she informed Grete that the preparations were ready for Hannah to go to London.¹⁶⁰ Somehow she had secured the guarantee of 50 pounds. And Rohrheimer was ready to send the 11 pounds for the year, as soon as Grete let her know.¹⁶¹ As many options and alternatives as there seemed to be, Rohrheimer knew that Grete had to make a decision. “While I do not want to interfere at all with your wishes, it is the feeling of the people to whom I have talked about the children that you should send them to the places open to them as quickly as they will be accepted there.”¹⁶²

The plans continued to move forward, making that decision more difficult. Grete heard from Rosi Grunblatt, Jacobson’s sister.¹⁶³ Grunblatt told her that their family was willing to supply the 50 pounds Silkin required.¹⁶⁴ At the same time, the Argentina plan was progressing.¹⁶⁵ The Oppenheimers were debating what to do and whether they could rely on the guarantees made for them or get to Argentina as a family.¹⁶⁶

They decided to act more quickly, to guarantee the children got out, rather than risk waiting to travel together.¹⁶⁷ Ruth’s passage came more quickly than they could have imagined. The day after Grete wrote to Rohrheimer about it, she learned that Ruth would be leaving for England with a transport of children just ten days later.¹⁶⁸ So soon was the departure, the pullover that Grete was knitting her would probably not be ready

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Grunblatt had escaped the Russian Revolution by coming to Germany, where she met Grete Oppenheimer. The National Holocaust Centre and Museum, “Photograph 4; Ruth David,” <https://www.nationalholocaustcentre.net/photograph-4-ruth-david> (accessed 14 January 2018).

¹⁶⁴ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 26 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

in time.¹⁶⁹ While Ruth's passage to England came quickly, Hannah's situation was more precarious. "Nobody knows what may happen," Grete wrote, and asked if Rohrheimer would attend to all the necessary undertakings to get Hannah to England.¹⁷⁰

They were so busy when Ruth left that Moritz wrote to Rohrheimer instead of his wife.¹⁷¹ He suggested they send her Hannah, even for a short time.¹⁷² Grete added a handwritten note to the letter. She described with joy the scene at the train station, "nice girls and boys, and Ruth was more glad than we feared she would be...she was sorry to leave us but now she has the intention to enjoy all the nice and interesting things she is going to see."¹⁷³ With what little time she had, Grete thanked Rohrheimer for all that she did so Ruth "could live in freedom" and all she was doing for Hannah.¹⁷⁴ She also mentioned that they had sent their papers to the Argentinian consul and were awaiting an answer.¹⁷⁵

Rohrheimer then finalized the preparations for sending Hannah to England.¹⁷⁶ She sent Silkin the check and told the Oppenheimers that it was done. She instructed Silkin to make the final arrangements and included a check for the 11 pounds.¹⁷⁷ Hannah was to be taken from Mannheim, Germany to London, where she would reside at the Herne Hill

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Moritz Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 6 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Grete Oppenheimer to Rena Rohrheimer, 6 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 19 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁷⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 17 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

Hostel.¹⁷⁸ All that was left for the Oppenheimers to do was to wait, as it would likely take some time.¹⁷⁹

Fortunately, all of the children escaped. Hannah made it to England. She left in August 1939. She lived with Storr until being evacuated out of London for fear of bombings. Hannah wrote to Ruth in the northeast, although the two rarely saw one another.¹⁸⁰ Feodor and Michael escaped Germany to France. Feodor was housed at Chateau du Masgellier, par le Grand Bourg, Creuse, Unoccupied France and Michael at Maison des Pupilles, Haute Garonne, Unoccupied France.¹⁸¹ Eventually, a French family who had promised Grete they would look after the children in case of emergency took them in and cared for them.¹⁸²

Grete knew that the children reached safety. She wrote a letter to a cousin and shared the happy news. She also addressed the letter to her children so they could see it if she did not survive. Grete and Moritz did not survive. They made it to France, only to be deported to Auschwitz from the notorious Drancy assembly point outside of Paris. At Auschwitz on August 19, 1942, Grete and Moritz were murdered by gas along with 900 other people.¹⁸³

Johanna Falkenberg

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 19 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁸⁰ David, *Child of Our Time*, 67.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 142-43; Holocaust Survivors and Victims Resource Center digital indices, RG-43.059M, reels 1-2, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁸² David, *Child of Our Time*, 140.

¹⁸³ David, *Child of Our Time*, 143-44; Rena Rohrheimer to Dave, 21 February 1947, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

While all of the efforts to save the Oppenheimers were unfolding, Rohrheimer had another cousin who needed her help escaping from Nazi Germany: Johanna Falkenberg.¹⁸⁴ Falkenberg and Rohrheimer had been in communication with one another while Rohrheimer was on sabbatical. Evidently, Rohrheimer planned to travel to Nazi Germany to visit her cousin, but Falkenberg reached out just before Rohrheimer left the United States. “We are besides ourselves,” Falkenberg wrote, “and have had frightful experiences and advise you not to come here. We are well and live. Dear Karl is not with us; we do not know where he is. Help us to get away from here as quickly as possible.”¹⁸⁵ Johanna Falkenberg (nee Rohrheimer) lived with her husband Karl and his mother. She penned a powerful account of life in Europe and sent it to Rohrheimer. “We have no more furniture; all is smashed up; the pots and pans are in bits; the windows in pieces”¹⁸⁶ “We are sleeping on the floor...I do not know where Karl is yet.”¹⁸⁷ Her sister was also looking for her husband. They shared their fates, “we poor women are sitting together and are wondering what is going to happen to us next.”¹⁸⁸ If that was not enough, they were given an order from the government, demanding that they fix the damage to their homes and that they must pay for it themselves. “With what, I do not know, as with all this excitement, I cannot find my money anywhere.”¹⁸⁹ Falkenberg also explained that she was now taking care of a 4½ year-old boy.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 12 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁸⁵ Rena Rohrheimer to Hortnese, Bernard, Lee, and Marthe, 22 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

¹⁸⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Abba Hillel Silver, 3 January 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

¹⁸⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Gusta Schultz, Bertha Solis-Cohen, and Huga Marks, 24 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Hoping to enlist more family members' help, Rohrheimer forwarded the letter to Gusta Schultz, a relative in Chicago, but was not sure whether anyone there would be able to help.¹⁹¹ Rohrheimer pledged to the Falkenbergs that she would go to the German Consul in Geneva to see what she could do, although she was doubtful about that as well.

She also expected Falkenberg's sisters, including Gusta Schultz, to act. "That she has not heard from either of her sisters who are in New York and Chicago and whom I would like to – well there are no words that would describe what I would like to do to them for not at least sending a cable to her at such a time."¹⁹² The bond of family was strong for Rohrheimer and she could not imagine people turning from their own kin. "They all make me a sick headache, and I wrote them a sharp letter last week, in which I told her that she was just as able to help them as I was; that her husband had a business and that she had a home and could house them, for I was sick of her flowery language- it was too sickening for me to swallow."¹⁹³

Of Falkenberg's other sibling, she lamented, "If Johanna's own sister Jennie, cannot help her at this time, it is very difficult for me to know what to do about her letter to me."¹⁹⁴ Not only that, it was a month removed from the Reich Pogrom (Kristallnacht), and Rohrheimer took notice. It may have influenced who she helped and when, sensing both the urgency and the necessity of intervention. Rohrheimer remarked about receiving "appeals from many refugees in and out of Germany."¹⁹⁵ But with the events transpiring in Germany, her priorities were changing. With the Reich Pogrom fresh in her mind, she

¹⁹¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Hortnese, Bernard, Lee, and Marthe, 22 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

¹⁹² Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 1 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Amelia, 16 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

wrote, “of course, at this writing, it is most urgent to get the people out of Germany first. One cannot tell where there will be a repetition of what happened last month.”¹⁹⁶

Rohrheimer was highly motivated to help the Falkenbergs. She cancelled her trip to Egypt in order to see what could be done for them. In addition to the moving letter, (one that she would disseminate many times over the years) Falkenberg’s parents, including her mother who Rohrheimer knew as Tante Emma, were “the only relatives who were really like parents” to Rohrheimer.¹⁹⁷

The chief logistical problem for Rohrheimer was that she was overextended. Having already written three affidavits, the U.S. government was unlikely to accept another.¹⁹⁸ Helping Johanna Falkenberg was not enough. Rohrheimer would also need affidavits for Karl and his mother.¹⁹⁹ When Rohrheimer reached out to others in the family, she asked them for any help they could give, “both in the way of the papers and money to [support] whoever I could get out of Germany” and pledged to do whatever she could.²⁰⁰ Knowing how dire the situation was, Rohrheimer also wrote to the American Consul in Stuttgart hoping to find out how quickly she could get the Falkenbergs out of Germany once she got an affidavit for Karl.²⁰¹ Rohrheimer was also getting sick from overwork. Still, she offered to appear in person if it would help expedite the matter.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 6 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

¹⁹⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Hortense, Bernard, Lee, and Marthe, 22 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Gusta Schultz, Bertha Solis-Cohen, and Huga Marks, 24 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁰¹ Rena Rohrheimer to American Consul Stuttgart, 18 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁰² Ibid.

Falkenberg also planned to eventually go to England.²⁰³ After she received her permit for England, she reached out to Rohrheimer for help. To assist Falkenberg when she would arrive, Rohrheimer changed her travel plans to include a return to France, Switzerland, and England, each one presenting an opportunity for asylum for the Falkenbergs.²⁰⁴ Rohrheimer was set to leave for London July 18, 1939 and planned to see Falkenberg the following week.²⁰⁵

Despite the plan, at the end of the year, Falkenberg was still in Germany, and Rohrheimer was starting to despair, so she called in another favor from Lord Henry Snell, who had served on the Shaw Commission and had helped with the Oppenheimer cases. Having heard that the Salvation Army in England helped 1,000 Jewish refugees, she wondered if the organization could help Karl Falkenberg as well. She knew it was a desperate hope, akin to a “dying man grasping to a straw.”²⁰⁶ Rohrheimer also wondered whether a group of Quakers, The Committee of Friends could help as well.²⁰⁷ She closed with an emotional appeal, “every day I received pleading letters from her. You can imagine what this means to me who is so anxious to help and feels as incompetent as a newborn babe. I will sign the affidavit but what then? Can you help me? I am improvising, thank you.”²⁰⁸ None of these appeals came through for her.

Despite Rohrheimer’s frustrations and limits, she did not ignore Falkenberg’s cause. A friend of Rohrheimer’s went on a lecture tour of the United States to raise

²⁰³ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 12 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

²⁰⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 26 May 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

²⁰⁵ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 17 July 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

²⁰⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Lord Snell, 26 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

money for “the immediate requirements of the refugees who remain in Switzerland while waiting to get into other countries.”²⁰⁹ She asked for copies of Johanna’s letters and Rohrheimer showed her. She intended to quote them on her lecture tour. Meanwhile, Rohrheimer hoped to be able to get to Zurich to see what could be done on Johanna’s behalf.²¹⁰

Knowing that it was unlikely the United States would accept another affidavit from her, Rohrheimer asked her cousin, Clarence Goldsmith, if he knew anyone who could make one out for Johanna and her husband.²¹¹ This was not a large favor to ask, especially for Gusta.²¹² As Rohrheimer saw it, “it is not necessary to be wealthy, as neither Lee nor I are; it is only necessary to prove a good citizenship and that you are and have been in business, as you have been; that you have a home and can take care of these people. You are just as able to do this as we are.”²¹³ She even pointed out the advantage that Gusta had, “you know what you can do about this and to whom to go about it.”²¹⁴ But Gusta offered little assistance.

When Rohrheimer went to the American Consul’s office in Geneva in December 1938, she encountered an unlikely ally. She began talking with a woman there about the Chicago bond market. Rohrheimer indicated that her only interest was in helping refugees. The woman retorted, “I hope you will not get it in the neck.”²¹⁵ To this, Rohrheimer’s responded by shoving “Johanna’s letter right under her nose, and after

²⁰⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 1 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 1 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²¹² Rena Rohrheimer to Gusta, November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 1 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

reading it, said she, ‘Poor thing.’ What could we do to help.”²¹⁶ The woman was not bluffing. She offered the services of her friend, James L. Houghteling.²¹⁷ Houghteling (1883-1962), had been vice President of the *Chicago Daily News* and director of the *Chicago Times* and was currently serving as Immigration Commissioner for the United States. He would later serve as an assistant to Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau. Rohrheimer asked if she would introduce her. The woman complied, penning for her a note. “Dear Mr. Houghteling: Can’t you bend a little and allow one or two of these poor refugees to pass through! This note will be sent you by an acquaintance I met at the Consulate, Mrs. R. M. Rohrheimer. Thanking you, Signed- Miss Alice J. Epperson.”²¹⁸ Rohrheimer suspected he would be of little help, but appreciated the effort, nonetheless. She asked Goldsmith whether he had heard of Houghteling or Miss Epperson, wondering also if she was “of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy, or what.”²¹⁹

Rohrheimer also approached Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver about the Falkenbergs. She related the account from Johanna and detailed the financial needs they would have if they were to get to Switzerland. She also noted that Karl was a skilled mechanic, and while he would not be able to work in Switzerland, could work in whatever country they manage to get to.²²⁰ If Silver wrote back, no record of the letter remains.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ James L. Houghteling (1883-1962) was Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization for the United States from 1937-1940. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “James L. Houghteling,” <https://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/our-history-20> (accessed 2 November 2017). Houghteling’s wife, Laura Delano Houghteling was President Roosevelt’s cousin. She opposed a proposed admission of 20,000 Jewish refugee children claiming, “20,000 charming children would all too soon grow into 20,000 ugly adults.” Diary of Jay Pierrepont Moffat, entry for 25 May 1939, Jay Pierrepont Moffat Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

²¹⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 1 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Abba Hillel Silver, 3 January 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

Johanna Falkenberg hoped to get to England thanks to Rohrheimer's efforts. A Catholic friend of Rohrheimer's signed a domestic employment certificate for Johanna, announcing her intention to place her in her home. This friend from Cambridge lived in Beccles, Suffolk, but Rohrheimer hoped for Johanna to find work in London. All of the waiting was trying for Johanna, who from time to time would tell Rohrheimer that she could not "hold out any longer."²²¹

Rohrheimer was out of ideas and options. Those few solutions that existed were not feasible for one reason or another. Aside from the financial struggle to get Johanna Falkenberg into another country, she would have to support Falkenberg once she arrived. Rohrheimer could not afford this. Nor could Falkenberg work, even illegally, for fear of spies – that other immigrants could turn her in. Upon proposing Falkenberg work as a domestic, the reaction was immediate and emphatic, "Absolutely not...there are all kinds of spies about here...the Police are very keen and all families are watched very carefully. If it would be discovered then many others would suffer because of that error."²²² Even Kurt Falkenberg, a skilled mechanic, would not be able to work. This was not just a tall-tale to Rohrheimer. She herself knew of a refugee in France who was jailed for trying to work and who waded across a stream in the dark in no-man's land to escape to Switzerland.²²³

Falkenberg was also growing desperate. Her travel visa number for the United States was over 20,000. Karl was in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp.²²⁴ She wrote to her cousin, imagining possibilities of escape to Buenos Aires or Montevideo. Still

²²¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Johanna Falkenberg to Rena Rohrheimer, 11 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

holding the United States as a possibility, she speculated that they could all live together there and that Karl could work as a locksmith. She was not insistent on any one plan, merely anywhere, “we can go and take the quickest way.”²²⁵

Falkenberg took a chance writing as she did. “Had the letter been opened, she would have also been arrested.”²²⁶ Whether she was being naïve, bold, or defiant, she wrote what she did. “Someone who saw it was astounded that Johanna should have sent it through the mail, but I guess that she did not care whether they killed her or not; a quick death would be preferable to the slow one.”²²⁷ And Rohrheimer recognized it for what it was: a frank account of a desperate situation.

The landscape in Europe was changing rapidly. No longer could one get a signed affidavit and wait safely in Germany for entry to the United States.²²⁸ Rohrheimer heard the drumbeats of war, fearing even by the time the letter reached its destination that they “may be in the midst of a world war; so pessimistic are the people here. History is moving so quickly.”²²⁹ Rohrheimer was beginning to see the limits of her advocacy. She was resigned to the fact that “Working individually is almost a hopeless task. Better and quicker work can be done through organizations, as in that way, people can be taken out en masse.”²³⁰ She was also reaching the ends of her means. “While I am willing to do anything in my power to help, I have no funds from which to work. That must come from other sources; either from individuals or organizations.”²³¹

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Miss Jones, 29 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²²⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 1 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²²⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Amelia Koch and Gusta Schultz, 24 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

She pledged to go visit Zurich for the Falkenbergs again, something she still could do. But Rohrheimer was still sick and it was to be an ordeal, the crowds of people there, hovering “at the door whenever it is opened and the clerk peeps out. 200 people want to be taken care of at the same time. It is a tragic sight.”²³²

Rohrheimer went to London to see about getting employment for Falkenberg. She visited the Domestic Bureau, Bloomsbury House, in London.²³³ Bloomsbury House, which had been established in 1860 in order to help the “less degraded class of penitent fallen women,” evolved into a benevolent institution.²³⁴ Joyously, Rohrheimer reported to Goldsmith in June of 1939 that Johanna had gotten her permit for England.²³⁵ Johanna wanted Rohrheimer to come to meet her and help her find work. These “glad tidings”²³⁶ came the same day as news that Ruth Oppenheimer would be safely on a transport June 6, 1939.²³⁷

Magdalena Starkenstein

While she helped the Oppenheimers because they were family, other people Rohrheimer helped came to her in different ways. Rohrheimer studied for a while at Cambridge. While studying there, Rohrheimer met a young woman named Magdalena Starkenstein and pledged to help her escape.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, July 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²³⁴ UCL Bloomsbury Project, http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/institutions/home_hope.htm (accessed 4 April 2018).

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.



Magdalena Starkenstein was the daughter of Professor Emil Starkenstein²³⁸ and Maria Starkenstein-Weil.²³⁹ Rohrheimer's first attempt to meet with Magda in Prague, a planned meeting in 1938, was unsuccessful.²⁴⁰ Starkenstein would not be in Prague when Rohrheimer was interested in visiting. But she managed to communicate both her sadness at missing her and the enormity of the crisis, "the situation is worse every day."²⁴¹

Rohrheimer called her "my Czecho girl."²⁴²

Despite the name, Rohrheimer had great respect for her. She was someone "whom I more than admire because while everyone was rushing away from Prague because of the war scare, she was rushing back from England to Prague to help with the work of the refugees and each day, met them at the railroad station and helped them."²⁴³ Starkenstein was concerned with her own life but actively helped others and tried to do whatever she could for them.²⁴⁴ She described to Rohrheimer some of the social work she was doing, in addition to coming home from a full day at the train station, helping refugees.²⁴⁵ Having

²³⁸ Emil Starkenstein (1884-1942), was a Czech-Jewish pharmacologist and one of the founders of clinical pharmacology. He was killed in the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp November 6, 1942. Jezdinský J., US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, "Emil Starkenstein--one of the most important personalities of European continental pharmacology in the period between the two world wars" <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16892006> (accessed 27 March 2018).

²³⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Lee Goldsmith, Undated, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²⁴⁰ Magda Starkenstein to Rena Rohrheimer, 16 September 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 6.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 18 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²⁴³ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 1 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²⁴⁴ Magda Starkenstein to Rena Rohrheimer, 19 October 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 6.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

returned to Prague to help others, Starkenstein now recognized it was she who needed help. Once she could no longer continue her studies, she needed to escape.

As both one in need and as one giving care, Starkenstein appreciated what Rohrheimer was doing even more. Starkenstein found comfort in Rohrheimer's letter. She wrote back, "you probably cant [*sic*] imagine, what in this time and trouble means such a letter to us. I thank you very very much for it, it did help me a great deal."²⁴⁶ Starkenstein placed a great deal of trust in her, especially as she began to understand the gravity of the situation and realized that "there wont [*sic*] be long the possibility of building a future for me here."²⁴⁷ Thus, she placed her life in Rohrheimer's hands. She wrote to her, "You have been so awfully kind, to ask me, if you can anything do for me. I hope you don't mind my taking that so literally, but there is nobody beside you, whom I could call upon."²⁴⁸

Starkenstein had an idea of what she needed and was direct with Rohrheimer about it. She also knew she was asking for a lot. "I know there is needed an affidavit, and I have not got one."²⁴⁹ So she asked for one. "Dear Miss Rohrheimer, would it be possible for you to help me in this?"²⁵⁰ She also made sure to demonstrate how serious she was and that she understood how the process worked. She reassured Rohrheimer, "it would be naturally a pure formality, because I would never go to America befor [*sic*] beeing [*sic*] sure that I could earn my living there."²⁵¹ So she asked for another favor,

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

“perhaps do you know any antiquariats for books or pictures for which I could find some work?”²⁵² She explained also that she spoke a variety of languages.²⁵³ Also, she had experience as a librarian. She closed her appeal with pragmatism and realism, apologizing, “I am sure, there are many people longing for an affidavit to America now, and perhaps you have got all this trouble with other friends already, but if it would be possible to send me one, I would be ever so thankful to you.”²⁵⁴

Rohrheimer did more than just provide an affidavit. She began looking to place Magda, who had two years of college, in an academic setting.²⁵⁵ Rohrheimer enlisted the help of Dr. David Rennie Hardman from Cambridge,²⁵⁶ who wrote her two letters, giving Starkenstein a great recommendation.²⁵⁷ He also communicated with Starkenstein directly but admitted that his ability to help was limited. He wrote Rohrheimer that “It is a damnable business and makes my blood boil when I think of it. I am very anxious to help all of them and only wish I had enough money to start a fine hotel or holiday camp they could all run. But I haven’t, so there it is.”²⁵⁸ He indicated that he had a list of nine people who were looking for his help. He then added that “quite a number are seeping through to Cambridge, but they have all got very high qualifications academically, which makes it easier.”²⁵⁹

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Note, MS 161/box 1/folder 6.

²⁵⁶ David Rennie Hardman (1901-1989) was a Cambridge University Professor and Member of Parliament. He became the first Socialist President of the Cambridge Union (a debating and free speech society in Cambridge, England) in 1924. In 1945, he was elected as Member of Parliament (MP) for Darlington, a seat he held until 1951. “English Lecturer Analyzes Nations’ Views on War Peril,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (20 April 1939): 14.

²⁵⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Unknown, Undated, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²⁵⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to David Hardman, 29 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

Rohrheimer wrote to Starkenstein from Switzerland.²⁶⁰ On the advice of the British Consul, she intended to go to Prague to help Starkenstein. Before she could get to Prague, Rohrheimer went to Zurich in late 1938, to collect information for Starkenstein.²⁶¹ There, she was advised to make out the affidavit temporarily and indicate in a note at the bottom that she intended to adopt Starkenstein. She postponed her trip to Prague because her cousin and his son in Germany had been arrested and she remained in Switzerland to meet with people on their behalf.²⁶² She asked Starkenstein, however, whether she should move forward with the affidavit as described. She also relayed the Consul's prediction that it would be at least two years before anyone whose name was not already on the list could leave, "but that a close relationship might make some difference."²⁶³ In the meanwhile, Rohrheimer advised her to file her application with the American Consul and add her name to a list that was "probably quite long."²⁶⁴ On her end, Rohrheimer wrote to America for information regarding what forms and documents were necessary. Past experience with the Oppenheims gave her "some experience in making out affidavits."²⁶⁵ She did know that she needed Starkenstein's family information.²⁶⁶

Starkenstein remained uncomfortable asking for so much. She reported "getting a bad conscience already now, for bothering you so much, especially now, when you have got all this trouble with your relatives."²⁶⁷ She even downplayed her own situation,

²⁶⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Magda Starkenstein, 28 October 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 6.

²⁶¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Magda Starkenstein, 16 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 6.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Magda Starkenstein to Rena Rohrheimer, 21 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 6.

remarking that is was “marvellous, [*sic*] compared with our fellows behind the frontiers.”²⁶⁸ And she told Rohrheimer “please dont [*sic*] worry about me.”²⁶⁹

At this time, the long hours and vigorous activism took their toll on Rohrheimer. When the Starkenstein matter was done, she would try to avoid having her name given to people in need of such assistance. “Don’t give my name to people” she wrote, “I’m a widow and ill, and am warned by my physician to assume no responsibilities.”²⁷⁰ Having to limit her travel and direct contact with Starkenstein, she called for help. She reached out to Miss Beatrice Wellington, a Canadian high school teacher who came to Prague in 1938 as a representative from a Quaker group based in Switzerland. The two had met through their mutual acquaintances and similar work. Wellington was helping to evacuate Czechs to England.²⁷¹ Miss Wellington also served as liaison for Rohrheimer and explained a great deal of the politics and bureaucracy of rescue to her.²⁷² Rohrheimer used that information to move forward with the case. She also had Wellington call on Starkenstein when she visited Prague.²⁷³

The case, though, was not moving forward. Unable to secure a position or the necessary paperwork for Starkenstein, Rohrheimer reached out for more help. This time she approached the scholar, Dr. Cyrus Adler, by way of a mutual acquaintance – Henriette “Nettie” Pollock, Adler’s cousin.²⁷⁴ Rohrheimer asked Adler if he could place

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Lee Goldsmith, Undated, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²⁷¹ Milena Roth, *Lifesaving Letters: A Child’s Flight from the Holocaust* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 165-66.

²⁷² Magda Starkenstein to Rena Rohrheimer, 21 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 6.

²⁷³ Rena Rohrheimer to Magda Starkenstein, 7 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁷⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 15 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

Starkenstein in the Dropsie College library. If not, she at least sought some advice.²⁷⁵ The elderly Adler had no position to offer but did have some words that he believed to be helpful, including an assurance that “the young woman is fairly safe in Geneva.”²⁷⁶

When his reply reached Rohrheimer, she was quite unhappy. Rohrheimer vented to Adler’s cousin, Pollock. Rohrheimer pointed out that Adler misread the letter, mistaking where Starkenstein was, and showed a complete lack of understanding about the working situation in Switzerland, where he erroneously thought her to be.²⁷⁷ Not only was she in Prague, but would not be able to work if she were in Switzerland; she would have no way to live. Rohrheimer was exhausted at having to teach this same lesson about the Jews now stuck in Switzerland, and England and France as well. She wished for the newspapers to report this correctly and insisted that “it is very, very, very important for people to know and understand this. Yes, Very, Very, Very IMPORTANT.”²⁷⁸ (Emphasis in original)

Rohrheimer wrote a similar letter to Bert Rosenberg, who agreed the case had merit, but “did nothing about it.”²⁷⁹ She did get a favorable response from from Wellington, who, along with two others (Alice Cheyney²⁸⁰ and Clara Roe) drove out to see Rohrheimer. Rohrheimer came to Wellington when she was at her wit’s end. She showed Wellington her obvious frustration, relating her low expectations about a recent request she sent. “Whether I will get any valuable suggestion, it is hard to say, for after

²⁷⁵ Ibid.; Henriette Pollock to Rena Rohrheimer, 27 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁷⁶ Henriette Pollock to Rena Rohrheimer, 27 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁷⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 15 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Cheyney, daughter of Dr. Cheyney of the University of Pennsylvania and worked in Prague at the International Labor Bureau. Rena Rohrheimer to Bertha Solis-Cohen, Undated, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

waiting for 6 weeks for a reply from some one in whom I had placed some confidence, in fact much confidence, I received such a stupid reply, showing me that she could not even read a letter intelligently....I am too disgusted to even reply to her stupid answer.”²⁸¹ But she put great stock in Wellington as a solution to her trouble with relying on other people. In Rohrheimer’s estimation, this “new acquired Protestant friend” was “the person who is going to do something about it.”²⁸²

Wellington’s report was frank and bleak. She emphasized for Rohrheimer that Starkenstein “cannot have a future in Czechoslovakia. Laws against Jews are being drafted here now.”²⁸³ (Emphasis in original) Wellington told Starkenstein and reiterated to Rohrheimer that it was only going to get harder for her if she stayed. So Wellington offered some advice: get transcripts and evidence of your education together and get out, even if it means poverty and hardship.²⁸⁴ She continued to press Rohrheimer on the necessity of getting Starkenstein out of Prague. In her opinion, it was so dire that she was willing to contribute herself to help. “So urgent do I feel the necessity of getting this girl out of this mess, that if she can leave and get into the United States, even without money, I should be glad to get her a guarantee of some of my salary over there (which is American), if this is possible.”²⁸⁵ She saw this as a last resort and would do it, but asked Rohrheimer to consider other solutions as well.

Rohrheimer began to look for any help she could get, including asking her private physician to swear an affidavit.²⁸⁶ The reply from Dr. Lowenberg was in line with that of

²⁸¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Beatrice Wellington, 14 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁸² Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 15 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

²⁸³ Beatrice Wellington to Rena Rohrheimer, 16 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Dr. Lowenberg, 30 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

the Jewish institutions. He had already committed to giving affidavits for a number of people but was not enthusiastic about that process. His understanding was that by signing an affidavit, he would become the guarantor for the refugee, promising not to let that person become a public charge. He was concerned for the status of Jews in America and abroad, worried that “if such a person should become a public charge and one is unable to make good on his promise it not only would be to the refugee’s great disadvantage but would also put individual Jews who sign such affidavits in a very bad light, if too many Jews follow this practice and do not make good it will do the Jew in this country no good. In other words, I feel that if the practice is abused both the Jews here and the refugees will suffer.”²⁸⁷

Starkenstein began to worry. In a panicked letter to Rohrheimer, she stressed her need for an affidavit. She was aware of the time constraints and how long it would take to get an American visa. The affidavit would allow her to get a British visa and with that, enter Holland. To do this, she wrote to a Mr. Potter but wondered whether she would even hear back. She was similarly doubtful that Rohrheimer would be able to help her.²⁸⁸

Her doubt turned out to be misplaced as Starkenstein managed to make it out of Prague.²⁸⁹ Rohrheimer was able to provide an affidavit to get her to Holland.²⁹⁰ Holland was good to Starkenstein. There, she was able to continue her studies thanks to Dr. Ernst

²⁸⁷ Dr. Harry Lowenburg to Rena Rohrheimer, 13 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁸⁸ Magdalena Starkenstein to Rena Rohrheimer, 21 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

²⁸⁹ Wiener Kunst Geschichte Gesichtet, “Magdalene Starkenstein ver. Van Emde Boas,” http://www.univie.ac.at/geschichtegesichtet/2010/m_starkenstein.html (accessed 8/25/2017).

²⁹⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Lee Goldsmith, Undated, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

Laqueur.²⁹¹ She married neuropsychiatrist Coenraad van Emde Boas.²⁹² But Rohrheimer knew that Holland was not safe. Her “Holland kin-folk” expected that war was imminent and “Dutch Jews, always so safe, are trembling in their boots.”²⁹³ Rohrheimer’s concerns were well-founded and Starkenstein and her husband were forced into hiding. Fortunately, Gre and Frits Ruiter, committed socialists and members of the organization, where van Emde Boas had lectured, helped hide Starkenstein and her husband.²⁹⁴ Unfortunately, the Ruiters could not take in the Starkenstein’s son Walter. But Pieter (Piet) and Arentje (Annie) de Vries in Andijk, North Holland, who lived nearby, were able to take Walter in.²⁹⁵ All were reunited after the war.²⁹⁶

Otto Rosenthal

While Rohrheimer worked to save Starkenstein, she was also trying to help Dr. Otto Rosenthal. Rosenthal came to her through a non-Jewish friend of hers.²⁹⁷ The friend

²⁹¹ Laqueur (1880-1947), was a pioneer in endocrinology and one of the first to isolate estrogen and testosterone as well as one of the first to develop medically useful insulin. He insisted that 10% of the profits the company made go to research. From this, he was able to conduct his research. Jewish Currents, “August 7: Testosterone and Estrogen,” <http://jewishcurrents.org/tag/ernst-laqueur/> (accessed 3 September 2017). His daughter Renata was an associate of Etty Hillesum. Wiener Kunst Geschichte Gesichtet, “Magdalene Starkenstein ver. Van Emde Boas,”

http://www.univie.ac.at/geschichtegesichtet/2010/m_starkensteen.html (accessed 8/25/2017); Etty Hillesum, *Etty: The Letters and Diary of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 608.

²⁹² Coen van Emde Boas (1904-1981) was a famous Dutch psychiatrist who specialized in sexology. Coenraad Van Emde Boas, “Joodserfgoedrotterdam,” <http://www.joodserfgoedrotterdam.nl/coenraad-van-emde-boas/> (accessed 27 March 2018).

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, “The Righteous Among the Nations: Vries de Family,” <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4039519> (accessed 8 August 2017).

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. For their efforts despite the risk to their own lives, Pieter de Vries and his wife, Arentje Alberdina de Vries-Broeyer, were honored by Yad Vashem in 1989 as Righteous Among the Nations.

²⁹⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Emily, 24 October 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

put him in touch with Rohrheimer and praised his “brilliant mind.”²⁹⁸ Rosenthal, born in Germany, was a professor who had lived and taught in Rome and had become an Italian citizen in 1925.²⁹⁹ Sensing the danger to Jews, even in Italy, he wanted to emigrate to get to America, where he could teach. If he could do so with a contract, he would be outside of the quota system.

Rohrheimer took the case and as was typical, she started by asking him to provide her with information she could use to fill out the paperwork for him.³⁰⁰ The need for accurate information would be a hallmark of the case. She went to the American Consul in Geneva and inquired as to the procedure for the American Consul in Rome, where Rosenthal was living.³⁰¹ They told her that he should put his “name on the waiting list at once so that you would not be too far down the list when or if it will be possible to have an affidavit arranged.”³⁰²

Rosenthal sent her his curriculum vitae, attesting to his impeccable credentials.³⁰³ He was also certain to point out that having taught in Italy for five years, he more than met the two years required for entry into the United States in the “immigrant status.”³⁰⁴ Yet he still needed an affidavit.³⁰⁵

When Rohrheimer planned her trip to Prague, she also intended to stop in Italy. Because she postponed the trip due to her health, the visit to Italy was also put on hold.³⁰⁶

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 23 October 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Otto Rosenthal to Rena Rohrheimer, 4 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 16 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

Still, she managed to keep in touch with Rosenthal and followed up on the paperwork she was waiting for him to return to her.³⁰⁷ The reason he waited was significant and he sent a letter the same day, offering her an explanation.³⁰⁸ Despite having acquired citizenship 12 years prior, he did not have valid documentation for this purpose.³⁰⁹ Having requested the papers from the local authorities, he took stock of his situation and decided, “I think it may be advisable to stay here a bit longer.”³¹⁰

Despite Rosenthal’s pessimism, Rohrheimer moved forward. While in Geneva, she continued investigating for him. What she discovered was the possibility of finding him an appointment or a contract.³¹¹ Yet again, there were complications. This time, it was Rosenthal’s silence. She had not heard from him in several weeks, leading her to wonder if he had received her letters or left the country.³¹² So she wrote to Rosenthal’s brother, Rudolf Rosenthal. She left him an address and as a demonstration of her commitment, offered to come to Rome if he was there.³¹³

Eventually, Rosenthal managed to get an affidavit. He had travelled the previous summer with a professor from New York who was willing to sign for him. A friend of Rosenthal’s mother was also going to provide him with an affidavit. Despite these advances, he knew that without a contract to work in the United States, he would have to wait his turn under the German quotas, which limited the number of people who could emigrate from each country.³¹⁴ For the foreseeable future, he was stuck.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 29 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Otto Rosenthal to Rena Rohrheimer, 16 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

Rohrheimer though, was not willing to give up. With his situation mired in bureaucracy and Rohrheimer's travels making communication between the two of them difficult, she offered other solutions. The first idea she had was the "Friends of Refugee Teachers," a Cambridge, Massachusetts based organization that worked to, "find teaching positions and accommodations for German and Austrian teachers who had fled Hitler."³¹⁵ Knowing one of the "members of the Advisory Council from the Middle Atlantic States," Rohrheimer was willing to introduce them, but not if Rosenthal had already reached out to the Committee.³¹⁶ In the event that he had not, she went ahead and filled out the form and sent it to him to complete.³¹⁷ Rosenthal did apply for relief from the Julius Rosenwald backed Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars yet he was denied a grant. (As was Emil Starkenstein.)³¹⁸ Rohrheimer also knew someone who was set to return to the United States a few days later. She had not heard from Rosenthal at the time she met with this unnamed person, but pledged to secure a contract from her once she arrived in the United States.³¹⁹ Again, the miscommunications between the two cost them time.

Having not heard previously of the "Friends of Refugee Teachers," Rosenthal filled out some of the paperwork and returned it to Rohrheimer. Further, he asked her to contact some of its members and pass along his C.V.³²⁰ He stressed "that the thing which I am in most need of is to get the contract here in Europe before sailing since I have no

³¹⁵ Kenan Heise, "Obituary: Nursing Care Activist Dorothy Holabird," *Chicago Tribune* (6 April 1988): 2.

³¹⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 2 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Grant file, 1938-1939, Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars Records, MS 922/Box 108/folder 38, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

³¹⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 2 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

³²⁰ Otto Rosenthal to Rena Rohrheimer, 6 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

chance of getting a visa without a contract.”³²¹ He explained that not any contract would suffice, but one with a set duration and terms. He also acknowledged that it was “a big difficulty to overcome.”³²² (All emphasis in original)

Apprehending how complicated the matter was becoming, Rohrheimer asked Rosenthal some “pointed questions,”³²³ including details of his teaching, books he authored (and the languages those books were written in), the nature of the contract he sought (whether it must be a college or university, or whether a Sunday or Jewish Religious School would suffice), and what duration the contract must be.³²⁴ She stressed to him that it was “really quite necessary to know these facts” that were quite well-known to him but vague to her.³²⁵ In complex immigration situations such as this, accuracy mattered.³²⁶

Rohrheimer continued exploring her options, sending his information to every possible location. Among the places she sent his credentials was one place close to her home: Philadelphia. She contacted the Board of Education there about him. She passed along his accomplishments and was sure to note that he had been an English schoolmaster before his retirement.³²⁷ She also referred to a meeting she had planned with Professor David Rennie Hardman of Cambridge. Rohrheimer had mentioned Rosenthal to Hardman, but she was more involved in finding “engagements” for Professor Hardman than she was with pressing Hardman to help Rosenthal.³²⁸ Rosenthal

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 8 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Dr. Louis Nusbaum, 23 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³²⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 19 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

also sent Rohrheimer a letter from a retired teacher friend of his. Rohrheimer made a copy and planned to distribute it in hopes of finding Rosenthal a position.³²⁹

Rohrheimer sought still more information from Rosenthal. She asked him whether he actually had obtained a visa or the promise of a visa and on what date he might go to the United States.³³⁰ She offered him a few options. If he did have a visa, she assured him that he could go to England while awaiting entry into the United States. Rohrheimer also offered to consult with Professor Hardman. She promised to make inquiries on Rosenthal's behalf, if she made it to London. She also suggested that Rosenthal write to Felix Frankfurter, who had recently been nominated to the Supreme Court. She added, "If I had your C.V. I'd mail it to him."³³¹

As willing as Rohrheimer was to help, she failed to enlist the help of one of her closest and best-suited allies. Rohrheimer pursued a number of options for Jewish scholars, but made no mention of Rosenthal to her friend Cecelia Razovsky. Among her positions, Razovsky was Executive Director of National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees and Emigrants Coming from Germany (NCC) and Head of the Migration Department of the National Refugee Service (NRS). The NCC in particular was adept at bringing scholars to the United States, in many instances Jewish ones who were not eligible under other organizations. There was no shortage of academics, but positions were in short supply.³³² Given her knowledge of academic and scientific institutions, Razovsky began to search for placements for Jewish scientists and scholars. One of the

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 29 January 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Bat-Ami Zucker, *Cecilia Razovsky and the American-Jewish Women's Rescue Operations in the Second World War* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), 96.

most successful of the many projects in which Razovsky participated was the ‘University of Exile’ initiative. This program was established at The New School for Social Research in order to benefit German professors.³³³ Rohrheimer asked Rosenthal if he was familiar with the “University [in] Exile.”³³⁴ Again taking it upon herself to pursue this option, she reached out to one of her relatives who was “well acquainted with one of the organizers.”³³⁵ Another such initiative Razovsky could have helped with was the establishment by the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati of a scientific foundation for European Jewish scholars, which ultimately succeeded in bringing eleven scholars to the United States.³³⁶ Of all the people Rohrheimer contacted on Rosenthal’s behalf, Cecelia Razovsky may have been the best informed and best equipped to help him. But for reasons difficult to discern Rohrheimer did not consult with her on the Rosenthal case.

Amidst the recounting of progress on the Oppenheimer cases in her next letter, she updated him on his own case. She related to him that the American Consul planned to have a new system in place by July of that year. She explained that there would be 2,700 visas issued each month, except for May and June, when apparently, the Consul would be away. Each new year for issuing visas started in July. She offered to take up his case with the Consul in Naples, although she did not think he would “be able to get something definite.”³³⁷

³³³ Claus-Dieter Krohn, *Intellectuals in Exile* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

³³⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 29 January 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

³³⁵ Had Rosenthal contacted Frankfurter, he would not have found much relief. Frankfurter, upon meeting with Jan Karski, told the Polish activist that he did not believe him. Not that he was lying to the Justice, but Frankfurter simply could not believe what he was hearing. Richard Brody, “The Unicorn and ‘The Karski Report,’” *The New Yorker*, 15 December 2010, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-unicorn-and-the-karski-report/amp?amp_gsa=1#amp_tf=From%20%251%24s (accessed 6 May 2018).

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

³³⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 26 February 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

Rohrheimer apologized for not being able to do more, “I do regret so much that I have not accomplished anything for you yet in re a job at an American University, Seminary or College. My friend is still working on this, but as you suggested, these things at such a long range are difficult.”³³⁸ She then reminded him of someone who had escaped, albeit temporarily: a Professor she knew in the United States who was asked to come and lecture there on a visitor’s visa. But she suggested that a permanent visa was preferable, and wished for Rosenthal to have one soon in hand.³³⁹

While she was in Palestine, Rohrheimer met with Otto Rosenthal’s brother, Uri Nadav (formerly Willy Rosenthal) about Rosenthal and his other brother, Rudolph.³⁴⁰ All three of them were interested in getting Otto to safety. He had three doctorate degrees, but was ill and unlikely to find work. Nor was he willing or able to make the trip, illegally, to Palestine. Nadav detailed the perils of such a journey, “months of hardship being battered about on the high seas and subject to all kinds of inconveniences, brutality from the officers and sailors on board from the Captain down to the meanest sweeper boy of the deck.”³⁴¹ Rosenthal doubted their ailing brother was up to the task, physically, and that a search for a solution in Europe was best. Nadav felt differently. “Both of my brothers are impractical. They are soft and you might write and say, I will do what I can to help Rudolph but he must make up his mind that he will have to endure hardships; if he wants to come here illegally there will be all kinds of deprivations to overcome; when

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

³⁴¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 7 July 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

he decides that he can and wants to endure these difficulties, then I will be able to help him.”³⁴² Rudolph perished in the Holocaust.

While Rohrheimer succeeded in saving at least eight lives, Rosenthal’s was not one of them. All of the plans and possibilities that they discussed and worked on, failed to result in a successful escape. Rosenthal was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944. With little or no opposition from the Italian government, the police carried out the German deportation order. Rosenthal was one of over 700 people set out on the fifth train from Milan during the period of deportation.³⁴³ His convoy left Milan on the 30th of January 1944 and arrived seven days later.³⁴⁴

Reflections for Rohrheimer

For Rohrheimer, family meant a great deal. Her top concern was her family and she would focus on their safety before anyone else. She was forced to delay working on cases like Rosenthal’s, when emergencies arose in her own family. When Ernst and Moritz were in the concentration camp, Rohrheimer turned her attention and much of her energies towards them. At the same time, she recognized that family is not always as welcoming as one would like. When she prepared for Ernst’s arrival in the United States, she made sure that there would be a large contingent to welcome him. That she was all

³⁴² Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 15 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

³⁴³ Susan Zuccotti, *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, Survival* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), 168.

³⁴⁴ Centro di Documentazione Ebraica, “Otto Rosenthal,” <http://digital-library.cdec.it/cdec-web/persona/detail/person-6569/rosenthal-otto.html> (accessed 25 August 2017); Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, “The Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names: Otto Rosenthal,” <http://yvng.yadvashem.org/nameDetails.html?language=en&itemId=11201999&ind=2> (accessed 25 August 2017); Database of Austrian victims of the Holocaust, Documentation Centre for Austrian Resistance, Vienna.

but ignored when she came to see them must not have been lost on her when she planned Ernst's reception.³⁴⁵

Most often, the appeal of helping was not out of humanitarian concern, altruism, or even economic gain – it was in some way, personal. In looking to secure her friend Cecelia Razovsky's assistance and guarantee, Rohrheimer did not recount Hannah Oppenheimer's plight. In fact, she mentioned that Hannah's father and brother had been interned in Concentration Camps, but made no attempt to describe Hannah's current situation. She told Razovsky how much she, personally, would value her help. "Whatever you can do for us that will help to get this child out of Germany and into England while she is waiting to get into the U.S. will be appreciated by me."³⁴⁶ It may have gone without saying that the Oppenheimers, Hannah in particular, would appreciate it, but Rohrheimer could not go without saying how much she would.

Despite being related to the Oppenheimers and feeling a responsibility to them, Rohrheimer was not particularly close with the family. She actually felt estranged from most of them, even when visiting. She recalled, whenever she came Germany, "the folks would phone...but never made any attempt to see me."³⁴⁷ Grete and Moritz were the exception. Rohrheimer recalled one visit, "good enuf, as I now quite remember, I recall meeting you and being hospitably received in your home."³⁴⁸

Rohrheimer helped the Oppenheimers because she had a specific and compelling personal connection. "The real reason that I was willing to help him with the affidavit is

³⁴⁵ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 6 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

³⁴⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Cecelia Razovsky, 14 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

³⁴⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 6 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

because as a child I can still recall my father telling me how his sister, the grandmother of Ernst, had taken care of him, and it was because of those words which have never left me that I was willing to help Ernst, for of course, I do not know Ernst.”³⁴⁹

With Silkin, she also appealed not solely to his humanity, but to other values. She urged his participation by reminding him that Hannah Oppenheimer was going without an education at the time.³⁵⁰ As a teacher, she appreciated the value of an education and hoped others would feel the same way. Whether it was because he ran a school or not, Silkin did too.

To persuade people to help, Rohrheimer often included photographs, particularly of the Oppenheimer children, with her letters.³⁵¹ Rohrheimer knew what an impact they would have, “It just this minute occurred to me that Frank Binswanger³⁵² is on the Board. Perhaps Frank, when he sees these sweet children will melt and help us. That little boy 8 is certainly adorable, isn’t he? Be sure and let Frank see it.”³⁵³

She was not able to save everyone. Rosenthal was one such person who did not benefit from her labors. She did spend time working on his case, corresponding, and trying to make connections. But in with her letters, even when reporting bad news, were accounts of her travels and her requests of him, for travel advice, lodging information, or idle chatter.³⁵⁴ In her letters, she also included accounts of successfully bringing her cousins out of Europe. She even bragged about personally signing an affidavit for one

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Joseph Silkin, 14 April 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 5.

³⁵¹ Rena Rohrheimer to David Hardman, 18 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio; Rena Rohrheimer to Alice Goldsmith, 18 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³⁵² Frank G. Binswanger, Sr. is the founder of the real estate organization, Binswanger Management Corporation.

³⁵³ Rena Rohrheimer to Bertha Solis-Cohen, 21 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³⁵⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 19 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

cousin who had just been released from a concentration camp along with his father.³⁵⁵ At times she appeared to be utterly tone-deaf, lamenting her own troubles to the very people she was trying to help. In a letter to Rosenthal, she related her hopes for the Oppenheimer case and that she was awaiting news there but “in the meantime I have decided to get some sun, as my friends have been writing to me, ‘You know you a hard year ahead of you when you return to America so try and come back well.’”³⁵⁶ She also sought advice and travel tips from people in the middle of their ordeals. She did the same with Starkenstein as well.³⁵⁷ Starkenstein did survive, but while she was desperately trying to escape, as was Rosenthal, the frivolity in Rohrheimer’s letters strike one who reads them in retrospect as being oddly ironic. If Rosenthal or Starkenstein were bothered or annoyed when they read of Rohrheimer’s diversions, neither one ever indicated.

Whether the time she spent socializing and travelling took away from the progress she could have made on other cases is unclear. It is more apparent that she did not fully utilize her tools. Without any prior experience in the areas of law, immigration, or foreign policy, what she was able to accomplish is remarkable. But evidently there were times when Rohrheimer inexplicably failed to make use of some of her best assets. Given the work that Cecilia Razovsky did for Jewish scholars in Europe, she would have been a valuable resource for Rosenthal. But for unknown reasons Rohrheimer did not seek Razovsky’s help in that particular case.

To be certain, her socializing was not mere frivolity. While the letters did reflect Rohrheimer continued with her social life, not all of it was for her own entertainment.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 26 February 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

³⁵⁷ Otto Rosenthal to Rena Rohrheimer, 4 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

During many of her social calls, she met people who would help her make connections and exert influence. These included Marie Ginsberg, “a more dynamic person,”³⁵⁸ Rohrheimer had never met. Ginsberg, “a woman of inexhaustible energy and resolution”³⁵⁹ was a librarian for the League of Nations but in Rohrheimer’s estimation, “the work she does for the Jewish people before, during and after her working hours makes the real job sink into pale white, if there be such a color.”³⁶⁰ The two would come to work together on to rescue Jews.³⁶¹ On another occasion, she attended a banquet for Princess Catherine Radziwill (1858-1941), the famous Polish-Russian writer who authored numerous books including *Behind the Veil at the Russian Court* (1914) and *It Really Happened* (1932). Radziwill also helped to prove that *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was a canard.³⁶² There at the party along, Rohrheimer met the representative from the American Consul’s Office in Zurich. Rohrheimer had been planning to make an appointment during the week, but made one that evening, instead.³⁶³ It was then through this same woman that she met Beatrice Wellington, who would come to help with the Starkenstein case, particularly by visiting with a despondent Starkenstein while Rohrheimer was too ill to travel.³⁶⁴ Rohrheimer’s relationship with Lord Harry Snell, whom she called on for help, also came about from meeting him at a dinner party.³⁶⁵

³⁵⁸ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 30 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³⁵⁹ Norman Bentwich, *The Rescue and Achievement of Refugee Scholars: The Story of Displaced Scholars and Scientists 1933-1952*, (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953), 17.

³⁶⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 30 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³⁶¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Dr. Lowenberg, 30 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³⁶² Princess Catharine Isaac Landman, “‘Protocols Forged in Paris’ Says Princess Radziwill,” *American Hebrew* (25 November 1921).

³⁶³ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 30 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³⁶⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Magda Starkenstein, 7 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³⁶⁵ Rena Rohrheimer to Lord Snell, 14 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

What was supposed to be a year of relaxation and travel, turned into a taxing, stressful mission to fight bureaucracies, governments, and politicians, in order to save a handful of people, some of whom she barely knew. She wrote of this to Rosenthal. She told him, "When I came here 10 weeks ago I did not know one person in this town- not one, but now between the requests to help the refugees here, and the mail that is coming in, I am simply rushed to death."³⁶⁶ Despite the unfortunate choice of words, she did what she could, admitting "I have tried in a modest way to help the refugees whom I meet daily- my work has become so involved that yesterday it was necessary for me to employ an interpreter and typist to help me accomplish what little I am doing to aid in the encouragement of the spirit and morale of those who seek daily aid from me."³⁶⁷ Even with this help, the time Rohrheimer spent working on various cases was significant. "My room has become a meeting place for refugees who ask for help- affidavits, lessons in English, money for food, etc."³⁶⁸ Rohrheimer devoted the better part of her day to the various cases, visiting Consuls, meeting with refugees, and writing letters. In one of the letters she wrote to Clarence Goldsmith, she indicated that at 4 PM she had no choice but to take a break from writing letters because she had begun at 7AM.³⁶⁹

Rohrheimer was so overwhelmed with requests for help that she was not always willing or able to comply. While she went to great lengths for many people, others were

³⁶⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 14 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

³⁶⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Dr. Lowenberg, 30 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1; Founded in 1917, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action." For more information, see Gregory A. Barnes, *A Centennial History of the American Friends Service Committee* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 15 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

not as fortunate. One such person came from The Friends' Service Committee.³⁷⁰ She related that this group was persistent, "long pursuing me" and "'wished on me' a German Refugee, A Berlin physician a meek, mild, stooped little man of 47...studying higher mathematics in the hope, being a friend of the great Einstein, that he can somehow get a job as a math teacher in a year or two."³⁷¹ Her appraisal of his aspirations was blunt, "Vain hope! No personality, too mouse-like, too quiet, and stooped."³⁷² Despite her pessimism and disinterest, he did have friends looking for someone to sponsor his expenses.³⁷³ Reluctantly, she helped there as well. She detailed her belt-tightening and the frugality that allowed her to help pay his way. It was not all a complete sacrifice, despite her complaining and unflattering description of her new dinner companion. "I like the poor d[ear] but English-German 'made' conversation wears me down."³⁷⁴ Even some of those who she was more inclined to help, she could not. She had overextended herself in a number of ways, including the writing of affidavits. After reaching her limit, she could not write any more herself and the best she could do was try to find someone else to write one. Her appeal to her doctor back home was one such attempt.³⁷⁵

While she did have means and some money, she recognized that others did not. Still, she argued that "one can help in other ways besides helping with money."³⁷⁶ She hoped that Ernst Oppenheimer, and others she saved, would let her know how they were doing, and what they "will do for other people who will also be in distress, for as long as

³⁷⁰ Rena Rohrheimer to Lee Goldsmith, Undated, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Dr. Harry Lowenburg to Rena Rohrheimer, 13 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³⁷⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Grete Oppenheimer, 6 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 3.

the world exists there is always sadness and there are always people who require assistance.”³⁷⁷

The time and expense for Rohrheimer was great, not to mention the toll it took on her health. She took the setbacks so hard, it made her ill. “I was so upset over all the letters for help that I received that I became run down.”³⁷⁸ The needs of the community were just too much for her. “There are hundreds of people begging me for affidavits and I try to think of everyone, even people whom I have never heard of before are begging and imploring me to help them. That is what we must all do now; help others and forget about ourselves. I find that many people are only thinking of themselves and cannot get beyond themselves.”³⁷⁹

With the talk of selflessness and concern for others, Rohrheimer described a vision of altruism and sacrifice. But it is hard to determine what she really expected to get as a result of her efforts. At times, she indicated that she did not expect much, if anything in return. She did ask “that the people that I am fortunate enough to have been able to help can show me their appreciation by some day writing to me and telling me what they are doing to help others.”³⁸⁰

She did receive some recognition for her work. Aside from the many thanks that accompanied letters from the people she helped, her cousin Amelia also paid her a great compliment. Amelia mused, “I wonder if you realize what a very fine piece of work you have done in letting so many of our relatives come over, and I hope God will reward you

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

in happiness in a like measure as you have given this happiness.”³⁸¹ Whether Rohrheimer expected or welcomed the praise, even more importantly, Amelia gave more than praise, she offered to sign affidavits, if they would be accepted.³⁸² David J. Galter, editor of *The Jewish Exponent*, also recognized her accomplishments. He shared with her that “we read your letters and marveled at the spirit which is animating you. We can readily see what a source of comfort you must be to those rallying around you.”³⁸³

Galter’s assessment matched reality. Rohrheimer’s presence and efforts had great impact. Interestingly, Rohrheimer was often not even sure how some people made their way to her door. Seemingly, it was enough to know where she was and that she might help. While she did not show most of these people the sort of attention she gave to others, she did what she could. “Two people, a couple, who had not had food for four days rang my bell on the eve before Yom Kippur and I gave them food in fact had them sit down to my table where I had had a dinner prepared for two but there was plenty for the four of us- my maid, myself and this couple; they left and have wondered on but where I know not.”³⁸⁴

Given the enormity of the events, Rohrheimer suspected that there were larger implications to what she was doing. She sensed that she was doing work that would earn for her a sense of immortality. In one letter she explained that if she was able to help people out of their tragic circumstances, “then I feel that perhaps I could accomplish something worthwhile-something that I might be remembered for.”³⁸⁵ At times, her

³⁸¹ Amelia Rosenbaum to Rena Rohrheimer, 25 November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ David J. Galter to Rena Rohrheimer, 5 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

³⁸⁴ Sayings, Undated, MS 161/box 1/folder 8.

³⁸⁵ Rena Rohrheimer to Abba Hillel Silver, 3 January 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

motivation appeared to be tied to this aspiration. Some of her actions stemmed from the calculated maintenance and cultivation of her reputation. She knew that her legacy was tied to what she was able to do for her relatives and others in Europe.³⁸⁶ Other actions came from an awareness of the consequences for not intervening. Whether she was interested in her own legacy or not, the personal connection and sense of duty was strong. She quoted to Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver a line of Talmud that had been sent to her and had affected her deeply: “There is no comparison between hearing and seeing.” She went on to tell him that “I hear every day of suicides; people tell me that they want to commit suicide; I have seen the faces looking into blank space at the American Consul’s office in Zurich and those expressions, I cannot forget. It is because of these things that I have remained here in Lausanne.”³⁸⁷

When she wrote to Silver, Rohrheimer was in despair. As driven as she was, she did not know what to do but put her frustrations in Silver’s hands. “As I am getting nowhere, I am appealing to you for advice. Can anything be done so that I can help our suffering people.”³⁸⁸ She wrote to a colleague, of going “from American Consul to American Consul around Switzerland, Geneva, Lausanne, Zurich, like a merry-go-round- without the ‘merry’ and after writing reams of - rather using up reams of paper.”³⁸⁹ The result of this, “I ask myself, what have I accomplished and the answer is Nothing. Not really nothing but the results are discouraging.”³⁹⁰

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Charlotte, 4 January 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

Rohrheimer unquestionably became frustrated and discouraged as the stakes grew higher and the challenges she faced were more daunting. Even when the people she thought she could count on let her down, she was utterly dejected. She wrote:

I am at a loss as to whom to ask about this. I would like to write to Louise Langsdorf or the Council of Jewish Women or both; but I am so disappointed with the replys [sic] and the lack of replies to my letter about these serious matters that I am quite dejected about it all. Either I am too near the scene and seeing the sufferers and hearing from them daily make me realize the seriousness of the situation- or the separation of U.S. and Europe by the ocean detracts from the imagination or the seriousness of the situation or the people are more indifferent to it- I do not know, but when I write lengthy letters to people like Dave Galter and Nettie Pollock, and Emily Solis-Cohen- people in whom one has every confidence- they not being the ordinary common fray, shallow, and the gay light hearted type- and either get no reply at all [sic] is the case with two of these three- or after waiting 7 weeks to get a reply indicating that the letter was not even read correctly, and part of the letter that was read incorrectly was answered by a man of the caliber of Dr. Cyrus Adler, which showed that he is not at all cognizant of what is happening over here, I think that I either should forget all about refugees and let those that might be saved through me, could I get the proper responses to my appeals, die by the wayside or- perhaps not give up the ship and write to such people as Dorothy Thompson, Henry Morgenthaw [sic], Stephen Wise, and people who really could do and are doing things.³⁹¹

Similarly, her plea to Rabbi Silver was about more than what to do with the Consuls.

Having detailed all of her efforts and responsibilities, she thought it would be obvious to him just how discouraged she was.³⁹² If she could not count on such luminaries, she could have little hope.

Also discouraging was the apathy and disinterest she saw in others, her upset exacerbated in the face of worsening conditions. Her sense of urgency was evident. She received many letters each week. One week, she received twenty. "From the contents however, one would not think that the Germans were having such a bad time of it. In fact,

³⁹¹ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 15 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

³⁹² Rena Rohrheimer to Abba Hillel Silver, 3 January 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

I do not believe that in the 20 letters any reference was made of the situation. Some day the people may wake up.”³⁹³

Rohrheimer’s displeasure with the lack of interest and commitment to the refugees was apparent. She became irate at a meeting of the American Interorganization Group. The subject for the night was “American Peace Movement” and the speaker was a “Mr. Wood” of Philadelphia, Assistant Director of World Economic Organization. There were so many different groups, she could not remember the exact name of the group. Despite the subject, Rohrheimer noted that “there was not one word mentioned about Germany or conditions there.”³⁹⁴ Not content to let this stand, she called on the Secretary of the International Organization of Women’s Clubs, Miss Saidie Orr Dunbar.³⁹⁵ She asked whether their organization “was doing any work at all in behalf of the German sufferers.”³⁹⁶ Miss D. responded that hers was “an organization for Peace and of course in working along those lines we naturally come across some cases worthy of our attention.”³⁹⁷ She even informed Rohrheimer that they were working on one at that time. To Rohrheimer, this was inadequate. “One such case at a time like this when, of course, I think that all other work might cease temporarily along her line and her well organized office might be utilized for these emergencies.”³⁹⁸ But it was not to be, as Miss D. would be leaving shortly for India, to attend to a meeting there.

³⁹³ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 21 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ General Federation of Women’s Clubs, “GFWC International Past Presidents,” <https://www.gfwc.org/who-we-are/history-and-mission/gfwc-international-past-presidents/> (accessed 4 April 2018).

³⁹⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 1 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

There was no respite for Rohrheimer. She noted that “My room at the hotel is a rendez-vous [sic] for refugees. I have them in my room daily, wanting to commit suicide and I hear nothing but of the horrible happenings; the people have left their homes; their furniture; their clothes and all their money.”³⁹⁹ People unburdened their souls as well, “and just now, a lady, a Sudeten German, told me that she wishes the end was here. So you can know how I feel, seeing this all the time, for Lausanne is full of refugees, staying here while waiting for visas to another country.”⁴⁰⁰ As overwhelming as that was, it did not stop her. She continued, “But I do not want to dwell on these things now; there is too much to be done right here; I give some English lessons every day to different refugees all hoping to get to England or to the U.S.”⁴⁰¹

Working every day to help others, Rohrheimer saw who was and who was *not* involved in the same work. It surprised her to see that “The Jewish people may be doing a great deal for our people but it has been my own personal experience that the Christians whom I have met are actually doing more for the refugees than the Jews. They are taking them in their homes, feeding them, not one meal, but by the year...and charging nothing for it.”⁴⁰² Still, it took many people, of all faiths and backgrounds, working together, to save lives. That collaboration gave her inspiration and hope. “To be in England and to see the cooperation of Catholics, Protestants and Jews is truly inspiring. It is giving me much satisfaction to be able to serve our people and I wish that I could have accomplished much more than I am able to do single handed.”⁴⁰³

³⁹⁹ Rena Rohrheimer to Gusta Schultz, November 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 1.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Rena Rohrheimer to Amelia, 16 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

⁴⁰³ Rena Rohrheimer to Louis Nusbaum, 17 February 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

Aside from her finite means and narrow influence, she knew her other limitations. As aware as she was of the powerful narratives that people had, she looked to others to share their stories. She used Falkenberg's powerful imagery on numerous occasions and offered it to others. She told Rosenthal: "If I had literary ability, I have much valuable information that I am gathering each day from some very unusual people whom I am meeting and I am wondering whether, you would not be able to write some stories from this information that I could send to some American magazines."⁴⁰⁴ She thought maybe he could help his own cause or others' through their narratives. She asked him, "Have you ever written [shorter] stories, or stories of fiction. I have been hearing stories of refugees who have walked across the border of France into Switzerland; some have waded across the border etc. etc. and think that a book might be written telling of these things. It is a pity to lose any of this information."⁴⁰⁵ Her realization that so much was in danger of being lost – people, places, events, histories – suggests what she finally came to understand about the impending Holocaust. She could not save everyone or everything.

By the end of her labors, Rohrheimer's measure of success changed. After having toiled for some time, she admitted, "If I succeed in getting three out of Germany, I suppose I should be pleased but there is a great responsibility to separate the children from their parents. Who knows whether they will be properly place[d] and if they will be happy or homesick and miserable."⁴⁰⁶ As she worked on the various cases, she came to view success differently. Eventually she realized that getting people to freedom was the

⁴⁰⁴ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 14 December 1938, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Rena Rohrheimer to Clarence Goldsmith, 2 June 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 2.

most important thing and their happiness in their adoptive lands was irrelevant in the face of growing danger.

She sensed these questions were part of a bigger picture. “I had made a resolution that I would never leave this part of the world until I had done everything in my power to help my relatives, and now I feel that at least this I have accomplished. How well, that remains to be seen.”⁴⁰⁷ As well as Rohrheimer seemed to grasp the enormity of the situation in Europe, she continually wished that she could have done far more. Ultimately, she took great pride in having rescued eight people, although it is unclear whether she was ever able to be satisfied with the limited results of her strenuous efforts.

⁴⁰⁷ Rena Rohrheimer to Otto Rosenthal, 26 February 1939, MS 161/box 1/folder 4.

Conclusion

All Efforts Fall Short

Despite months, even years of work, it is possible to conclude, in retrospect, that ultimately all of these efforts fell short. Corets fell short because the boycott did not stop Hitler. Yet, it is clear that the effort did have some level of impact. The *Journal of Commerce* announced, “RECORD DIP NOTED IN GERMAN TRADE.”¹ Also relying on statistics from the Department of Commerce, *The New York Times*, announced, “REICH EXPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CUT” “1938 TOTAL LIKELY TO BE LOWEST SINCE 1919 INSTEAD OF HIGH.”² Reporting of similar results also came from Germany, which was well-received by the participants in the boycott. Proud announcements were made to the chapters. “They admit losing 60% of their foreign trade, so we can readily see that we have not worked in vain.”³

Despite the economic losses, which had an incalculable effect on the German war-effort, it did not dissuade the Nazis from their policies. Hitler feared the economic power of the Jews and “that an air-tight boycott would cripple its economy.”⁴ But the threat or the early realizations of that threat were not enough to change his behavior. It is mere speculation to suggest that had the boycott been more effective, he might have altered course.

¹ Bertha Corets to B’nai B’rith, 2 December 1938, MS 307/box 1/folder 5.

² Ibid. On November 17, 1938, The New York Times declared, “GERMAN EXPORTS TO UNITED STATES INCREASING” “1938 LIKELY TO BE NEAR THE 1930 PEAK.”; The Holocaust Historiography Project, “William Lindsey collection — 1938 NYT headlines,” <https://www.historiography-project.com/lindsey/nyt/1938/11.php> (accessed 6/13/2017).

³ Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Minutes, 23 May 1934, MS 307/box 1/folder 12.

⁴ Moshe Gottlieb, “In the Shadow of War: The American Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in 1939-1941,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 2 No. 62, December 1972, 147.

Had there been more uniformity, cooperation, and support, the boycott could have had more of an impact, as it “was only a thorn, rather than a spear, in Hitler’s side.”⁵ It is impossible to tell how much impact it would have been. That some experts argue the boycott had no impact, makes it harder to claim a stronger boycott would have had much of an effect.

The seminary students believed that they failed because their efforts did not save a single person. Their efforts were far removed from actual life-saving. Had they been able to implement their plan to its fullest, and win the support of the American government and influence them and the United Nations, there might have been a different outcome. But their efforts fell short along with the ambitions of so many others. Even if they had been able to get enough support for their movement to petition the people in power, they would have still had to succeed where others failed, including the governments and armies at war with the Germans.

It is unclear whether had they managed to save even one person, if they would have considered their efforts a success. They also failed to amass a great groundswell of support. Where they were unable to convince Rabbi Wise, apogee of the Jewish community, to sign on, they did convince the SCA. Despite winning the participation of the SCA, little of their plan was ever implemented. While they might not have viewed empowering others as a goal, they did meet it. They did enjoy some success in creating a culture of advocacy outside the conventional powers of the community.

Yet if the seminary student initiative is examined through a different lens, it is possible to argue that they were much more successful than they themselves might have

⁵ Friedman, *Consumer Boycotts*, 138.

believed. They clearly raised awareness. As little as the Jewish community knew about what was happening to their own brothers and sisters abroad, the Gentile community was even less knowledgeable. Hosting hundreds of seminary students and educating them on the horrors of Jewish life in Europe was no small feat. They also managed to bring many Jewish and Christian religious leaders together. It is impossible to calculate how the effects of this collaboration reverberated through the careers of these young seminarians. As rare as it was in the 1930s, the program that the Jewish and Christian seminarians created was pioneering. These collaborations continue today, and interfaith work a key piece of modern religious relations.

They seminary students also managed to affect a change in the attitudes of the Jewish community. With the conflicts between Bergson's group and Wise's establishment, new strategies were emerging. Rafael Medoff, whose book first brought the Students' efforts to light, believed they did have an impact on the shifting landscape. They may have been small players, but "their efforts accelerated that shift and supplemented the Bergson Group's efforts to make the rescue issue a high priority on the Jewish agenda."⁶ They also modeled a type of grassroots resistance. "Tiny in number, but persistent and imaginative, the students demonstrated that it was possible, even without funds, office staff, to make a real difference in the shaping of American Jewry's response to the Holocaust."⁷

⁶ Medoff, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*, 114.

⁷ Ibid.

Successes

Despite their limitations and shortcomings, the failures and inadequacies of their efforts, they all did have some measure of success. The key to understanding and evaluating their labors is determining what the measure of that success is. Using different standards, it is impossible to assert that their efforts were completely useless.

The boycott's most significant contribution may have been outside of quantifiable matters. For those unable to physically or militarily attend to the needs of their brethren, the boycott "had a cathartic effect on groups like the Jewish War Veterans, who felt a need to strike back at the Nazi tormentors."⁸ For the seminary students, they did raise awareness. They pioneered interfaith work, and they also introduced a number of innovations well before they became established: black armbands and standing for the victims of the Nazis during Kaddish.⁹ Rohrheimer did not intentionally set out to save people. She had gone to Europe because she was on vacation. Her initial goal after beginning to help her cousins, was just to attend to their welfare. And she succeeded in saving Grete's daughters. That she also saved other lives only added to her accomplishments. Under that measure, she was a considerable success.

Success and Failure in Retrospect

There was no perfect response. Given the size, complexity, and unprecedented nature of the crisis, there may have been no way to affect any significant change on a large scale. At the very least, there was no way to have predicted what would work and

⁸ Henry L. Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 190.

⁹ Email correspondence with Dr. Richard Sarason, 10 August 2017.

what would not. In this respect, any genuine effort to save European Jews from Nazi oppression must be regarded as a positive step, no matter if that step was small or large.

What is evident, is that no one person, even a lone actor like Rohrheimer, could operate completely independently. Whether it was the other people engaged in the rescue efforts like she saw, or the coordination of a multi-organizational boycott, or the coming together of a diverse, yet like-minded group as with the seminary students, success came from collaboration.

The measure of success is equally elusive. Even the boycott, an effort of quantifiable progress, is hard to assess. If pure data does not create consensus, evaluating efforts like the seminary students is even more difficult. Their own measure of success, saving lives, led them to view their activities as a complete failure, having not saved anyone. The more intangible gains including interfaith work and raised awareness, are outside the bounds of quantifiable measurement. Rohrheimer's attitude may best represent the reality of Holocaust activism. Even Rohrheimer, who could literally count the number of people she saved, could not ever acknowledge whether she had done enough, or even all that she could have.

America could not have prevented Hitler from murdering Jews.¹⁰ Nor could any effort, individual or group, have saved them. Small-scale efforts did have an impact, in some cases saving lives, raising awareness, or aiding the campaign against the murderous tyranny of Nazi Germany. As a result of the fact that more than six million Jews were brutally slaughtered by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, it is clear that history will always properly conclude that the world never did enough. That many American Jews

¹⁰ Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, 220.

did not remain silent, that many did not stand idly by when Jewish blood was shed, this, too, is important to remember. Their actions were a visible reminder of what was possible, a reminder that there were efforts – even if these efforts fell far short of what

These successes and failure stand alongside the successes and failures of contemporaneous individuals, groups, institutions, and governments. While the efforts here shed little new light on the failures of the establishment, they illuminate the unsung and unknown. From these efforts we learn what worked and what did not, what was accomplished with little more than determination, and possibly, what could be done in the face of darkness.

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