

“THIS THEATRE IS A BATTLEFIELD”:
POLITICAL PERFORMANCE AND JEWISH-AMERICAN IDENTITY, 1933-1948

by

GARRETT EISLER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2012

©2012

GARRETT EISLER

All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for
the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of
the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

David Savran

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Jean Graham-Jones

Date

Executive Officer

David Savran_____

Marvin Carlson_____

Morris Dickstein_____
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

“THIS THEATRE IS A BATTLEFIELD”:
POLITICAL PERFORMANCE AND JEWISH-AMERICAN IDENTITY, 1933-1948by
Garrett Eisler

Advisor: Professor David Savran

This dissertation explores the effect of political performance on Jewish-American cultural identity during the World War II era. With the rise of Hitler, many previously secular and assimilated Jewish theatre and film artists embraced their ethnic heritage and used their work as vehicles for, first, antifascist and, subsequently, Zionist mobilization. This cultural work, I argue, proved instrumental in effecting a postwar shift in Jewish-American identity from assimilation to “hyphenation.”

I begin by tracing Jewish artists’ involvement in the prewar antifascist activism of the Popular Front. At a time when isolationist sentiment engendered American complacency towards Hitler and when Jewish concerns were marginalized, even demonized, as “warmongering,” producing and exhibiting antifascist narratives was difficult. But by exploiting various genres of the popular stage (agitprop, musical satire, social realism) and film (espionage thriller, historical allegory), these artist-activists gradually influenced the public sphere regarding intervention into the European crisis. For many artists who had hitherto masked their Jewish identity (by changing their names, for instance), these projects marked a process of “coming out” that paved the way for greater acceptance of Jewishness in the postwar era.

I then turn to the 1940s to show how, after Pearl Harbor, many of these same Jewish-American artists continued their activism by enthusiastically joining the U.S. war propaganda effort, and, after victory, campaigning for a Jewish state in Palestine. My main focus is on close

readings, based on archival research, of three propaganda pageants by the playwright and screenwriter Ben Hecht in collaboration with émigré composer Kurt Weill: *Fun to be Free* (1941), *We Will Never Die* (1943), and *A Flag is Born* (1946). By intervening into public debates over isolationism, America's response to the Holocaust, and the birth of the State of Israel, these works asserted Jewish agency more overtly than anything previously on the American stage. Such cultural work, I argue, anticipated and influenced a postwar shift to a more openly professed Jewish-American identity—something reflected in other cultural products of the era such as the 1947 film, *Gentleman's Agreement*. As the United States' swift recognition of Israel in 1948 indicated, something had changed in Americans' attitudes towards Jews. This project argues that the work of this Jewish-American “cultural front” throughout the war era was instrumental in bringing that about.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many institutions provided funding and resources for this project. A generous travel grant from the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music enabled me to travel to the many collections around the country with materials pertinent to my topic. I am especially grateful to Carolyn Weber there and the foundation's archivist, Dave Stein, for his tireless assistance and trust in sharing with me invaluable items from its collection. Another major site of research, the Newberry Library in Chicago, awarded me a Short-Term Resident Humanities Fellowship to explore their extensive Ben Hecht archive; specific thanks go to Diane Dillon, Daniel Greene, curator Martha Briggs, Program Assistant Leslie Kan, and the entire research desk staff. I was honored to receive the Drench Memorial Research Fellowship from the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (housed in New York's Center for Jewish History), which, in addition to funding, gave me the chance to share my work in a public lecture.¹ (Special thanks to Paul Glasser, Nadia Kahn, and Giovanni Massa.) Later in the process, Temple University's Feinstein Center for American Jewish History (Lila Corwin Berman, Director) awarded me a much-appreciated Summer Fellowship grant that helped a great deal in bringing this project to completion.

I am also very grateful to my home institution, the CUNY Graduate Center, for supporting my work in a number of ways. To my department I am thankful for a Vera Mowry Roberts Dissertation Award and a Martin Tackel Theatre Research Fund grant. I wish to thank Professor Randolph Braham of the Center for Jewish Studies and the Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies for awarding me a Dissertation Award in Holocaust Studies as well as support from the J. & O. Winter Holocaust Research Fund. And I could not have supported myself

¹ A video of the lecture is available online at the Center for Jewish history website: <http://www.cjh.org/pages.php?pid=45&video=12092010YIVODRENCHLECTURE.mp4> (accessed 1 July 2012).

throughout this process without my receipt of a CUNY Writing Fellowship and the attached two-year residency at CUNY's LaGuardia Community College, for which I have Professor James Wilson to thank.

Other libraries and collections whose staffs I am grateful to include the Library of Congress's Recorded Sound Division (and librarian Karen Fishman); the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library at Yale University (and Emily Ferrigno); the Morgan Library and Museum Reading Room (and Maria Isabel Molestina); and the entire staff at the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

I am also grateful to the many professors, colleagues, mentors, and friends who freely shared advice, research tips, and even sources, especially Martin Harries, Alisa Solomon, Jonathan Shandell, Henry Bial, and Ellen Adler.

More personally, I could not have completed this three-year project without the encouragement and patience of my parents, Lawrence and Marilyn Eisler, as well that of my wife, Alissa. I also wish to thank her family, especially Anita Heyman for her expert proofreading assistance and Ms. Asenath Heyman, who provided a generous gift of support at a crucial moment.

Finally, I am most grateful to my advisor, Professor David Savran, for his encouragement of this project from the very beginning and for his profoundly and rigorously supportive feedback. Much thanks as well to my other, very patient, committee members, Professors Marvin Carlson and Morris Dickstein. All have been instrumental in recommending me for many of the grants and awards I have received to support the writing of this, and, together, they have provided an ideal prism of perspectives for this interdisciplinary endeavor.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter 1.	
“Premature” Antifascist Drama and the Jewish-American Cultural Front, 1933-1941	11
Chapter 2.	
Patriotic Pageantry as Antifascist Allegory: Ethnic Americanism in <i>Fun to be Free</i>	73
Chapter 3.	
From Bar Kochba to Barney Ross: Staging the Fighting Jew in <i>We Will Never Die</i>	111
Chapter 4.	
“1776 in Palestine”: <i>A Flag is Born</i> and the Americanization of Zionism	157
CONCLUSION.	205
BIBLIOGRAPHY	212

Introduction

My eloquence on behalf of democracy was inspired chiefly by my Jewish anger. I had been no partisan of democracy in my earlier years. Its sins had seemed to me more prominent than its virtues. But now that it was the potential enemy of the new German Police State I was its uncarping disciple. Thus, oddly, in addition to becoming a Jew in 1939 I became also an American—and remained one.

Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century*

This is a story of Jewish Americans who “became American” by becoming more Jewish. More precisely, it concerns a group of dramatists, producers, and performers during the 1930s and 1940s who modeled a new Jewish cultural identity through political advocacy on stage and off. In a succession of campaigns—for intervention into World War II, raising awareness of the Holocaust, and establishing a Jewish state—these artist-activists not only spoke up for “Jewish issues” but successfully framed them as “American” issues that were part of the greater domestic and world conflicts facing the country as a whole.

The performing arts provided Jews an especially crucial public platform in this period for communication and mobilization around issues pertaining to anti-Semitism and Zionism. The pressures of isolationist sentiment and artistic censorship made openly airing these topics difficult, however, even though many Jews were active in the entertainment industries of Broadway and Hollywood. Given such obstacles, Jewish artists found an outlet in the progressive political coalition of the era’s “Popular Front” culture, elevating causes of political liberation abroad and racial/ethnic tolerance at home. But even then, their concerns often had to be addressed only in abstract and universal terms; Popular Front activism foregrounded Jewish causes per se much less than labor and poverty issues or, in matters of race, the struggles of African Americans at home and victims of imperialism abroad. John Wexley’s 1934 play *They Shall Not Die*, for instance, told the story of the “Scottsboro Nine” (black sharecroppers wrongly

accused of rape) and the Jewish lawyer who defends them. The shift from the “they” in *They Shall Not Die* to the “we” in Ben Hecht’s *We Will Never Die*—his 1943 “mass memorial dedicated to the two million Jewish dead of Europe”—is what this project seeks to document: the formation of a new Jewish-American cultural identity and advocacy via dramatic performance during the era of fascism and war.¹

By the late thirties a core Jewish-American “cultural front” emerged within the greater Popular Front that went further in publicizing Jewish issues and the threat of Nazi anti-Semitism.² At the forefront of this movement was a group of frequent collaborators: Ben Hecht, famed playwright, screenwriter and journalist; composer Kurt Weill; actors Paul Muni, Edward G. Robinson and John Garfield; producer Billy Rose; and playwright-director Moss Hart. All these men underwent a reawakening of their Jewish identity in response to the rise of Hitler, joining the antifascist crusade of the Popular Front at a time when the nation was still officially neutral towards Germany and a majority of the population staunchly opposed entering World War II. When America finally got involved, these artists enthusiastically joined the U.S. war effort, lending their talents to antifascist and patriotic propaganda. But when the genocide of European Jewry became clear and war policy did nothing to stop it, they initiated their own campaigns to raise awareness and urge action in some of the very first American cultural works addressing what would later become known as the Holocaust. Many in this same group later turned to the postwar refugee crisis and took up the cause of a Jewish Palestine at a time when Zionism was still a fringe movement in America—even among Jews.

While these artists were not all typically “of the left” in every respect, and while they often disagreed among themselves and with other American Jews, their body of cultural work on

¹ “We Will Never Die” Madison Square Garden souvenir program, Kurt Weill Foundation, New York.

² My use of the phrase “cultural front” is indebted to Michael Denning’s 1996 study *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1996).

behalf of Jews during this period was very much of the Popular Front “structure of feeling.”³ Not only were many of its inherent aesthetic qualities of a piece with forms of propaganda-dramaturgy pioneered in the radical labor theatres of the 1930s, but it also disseminated in performance via prominent Popular Front cultural organs (theatre companies, film production units, publications, radio programs, etc.). It also frequently echoed, and shared personnel with, such milestone Popular Front political pieces as *Pins and Needles*, the Federal Theatre Project’s “Living Newspapers,” Orson Welles’s Mercury Theatre productions, Norman Corwin’s *Pursuit of Happiness* radio program, and “social problem” films of the Warner Brothers studio. The efforts of these creative and performing artists to confront and depict the crisis of the Holocaust and its aftermath, within the dramatic forms of Popular Front, made possible a breakthrough in the more open depiction of Jewish *subjects* (in the senses both of subject matter and personhood) in American drama and American culture at large.

Chapter 1 situates the work of this Jewish-American “cultural front” within the politics and aesthetics of the greater Popular Front. I especially focus on the genre of the antifascist drama and the role American Jews played in its popularization, beginning long before U.S. involvement in World War II. I demonstrate how dramatic depictions of Nazism abroad and fascist sympathizers at home advanced (even if sometimes indirectly) the cause of Jewish rights during the 1930s in the face of isolationist public sentiment. As a staple of progressive Popular Front culture, the antifascist drama became a form with unique political import, especially as debate over entering the war grew increasingly heated in the years leading up to Pearl Harbor. Many Jewish-American playwrights (Clifford Odets, Irwin Shaw, and Lillian Hellman, among others) advanced antifascist themes. Many screenwriters, film producers and movie stars did, as

³ For Denning’s application of Raymond Williams’s concept of the “structure of feeling” to describe the pervasiveness of Popular Front ideology throughout the American culture of the 1930s and beyond, see Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 26.

well—sometimes in the prewar antifascist films of Warner Brothers and sometimes offscreen in the activism of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League.

The remaining three chapters are devoted to close readings (based on extensive archival research) of three 1940s propaganda pageants—written by Ben Hecht in collaboration with Kurt Weill and other Jewish “cultural front” artists—that, together, I argue, mark a watershed in the development of Jewish American drama. Chapter 2 shows how *Fun to be Free* (1941), a mass-spectacle protesting isolationism, merged an ideal of ethnic pluralism with traditional patriotic Americana by depicting earlier moments in history when the country took up arms in defense of oppressed peoples over the objections of the “appeasers of their day.” Amid the Founding Fathers and other iconic American political leaders, the pageant also included the lesser known story of Haym Salomon, a Polish-Jewish immigrant who helped finance George Washington’s army. Performed in October 1941, just two months before Pearl Harbor, *Fun to be Free* tried to make American audiences of all backgrounds feel more invested in the antifascist struggle while challenging isolationism’s dominance of American public discourse.

Chapter 3 reads Hecht and Weill’s wartime pageant *We Will Never Die* as a performance of the Zionist ideal of “Muscular Judaism,” foregrounding themes of resistance and resilience in Jewish history. This epic event (directed by Moss Hart) toured large arenas in major cities throughout the country at a time when details of the Holocaust were still unknown to most Americans. In addition to celebrating achievements in Jewish history (in a “roll call of the great Jews”), the performance featured haunting recitations of the details of Nazi massacres by actors playing the ghosts of Jewish victims. It also included tributes to Jewish soldiers in the U.S. and allied forces and to the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, which was enacted on stage just weeks after it occurred. Through all these episodes, *We Will Never Die* mixed American

performance traditions (from civic pageantry to agitprop) with unassimilated Hebrew liturgical ritual, making it one of the most assertive representations of Jewish identity yet seen on the American stage. Moreover, the appearance in it of many of Hollywood celebrities (including Paul Muni, Edward G. Robinson, and John Garfield) breached their industry's "code of silence" on these and other stars' Jewish identities. *We Will Never Die* was also a highly political event; sponsored by the radical militant Zionist organization of Peter Bergson, it was part of an intense lobbying effort to force Allied intervention into the German massacres of the European Jewish population. The production garnered plaudits in the press, toured the country, and aired on national radio, further raising Americans' consciousness of the Holocaust.

Chapter 4 turns to Hecht's postwar Zionist drama *A Flag is Born* (1946), an allegorical tale about concentration camp survivors seeking the Holy Land. Opening almost two years before the creation of the State of Israel, *Flag* appears to have been the first Broadway play to address either Zionism or the Holocaust in explicit terms. Read today, the play's two lead characters—and old *shtetl* Jew (played by Paul Muni) and a hardened young "Jewish terrorist" (played by an unknown Marlon Brando)—anticipate the iconic heroes of two later postwar Jewish-American classics: *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Exodus*. (Hecht even names the old man "Tevye," after Sholem Aleichem's beloved milkman.) This onstage meeting of competing Jewish masculinities acted out a postwar identity crisis that weighed the legacy of patient suffering from "the old country" against the more militant ethos of the new homeland; and it was a debate with as great an import for Jews in America as those abroad. *Flag*'s searing denunciations of the British government (then ruling Palestine), along with accusations against American Jews for not doing enough during the Holocaust, made it one of the most controversial American plays of the immediate postwar era. (It was also effectively a fundraiser for the *Irgun*

guerilla fighters in Palestine.) Yet the publicity it drew and the success of its run on Broadway (and on tour) helped prepare the American public for the arrival of the State of Israel and for the Americanization of Zionism.

In my conclusion, I explore how Hecht's embrace of Jewish militancy ultimately alienated him from his former Popular Front colleagues—presaging an ideological divide over Israel that persists among American Jews to this day. That this split came with the onset of the Cold War and the anti-communist purges of House and Senate investigations signaled the final fracturing of the Popular Front coalition, especially among its Jewish followers.

I also take an overview of the greater cultural moment of 1948 in the context of Jewish-American identity; not only was this the year of Israel's founding, but it was the year that Hollywood's first exposé of anti-Semitism, *Gentleman's Agreement* (written by Moss Hart and co-starring John Garfield), won the Academy Award for Best Picture. The increased openness of Americans towards Jews in this period, I argue, was brought about not only by sympathy for victims of the Holocaust, but was the dividend of over a decade's worth of cultural work by a Jewish-American "cultural front," for whom the performing arts were a platform for both ethnic expression and civic participation.

To say much has been written about Jewish Americans and the performing arts would be an understatement.⁴ Most pertinent to this project have been studies in the formation of Jewish identity via performance during the first half of the twentieth century. Harley Erdman's *Staging*

⁴ Some of the most widely cited works include Neal Gabler, *An Empire of their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Doubleday, 1988); Steven J. Whitfield, *In Search of American Jewish Culture* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999); Henry L. Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Paul Buhle, *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture* (London: Verso, 2004); and J. Hoberman and Jeffrey Shandler, eds. *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies, and Broadcasting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

the Jew (1997) is an invaluable documentation of some of the most prevalent character types of the pre-1920 popular stage that were marked as Jewish; after the “Shylocks” and “Sheenies” of the nineteenth century, he argues, Jewish characters did become less threatening, but their amiability was accompanied by a disempowering and, by the twenties, deracinating to the point of “Jewish invisibility.”⁵ What made the Hecht propaganda pageants so revolutionary was not the sheer presence and visibility in them of Jewish bodies, but these figures’ possession of heroic bravery and moral rectitude, qualities rarely seen in Jewish characters on the prewar, English-speaking American stage.⁶

Andrea Most’s *Making Americans* (2004) picks up historically where Erdman leaves off, positing the Broadway musical as a major vehicle of assimilation for its many Jewish pioneers from the 1920s to 1940s.⁷ While Most agrees with Erdman’s observation of increased “invisibility” of Jewish-identified characters after the twenties, she chooses to see this as a deliberate strategy rather than imposed censorship, claiming that “the experience of Jewishness does not always manifest itself openly and obviously.”⁸ She reads key canonical musicals of the era as efforts by their Jewish authors to work out their own personal assimilation narratives into less ethnically specific terms, sometimes even displacing them onto other ethnicities—such as African American (*Babes in Arms*), Native American (*Oklahoma!* and *Annie Get Your Gun*) and Asian (*South Pacific*).

I have chosen to approach this same period and this same question—the visibility of

⁵ Harley Erdman, *Staging the Jew: The Performance of an American Ethnicity, 1860-1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

⁶ The Yiddish-language theatre in America, performed expressly for Jewish audiences, was free from the pressures of the mainstream commercial stage and thus routinely exhibited strong, sympathetic and inspirational Jewish dramatic heroes.

⁷ “The Broadway stage was a space where Jews envisioned an ideal America and subtly wrote themselves into that scenario as accepted members of the mainstream American community.” Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1-2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

Jewish characters and issues in American drama—from a different angle, focusing on those instances when American Jewish dramatists challenged conventional taboos and *did* attempt to bring Jewish content to the surface. Rather than exceptions that prove the rule, these remarkable works, I argue, were early indicators of an alternative, emergent identity that would become the post-assimilation “hyphenated” Jewish-Americanism of the postwar era.

The Hecht pageants that form the central focus of this study are not new discoveries. But most of the scholarly attention they have received to date has been in the contexts of either Holocaust history or Zionist politics. In their extensive documentation of the activism of Peter Bergson and his “Revisionist Zionism” movement, for example, historians David Wyman and Rafael Medoff have written much about *We Will Never Die* and *A Flag is Born*.⁹ Some Zionism scholars and other Jewish historians have grouped these two works by Hecht with other Jewish-themed “pageants” of the period, specifically the biblical epics produced by Meyer Weisgal in the 1930s—*Israel Reborn* (1932), *Romance of a People* (1933), and the Kurt Weill-Franz Werfel opera *The Eternal Road* (1937).¹⁰ Theatre historian Erika Fischer-Lichte does so in her 2005 study *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, placing these five “American Zionist Pageants” alongside contemporaneous examples of mass-spectacle in the Soviet Union and even Nazi Germany to

⁹ David S. Wyman *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); Rafael Medoff, *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926-1948* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002); David S. Wyman and Rafael Medoff, *A Race Against Death: Peter Bergson, America and the Holocaust* (New York: New Press, 2002). Other recent Bergson studies have spotlighted the Hecht pageants as well: Louis Rapoport, *Shake Heaven and Earth: Peter Bergson and the Struggle to Rescue the Jews of Europe* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 1999); Judith Tydor Baumel, *The "Bergson Boys" and the Origins of Contemporary Zionist Militancy* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ A 1996 article by Stephen Whitfield combines *The Eternal Road* with the two Hecht pageants: Stephen J. Whitfield, “The Politics of Pageantry, 1936-1946,” *American Jewish History* 84, no.3 (1996): 221-251. Atay Citron’s dissertation on all five pageants (three of Weisgal’s and two of Hecht’s) is probably the most exhaustively researched account of these works, but was completed over two decades ago. Still, I have been indebted to Citron’s accounts of the Hecht pageants and many other related Hecht works, some obtained from oral histories collected from then-surviving members of the Bergson group. Atay Citron, “Pageantry and Theatre in the Service of Jewish Nationalism in the United States, 1933-1946.” Thesis (Ph.D.). New York University, 1989. Also see Atay Citron, “Ben Hecht’s Pageant-Drama: *A Flag is Born*,” *Staging the Holocaust*, Claude Schumacher, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

explore variations on community building and utopian ideology in performance during the “liminal time” of the interwar and wartime eras.¹¹

While *We Will Never Die* and *A Flag is Born* certainly speak powerfully to the global historical and political questions surrounding the Holocaust and mid-century Zionism, little interest has been shown in them as examples of Jewish-American drama. By grouping them not with Weisgal’s work but with Hecht’s own *Fun to be Free* pageant-rally (a strictly secular embrace of American democracy and ethnic pluralism) as well as with the Jewish-authored antifascist plays and films of the 1930s, I aim to weave these works into the fabric of the distinctly American culture of the Popular Front in the United States.¹² Neither Hecht nor any of his collaborators ever emigrated to Palestine or, later, Israel. For these American Jews, the tragedy and conflicts for Jews abroad during the thirties and forties served as a catalyst mainly for increased mobilization at home. Aside from what they contributed to the international debate over the fate of world Jewry, these performances served as a crucible of *domestic* identity formation for their participants, into which they entered marked as “immigrants” (or as celebrities passing for “white” under “stage name” pseudonyms) and emerged with the new hyphenated cultural identity of “Jewish-American,” allowing them to embrace both sides of that equation equally.

When Hecht claimed that in the process of “becoming a Jew in 1939” he simultaneously “became also an American,” he was refuting the older assimilationist assumption that one identity must eclipse the other. Using political performance as a means of civic participation, he

¹¹ Erika Fischer-Lichte, “Towards the Rebirth of a Nation—American Zionist Pageants, 1932-1946,” in *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2005), 159-196.

¹² This study deals only with the Popular Front movement in the United States, so references to the term throughout should be read only in an American context and not in reference to European incarnations, which sometimes exhibited very different dynamics depending on the circumstances of the particular country at the time. See Larry Ceplair’s comparative study, *Under the Shadow of War: Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and Marxists 1918-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

and his colleagues demonstrated their “Americanism” by championing a pluralistic vision of the country that—in contrast to that of its fascist foes—embraced ethnic diversity as a strength. It was their Jewish identity that spurred them to civic action in the American public sphere, which, in turn, announced (especially during wartime) their arrival as patriotic Americans.

Just as armed service in World War II enabled social advancement for Jewish soldiers, the activities of their civilian brethren on the home front fighting fascism in the cultural arena—especially for immigrant and first-generation American Jews of the entertainment industry—proved consequential as well.¹³ Edward G. Robinson said of his 1939 starring role in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, “I feel that I am serving my country just as effectively as if I shouldered a gun and marched away to war.”¹⁴ And Ben Hecht told audiences at *A Flag is Born* in a post-curtain fundraising speech, “You, out front, are not in a theatre tonight, you are on a battlefield.”¹⁵ These artists were among the first to apply the mantra of the 1930s political theatre, “Drama is a Weapon,” to Jewish causes. Their cultural work on behalf of those causes became their war.

¹³ For discussion of military service as “Americanizing” acculturation for Jewish-American soldiers see Deborah Dash Moore, *G.I. Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Quoted in Steven J. Ross, “*Confessions of a Nazi Spy*: Warner Bros., Anti-Fascism and the Politicization of Hollywood,” in *Warners’ War: Politics, Pop Culture and Propaganda in Wartime Hollywood*, ed., Martin Kaplan and Johanna Blakely (Los Angeles: Norman Lear Center Press, 2004), 54.

¹⁵ Handwritten draft of fundraising speech for *A Flag is Born*, Ben Hecht Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.

Chapter 1

“Premature” Antifascist Drama

and the Jewish-American Cultural Front, 1933-1941

The plays on Nazism and fascism performed a function of the utmost importance to the America of the nineteen-thirties. They made a reluctant nation aware there was a demonic force loose in the world and impressed upon audiences that this satanic power was not content to remain overseas but would eventually extend its tentacles to all lands. Newspaper and magazine accounts, scenes in newsreels, and even the hourly radio reports failed to bring home the menace facing the world in these twin ideologies. It remained for an evening in the theatre, with the immediacy of footlight impact, to awaken a somnolent American to the danger.

Caspar Nannes, *Politics in the American Drama*

[W]ithin the relative vacuum of other progressive forces during the crucial era of antifascist sentiment, unionization, and open anti-Semitism, a kind of Jewishness provided the main lever for radicalism to advance within the Hollywood community, for radicals to raise very considerable sums of money and exert a star power unimaginable otherwise. For banquet goers and fund-pledgers, ghostwriters of liberal or labor speeches, the political and economic struggles of the world offered both anodyne and antidote to the inevitable temptations, stresses, and disappointments of career. Popular Front participation thereby became a major avenue of Americanization, redefining an imagined America in which former outsiders could properly belong.

Paul Buhle and David Wagner, *Radical Hollywood*

From Adolf Hitler's ascendancy in January 1933 through the Pearl Harbor attack of December 1941, the United States remained officially neutral towards Nazi Germany, its allies Italy and Japan, and the pro-fascist dictatorship of General Francisco Franco in Spain. During this period American Jews found themselves in a minority in their perception of an immediate threat from European events. Their countrymen, by and large, rejected dictatorship in the broadest sense, but a long national mythology of “splendid isolation” encouraged a more self-

interested stance.¹ So did embitterment over the United States' involvement in World War I, the country's first European military engagement. Some prominent Americans even welcomed the rise of fascist leaders—whether for the sake of fiscal and commercial stability or out of support for white-supremacist racial philosophies that still held sway in many American universities and cultured circles. The worse the economy seemed at home, the greater the appeal of authoritarian efficiency and ethnic scapegoating became. Domestic anti-Semitic tensions were exacerbated by the economic landscape of the Great Depression, and Jews were often singled out by economic populists as responsible for both Wall Street greed and the overreach of Washington's "Jew Deal."² When Jews advocated for U.S. intervention in Europe, isolationists often accused them of prodding America into another foreign war out of biased racial interests; Adolf Hitler, according to such logic, purportedly posed no danger to American security as a whole.

Because direct advocacy for Jewish causes was still stigmatized in 1930s America—even by many Jews, who feared anti-Semitic backlash—attempts to mobilize against fascism and anti-Semitism came up against formidable obstacles. One refuge for concerned Jewish Americans, then, was the Popular Front—the international coalition of leftists and liberals that coalesced in the mid-thirties precisely for the purpose of forming a bulwark against fascism. Under the umbrella of this broader movement, protests against dictatorship abroad could more easily be limned with classic domestic "patriot" narratives. One especially potent cultural form in this movement was the antifascist drama, a popular, yet "double-coded" vehicle for Jewish-American advocacy in a public sphere that otherwise marginalized explicitly Jewish voices. As oblique and coded as they were often forced to be, these provocative plays and films of the prewar and

¹ "Beginning in early 1935, American isolationism hardened from mere indifference to the outside world into studied, active repudiation of anything that smacked of international political or military engagement." David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 393.

² Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 109.

wartime eras still pushed the boundaries of acceptable political discourse in popular entertainment. By the time of the United States entry into the war in December 1941, they had raised awareness, informed public debate, and even incurred political condemnation. Most importantly, they increased the involvement of Jewish-American artists and entertainers in antifascist activism, providing them a rare platform for civic engagement in the age of isolationism. Working together with dedicated behind-the-scenes activist efforts in the Broadway and Hollywood communities, the antifascist drama catalyzed the mobilization of the entertainment and culture industries in their struggles against both fascists abroad and isolationists at home.

Antifascism in Popular Front Ideology and Aesthetics

To identify and demonstrate as an antifascist in the United States in the 1930s necessarily entailed joining forces with the Left in American politics. The infrastructure and networking of formal political organizations—whether the Communist Party, labor unions, or trade guilds—were essential in challenging the discourses of isolationism and home-grown authoritarianism in the public sphere. As long as the Roosevelt administration (however reluctantly) continued to accede to congressional demands for neutrality, the full power of the state buttressed the other side, as did the de facto white supremacy that still pervaded the media, academia, and business institutions. While protesting Nazism may seem utterly uncontroversial in hindsight, at the time such actions drew scrutiny. Anticipating the anti-progressive backlash of the postwar era, the armed forces were already discriminating against such activists during the war—rejecting some leftist enlistees and draftees under the classification “premature antifascist.” Antifascist speech after 7 December 1941 was American patriotism; before, it was subversive.

In order to motivate and mobilize like-minded citizens throughout the country, American antifascists of the thirties had no choice but to reach across partisan, ethnic and class divides to find strength in numbers. This coalition was not always harmonious, though, and took much political negotiation and cultural work to keep it together. Communists and labor activists were among the first in America to protest against Hitler, given the bloody political struggles in Germany between the Nazi and Communist parties in the late 1920s.³ Sectarian rivalries between communists and socialists proved hard to overcome at first; but by 1935—when Hitler and Mussolini had fully consolidated domestic political power and their imperial intentions had become clearer—different antifascist factions more easily found common cause. The goal of a united “front” against the fascist powers first became an explicit Communist Party goal at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in August 1935, which proclaimed:

Under present conditions, when bourgeois reaction is growing, when fascism is raging and the class struggle is becoming more acute, the role of the ILD [International Labor Defense] . . . must become, so to speak, a sort of “Red Cross” of the united front of the proletariat and of the antifascist Popular Front.⁴

The prime motive behind the Popular Front was expressly to sacrifice doctrinal purity and set aside more revolutionary goals (like the immediate overthrow of capitalism) in order to join forces against Hitler—not only with all workers, but even with bourgeois liberals in Western democracies. Even though, eventually, “a whole host of specific causes (. . . the Spanish Civil war, aid to refugees, etc.) attached themselves to Popular Front organizations,” write Larry

³ American antifascism first emerged in the 1920s in Italian and German immigrant communities. See Mary Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas, eds, *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 54. Anti-Nazism in particular would have to wait for greater American awareness of German politics. The first reference to Adolf Hitler in an American news magazine was in the March 1923 *Literary Digest*, but “further mention of Hitler and the NSDAP is missing . . . until the early fall of 1930” when Nazi election victories suddenly made them the second largest party in the German government. Michael Zalampas, *Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich in American Magazines, 1923-1939* (Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press, 1989), 5.

⁴ Georgi Dimitrov, “Unity of the Working Class against Fascism,” Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/unity.htm> (accessed July 21, 2010).

Ceplair and Steven Englund, “. . . the fundamental unifying factor—fervent opposition to international and domestic fascism—was never lost from view.”⁵

Jewish-American dramatic artists and entertainers played a prominent role not only in the Popular Front, but also its “cultural front,” the extension of political activism to the performing arts and mass media. Labor historian Michael Denning defines this cultural front as “the terrain where the Popular Front social movement met the cultural apparatus.”⁶ Two chief examples of that “apparatus” were the New York stage and the Hollywood film industries—each with a sizeable presence of politically engaged first-generation American Jews.

A prominent preoccupation of the cultural front with issues of racial prejudice can be read as expressing the especially urgent concerns of Jewish Americans living in a de facto anti-Semitic America. And yet combating anti-Semitism per se rarely emerged as a major plank in Popular Front platforms. Aside from general pleas for racial tolerance, African American causes (especially anti-lynching legislation) were the most visible race-related campaigns. Popular Front Jews joined their colleagues vociferously in those fights, and the New York stage was home to many plays by Jewish writers on African American subjects: labor-theatre protest pieces like Albert Maltz and George Sklar’s *Stevedore*; middlebrow Theatre Guild dramas like John Wexley’s Scottsboro trial dramatization *They Shall Not Die*; and Broadway musicals like George and Ira Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*.⁷ The cultural work done by Jewish writers on behalf of racial causes other than their own has been read by some scholars as an oblique or analogous

⁵ Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 100.

⁶ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 50.

⁷ Another example is Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart’s 1937 musical comedy *Babes in Arms*, which features a serious subplot about anti-black racism. Also notable in the thirties were two stand-alone popular songs about lynching by Broadway composers: Irving Berlin’s “Supper Time,” written for his 1933 theatrical review *As Thousands Cheer*, and “Strange Fruit” (1939) by Lewis Allan, a.k.a. Abel Meeropol.

dramatization of the authors' own feelings of difference and struggles against prejudice.⁸ But the antifascist drama finally provided Jews a means of breaking a perceived taboo on serious (i.e., nonmusical and non-comedic) Jewish subjects in popular entertainment. Just as the specific issues of the anti-lynching drama provided a new focus for telling African American stories, antifascist dramas provided a similarly topical vehicle for Jewish concerns.

Delineating a distinct antifascist aesthetic requires taking into account both an artwork's apparent ideological content and the historical circumstances of its creation. Given the social prejudices and assimilationist pressures Jewish artists in America faced at the time, we may not always be able to rely on an artist's stated intention to guide a political interpretation of the work; in such cases, the work itself might say in dramatic terms what the artist publicly could not. Reading such works, then, necessitates considering both the artist's aesthetic influences and their personal political affiliations and activities—which, while off-stage or off-screen, were often very public. Building on Alan Trachtenberg's separation of the "politics of aesthetics" from the "politics of affiliation and allegiance," Denning proposes a dialectic between "aesthetic ideologies" (the ideological content of the work itself) versus "cultural politics" (the political activities taken by the artist in the public sphere).⁹ These categories need not be mutually exclusive nor posed in binary opposition to each other, since, in the context of the Popular Front cultural work, aesthetic choices often flowed from political imperatives.

On the one hand, the antifascist drama can be identified by the presence of key ideological themes essential to the antifascist cause: championing democracy over dictatorship, racial tolerance over prejudice, and native self-determination over imperialist conquest. Some works treated the crimes of Germany and Italy directly. But usually these regimes were relegated

⁸ See Most, *Making Americans*.

⁹ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, xix, 473-4.

to an offstage subplot in an otherwise seemingly unpolitical play (like S.N. Behrman's 1934 *Rain from Heaven*) or to the realm of allegory (as in Irwin Shaw's 1939 *The Gentle People*). In Hollywood, even further layers of subterfuge were required due to industry-mandated impositions on free expression for both commercial and political reasons.

The prewar antifascist drama, then, must therefore be read as a double-coded form. When the apparent "aesthetic ideology" of the work is veiled behind trappings of genre, anti-Semitic pressures, or outright censorship, the "cultural politics" of its (sometimes multiple) authors increases in significance. George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart's 1939 play *The American Way* appears to tell a generic immigrant melodrama about a Gentile family; but the documented offstage involvement of both authors in antifascist causes amplifies the brief appearance of Nazi-sympathizing "Bundists" in the play, bringing the underlying antifascism of the entire work to the surface. *Let Freedom Ring*, a 1939 Ben Hecht western, was marketed as a musical vehicle for singer Nelson Eddy; but Hecht's personal correspondence reveals his vision of it as a tribute to democracy, ethnic pluralism and free speech over oligarchical authoritarianism.

However obliquely, the antifascist dramas of the cultural front provided Jewish-American artists a significant opportunity to finally represent "The Jewish Question" on stage and screen, after the subject had been markedly avoided (even by Jews) in the entertainment industry for many years. Even when Jews and anti-Semitism were not explicitly identified in these works—and they rarely were—in the context of the isolationist politics of the time, the sheer choice of fascist-related subject matter could be read as a Popular Front gesture in itself. In such cases, it is only the cultural politics of the (often Jewish) artists behind the scenes that fills in the ideological blanks in a particular work's narrative.

The Antifascist Drama On Stage

“One thing which Germany has exported in quantity since Jan. 30, 1933 is dramatic material,” wrote a *Time* magazine critic just over a year after Hitler’s rise to power.¹⁰ Some of the New York stage’s most immediate theatrical responses to fascism came from workers’ theatre groups already heavily invested in the German communist struggles against the Nazis. In June 1934, Group Theatre actors Elia Kazan and Art Smith presented their “play of mass pressure,” *Dimitroff*, which memorialized the communist framed for the February 1933 burning of Berlin’s Reichstag.¹¹ It was presented by the labor-affiliated New Theatre League—the same umbrella group that would premiere *Waiting for Lefty* (by Kazan and Smith’s Group colleague Clifford Odets) six months later; when the Group decided to capitalize on *Lefty*’s downtown success by remounting it on Broadway, it played on a double-bill with a new Odets one-act, *Till the Day I Die*, based on a recent story from the *New Masses* about a communist underground resisting Nazi rule.¹² Anti-Semitism figures prominently in the narrative—not in the story of the Christian communist protagonist, but in the figure of a part-Jewish Nazi officer, who is killed when his secret is discovered; as he dies, he releases the hero and delivers to him (and the audience) the rallying cry of the early Popular Front: “‘Red Front’ I can’t say to you.... But ‘United Front’—I say that. In every capitalist country in the world this day let them work for the united front.”¹³ That this gesture of solidarity comes not from the hero but the officer—a non-communist Jewish bourgeois who pays for his attempted collaboration—brands this a distinctly

¹⁰ “New Plays in Manhattan,” *Time*, 2 April 1934.

¹¹ Neither Kazan nor Smith were Jewish, but were very active in the Communist Party at the time, especially in their attempts to organize the Group Theatre itself. The “mass pressure” in the play’s description referred to the solicitation of audience participation and action—much like what happens at the conclusion of Odets’s *Waiting for Lefty*, when actors call upon the audience to repeatedly chant, “Strike!”

¹² The published text of *Till the Day I Die* cites the title of its source story as “Those Who Are Stronger” by F.C. Weiskopf. Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty and Other Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1979), 104. At the time, Weiskopf edited a German exile journal, *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*, then published out of Prague.

¹³ Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*, 135.

Popular Front dramatic moment, reaching out beyond the party faithful to sound the antifascist alarm on Broadway. The commercial success of *Till the Day I Die* (especially when bolstered by the even more popular *Lefty*) signaled the commercial theatre's increasing comfort with fascism as a subject and the genre's expansion beyond the labor theatre fringe.¹⁴

The spirit of agitprop and labor theatre was carried into the mid and late thirties by the New Deal-sponsored Federal Theatre Project (1935-1939), which promoted many antifascist productions. Its dramatization of Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here*, about a fascist takeover of the United States from within, was deemed so important an event that it premiered simultaneously (on 27 October 1936) in eighteen cities across the country, including three productions in Yiddish. However, the previous January, Arthur Arent's "living newspaper" play, *Ethiopia* (about Mussolini's African incursion), was withdrawn by the FTP under pressure from the White House to omit any critical statements against U.S. neutrality.¹⁵ As the incident foreshadowed, the FTP's antifascism may have had appeal with the public, but eventually became a political liability when it was cited as an example of alleged communist influence on the program when Congress de-funded it in 1939.¹⁶

¹⁴ While not an explicitly antifascist work, *Waiting for Lefty* also addressed anti-Semitism; one of its five episodes shows a Jewish doctor (Dr. Benjamin) being fired by his hospital due to prejudice. Odets briefly played the role of the doctor himself during the Broadway run. In his original, rather experimental, stage directions for the play, he even suggested that a voiceover interject during the scene "that the USSR is the only country in the world where Anti-Semitism is a crime against the State." "Waiting for Lefty," *New Theatre*, February 1935, 19.

¹⁵ The cancelation of *Ethiopia* led Elmer Rice, then head of the FTP's New York branch, to resign in protest. Rice's own antifascist play *Judgment Day*, another dramatization of the Dimitroff trial, played Broadway in 1934 and remained in the repertory of political troupes and FTP chapters throughout the decade.

¹⁶ Alongside the theatrical activities of the labor theatres and the FTP, left-wing antifascist drama also proliferated in print via the New Theatre League and other labor-affiliated publishing networks. One notable 1939 volume, *Six Anti-Nazi One Act Plays*, included pieces by screenwriter Hy Kraft, playwright Jerome Lawrence (future co-author of *Inherit the Wind*), critic William Kozlenko, and, from Europe, the exiled German writer Johannes Wüsten. (Lawrence is credited as Jerome Schwartz, his born name, and Wüsten under the pseudonym Peter Nikl. Another contributing writer, Peter Bernt, has left no historical trail behind, suggesting that name, too, may have been an alias.) The book also featured one of the first American editions of a Bertolt Brecht play, *The Informer*—which later became a scene in his *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* (or, as it was titled in its 1945 U.S. premiere, *The Private Life of the Master Race*), an antifascist project that Brecht first composed in exile between 1937 and 1938. Stephen Moore, ed. *Six Anti-Nazi One Act Plays* (New York: Contemporary Play Publications, 1939).

In November 1937, one of the FTP's most successful alumni, Orson Welles, inaugurated his independent Mercury Theatre (a self-professed "people's theatre") with an updated staging of *Julius Caesar* set in the black-shirted and jack-booted Rome of Mussolini. Subtitled "Death of a Dictator," Welles heavily adapted the original text to recast Brutus's ill-fated assassination plot as a noble fight against fascism, and staged the orations to resemble Nuremberg rallies.

Shakespeare's relatively short scene showing the assault on Cinna the Poet by an angry pro-Caesar mob became an unexpected centerpiece of the performance; here Cinna, played as a disheveled bohemian, was beset upon by extras dressed as contemporary urban thugs, an image clearly evoking the figure of the helpless European dissident. In true Popular Front spirit linking foreign and domestic racism, Nazi anti-Semitism, and Southern lynching, Welles told the press, "This is the same mob...that hangs and burns negroes in the South, the same mob that maltreats the Jews in Germany."¹⁷

For the more affluent audiences of Broadway, a more bourgeois and realist antifascist drama emerged with protagonists who were not Communist organizers, but assimilated German-Jewish professionals suddenly stripped of their class privilege by racial persecution. In *Kultur*—considered by the *New York Times* as "the first of the plays about the new regime in Germany" when it opened on 27 September 1933—a doctor from an old, respected Jewish family ends up having to save the life of the unnamed anti-Semitic "chancellor." ("Nowhere in *Kultur*'s three acts was Herr Hitler mentioned by name, but there could be no doubt that he was the *deus ex*

¹⁷ Michael Mok, "Brutus and the Mob," *New York Post*, 24 November 1937, quoted in Simon Callow, *Orson Welles: The Road to Xanadu* (New York: Viking 1995), 324. While Welles himself was not Jewish, it is worth noting that many key collaborators on *Caesar* were particularly active in Jewish-American cultural front activities. Welles' co-producer John Houseman was born in Romania (as Jacques Haussmann) to an Alsatian Jewish father and did not become a U.S. citizen until 1943. Composer Marc Blitzstein and designer Sam Leve were both greatly responsible for the *mise en scene* of the Cinna scene. "Much of Welles's early activism was provoked by his collaborators: Blitzstein had joined the Communist Party...while working with the Mercury... [and] Houseman and Blitzstein were active in the Theatre Arts Committee." Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 373.

machina of the piece and Germany its setting,” surmised the reviewer.)¹⁸ The play’s author, 69-year-old Adolf Philipp, was a German-Jewish immigrant of an earlier era, popular in New York’s downtown German theatres for variety acts and Viennese style musical comedies.¹⁹ But *Kultur*’s coy evasion and fabulist plot were faulted by critics and the play did not complete its planned two-week run.²⁰

Other more realist antifascist social dramas soon followed suit, which—unlike the early agitprop plays about political persecution—focused specifically on anti-Semitism as Nazism’s central evil. Their protagonists were highly cultured and assimilated Jews from the professional classes (medicine, academia, literature), making them perfect Popular Front victims to win the sympathy of middle-class liberal audiences. Two months after *Kultur*, in November 1933, future filmmaker (and Hollywood Popular Front leader) Robert Rossen directed *Birthright*, an American play by Richard Maibaum about a highly assimilated Jewish family in Germany who, like the characters in *Kultur*, face discrimination despite their past heroism in war and religious conversion.²¹ From London came, in March 1934, Leslie Reade’s *The Shatter’d Lamp*, about a gentile German professor persecuted for marrying a Jew. That same month the prestigious Theatre Guild—which prided itself on plays of social conscience—attempted to bring to Broadway one of the first German anti-Nazi plays, *Races (Die Rassen)* by Ferdinand Bruckner,

¹⁸ “The Play: The Chancellor,” *New York Times*, September 27, 1933.

¹⁹ For more on Adolf Philipp (1864-1936), see John Koegel, “Adolf Philipp and Ethnic Musical Comedy in New York’s Little Germany,” *American Music* 24, no.3 (2006): 267-319. Phillip immigrated to the United States in 1890, at the age of 26, and later ran the Germania Theatre in New York’s Astor Place. *Kultur*, written near the end of Philipp’s life, was produced on Broadway as a star vehicle for popular actor Charles Coburn, who also co-directed.

²⁰ “‘Kultur’ is Withdrawn: Play Hinting at Nazi Regime Closes at the Mansfield,” *New York Times*, 5 October 1933.

²¹ Rossen and Maibaum had teamed up on Broadway the previous year for the anti-lynching play *The Tree*. The son of an immigrant rabbi, Rossen later became integral to the Hollywood cultural front and headed the Hollywood Writers Mobilization. After the war, he was one of the chief targets of postwar anticommunist investigations and eventually cooperated to avoid blacklisting. Maibaum went on to a largely undistinguished screenwriting career until the 1960s when he was tapped to adapt the spy novels of Ian Fleming for the first James Bond films.

but they abruptly closed it after its trial run in Philadelphia.²² That December they mounted S.N. Behrman's *Rain from Heaven*, a Shavian romantic comedy featuring a subplot about a German Jewish refugee writer (modeled on the exiled critic Alfred Kerr) who presages Hitler's "Final Solution" in a futuristic fable he calls "The Last Jew"—positing "the extermination of the Jews" from a Broadway stage more than a decade before the audience would learn of such a supposedly unthinkable thing actually happening.²³

That these victims were often Jewish in name only—or by distant blood relation or by marriage—and bore few ethnic cultural markers worked to make Jewishness less foreign to American Gentiles in an age of pervasive caricature. But these dramaturgical devices also risked diluting antifascism's plea for equality and tolerance as absolute values—implying that assimilated and successful characters were inherently more sympathetic (and less deserving victims of discrimination) than more marginalized ones. As Hannah Arendt wrote three decades later about the memorializing of the Holocaust: "The fate of 'famous' Jews is still deplored at the expense of all others. There are more than a few people, especially among the cultural elite, who still publicly regret the fact that Germany sent Einstein packing, without realizing that it was a much greater crime to kill little Hans Cohn from around the corner, even though he was no genius."²⁴

²² Bruckner, a.k.a. Theodor Tagger (1891-1958), an Austrian-born Jew, later gained international fame when his 1929 *Pains of Youth* (*Krankheit der Jugend*) was rediscovered. He wrote *Die Rassen* while exiled in Paris in 1933. After the Theatre Guild's abandoning of the play, it did not receive another American production until New York's Classic Stage Company presented a new translation by Barry Edelstein in February 2001. In the play's production history Edelstein notes a wartime German-language reading "in New York on 7 February 1942...directed by and featuring a number of German and Austrian theatrical luminaries then living in American exile." Ferdinand Bruckner, *Race*, trans. Barry Edelstein (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2002), 4.

²³ S.N. Behrman, *Rain from Heaven* (New York: Samuel French, 1936), 28-29. Behrman (his initials stood for Samuel Nathaniel) was one of Broadway's most popular and respected liberal dramatists of "high comedy" from the thirties through the fifties. I am indebted to Martin Harries for sharing with me a draft of his unpublished essay on this play.

²⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report Upon The Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 134. The use of an assimilated, nonreligious Jewish professor or doctor as hero—i.e. a figure who identifies only as "German" and only becomes a Jew when the Third Reich labels him as one—remained one of the most popular

By the late thirties, some bourgeois dramas drew attention to the increasing proliferation of Nazi-inspired groups in the United States. (The German American Bund, founded in 1936, attracted a national membership of 25,000 by 1939, leading to massive rally that year in New York's Madison Square Garden.)²⁵ Elmer Rice's *American Landscape* (1938) chronicled the fate of an old New England family and their historic Connecticut property from colonial times to the present, when the impoverished descendants decide to sell the land to a Bund-like organization for use as their camp. The following month, January 1939, George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart departed from their usual comic optimism in the patriotic epic *The American Way*—which covered four decades in the life of a German Gentile immigrant family. Told as a near-parallel to the Jewish-immigrant narrative (including an opening scene at set Ellis Island in 1896) the Gunther clan struggle through love and loss to achieve the American Dream; and they mostly succeed until the final moments when the patriarch, Martin, is beaten to death by Bundists while trying to stop his grandson from joining them. Played by prominent Hollywood Popular Front activist Frederic March, Martin is allowed to be both a Gentile hero and a (virtually) Jewish martyr.²⁶

Allegory was another strategy for Broadway antifascist narratives. Irwin Shaw's *The Gentle People*, premiered by the Group Theatre in January 1939, brought the fascist menace to

narrative tropes of antifascist drama and literature throughout the period, from Friedrich Wolf's 1934 German play *Professor Mamlock* (included in the Federal Theatre Project's Yiddish repertory) to best-selling novels like *The Mortal Storm* and *Escape*—both made into high-profile Hollywood films, where their victims' racial identities were blurred as either “non-Aryan” or simply “refugee.”

²⁵ “German American Bund,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Holocaust Encyclopedia, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005684> (accessed 21 July 2010).

²⁶ As an officer of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, March (not Jewish) made a conspicuous show during the play's run of enlisting the entire *American Way* cast to sign, in January 1939, the League's “Declaration for the Defense of Democracy” petition, which demanded immediate severing of all U.S. relations with Germany. Playwrights Kaufman and Hart not only signed the petition but also helped draft it as members of the League's New York branch. “Civic Leaders Form N.Y. Committee of 56,” *Hollywood Now*, 27 January 1939.

Coney Island.²⁷ This self-professed “Brooklyn fable” of two old fishermen (one of them Jewish) bullied into paying protection money to a local thug drew upon the “gangster theory of fascism” prevalent in Popular Front discourse, which often demystified grandiose dictators as petty racketeers.²⁸ Shaw’s choice of apolitical everyman heroes actually riled some left-wing critics who “warned against [the play’s] heretical dimension, the privileging of individualist rather than collective action.”²⁹ But this stress on the role of the individual (and the message that “ordinary people must actively fight back”) was typical of the Jewish-American antifascist drama as a whole, helping the genre relate to broader “American” themes and reach audiences beyond organized leftist circles.³⁰

Regardless of the weightiness of the subject, fascism perhaps inspired more satire than any other stage genre. As early as October 1933, *Let ‘Em Eat Cake* by George S. Kaufman, Morrie Ryskind and George and Ira Gershwin (a sequel to *Of Thee I Sing*, the same team’s 1931 sendup of presidential politics) essentially musicalized the then-proverbial question, “Can it happen here?” In a general burlesque of all things totalitarian—sampling from Germany, Italy, and Russia at will—the musical’s grotesque tableau of Washington, DC besieged by a violent

²⁷ Irwin Shaw (born Irwin Shamforoff in 1913) emerged as a young hero of the labor theatre in 1936 with his antiwar fantasy *Bury the Dead*, about fallen WWI soldiers who refused to be buried until politicians and capitalists foreswore future wars. The play echoed the Communist Party’s pacifism of the earlier part of the decade, when all war was denounced as capitalist and imperialist gamesmanship in which the working classes died as pawns. But Shaw soon embraced militancy in his 1937 Spanish Civil War drama, *Siege*—whose commercial failure, Harold Clurman concluded, stemmed from “those who approved the supposed pacifism of [Shaw’s] early work [being] now shocked at his acceptance of violence and bloodshed.” Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years: The Group Theatre and the Thirties* (New York: Da Capo, 1983), 218.

²⁸ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 375. Drama’s ultimate example of gangster-fascism would be Brecht’s *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, written in exile in 1941, but not produced until 1958, two years after the author’s death. In it, Hitler himself is caricatured as a Chicago racketeer in cahoots with amoral capitalists.

²⁹ Alan Wald, *Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left and the Antifascist Crusade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 96. Wald’s discussion of Shaw is particularly notable for his situating of the author’s early work in the contexts of antifascism, thirties radicalism (which Shaw later disavowed) and evolving views of Jewish masculinity.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Warner Brothers released a film version of *The Gentle People* in June 1941—after the outbreak of war in Europe but six months before Pearl Harbor. Re-titled *Out of the Fog* and starring John Garfield as the gangster Goff, the film rechristened the Jewish character of Goodman as Goodwin. Robert Rossen was one of the credited screenwriters.

revolution of “blueshirts” may have been in jest; but opening in the depths of the Depression within months after Hitler’s rise to power, its cool reception and relatively short run of ninety performances indicated the material was deemed too unsettling for musical comedy.

The musical-satire strain of antifascism continued with *Parade* (1935), a revue by labor theatre dramatists Paul Peters and George Sklar and composer Jerome Moross, which was produced by the Theatre Guild on Broadway.³¹ In 1937, *Pins and Needles*—initially an amateur revue by the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union—took Broadway by storm and ran for three seasons. Authored mostly by songwriter Harold J. Rome, it constantly updated itself with contributions by such prominent Jewish-American Popular Front figures as Marc Blitzstein and Arthur Arent. The subjects of most songs and subjects were domestic labor and social causes, but according to Denning’s account,

the antifascist numbers were probably the best-known of the topical sketches....They included the early satires of Mussolini, “Mussolini Handicap” and “Public Enemy Number One”; an attack on British appeasement, “Britannia Waves the Rules”; a sketch on the Nazi suppression of the work of Heinrich Heine, “Lorelei on the Rocks”; and an allegorical account of the Biblical tyrant Belshazzar, “Mene, Mene, Tekel.”³²

Pins and Needles’ success (both on Broadway and on tour) was symptomatic of the growing following of the Popular Front itself—along with its antifascist tenets—in the mid to late thirties.

A more “uptown” anti-Nazi, nonmusical comedy was Claire Boothe’s *Margin for Error*, which opened November 3, 1939, just two months after the beginning of the European war. The play in retrospect seems an unlikely cultural-front product—a comedy-mystery about a Jewish New York policeman assigned to guard the German consul from angry Americans. And Boothe, wife of *Time* magazine publisher Henry Luce, was not only not Jewish but also no “fellow traveler” of the Popular Front; during the war she became a Republican congresswoman (elected

³¹ Among *Parade*’s sketches were indictments of homegrown fascistic figures Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin, in keeping with the Popular Front’s mission to fight fascism both abroad and at home.

³² Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 298.

in 1942) and a leading anti-communist. But *Margin for Error* is nevertheless a case in which the author's personal "cultural politics" are overshadowed by the work's "aesthetic ideology." Capitalizing on the popularity of New York mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, the plot was based on an actual incident when LaGuardia pointedly answered a German consulate request for police protection by sending an all-Jewish squadron.³³ In addition to ridiculing German officials and lionizing LaGuardia (a Popular Front icon), Boothe provided a Jewish proletarian hero, Officer Finkelstein (played by popular character actor Sam Levene), the chance to triumph, albeit comically, over the Nazi menace. Whether Boothe would have been recognized as a Popular Front figure or not, the prominent participation of such prominent Jewish actors as Levene and Otto Preminger (who also directed) made it a notable antifascist landmark for the Jewish-American cultural front in the early days of the European war.³⁴

Kurt Weill: "I do not consider myself a 'German composer.'"

One of Broadway's most prominent antifascist composers during the 1930s was Kurt Weill, an émigré who quickly adopted the United States as his home. The son of a cantor whose family lineage in Germany went back more than five centuries, Weill was, according to Jürgen Schebera, "steeped in the Jewish musical tradition."³⁵ Though he wrestled with his faith as a young man, developing what Christian Kühnt calls "a strong aversion to Jewish institutions," he

³³ The incident that prompted the threatened violence against the German consulate was the German anti-Semitic backlash against the assassination by a Jew of a Nazi diplomat in Paris on 7 November 1938. Since this was the same assassination that served as a pretext for the *Kristallnacht* attacks on German and Austrian Jews one night later, audiences attuned to that event might have added their own tragic dimension to this seeming farce.

³⁴ In 1943, Preminger directed a film adaptation of *Margin for Error* for Twentieth Century Fox, starring another Jewish comic, Milton Berle, as Finkelstein.

³⁵ Quoted in Kim Kowalke et al, "*The Eternal Road and Kurt Weill's German, Jewish, and American Identity*," *Theater* 30, No. 3 (2000): 88. "[Weill's] father was proud to be able to trace his German-Jewish family line back to 1360...and the children learned both to take pride in their Jewish ancestry and heritage and to practice their religion seriously. These are important roots of Weill's music; though they are expressed differently in different periods of his creative output, they are always there and are especially evident in some of his early work, as well as in several works composed after 1933 in France and the United States." Jürgen Schebera, *Kurt Weill: An Illustrated Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 7.

also rejected assimilation.³⁶ Despite having achieved high stature in the German opera world, he left Germany (for good) in March 1933, after already feeling the impact of organized anti-Semitism personally; as early as February 1933, performances of his music were being disrupted by Nazi party members and soon his name was singled out in official denunciations of “degenerate” culture.³⁷ According to Schebera, Weill’s “decision to break radically with Germany and to take leave altogether of German and European traditions in his music—as he did from about 1938 on in the United States—has its basis” in the direct targeting by Hitler’s government of his music and him personally.³⁸ When *Life* magazine, after the war, still referred to Weill as German, he protested, “Although I was born in Germany I do not consider myself a ‘German composer.’ The Nazis obviously did not consider me as such either, and I left their country (an arrangement which suited both me and my rulers admirably) in 1933. I am an American citizen, and during my dozen years in this country have composed exclusively for the American stage.”³⁹ Both Weill’s American and Jewish identities were, for him, clearly motivated by his antifascism—and vice versa.

After two years in transit through Europe, Weill arrived in New York in September 1935, upon which he immediately embarked upon a series of politically charged musical theatre works focusing on themes of war, tyranny, liberation and even anti-Semitism. The project that officially brought him to America was the biblical opera *The Eternal Road*, conceived by Zionist philanthropist and impresario Meyer Weisgal, who commissioned Weill as part of a team of

³⁶ Quoted in Kowalke et al, “*The Eternal Road*,” 90.

³⁷ For details of the Nazis’ intense anti-Semitic campaign against Weill see Schebera, *Kurt Weill*, 203-210.

³⁸ Schebera, *Kurt Weill*, 204. He adds: “This is important to bear in mind whenever we think about the ‘two Weills’”—referring to a common formulation used to describe the difference between Weill’s “classical” early German work and the “popular” scores of his exile. Schebera’s point is to show how Weill’s motives for changing musical styles were more deliberate and considered than simply “selling out,” as some have accused. However, the very notion of “two Weills” itself is increasingly contested in Weill scholarship by those claiming more continuity across these periods.

³⁹ “Letters to the Editor,” *Life*, 17 March 1947, 17

Austro-German Jewish exiles (along with director Max Reinhardt and author Franz Werfel) to create a spectacle retelling the legends of Hebrew scripture through the prism of contemporary exile and oppression.⁴⁰ (The opening stage directions situate the drama in the “timeless community of Israel” during “timeless night of Israel's persecution.”)⁴¹ Work began on the project in June 1934, in Europe, but when Weisgal announced plans to premiere the opera in New York, he brought Weill to the United States.

While awaiting the long delayed production of *The Eternal Road* (which finally opened in January 1937), Weill quickly became involved with some of New York's most political theatre companies. The Group Theatre commissioned from him an Americanized adaptation of Czech novelist Jaroslav Hasek's WWI satire *Good Soldier Svejk*—resulting in *Johnny Johnson*, written with American playwright Paul Green. While war itself, not Germany, is the enemy in the story, its anti-militarism jibes with the antifascism of the time. (War against Hitler was justified, according to the Popular Front, only because he was the true warmonger). Opening on 19 November 1936, *Johnny Johnson* was an avowedly pacifist work, but not isolationist. Weill and Green's opening number, “Over in Europe,” appears to mock isolationists and warmongers alike when a grandiose small-town mayor (described making “a gesture that looks like a combination raspberry and Fascist salute”) urges that “America will stay out”—until news arrives of President Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war, after which he immediately reverses course.⁴²

⁴⁰ Weisgal had already presented two landmark American Zionist pageants: *Israel Reborn*, performed in Chicago in 1932; and *Romance of a People*, created for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair, after which it toured other U.S. cities, including New York.

⁴¹ Franz Werfel, *The Eternal Road: A Drama in Four Parts*, trans. Ludwig Lewisohn (New York: Viking, 1936), ix.

⁴² Paul Green, *Johnny Johnson* (New York: Samuel French, 1937), 5-7. Any hints that Johnny's pacifism applied to the new war were put to rest by Green himself in a 1942 article asserting that the character would recognize that the stakes had become higher. Laurence G. Avery, ed., *A Southern Life: Letters of Paul Green, 1916-1981* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 367.

Weill's next Broadway show, *Knickerbocker Holiday*—written with Maxwell Anderson and produced by Anderson's Playwrights' Company—engaged the contemporary struggle between liberty and tyranny via historical allegory.⁴³ Anderson wanted to retell Washington Irving's already tongue-in-cheek history of Peter Stuyvesant's seventeenth-century Dutch New Amsterdam colony as a satire of modern dictatorship. But while the exaggerated accents of Anderson's Dutchmen might have reminded thirties audiences of vaudevillian “Dutch acts” (which, in fact, caricatured Germans), the playwright's contemporary models for his colonial police state were domestic as well as foreign. An outspoken critic of Franklin Roosevelt, Anderson believed that the New Deal was leading the United States down a path eerily similar to European statism in its embrace of centrally administered economic programs.⁴⁴ Anderson's Playwrights' Company colleagues, loyal Democrats all, finally “cajoled” Anderson into toning down the script's more FDR-specific critiques.⁴⁵ And, as Foster Hirsch surmises, “Weill, a refugee from Hitler's Germany, for whom Roosevelt's—or Stuyvesant's—brand of

⁴³ Anderson left the Theatre Guild in 1938 to found The Playwrights' Company along with four other regular Guild dramatists: Elmer Rice, Robert E. Sherwood, S.N. Behrman, and Sidney Howard. They broke with the Guild in order to have even greater artistic—and political—freedom in the production of their work. Their first two productions—*Knickerbocker Holiday* and Sherwood's *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*—both looked to American history to celebrate democracy in troubled times. (The two plays opened back to back, within one week of each other in October 1938.) Beginning with *Knickerbocker*, the Playwrights' Company virtually became Weill's artistic home, and in 1946 he was made an official member.

⁴⁴ In a *New York Times* essay that later appeared as the published preface to the musical, Anderson elucidated the political philosophy behind his libretto. “Whatever the motives behind a government-dominated economy,” he wrote, “it can have but one result, a loss of individual liberty in thought, speech and action.” He also warned that “Social Security [enacted in 1935] is a step toward the abrogation of the individual and his absorption into that Frankenstein which he has invented to serve him—the paternal State,” and that, “The continent of Europe has been captured by such governments within the last few years, and our own government is rapidly assuming economic and social responsibility which take us in the same direction.” Maxwell Anderson, “On Government,” *New York Times*, 13 November 1938. For further discussion of the political tensions in *Knickerbocker Holiday* see Gerald Rabkin's chapter on “The Political Paradox of Maxwell Anderson” in *Drama and Commitment: Politics in the American Theatre of the Thirties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 272-274.

⁴⁵ Elmer Rice, *Minority Report: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 380. As if to prove *Knickerbocker Holiday*'s antifascist bona fides, The Playwrights' Company offered benefit performances in December 1938 to aid European refugees. Weill's continuing commitment to the play's antifascist politics was also evident in negotiating film rights in 1939 when he tried “to persuade the producers to commission a screenplay that developed and emphasized the anti-Nazi satire in Anderson's play, and excluded the anti-New Deal satire.” Unfortunately, neither Weill's message nor much of his music made it into the film, released in 1944. David Drew, *Kurt Weill: A Handbook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 308.

authoritarianism was child's play, a mere jest, also hoped to temper the playwright's hostility."⁴⁶ Weill even appears to have influenced Anderson to include at least one explicit Nazi reference (to the German "Strength Through Joy" recreation program) in one of Stuyvesant's lyrics.⁴⁷

Anderson's opposition to Roosevelt did not make him any less an antifascist—perhaps even a more extreme one. But even if *Knickerbocker Holiday* might better be classified as a work more anti-authoritarian than antifascist per se, the collaboration between Anderson, a *laissez-faire* liberal, and Weill, a committed antifascist of the left, was a typical Popular Front alliance—even if, as Foster Hirsch surmises, the two artists were “attacking different tyrants—Roosevelt for Anderson, Hitler for Weill.”⁴⁸ Nowhere is the musical's celebration of unruly American democracy more apparent than in the song, “How Can You Tell an American?” a tribute to disobedience. Part of the song's joke is that the question in the title can only be answered in the negative: “It isn't that he's good or bad./ It isn't that he's gay or grim./ It's only that authority repels him as a lad/ And never goes down with him.”⁴⁹ On their own, the lyrics may simply imply petulance; but the celebration of small freedoms reminded 1938 audiences about the everyday differences between democracy and dictatorship, especially at a time when the latter was increasingly suggested (by Bundists and other fascist sympathizers) as a possible, even desirable, solution to the problems of the Depression. Moreover, the song's exultant ragtime musical setting employs jazz as the language of liberty, which, in the context of Weill's personal biography, was a potent performative answer to the country that had deemed such

⁴⁶ Foster Hirsch, *Kurt Weill on Stage and Screen* (New York: Limelight, 2003), 167.

⁴⁷ Elmar Juchem, “Musical Alchemists: Weill and Anderson as Collaborators,” *Kurt Weill Newsletter* 28, no.2 (Fall 2010), 6.

⁴⁸ Hirsch, *Kurt Weill*, 171.

⁴⁹ Maxwell Anderson, *Knickerbocker Holiday: A Musical Comedy in Two Acts* (Washington, DC: Anderson House, 1938), 32.

music “degenerate.” Through this song, Weill not only defines “an American,” he becomes one.⁵⁰

As war approached Anderson gravitated away from critiques of American government excess and addressed the looming menace of European tyranny more directly: his 1939 *Key Largo* featured Paul Muni as a disillusioned Spanish Civil War veteran finding redemption by standing up to local gangsters (who, again, stand in for foreign fascists); *Candle in the Wind* (1941) starred Helen Hayes as an American actress abroad trying to rescue her lover, a French resistance fighter, from a concentration camp. (Weill’s wife, Lotte Lenya co-starred.)⁵¹ With Weill he wrote *The Ballad of Magna Carta* for Norman Corwin’s “Pursuit of Happiness” radio program, airing 4 February 1940; aside from celebrating Western democracy’s founding document, the piece uses the long reviled figure of King John as a stand-in for modern tyrants, especially when he is denounced for “the practice of pulling a tooth a day to extort money from the wealthy Jews.”⁵²

In the course of these and other projects, Weill’s antifascist drama continued to intertwine with his forging of a new American identity for himself. In August 1937 he applied for American citizenship and began Americanizing himself culturally by pronouncing his name with a *w* sound (not a *v*) and foregoing the German language in his private life (even in conversation and correspondence with the Viennese-born Lenya). Accordingly, much of his work in this period foregrounded American diversity, opportunity, and reinvention. An abandoned project, “The Opera from Mannheim,” attempted to dramatize the immigrant/exile experience itself; developed

⁵⁰ The song caught on as a Popular Front favorite, as is evidenced by its performance on Norman Corwin’s “Pursuit of Happiness” radio show in January 1940. John Dunning, *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old Time Radio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 556.

⁵¹ Given The Playwrights’ Company members’ antifascist beliefs, it ended up being a major producer of the genre, presenting such works by Anderson, Rice (*American Landscape, Flight to the West*), and Sherwood (*There Shall be No Night*) throughout the prewar and war eras.

⁵² Kurt Weill and Maxwell Anderson, *The Ballad of Magna Carta* (Valley Forge, PA: European American Music Corporation, 1968), 5.

in 1937 in collaboration with the lyricist E. Y. Harburg and playwrights Sam and Bella Spewack (all prominent Broadway and Hollywood Jewish-American progressives) the story concerned a troupe of Jewish musicians recently escaped from Germany who end up in middle America resurrecting their repertoire in a small-town theatre. Simultaneously, with Paul Green he embarked on “The Common Glory”—“a large-scale musico-dramatic portrayal of the beginnings of the American Constitution,” a project that Weill hoped would reflect “the socialist idea in early America, its fight against the followers of European feudalism, and its final triumph in the Constitution,” and draw contrasts “right up to Hitler and Mussolini.”⁵³ The defunding and disbandment by Congress of the Federal Theatre Project (for which he was writing it) put an abrupt halt to both this project and a musical about populist hero Davy Crockett developed for actor Burgess Meredith.⁵⁴ Weill soon found a new civic sponsor in the 1939 World’s Fair who commissioned from him a pageant celebrating the centenary of the railroad in America. A freeform travelogue across time and territory, *Railroads on Parade* (a “Fantasia on Rail Transport”) provided the composer an opportunity to delve into indigenous American musical traditions. While outwardly a proudly patriotic spectacle, its performance in the midst of the World’s Fair and its composition by a famous exile could not help but infuse the entire piece with a broader sense of *migration*. That theme was also implied in a commission Weill accepted in 1938 for a collection called “Folksongs of the New Palestine”; along with other Jewish-American and refugee composers (including Aaron Copland and Darius Milhaud), he wrote

⁵³ Drew, *Kurt Weill*, 294-295. Weill’s attraction to the Constitution’s origins extended also to the colonial-era *Knickerbocker Holiday*, which he described in a 1942 radio interview as celebrating “the childhood of American democracy.” “I’m an American,” Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, <http://www.kwf.org/kurt-weill/for-further-reading/33-foundation/kwp/354-im-an-american> (accessed 20 June 2012).

⁵⁴ The Davy Crockett narrative would have pitted the rise of a frontier capitalist with Crockett’s more patriotic service in Congress and his community. See Drew, *Kurt Weill*, 297-298.

piano arrangements of Zionist work songs.⁵⁵ For Weill the connection to this would-be Jewish homeland had become all the more personal by this time, since his sister and parents had now immigrated there.

Even Weill's first Hollywood sojourn, in 1937, found him occupied with what was to be the industry's most topical antifascist film. Independent producer Walter Wanger was adapting a 1924 novel about the Russian Revolution, *The Love of Jeanne Ney*, as a Spanish Civil War story for a production unit composed of members of the Group Theatre, including Clifford Odets who had written the screenplay.⁵⁶ Before the film could begin shooting, though, the creative team was instructed by enforcers of the Hollywood Production Code to "ensure that their film's mise-en-scene and dialogue fail 'to definitely identify any of the combatants with either faction of the Spanish Civil War.'"⁵⁷ Starting over from scratch, Wanger then replaced Odets with another famous radical Jewish-American playwright, John Howard Lawson, switched directors, and dismissed Weill, as well, even though his score was completed. When the film was finally released in June 1938 as *Blockade*, none of Weill's music remained and he had learned firsthand just how difficult it was to produce authentic antifascist drama in Hollywood.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ The description on the front of the published sheet music for the collection read: "An Outstanding Contribution to Jewish Music Composed by true builders, the pioneers and arranged by a group of eminent Jewish composers." Quoted in David Farneth et al, *Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2000), 185.

⁵⁶ The director Wanger originally hired was Lewis Milestone (a Russian-Jewish immigrant) who had just made, with Odets, a proto-antifascist film for Paramount, *The General Died at Dawn* (1936), starring Gary Cooper as an American mercenary fighting Chinese warlords. Odets, making his debut as a screenwriter, hoped to pepper the speeches of his villain with Hitler and Mussolini quotations, but he was vetoed by the studio. Milestone did show Yang, however, at one point conferring with a German military advisor. See Margaret Brenman-Gibson, *Clifford Odets: American Playwright, The Years from 1906 to 1940* (Atheneum: New York, 1981), 396-409.

⁵⁷ Matthew Bernstein, *Walter Wanger: Hollywood Independent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 131.

⁵⁸ One song Weill wrote for the film, "The River is Blue," with lyrics by Ann Ronell, was eventually published. (The song's title was at one point a working title for the picture.)

Antifascist Cinema: The Production Code and Political Speech

Perhaps the most famous antifascist American play of the decade was one never produced. In the summer of 1938, Murray Burnett, a twenty-seven-year-old New York schoolteacher, went to German-occupied Vienna; after the *Anschluss* that spring, exiled Jewish relatives asked him to try to retrieve some of their savings there. En route back to America, he stopped in the South of France and visited “a nightclub with a polyglot clientele where a black man played the piano.”⁵⁹ The combined experiences of Vienna’s anti-Semitism and the club’s haven for exiles sparked an idea for a play that he finally wrote—with a friend, Joan Alison—two years later. They set the action in the club, changed the locale to Morocco, and called the play “Everybody Comes to Rick’s.” In late 1941, having failed to find a Broadway producer, they sent the script to Warner Brothers, who immediately bought it. After several screenplay revisions—first by the team of Julius and Philip Epstein and then by Howard Koch—the studio premiered the film in November 1942 under a new title, *Casablanca*.

“From Murray Burnett to the Epsteins to Howard Koch,” writes Aljean Harmetz, “*Casablanca* was shaped by Jews whose religion or politics had made them premature antifascists.”⁶⁰ What gave the film political “maturity” was its timing—the script of “Everybody Come to Rick’s” arrived at Warner Brothers on 8 December 1941, the very next day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor drew the United States into the war at last. “If it had come to the studio in 1939,” speculates Harmetz, “it would have been perceived as an uncomfortably aggressive anti-Nazi statement.”⁶¹ Instead, *Casablanca* went on to become one of the most successful and beloved American films of all time.

⁵⁹ Aljean Harmetz, *Round Up the Usual Suspects: The Making of Casablanca* (New York: Hyperion, 1992), 54.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

Concurrent to the rise of fascism in Europe was the increased censorship of the American cinema, thereby complicating the use of the medium to protest that political reality. After a wave of protests (mostly in the name of Christian morality) to depictions of licentiousness and criminality in early sound films, the major studios, in 1930, formally adopted a list of proscriptions from the head of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association, Will Hayes. While at first treated as voluntary guidelines, these regulations became an enforced code in 1934 that all studio films had to satisfy in order to receive distribution. Regulation of film content was possible due to both its self-imposed nature (a preemptive gesture of industry self-policing to avoid threats of local censorship boards) and the fact that motion pictures had not yet been legally sanctioned as forms of protected speech.⁶²

Contrary to popular legend, the “Production Code” (or “Hayes Code”) was not just concerned with depictions of sex and violence, but also with general adherence to United States law and even foreign policy. Section X of the code stipulated (under “National Feelings”) that the “just rights, history, and feelings of any nation are entitled to consideration and respectful treatment” and that the “history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly.”⁶³ One factor behind this provision was the studios’ own reluctance to offend foreign audiences and importers. The profits from the worldwide market for American movies—especially in Germany—encouraged the Hollywood moguls (no matter what their personal feelings were, in most cases, as Jews) to continue to put politics aside in their business affairs throughout the 1930s.

⁶² All the way up to the Supreme Court, judges consistently deemed the movie business as a purely commercial enterprise, not art (let alone journalism or politics). Any regulation therefore was justified in the interest of consumer protection. See Gerald Butters, *Banned in Kansas: Motion Picture Censorship, 1915-1966* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2007), 42-45.

⁶³ Olga J. Martins, *Hollywood’s Commandments: A Handbook for Motion Picture Writers and Reviewers* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1937), 288.

Beginning in 1935, criticizing a foreign government on screen also ran the risk of violating federal law, thanks to the first of five “Neutrality Acts” passed by Congress to enforce an isolationist foreign policy. (Subsequent acts were passed in 1936, 1937, and as late as November 1939.) While President Roosevelt himself became increasingly determined, in private, to aid Great Britain against Germany, his administration was still obligated by a majority-isolationist Congress to monitor the cinema and the airwaves and guard against a feared mass-manipulation of public opinion against Germany.

Studios learned very quickly how formidable these hurdles were in producing and exhibiting antifascist content. In 1934 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer bought the nationwide distribution rights for one of the first anti-Nazi films ever made in America, *Are We Civilized*, produced by the smaller “Poverty Row” studio, Raspin. But the German embassy in Washington still had enough clout in political circles to successfully lobby for the cancellation of the movie’s release. MGM ran into similar trouble the following year when it acquired the rights to, and soon abandoned, a film adaptation of Sinclair Lewis’ *It Can’t Happen Here*. (“I wrote *It Can’t Happen Here*, but I begin to think it certainly can,” Lewis complained to the press.)⁶⁴ According to Michael Birdwell, the pressure from the Production Code Administration’s head, Joseph Breen, was fierce:

As the head of the PCA, Breen was supposed to make Hollywood’s product as “safe” and unobjectionable as possible. A devout Catholic and a former public relations director for the Peabody Coal Company of Illinois, Breen was also a rabid anti-Semite. When he assumed the role of chief censor in 1934, he...believed movies should avoid sexuality, criticism of American institutions, adultery and politics. Jewish moguls absolutely irked Breen and he considered them unregenerate ‘lice,’ pariahs who corrupted the morality of American moviegoers.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Quoted in Michael Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers: Warner Brothers’ Campaign Against Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 20.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 21. For more on Breen’s anti-Semitism see Gregory Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 170.

The personal anti-Semitism of the Production Code's leading enforcer was surely another obstacle to Jewish-American free expression in pre-WWII cinema.

The Warner Brothers Campaign

In addition to governmental, financial, and public relations pressures to steer clear of addressing the European conflict on screen, the Hollywood studio chiefs (who in this era always had the final say over all content in their companies' pictures) were, for the most part, not even personally inclined to ally themselves with the antifascist movement. As business tycoons—and among the wealthiest in the nation—nearly all had supported the Republican party ever since the 1920s.⁶⁶ As Jews they privately expressed concern about nearby California Bundists and collectively founded a Community Relations Committee in 1934 to wage an information campaign against them in the local press.⁶⁷ But outwardly, having successfully attained cultural and commercial assimilation into the upper ranks of American business, the last thing most studio heads wanted to do to their reputations was to associate with any cause perceived as either Jewish or leftist—let alone both.

The first—and for a long time only—major studio to buck this trend was Warner Brothers. Jack Warner, the youngest partner of the four founding brothers, actively campaigned for FDR in 1932, chairing a fundraising committee of fellow Hollywood supporters and producing a “Busby Berkeley-style” rally (billed as a “Motion Picture Electrical Parade and

⁶⁶ “At its topmost levels, Hollywood [before World War II] was a reactionary enclave of Jews wearing the fashions of American gentility.... Politically, genteel fashion dictated fealty to the Republican party, though until the late twenties *most* of the Eastern European immigrant Jews had affiliated themselves with the Republicans, largely because most of them had immigrated during Republican administrations early in the century and wanted to express their gratitude to the party in power, but also because most of the German Jews, who served as models for the Eastern Europeans, were Republicans.... The Hollywood Jews were after acceptance from those they regarded as their betters, and they saw their community of interest lying with the rich and the powerful of Los Angeles—a conservative lot in a deeply conservative place.” Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 315-316.

⁶⁷ See Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 338-341.

Sports Pageant”) in Los Angeles’ Olympic Stadium.⁶⁸ After Roosevelt’s inauguration, Warner promptly assumed the duties of Los Angeles chairman of the National Recovery Act, a New Deal initiative immediately promoted in Warners’ 1933 *Footlight Parade*, where the unmistakable NRA logo is conspicuously inserted at one point into Berkeley’s epic choreography.⁶⁹ But as their films continued to project progressive themes, the Warners were ever cautious not to have their concerns—especially their anti-Nazism—publicly linked to their ethnicity. “We will be looked upon by the community, not just Hollywood, of saying certain things *because* of being Jewish,” confided Harry Warner in private in 1936. Jack Warner still recommended to Harry in 1939 that “the less you, I, or any Warner talks at this time, the better”; Jack preferred to let Roosevelt speak for them since “he isn’t a Jew.”⁷⁰

Such worries did not stop the Warners from addressing the Nazi threat with a directness that was rare in the industry during the thirties. Their first step was closing their Berlin office in 1934 and ceasing to exhibit films in Germany, becoming the first major studio to do so.⁷¹ (MGM, Paramount, and Twentieth Century-Fox were still doing business in Germany as late as 1940, months after the outbreak of war in Europe.) Warner Brothers also became increasingly involved in Jewish charity and rescue efforts. The studio was a large contributor to the United

⁶⁸ Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 317; Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner, *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America’s Favorite Movies* (New York: New Press, 2002), 59. The stadium, now known as the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, hosted the Olympic Games in 1932.

⁶⁹ In *Footlight Parade*’s concluding number, “Shanghai Lil” (about U.S. seamen on shore leave in China), a typical Berkeley overhead shot shows dancers—to the tune of Sousa’s “Stars and Stripes Forever”—coalescing first into the pattern of an American Flag, then a portrait of FDR, and then the image of the NRA eagle.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 343; quoted in Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 31-32.

⁷¹ Discrepancies persist to this day as to what exactly prompted Warner Brothers’ decision to withdraw from the German film market in 1934. Jack Warner later claimed it was done out of protest over the death of a Jewish company representative at the hands of Nazi thugs. But Birdwell and others have persuasively questioned the veracity of the story, arguing instead that Harry Warner simply refused to comply with the new German strictures governing content of imported films. Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 17-18.

Jewish Appeal (they pressured employees to give a percentage of their salaries) and other refugee-aid societies, including some that helped Jews migrate to Palestine.⁷²

Whatever fears the Warners had of being perceived as “too Jewish” were counterbalanced by the added social prestige they gained from cultivating a reputation as humanitarians, helping them shed the prevailing anti-Semitic stereotype of studio moguls as uncultured peddlers. When Jack Warner, for example, gave a Hollywood dinner in March 1938 for Thomas Mann (perhaps the most publicly lauded non-Jewish German exile in the country), the true beneficiary was not the Nobel Prize-winning author but Warner Brothers, which gleaned new respectability from the association with him. In this and other examples of what Neal Gabler dubs “festivals of philanthropic virility” the moguls (both at Warners and elsewhere) exchanged financial capital for the new cultural capital of antifascist humanism, “a way of buying respectability by doing what the respectable did.”⁷³ For the Warners, such conspicuous activism was also a way of projecting a more heroic Jewish image than had been typical in the public imaginary—and this new image they soon championed on screen, as well.

If philanthropy could elevate them from hucksters to humanitarians, the Warners also wanted their activism to promote them from Jews to “Americans.” In couching their work on behalf of Jews abroad in the most patriotic terms, they celebrated the cherished liberties of the American homeland, not the tenets of ancient Israel. Harry Warner courted the historically conservative America Legion more than any organization on the left, reassuring them at their 1938 convention that he had “no sympathy with Communism, Fascism, Nazism or any ‘ism’ other than Americanism.”⁷⁴ And one of his first gestures toward political engagement in his films was initiating, in 1936, a series of short subjects (the “Old Glory” series) each a

⁷² Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 24-29.

⁷³ Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 289.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 65.

Technicolor dramatization of famous scenes from American history, stressing civil liberties, egalitarianism, freedom of worship, and religious tolerance.

Whether he was aware of it or not, though, Harry Warner embodied in these moves the Popular Front in action. Addressing in one breath both American Legionnaires and the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, he forged exactly the kind of coalition that made the political advances of antifascism possible in these years. Wrapping anti-Nazism in the American flag, and invoking the words of the founding fathers was also typical of the “Americana” strain of the Popular Front, which repeatedly lionized Lincoln (from the American brigade that fought in his name for the Spanish Republic to Aaron Copland’s 1942 “Lincoln Portrait”) and constantly looked to patriotic legend for progressive precedents. That same strategy was evident on the far left end of the Popular Front spectrum, as well; even the Communist Party, in “a sentimental appeal to the country’s heritage,” adopted the slogan “Communism is Twentieth-Century Americanism.”⁷⁵

The Hollywood Anti-Nazi League

Warner Brothers’ gestures notwithstanding, the most intense antifascist activism in Hollywood came from the artists of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League (HANL). After its formation in the summer of 1936, the organization “quickly reached the forefront of Popular Front organizations in the United States.”⁷⁶ Within three years its paid membership ranks grew to 5,000 and its news journal, *Hollywood NOW* (“A Journal in Defense of American

⁷⁵ Ira A. Levine, *Left-Wing Dramatic Theory in the American Theatre* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 134.

⁷⁶ Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 107.

Democracy”), and radio broadcasts reached audiences well beyond the Hollywood community.⁷⁷

Not all but certainly many of its most active members were Jewish: actors Paul Muni and Edward G. Robinson; German émigré directors Ernst Lubitsch and Fritz Lang; from the Broadway theatre, Oscar Hammerstein II and entertainer Eddie Cantor; and author turned Hollywood screenwriter Dorothy Parker.⁷⁸ The HANL publicized news of fascism’s reach at home and abroad, raised money to fight dictators and aid refugees, and, above all, promoted antifascism as a celebration of American democratic values, not a furtive Communist plot.⁷⁹

While *Hollywood NOW* offered unflinching details of Jewish suffering in Europe, anti-Semitism always ranked in their coverage as just one of fascism’s evils; always building coalitions, HANL addressed an interfaith—and interracial—audience, highlighting Nazi crackdowns on Catholics as well as Jews, and the intimidation tactics of Klansmen as well as Bundists.⁸⁰

In December 1938 the League formed a “Committee of 56” to sign a “Declaration of Democratic Independence”—a petition deliberately modeled on the 1776 document, down to the number of signers. (Committee chair Melvyn Douglas arranged for newsreel cameras to record the official signing on “a stage decorated with American flags and pictures of George

⁷⁷ The HANL newspaper began as the eight-page bi-weekly *Anti-Nazi News* but changed after the first year to a four-page weekly called *News of the World*. Eventually that name was abbreviated and the publication became *Hollywood NOW*, switching to monthly publication in early 1940. By its second year, its masthead included an “Eastern Distribution” office, indicating a growing subscriber base in New York. It broadcast news and information programs—as well as antifascist radio plays—on the Warner Brothers-owned station KFWB. For narratives of the Anti-Nazi League’s activities, see Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition*, 104-112; Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 328-329, and Buhle and Wagner, *Radical Hollywood*, 78-79. For direct quotations I have consulted the nearly complete *Hollywood NOW* microfilm collection (1936-1940) at the New York Public Library.

⁷⁸ Parker (born Dorothy Rothschild to a German-Jewish father and Protestant mother) rarely if ever publicly identified as Jewish, but she has been immortalized as such by the NAACP, to whom she bequeathed a substantial fortune in her will; a plaque marking her ashes at the association’s Baltimore headquarters pays tribute to “the bonds of everlasting friendship between black and Jewish people.” “Dorothy Parker,” National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, <http://naacp.com/about/history/dparker> (accessed 21 July 2010).

⁷⁹ A typical example of HANL’s invocation of classic American history and civics was a regular feature in their newspaper called “The American Idea vs. The Nazi Idea,” which juxtaposed the words of the Founding Fathers and past presidents with quotations from Hitler and other Third Reich spokesmen.

⁸⁰ HANL’s outreach to African-Americans included a special Interracial Commission subcommittee and events featuring prominent civil rights leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois.

Washington and Abraham Lincoln.”)⁸¹ The statement, addressed directly to the president and the Congress, called for a severing of all ties (especially economic) with Germany until it was “willing to enter the family of nations in accordance with humane principles of international law and universal freedom.”⁸² Other prominent Jewish-American, Popular Front followers who were not HANL members but added their signatures included Harry and Jack Warner, Carl Lemmler (founder of Universal Studios), Groucho Marx, George Cukor, Ira Gershwin, and Ben Hecht.⁸³

The event came at the end of a year of rapid escalation in the European crisis—especially regarding European Jewry. In March, Hitler’s annexation of Austria put a whole new population of previously safe Jews at risk; in September, the Munich conference signaled that the Western democracies could not be counted on to stop German expansion; and November brought *Kristallnacht*, the sweeping pogrom of German, Austrian, and Czech Jews that pushed even Franklin Roosevelt to break his officially neutral public stance and tell reporters, “I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth century civilization.”⁸⁴ Meanwhile, Roosevelt’s one attempt to help Jewish refugees that year—convening a conference of diplomats in July at Evian, France—proved utterly ineffective. In response the 11 November 1938 edition of *Hollywood NOW* bore on its front page an editorial headlined “We Must Fight Back,” where the “we” appeared to speak clearly on behalf of Jews even while reaching out to the country at large:

Some people in this country, both Jews and non-Jews, have been intimidated. They counsel a policy of appeasement or letting Hitler have his way in order to prevent more pogroms. . . . The only course that any American can follow is to fight back against the Nazi menace to civilization. This course is the only one for Jew and non-Jew alike. It

⁸¹ “Newsreels Record Formal Signing of Declaration,” *Hollywood Now*, 23 December 1938.

⁸² “Declaration of Democratic Independence to the President and the Congress of the United States of America,” *Hollywood NOW*, 23 December 1938.

⁸³ Among the famous non-Jews who signed were John Ford, Henry Fonda, Myrna Loy, Joan Crawford, Burgess Meredith, Hecht’s frequent writing partner Charles McArthur, HANL chair Donald Ogden Stewart, and Warner Brothers stars James Cagney, Bette Davis, and Claude Rains.

⁸⁴ “Roosevelt Holds Nazi Brutality Incredible,” *Washington Post*, November 16, 1938.

makes no difference whether Jew, Catholic, or Protestant attacks Hitler. He has manufactured the story that Jews control the press in all democratic counties in order to blame all opposition on the Jew. Inaction, silence, frightened acceptance is what Hitler wants. Let's follow the example of Franklin D. Roosevelt, not the example of Neville Chamberlain.⁸⁵

While not yet calling upon Roosevelt to do anything specific that would break congressional neutrality laws, the League clearly suggests between the lines that their support of this president will depend on his standing up to Hitler and, if necessary, going to war over the fate of the Jews—a heretical thought in the American politics of 1938.

When addressing an audience broader than the readership of *Hollywood NOW*, League leaders were ever careful to articulate these concerns in the most all-encompassing patriotic language. A week before the release of their “Declaration,” many of the signers appeared on a December 14 radio broadcast commemorating the “National Rededication Day” of the Bill of Rights. (The *Los Angeles Times* identified Muni as “the principal actor-speaker.”)⁸⁶ In newsreel footage of the event, Robinson echoes the patriotic rhetoric of his chief employer Harry Warner; “This great radio program,” he says, “sponsored by the motion picture industry is intended to remind us all of the liberties and privileges with which we are blessed in this country. Let us now reaffirm the glory of Americanism—the greatest, the freest, and the happiest ‘ism’ in all the world.”⁸⁷ If Communism could be “twentieth-century Americanism,” so could antifascism.

HANL also utilized theatre and performance as key organizational, motivating, and fundraising tools. In July 1938, the League hosted the Los Angeles premiere of *Pins and Needles*, with proceeds going to refugees from recently annexed Austria.⁸⁸ *Ready! Aim! Fire!*

⁸⁵ “We Must Fight Back!” *Hollywood NOW* (11 November 1938), 1.

⁸⁶ “Fight Urged for Freedom,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1938. The event also featured “a historical drama, announced by Robert Taylor and directed by Frank Capra, included in its cast Edward G. Robinson...James Cagney...Lionel Barrymore, [and] Edward Arnold...[followed by] patriotic songs sung by Tony Martin, Jeanette McDonald and Judy Garland, accompanied by an orchestra directed by Meredith Willson and a chorus.”

⁸⁷ *Hollywood: An Empire of Their Own*, directed by Simcha Jacobovici (A & E Home Video, 2005), DVD.

⁸⁸ “‘Pins and Needles’ Premiere Thursday to Benefit League,” *Hollywood NOW*, 9 July 1938.

(1937) by Gene Stone and Jack Robinson (late of the Federal Theatre) offered a fable—“in the Gilbert and Sullivan tradition”—of dictators seeking just the right battle song.⁸⁹ *Sticks and Stones* (1938) satirized Hollywood itself and showcased some of the industry’s most promising young (Jewish) entertainers: Bert Lahr, Milton Berle, Sam Levene, and John Garfield.⁹⁰ In 1939, Los Angeles alumni of the recently terminated California Federal Theatre Project presented *The Show Goes On*; the review in *Hollywood NOW* praised one sketch in particular about Hitler going to a fortune teller: “‘You’re going to die on a Jewish Holiday,’ she tells him. ‘What Jewish holiday?’ demands the No. 1 Aryan of his time. ‘Any day you die will be a Jewish holiday,’ is the seer’s payoff line.”⁹¹ It must have been heartening for Jewish-American film artists to hear such blunt humor at a time when even the word “Jewish” was rarely if ever spoken on screen.

Muni and Robinson: “Two Sides of a Coin”

Among the most famous stars participating in HANL and other activism, the most visible tended to be Warner Brothers contract players. In press coverage of their political appearances, these actors’ real-life personas clearly echoed the combative underdogs they (especially the male stars) so often played on screen in the thirties. Muni, Robinson, James Cagney, and Humphrey Bogart were, according to Morris Dickstein, seen by the public as “embattled outsiders clawing their way to the top” who “served as the focus for rebellious energy at a time when many felt helpless before larger forces.”⁹² Informing these personas was the urban, immigrant, and working-class landscape of so many of their pictures, especially the studio’s signature gangster

⁸⁹ “League Members Theater Party,” *Hollywood NOW*. 5 November 1937.

⁹⁰ “MPAC’s Political Cabaret in Rehearsal,” *Hollywood NOW*. 5 August 1938. Among those contributing material to “Sticks and Stones” were Yip Harburg, Jay Gorney, Dorothy Fields, and S.J. Perelman. Song titles included “It Can’t Happen Here” and “Swing Left, Sweet Chariot.” The show was initially produced by HANL’s sister organization, the Motion Picture Artists Committee, as a fundraiser for the Spanish Republic.

⁹¹ “Ex-WPA Actors Hit Hitler in Revue,” *Hollywood NOW*, 11 August 1939.

⁹² Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 68-69.

stories.⁹³ And as articulated on screen by actors often embodying the immigrant experience in their voices and urban accents, the image of America projected by these films was, as Gabler argues, “the least assimilative” in Hollywood.⁹⁴

Paul Muni and Edward G. Robinson were among the stars most representative of these traits when both began their careers playing some of the most “rebellious” of the Warner Brothers hoodlums in the early thirties. Even when they advanced their careers by playing more noble heroes of conscience, their films still echoed the social concerns of the studio. Both actors used their fame and their films to advance their own political causes, and their activism was heavily informed by their Jewishness.

Muni was born Muni Weisenfreund in the outer reaches of Austria-Hungary in 1895. (When he joined the HANL executive board in 1937, a post-*Anschluss* article proudly claimed him as “an anti-Nazi long before his home country, Austria, was seized by the Nazis.”)⁹⁵ Coming of age in New York, he began his acting career in the Yiddish Theatre of Second Avenue before catapulting to movie celebrity playing an Al Capone-inspired Italian gangster in *Scarface* in 1932. It would be the first of many “ethnic” roles for Muni, who made a specialty of them in a succession of Warner Brothers films. He was a Chicano lawyer in *Bordertown* (1935); the eponymous nineteenth-century Mexican statesman in *Juarez* (1939); and he was even a Chinese farmer in the 1937 Oscar-winning adaptation of Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth*. Celebrated by the press as a chameleon, this man of a thousand faces appeared to play every

⁹³ More than those of any other studio, Gabler argues, Warners’ films were populated by “the people at the margins,” consisting of “the losers and the loners, the prize-fighters, meat packers, truck drivers, coal miners, cardsharps, gumshoes, racketeers, con artists, and the rest of what seems like the detritus of Depression America.” Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 197, 195-196.

⁹⁴ Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 197.

⁹⁵ “In Progressive Hollywood,” *Hollywood NOW*, 5 August 1938.

ethnicity but his own.⁹⁶ While he would not play a Jewish character on screen until 1959 (in his final film, *The Last Angry Man*) one of Muni's early career-making stage performances was as the powerful Jewish lawyer, George Simon, in Elmer Rice's *Counselor-At-Law*—a play explicitly about the cost to one's soul of assimilation and material success. After winning acclaim in the 1931 Broadway premiere of the play, Rice reports that Muni turned down the Hollywood film version out of fear of being typecast as Jewish so early in his career.⁹⁷

The Life of Emile Zola (1937) was a project Paul Muni actively pursued. Hardly a biography of the French author's entire "life," the film actually spends the bulk of its two-hour running time on Zola's involvement in that landmark case of anti-Semitism, the Dreyfus affair.⁹⁸ The protagonist of the film, however is not the persecuted Jewish officer, but Zola (portrayed as a "righteous Gentile" *avant la lettre*) who pleads his case. (The role of Dreyfus himself, who has much less screen time, was played by Joseph Schildkraut of the famous Yiddish Theatre acting family.) And since Dreyfus' Jewishness is all but erased in the film, audiences unfamiliar with the history would have had to pay close attention to understand that anti-Semitism played any role in the case at all. The word "Jew," never spoken, only appears on screen written next to

⁹⁶ Typical of the popular culture's coverage of Muni as chameleon is a *New York Times* piece promoting his appearance in Maxwell Anderson's 1939 antifascist drama, *Key Largo*. Under the headline "Many-Faced Muni," a photo-spread shows the actor in some of his most wildly contrasting performances: Louis Pasteur, Juarez, Zola, the Chinese farmer from *The Good Earth*, and the Polish coal miner of Warners' *Black Fury* (1935). The caption reads: "Paul Muni, known as the 'Man of a Thousand Faces,' returns to Broadway... next week without the benefit of the elaborate make-up which has characterized so many of his roles. He is shown above as he will appear undisguised in...*Key Largo*, and below and at the right in some famous past disguises." One of the "character" pictures is of Muni in his first Broadway role, a rabbi in the 1926 play, *We Americans*. But the caption does not identify the character as a Rabbi or Jewish at all; the picture of the bearded actor in black garb presumably said enough. "Many Faced Muni," *New York Times*, 19 November 1939.

⁹⁷ Rice, *Minority Report*, 332

⁹⁸ Warners' favored strategy for making films about anti-Semitism without naming it was through prestigious historical narratives in which Jewishness played an implied but unspoken role. *They Won't Forget* (1937), for instance, was an updated, deracinated telling of the 1915 Leo Frank case—in which a Jewish New Yorker was convicted (wrongly) of the murder of a young girl and lynched while awaiting appeal. In the film, the Frank character is identified only as "northern," and the "prejudice" inflicted on him is ascribed to bitterness over the Civil War. Still, as with the Dreyfus affair, the Frank case, another landmark of modern anti-Semitism, would have been recognizable, even in disguise, to many in the audience (especially Jews) who lived through it only twenty years before. At least, that might have been the hope of the film's progressive Jewish director, Mervin LeRoy, and screenwriters Robert Rossen and Aben Kandel.

Dreyfus' name on a list that the corrupt French officers use to find a scapegoat for their problem. ("I wonder how *he* ever became a member of the general staff," sneers the main villain.)⁹⁹

William Dieterle, a leader in the Jewish émigré anti-Nazi community, directed *Zola* as well as Muni's next picture, *Juarez* (1939).¹⁰⁰ Based mostly on Franz Werfel's *Emperor and Maximilian*, the plot pitted the decadent Spanish Hapsburg aristocracy against a rebellious indigenous, non-white people. The narrative also tapped into prevalent fears of Hitler's designs on Central and South America, as well as parallels between its on-screen Spanish-speaking populist rebels and the recently-defeated anti-Franco fighters in Spain. Muni yet again dons ethnic makeup playing President Benito Juárez, who was part Native American—furthering his continual identification on screen with the ethnic other.¹⁰¹

While never as lauded as Muni (who won an Academy Award for *The Story of Louis Pasteur*), Edward G. Robinson was just as successful and in demand at Warner Brothers, and the two men shared many parallels. Born in Rumania as Emmanuel Goldenberg (the family name lived on in his fictitious middle initial), Robinson began in the Yiddish Theatre, as well, and even co-authored, and starred in, a 1929 Broadway stage comedy called *The Kibitzer*.¹⁰² Like Muni, Robinson also made his film debut as an Italian gangster, in 1930's *Little Caesar*, and continued to play various ruffians of indeterminate ethnicity for Warner Brothers throughout the

⁹⁹ *The Life of Emile Zola*, DVD, Warner Home Video, 2005.

¹⁰⁰ Before leaving for the United States in 1930 (when he changed his name from Wilhelm to William) Dieterle acted for Max Reinhardt in Berlin. Dieterle also directed *Blockade* for Walter Wanger.

¹⁰¹ For a survey of multiple instances of Jewish-Indian parallels in 1920s and 1930s popular culture, see Most, *Making Americans*, 55-64.

¹⁰² According to an article about a 2011 public reading of the play, "The story centers on the misadventures of I. Lazarus, a cigar-store owner on Amsterdam Avenue who feels life is passing him by. . . . [He] tells his daughter and anyone else he can corner just how frustrated he is to be bursting with insight—backed not by hunches, but by 'statistics,' as he puts it—all while lacking the few dollars it would take to demonstrate his genius to others. Lazarus finally lands a chance to do big things after he saves the life of a Park Avenue millionaire. . . but only if he can make up his mind when to sell the 10,000 shares of stock with which he's been entrusted by the millionaire." Alison Leigh Cowan, "Kibitzer, a Forgotten Play Reworked by Edward G. Robinson, Gets a Reading," ArtsBeat Blog, New York Times Company, posted 7 December 2011, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/07/kibitzer-a-forgotten-play-doctored-by-edward-g-robinson-gets-a-reading> (accessed 10 December 2011). The play was made into a 1930 film by Paramount, but without Robinson.

decade. At the studio, the two actors became nearly interchangeable, especially when both graduated beyond their early gangster roles into high-prestige historical biographies. Robinson later wrote, “The Brothers Warner regarded us as two sides of a coin and did not hesitate to exploit the situation. He played Pasteur and Zola; I could have. I played [Paul] Ehrlich and [Paul Julius] Reuter, he could have.”¹⁰³

In *Dr. Ehrlich’s Magic Bullet* Robinson ended up replacing Muni in another historical biography, one clearly modeled on *Zola*. In 1938, screenwriter Norman Burnside (aka Burnstine) proposed to Warner Brothers a film about Paul Ehrlich, the Nobel-winning chemist who cured syphilis. With the Jewish hero as the central, not supporting role, Burnside wanted to go much further than *Zola* in exposing persecution against Jews. Writing to *Zola*’s producer, Henry Blanke, he complained that in that film “the Jewish question was handled pianissimo,” adding,

You told me you wanted a story for Paul Muni. Why not the life of Ehrlich—and in the picture instead of minimizing Ehrlich’s Jewish traits, put them in boldly and honestly....And I would hit hard the anti-Semitism that hampered Ehrlich.¹⁰⁴

While Ehrlich did not live to see Hitler, his story was still current thanks to Nazi campaigns to erase his name from many honor rolls in German medical academies.

Released in March 1940, six months after war began in Europe, *Dr. Ehrlich’s Magic Bullet* does stress Ehrlich’s outsider qualities, but not ethnically. He is shown early in the film as a medical renegade, a lowly orderly who angers his superiors by conducting unauthorized experiments. However, when one colleague (played by German actor Sig Ruman, a studio

¹⁰³ Edward G. Robinson and Leonard Spiegelgass, *All My Yesterdays: An Autobiography* (London: W.H. Allen, 1974), 89. Interestingly, the men Robinson mentions playing—Ehrlich, the chemist who cured syphilis, and Reuter, the founder of Reuters news service—were both Jewish; Muni’s roles were not. Robinson and Muni sometimes even switched roles in pre-production. Shortly before *Juarez* began shooting, Warners replaced Muni with Robinson in the title role and cast Muni in a Beethoven “biopic” intended for Robinson; the studio shortly switched the two actors back and the Beethoven film was never made. “Muni and Robinson,” *Boston Herald*, 28 July 1938, Paul Muni Collection, Harvard Theatre Collection.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 201-211.

contract player frequently cast as Nazis) complains to the hospital director, his real grievance against Ehrlich becomes clearer: “I have nothing against Dr. Ehrlich personally. Although I must confess to a certain feeling against people of his faith in our profession.” “I quite understand,” replies the director, who then calls in Ehrlich and kindly offers “a word of advice from an old man. . . . Men like you usually have a very difficult time in this world because they do not know how to conform. You must learn, Ehrlich—it’s conform, or suffer.”¹⁰⁵ While it was too late for mere “conformity” to save the German Jews of 1940, the depiction of one lone Jew up against an anti-Semitic German medical establishment still told a relevant story in this one scene in terms more specific than most films, even if in code.¹⁰⁶

In both *Erlich* and *Zola*, though, anti-Semitism remains—as Michael Rogin said of an earlier Jewish-themed Warner Brothers picture—the “structuring absence.”¹⁰⁷ It is the unspoken force obstructing and/or oppressing the barely acknowledged Jewish character. Thus their antifascist credentials have not stood up well with some historians and critics who fault their omission of the Jewish content inherent in their source stories. “By ignoring the anti-Semitism of the Dreyfus case,” writes Colin Schindler of *Zola*, “the film automatically renounces the right to make an effective statement on current anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany. . . . Once more the Hollywood desire to avoid offence turned what might have been a forthright radical expression into a muddled compromise.”¹⁰⁸ Felicia Herman, however, argues that audience reception of the film—especially with Jewish audiences—would have been informed and supplemented by

¹⁰⁵ *Dr. Ehrlich’s Magic Bullet*, DVD, Warner Archive Collection, 2009.

¹⁰⁶ The following year, Robinson made a film he considered even more antifascist, an adaptation of Jack London’s *The Sea Wolf* (1941). Robert Rossen’s screenplay recast Robinson’s role of a tyrannical ship captain into “a Nazi in everything but name.” Robinson and Spiegelglass, 218. Directed by Michael Curtiz, *The Sea Wolf* featured the contribution of another prominent Hollywood exile: composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 89. The film Rogin is referring to is *The Jazz Singer*.

¹⁰⁸ Colin Schindler, *Hollywood in Crisis: Cinema and American Society, 1929-1939* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 199.

memories of such a widely publicized event of then-recent history as the Dreyfus case. “The press coverage of the film from 1937,” she reveals, “in both Jewish and mainstream American newspapers indicates that much of *Zola*’s original audiences read the film as an effective plea for tolerance at a time when bigotry and prejudice were spreading throughout Europe. Viewers brought to the film a knowledge of the Dreyfus case which allowed them to augment the film’s relative lack of overt Jewish content.”¹⁰⁹ It is also true that the film industry’s policing of language did enable these movies to be more widely distributed and seen than if they had been marginalized as “Jewish films.”¹¹⁰ *Zola*’s success was particularly far-reaching, for it won the Academy Award for Best Picture of 1937.¹¹¹

Amidst all these oblique approaches to the cause, Warners’ release of *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* on 6 May 1939 was a breakthrough. (It was the first major studio to even use the word “Nazi” in the title of a feature film.) One way the studio was able to get a project this explicitly anti-German past the censors was by framing it as a quasi-documentary and even a public service. The story was based on the actual arrest and (well publicized) trial of eighteen German agents in New York in the summer and fall of 1938. The film, though a complete fictionalization of those events, begins and ends with gestures of implied authenticity; the story is introduced by a news announcer and ends with newsreel footage documenting recent German military actions. The first half of the narrative plays as a social drama from the spies’ points of view, taking the audience inside the German-American Bund and its hangouts in Manhattan’s Yorkville

¹⁰⁹ Felicia Herman, “Hollywood, Nazism, and the Jews, 1933-1941,” *American Jewish History* 89, no.1 (2001): 76.

¹¹⁰ Leo Braudy also comes to the film and the filmmakers’ defense: “By touching so lightly on Dreyfus’ Jewishness, the film in effect becomes about injustice generally, especially injustice perpetuated by a military establishment against one of its own who happens to come from a minority group. . . . A veiled story was a practical solution, and obviously preferable to no story at all.” Leo Braudy, “Entertainment or Propaganda,” in *Warners’ War: Politics, Pop Culture and Propaganda in Wartime Hollywood*, eds. Martin Kaplan and Johanna Blakely (Los Angeles: Norman Lear Center Press, 2004), 31.

¹¹¹ In a possibly discreet show of support for the movie’s implied Jewish narrative, Joseph Schildkraut won a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his performance as Dreyfus.

neighborhood. Then, at the midpoint, the FBI enters and the genre of the crime film “procedural” takes over as we watch American detective work save the country from these “fifth columnists.” For the lead role of the detective, Warners cast Edward G. Robinson—clearly a social promotion from his earlier gangster roles, but also possibly a nod to the role of antifascist avenger he was playing in real life as a leader of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League. (So involved was Robinson in HANL that their “Declaration of Democratic Independence” was signed at his home.)¹¹² Robinson himself certainly saw the film as an extension of his off-screen crusade; “I feel that I am serving my country,” he told the press, “just as effectively as if I shouldered a gun and marched away to war.”¹¹³

With Robinson starring, playwright John Wexley (*They Shall Not Die*) co-writing the screenplay, and émigré Anatole Litvak directing, *Confessions* bore the stamp of the Jewish-American “cultural front” at many levels. Still, not even this film addressed Jews or Jewish issues directly. Steven Ross reports that Warner Brothers had to give explicit guarantees they would avoid any mention of Jews in exchange for the PCA’s imprimatur.¹¹⁴ But references still abound in the script’s dialogue to the German propagation of “religious hatred” and obsession with genetics. (The Bund leader character, for instance, is a doctor who files his patients by race.) Caution and vagueness did not prevent backlash against the film, especially from increasingly organized Bundist groups, one of which set fire to a Milwaukee cinema exhibiting the film.¹¹⁵ *Confessions* also took on isolationists as well as outright saboteurs. When we meet Robinson’s character, FBI agent Edward Renard, he is busy debating other officials over the

¹¹² William MacAdams, *Ben Hecht: A Biography* (New York: Barricade Books, 1990), 213.

¹¹³ Quoted in Steven J. Ross, “*Confessions of a Nazi Spy*: Warner Bros., Anti-Fascism and the Politicization of Hollywood,” in Kaplan and Blakely, 54.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 76-77.

urgency of the Nazi threat.¹¹⁶ A fellow agent cautions against pursuing the case against their suspects because, he asserts, the United States is still neutral. Robinson's retort—his first line of the film—is delivered straight into the camera: “Germany is at war with *us*.”¹¹⁷

Confessions opened in May 1939. By January 1940—four months after war broke out in Europe—the PCA finally relaxed its rules governing antifascist content. This emboldened other studios to venture into the genre as well—if for no other reason than competition. MGM released three films in 1940 about the war in Europe: *The Mortal Storm*, *Escape*, and *Flight Command*.¹¹⁸ And between 1940 and 1941, Twentieth Century Fox opened *The Man I Married* (released in Europe as *I Married a Nazi*); Fritz Lang's thriller *Man Hunt*, based on Geoffrey Household's British thriller *Rogue Male* about a game hunter stalking Hitler; and *Confirm or Deny*, a newspaper drama about the London Blitz, meant to encourage Americans to come to the aid of British citizens.¹¹⁹ Charlie Chaplin's anti-Hitler satire *The Great Dictator* had already been in development for over a year at United Artists; it finally premiered in October 1940. Ironically this comedy by a non-Jewish star of the silent era was, at this point, the most topical and outspoken Hollywood film to date regarding the persecution of the Jews in Germany.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ The real life FBI agent Robinson's character was based on was Leon Turrou, who had written about his case for the *New York Post* and in a best-selling book released shortly before the film, *Nazi Spies in America*.

¹¹⁷ *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, DVD, Warner Home Video, 2010.

¹¹⁸ *The Mortal Storm* (directed by Frank Borzage) and *Escape* (Mervin LeRoy) were based on best-selling novels about contemporary Germany by Phyllis Bottome and Grace Zaring Stone, respectively.

¹¹⁹ All three of these films bore Jewish pedigrees. Lang never self-identified as a Jew, but because his mother was from a Jewish family, he knew he would have been considered so by the Nazis; he was also very politically active as a German refugee and was a charter member of HANL. *I Married a Nazi* was directed by Irving Pichel, later blacklisted. *Confirm or Deny* was co-written by two Jewish-American radicals, Jo Swerling and Samuel Fuller.

¹²⁰ Although Chaplin was not Jewish, the Nazis continually listed him as one in their cultural bans. In response, Chaplin often took pride in not denying such rumors out of solidarity with Jews against fascism. His casting of himself as a Jewish barber in *The Great Dictator* (alongside the twinned role of the dictator “Hinkel” himself) reflected this identification. See J. Hoberman, “The First ‘Jewish’ Superstar: Charlie Chaplin,” in Hoberman, et al., *Entertaining Americans: Jews, Movies and Broadcasting*, 34-39. *The Great Dictator* stood out from other antifascist films in its very use of the word “Jew” (at one point even painted on the barber's window by a stormtrooper). It also featured scenes of Jews in a concentration camp, albeit a very sanitized Hollywood version of one.

Ben Hecht: “My Tribe is Israel”

Even though his plays and films before the war were rarely overtly political, Ben Hecht was one of Broadway and Hollywood’s earliest anti-Nazi activists behind the scenes. He later wrote that he “turned into a Jew in 1939,” in reaction to the Nazi threat, but this appears to have happened at least four years earlier.¹²¹ On 31 July 1935—long before not only *Kristallnacht*, the *Anschluss*, and the Munich conference, but even before Hitler’s issuance of the 1935 Nuremberg laws—Hecht proclaimed himself both a Jew and an ardent antifascist in the pages of the *New York Daily Mirror*. Writing as a “guest columnist” for Walter Winchell (himself another early anti-Nazi voice), Hecht warned readers that what was developing in Germany was worse than the traditional anti-Semitism that European Jews had grown accustomed to:

In the old days, when the world was pushing them around a bit, the Jews knew why they were hated. It was the reward for being a Jew. God loved you but the goyim hated you. And this seemed to them fair enough. But today, when it is obvious that God loves nobody—least of all the Jews—the hatred of the goyim is a little more complicated and infinitely more difficult to bear.¹²²

But the real subject of his column turns out to be not the fate of Jews abroad but how those in the U.S. should react. After decades of pressure to assimilate in exchange for success and acceptance, he says, American Jews must acknowledge their Jewishness. Now that “the Hitler howl is like a lash driving [him] back into the Ghetto,” he writes, “The American Jew suffers from the astonishing fact that he is a Jew.” But such self-acceptance is necessary, Hecht insists, if American Jews are to be of any aid to their European brethren. “I have a feeling that this Jew consciousness is rather good for the seemingly assimilated Jew,” he concludes, somewhat optimistically.¹²³

¹²¹ Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (1954; repr., New York: Primus, 1985), 517.

¹²² “On Broadway,” *New York Daily Mirror*, 31 July 1935.

¹²³ *Ibid.* Significantly, Hecht does not address Judaism per se. He clearly addresses the secular American Jew, almost flippantly setting aside the persecution of more outwardly religious Jewish communities who supposedly

Previously, Hecht's public persona had not only been thoroughly secular but aggressively iconoclastic towards all upholders of conventional morality, including organized religion of all kinds. (His one work of fiction addressing Jewishness—his 1931 novel *A Jew in Love*—was even denounced as anti-Semitic caricature.)¹²⁴ His reclaiming of his Jewishness, then, was not a religious awakening, but an identification with his Eastern European heritage. Born in 1894 in New York City to Russian Jewish immigrants who soon moved to the Midwest, Hecht grew up far from the “melting pot” of the city, but still surrounded by his largely un-aculturated extended family. “A people to whom I belonged,” he later wrote of his learning of Nazi genocide, “who had produced my mother, my father and all my relatives I had loved, was being turned into an exterminator’s quarry, and there was no outcry against the deed.”¹²⁵ Once he did reclaim his Jewish identity, he did so, literally, with a vengeance. “Hecht’s new sense of his own Jewishness,” writes biographer Doug Fetherling, “his sense of belonging to a world brotherhood suddenly threatened with devastation, manifested itself, not in the study of Jewish history and thought, but in the purblind zeal of the convert.”¹²⁶

Hecht’s early fame sprung from a string of stage and screen successes in the late twenties and early thirties that often built upon his experiences as a Chicago newspaperman.¹²⁷ His

expect such oppression. (“They, as a rule, embrace the hatred of the infidel as testimonial to their piety.”) Instead he stresses the more precipitous fall of those who thought they had escaped that fate through assimilation. “The Jews today, alas, are not a religious but a social folk,” argues Hecht. “The continuation of the old persecution find them therefore unarmed....They haven’t learned how to take a snub.”

¹²⁴ Doug Fetherling, *The Five Lives of Ben Hecht* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen, 1977), 118-120.

¹²⁵ Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 519.

¹²⁶ Fetherling, *Five Lives*, 125. Fetherling also offers this intriguing reading of Hecht’s struggle with his own identity: “It might appear at times that his discovery of his own heritage was a negative one (as he himself said), that it was founded in other people’s anti-Semitism rather than his own Judaism. But a better reasoned notion is that the sudden shift from one extreme to the other was the only way he could resolve the conflict he doubtless felt very deeply—that of being thoroughly American and yet at base (he believed) so thoroughly only half-American.” *Ibid.*, 187.

¹²⁷ Hecht’s 1928 yellow-journalism satire *The Front Page* (written with Charles MacArthur) was a Broadway sensation and a 1931 film. His “original story” for Josef von Sternberg’s silent film *Underworld* was honored at the very first Academy Awards in 1929, and he wrote the screenplay for the controversially violent 1932 gangster film *Scarface* starring Paul Muni.

cynical iconoclasm and long aversion to politics and politicians of any stripe made him reluctant in his early career to engage in direct advocacy for political causes in his work. But beginning in the mid-thirties (perhaps not coincidentally concurrent with the ascendancy of Hitler), he began to take on more politically-themed projects, such as *Viva Villa!* (1934), a raucous but ultimately sympathetic portrait of the Mexican revolutionary and a film that reportedly won him the (unwanted) admiration of Josef Stalin.¹²⁸

Hecht's 1937 play *To Quito and Back* appeared to draw on his experience with that film by featuring as its protagonist a journalist/screenwriter who, after writing a movie called "Pancho Rides Again," falls in with real-life Ecuadorian communist insurgents—only to die in the process of searching for what he really believes.¹²⁹ *Quito*—produced on Broadway by the Theatre Guild—may have marked a political milestone for Hecht, but he was not welcomed with open arms by leftist critics, such as Mary McCarthy, who surmised in *Partisan Review* that the playwright was only "giving lip-service to radicalism."¹³⁰ More mainstream outlets, however, like *The New York Herald Tribune*, appreciated that, "however badly," the play dealt "with one of the most vital and provocative of present-day problems: the plight of an unstable intellectual liberal in a world of violently shifting social forces."¹³¹

Even if *To Quito and Back* did not succeed as theatre of the left, it was still an expressly antifascist play. Its most deplorable characters are imperialistic white capitalists, who, to safeguard their property and profits from natural resources, end up backing the counter-revolutionary "fascists."¹³² For someone as sensitive to the German threat as Ben Hecht to inject

¹²⁸ MacAdams, *Ben Hecht*, 159.

¹²⁹ The Villa-esque rebel leader was played by Yiddish Theatre star Joseph Buloff.

¹³⁰ Mary McCarthy, *Sights and Spectacles* (Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956), 6.

¹³¹ Quoted in Roy S. Waldau, *Vintage Years of the Theatre Guild, 1928-1939* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1972), 255.

¹³² Ben Hecht, *To Quito and Back* (New York: Covici, Friede, 1937), 140, 180.

that word into a 1937 script signals at least some connection in his mind to the European situation. And yet, without the excuse of Production Code censorship, he still chose to set his story in Ecuador, making it as displaced an antifascist narrative as Hollywood's oblique commentaries like *Juarez* and *Blockade*. As McCarthy wrote, "only in a baroque and slightly goofy setting is communism accessible to Mr. Hecht."¹³³

Ironically, the film Hecht was most proud of politically was a 1939 musical western he wrote for MGM, *Let Freedom Ring*. Marketed as a vehicle for the singer Nelson Eddy, this story about an eastern business tycoon descending on a frontier town to buy up its land and its people echoes the themes of many Popular Front agrarian narratives. Eddy plays a favorite son of the town, back from Harvard Law School, who takes on the interloping Wall Street railroad magnate Knox (played by Edward Arnold) by publishing a subversive newspaper. "Liberty is Sweeter than a Tyrant's Free Glass of Beer," reads one headline, warning workers not to be seduced by the deceptive ploys of "Boss Knox." In his opening titles for the film's prologue, Hecht announces in no uncertain terms that the stakes for this small town are higher than in more conventional films of the genre:

The greatest battles for liberty and human rights are not fought on the battlefields of history but in the hearts of a nation's people. This is a tale of the days when the New West refought without guns or banners the eternal struggle against oppression and won for another generation the gift of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.¹³⁴

With shooting for the film beginning soon after *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, parallels to Germany must have been clear, at least in Hecht's mind, during the film's opening pogrom-like sequence of ranchers' houses being set aflame by the Robber Baron's henchmen.

That Knox's railroad workers are all immigrants (mostly Irishmen and "Bohunks") implies a plea for ethnic pluralism and racial equality in the film, as well. In a rousing climactic

¹³³ McCarthy, *Sights and Spectacles*, 6.

¹³⁴ *Let Freedom Ring*, VHS, MGM/UA Home Video, 1994.

speech, the story's heroine implores the men (portrayed as a Wild West *lumpenproletariat*) to look beyond the kind of "bread and circuses" pandering that rallied the German masses to Hitler:

How about what you came here for? How about the thing that brought you over the seas—to the land where men were free and equal. That's your biggest job. To keep it that kind of a land. . . . Don't throw it away for a free drink and a pat on the back from the boss. Don't give this land back to men who laugh at freedom and human justice. . . . [Y]ou didn't come to this country to be [Knox's] men. You came here to be Americans. You came here to share in the heritage of liberty and fair play for all that the men who came before you won for you.¹³⁵

Eddy's character addresses the crowd in much the same vein, but through song—in Sigmund Romberg and Edward Heyman's "Where Else But Here," in which "Eddy tells people from various countries how wonderful it is to be in America, addressing each in their own ethnically clichéd musical idioms."¹³⁶

So committed was Hecht to this project as propaganda that upon first viewing the completed film, on 16 January 1939, he telegraphed his wife:

Just saw *Let Freedom Ring* in the projection room. It made everybody cry and looked and sounded like the best picture I've ever done for effectiveness. It is more patriotic than a Madison Square Garden meeting and all the rhetoric about freedom and humanity goes over like a cannonball....I wouldn't be surprised if it reelected Roosevelt and overthrew Hitler.¹³⁷

As hyperbolic as Hecht's ambitions for the film might have been, the antifascist implications of *Let Freedom Ring* were not entirely lost on 1939 audiences, especially those already motivated to seek them. The *Daily Worker* praised the film as "a resounding statement of the American people's will to democracy." Referencing a recent German-American Bund rally and Congressional investigations into Hollywood "warmongering," the critic also welcomes that the movie "does at least a little to purify the New York air so recently polluted by the vaporings of

¹³⁵ "Let Freedom Ring" typescript, 69-70, Morgan Library, New York.

¹³⁶ William Everett, *Sigmund Romberg* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 42.

¹³⁷ Ben Hecht to Rose Caylor Hecht, telegram, January 16, 1939, Ben Hecht Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.

[Bund leader] Fritz Kuhn and Martin Dies.”¹³⁸ Still, when *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* opened just a few months later, *Let Freedom Ring* would surely have seemed tame by comparison, if still politically relevant at all.

Hecht’s next political assignment came from Walter Wanger, producer of *Blockade*.¹³⁹ Wanger had been making antifascist films since *The President Vanishes* (1934), based on a Rex Stout novel about a band of “Grey Shirts,” under the command of a rogue industrialist, who kidnap the president as part of a coup d’état.¹⁴⁰ After *Blockade*, Wanger set out to film journalist Vincent Sheean’s 1934 memoir *Personal History*, which reported on multiple international conflicts. Sheean’s taste for adventure made the book a bestseller, but he was also a highly visible political activist and antifascist in print and in lectures—making any film based on his work of instant interest to Popular Front artists and audiences.¹⁴¹ Wanger developed several screenplay drafts (including one from John Howard Lawson) before handing the project over in 1939 to English director Alfred Hitchcock, who had just arrived in Hollywood. Hitchcock, eager to make films that supported his homeland’s battle against Germany, brought in his own screenwriter from the U.K., Charles Bennett, who jettisoned Sheean’s book entirely.¹⁴² In the resulting movie—*Foreign Correspondent*—all that remained from the source was the figure of an international reporter as protagonist. And while Hitchcock’s scenario did pit the American hero against implied Nazi agents and sweep him up in the diplomacy of appeasement, Wanger

¹³⁸ Peter Sidney, “‘Let Freedom Ring’ a Fine Film About U.S.A.,” *Daily Worker*, 11 March 1939.

¹³⁹ Wanger was the child of a prosperous west coast German-Jewish merchant family (originally named Feuchtwanger). His conspicuous embrace of radical causes earned him a reputation as the “liberal theoretician of the producer caste.” Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition*, 110.

¹⁴⁰ Hecht biographers MacAdams and Fetherling—as well as numerous Hecht filmographies—claim Hecht and Charles McArthur were uncredited script doctors on *The President Vanishes*, but without evidence of attribution.

¹⁴¹ Daniel Bell even went so far as to call Sheean “the latter-day John Reed of communist romanticism.” Daniel Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States* (1952; repr., Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 183.

¹⁴² The final screenplay credit for *Foreign Correspondent* went to Bennett, Joan Harrison (another English colleague of Hitchcock’s), James Hilton, and humorist Robert Benchley, who also acted in the film. Antifascist playwright Richard Maibaum (*Birthright*) did uncredited work on the script as well. Bernstein, 159.

was so wary of the Production Code Administration that he insisted that the nationality of the villains not be identified and that the German language never be spoken.¹⁴³

After shooting had completed in the Spring of 1940, Wanger—as if to redeem the original antifascist impetus for the film—decided to add an epilogue that would bring the European war home to American audiences. Presumably knowing Hecht’s strong advocacy of American intervention, Wanger engaged him to write the closing one-minute monologue. And so the film ends with the American hero, John Jones (Joel McCrea), in a London radio studio, broadcasting in the midst of the Blitz:

Hello, America. I’ve been watching a part of the world being blown to pieces. A part of the world as nice as Vermont and Ohio and Virginia and California and Illinois lies ripped up and bleeding like a steer in a slaughterhouse. And I’ve seen things that make the history of the savages read like Pollyanna legends.... [Sound of bombs] All that noise you hear isn’t static. It’s death, coming to London. Yes, they’re coming here now. You can hear the bombs falling on the streets and in the homes. Don’t tune me out. Hang on a while, this is a big story and you’re part of it. It’s too late to do anything here now except stand in the dark and let them come. It’s as if the lights were all out everywhere. Except in America. Keep those lights burning, cover them with steel, ring them with guns, build a canopy of battleships and bombing planes around them. Hello, America! Hang on to your lights. They’re the only lights left in the world.¹⁴⁴

What Hecht wrote in this direct address to the cinema audience (“Hello, Americans”) was effectively a call for Roosevelt’s Lend-Lease Act a year before it was enacted. That bill, which did indeed send “battleships” and other munitions to Great Britain, was still highly controversial when the president convinced Congress to pass it in March 1941, nine months before Pearl Harbor. What Hecht also accomplishes in the speech—overtly performed in the film with the trappings of propaganda, putting McCrea at a radio microphone, underscoring the finish with the strains of “The Star-Spangled Banner”—is bringing home to Americans what they have at stake in a war about others. The image of mass “slaughter” (likely intended as an allusion to the Jews)

¹⁴³ Bernstein, *Walter Wanger*, 159. Screenwriter Bennett later claimed Hitchcock had actors speak German backwards to get around the proscription and make the language unintelligible.

¹⁴⁴ *Foreign Correspondent*, DVD, Warner Home Video, 2004.

is placed in a landscape of small-town America. On screen, the world around McCrea literally descends into darkness as the air raid continues and his voice is almost drowned out by bombs. His life and that of the unseen Londoners behind him are in the audience's hands. Hecht and Hitchcock's compelling theatrics put an American face on the "big story" of the fight against fascism. As Jones reminds the audience, "You're part of it."¹⁴⁵

Hecht apparently worked on numerous other antifascist and otherwise war-related projects during 1941, but none of them came to fruition—at least not with his name on them. In March and April, he was reportedly in discussions to collaborate on a play about Britain's Royal Air Force written by a serving RAF pilot.¹⁴⁶ In January, British-Hungarian producer Alexander Korda announced the purchase of the rights to a scenario ("original story") by Hecht about German-occupied Paris, in anticipation of a film to be titled "Forbidden City," which was never made.¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Hecht appears to have been simultaneously writing a script for RKO based on Eric Ambler's antifascist espionage novel *Journey Into Fear* about an American munitions expert hunted by Nazi agents across the Middle East.¹⁴⁸ The film was eventually made by Orson Welles, who declined to use Hecht's script when he took over the project in July 1941. (It was not released until February 1943, well into the U.S. war effort.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ This short contribution to *Foreign Correspondent* came well before Hecht's fully-credited collaborations with Hitchcock on successful later films like *Spellbound* (1945) and the postwar antifascist thriller *Notorious* (1946).

¹⁴⁶ "News of the Stage," *New York Times*, 5 March 1941; "News of the Stage," *New York Times*, 10 April 1941. The play was announced under the title *R.A.F.* Hecht was no longer involved by the time it opened as *Golden Wings* with Guy Bolton sharing the writing credit with original author William Jay. Its opening on 8 December 1941, the day after Pearl Harbor, did not help it at the box office; it ran only six performances.

¹⁴⁷ "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times*, 24 January 1941. MacAdams reports that Hecht also discussed another Paris-based scenario with actor-director Erich von Stroheim in the spring of 1940, "an anti-Nazi screenplay" entitled "Abri: 50 Personnes." MacAdams, *Ben Hecht*, 214.

¹⁴⁸ "News of the Screen," *New York Times*, 24 February 1941; "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times*, 12 July 1941; "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times*, 29 July 1941. Denning credits Ambler (alongside Graham Greene) with pioneering "the antifascist spy-thriller... [which] became one of the classic genres of the Popular Front itself" due to how "its international intrigues proved particularly amenable to the antifascist aesthetic." Denning, *The Cultural Font*, 104, 378.

¹⁴⁹ Hecht's documented involvement in the early stages of *Journey into Fear* has led Hecht biographers and some film historians to inaccurately include the title in Hecht's filmography as an uncredited work, even though none of

One might think that, as one of the most prosperous and well-known screenwriters in the industry, Hecht would have been able to write any kind of film he wanted. But in an era when writers were still hired hands and their work was the property of the studio to do with as it wished, Hecht was no exception. Perhaps had Hecht worked for Warner Brothers he might have been assigned more socially conscious material. Instead, his two main employers of the late thirties and early forties, MGM and Twentieth Century Fox, came relatively late to the antifascist wave. (Both still had business interests in Germany as late as 1940.) Once the Production Code loosened restrictions on content related to the war after September 1939, however, Fox's Darryl Zanuck quickly emerged as a rival to Warners in producing progressive and antifascist titles. With Zanuck, Hecht wrote and co-produced an anti-Japanese war film, *China Girl* (1942), which went into production shortly after Pearl Harbor; while focusing on the Pacific not European war, the story did feature an "interracial" romance rare for a Hollywood film, between the hero and a Eurasian woman (played by Gene Tierney).

Hecht's greatest contribution to the prewar antifascist cause ended up being off-screen, as a columnist for *PM*. Launched by editor-publisher Ralph Ingersoll in 1940 as a progressive daily paper, *PM* quickly became "perhaps the most successful organ of the New York Popular Front."¹⁵⁰ Seeking a broad coalition for the paper's interventionist policy toward the war, Ingersoll hired Hecht to write a weekly column that, while called "A Thousand and One Afternoons in New York," was really a platform for his international views and antifascist

his material was ultimately used in Welles' film. The official screenplay credit went to actor Joseph Cotton, a Mercury Theatre actor and one of the film's stars. But Welles biographer Simon Callow argues that "the authorship—in the wider sense of the word—of *Journey into Fear* is something of a mystery," with Welles and nominal director Norman Foster also contributing to a film that "evolved in an improvisatory manner." Callow confirms Hecht's initial but discarded work on the screenplay. Simon Callow, *Orson Welles, Volume Two: Hello Americans* (New York: Viking, 2006), 13, 49.

¹⁵⁰ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 16.

advocacy. (“I was as much Jew as reporter,” he later wrote.)¹⁵¹ During the year leading up to Pearl Harbor, *PM* readers could read Hecht’s moving accounts of the plight of French Jews like philosopher Henri Bergson and director Julien Duvivier; his derisive dissections of isolationist spokesmen; and his tributes to the people of wartime Britain and their new prime minister, Winston Churchill. He also used the column to speak of his own Jewish experience and his awakened identity. In March 1941 a column called, “My Tribe is Israel” lambasted—as he did back in 1935—American Jews who sought safety from Hitlerism in assimilation. Now that “we are Jews in the eyes of our enemies,” he wrote, every Jew had no choice but to “answer as a Jew,” adding, “I am not attacking you, I am only asking you to fight.”¹⁵²

Among the Jews Hecht faulted were the Hollywood moguls. In November 1940, a secret meeting of many studio executives was convened by none other than Joseph P. Kennedy, Roosevelt’s controversial Ambassador to Great Britain (and a former movie producer himself) who had remained outspokenly pro-appeasement despite his president’s more interventionist sympathies. Kennedy’s message to Hollywood was grim. He prophesied that, a year into the war, England was no closer to winning and that the United States might have to reconcile itself to the prospect of a German victory. Under such conditions, he suggested, the studios would be wise to cancel any planned anti-Nazi films—not only to aid diplomacy with Germany but to avoid risking anti-Semitic backlash. (Attendees reported Kennedy saying “the Jews were on the spot” both in England and America, and that they would be “in jeopardy if they continued to abuse” the power of their medium.)¹⁵³ In the 16 January edition of *PM*, Hecht exposed in the East Coast press what was still only an inside-Hollywood story:

¹⁵¹ Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 520.

¹⁵² Ben Hecht, *1001 Afternoons in New York* (New York: Viking, 1941), 167. Viking published this collection of Hecht *PM* columns in October 1941.

¹⁵³ Quoted in Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 344. Actor Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., a Roosevelt supporter, spoke to producers present at the meeting and relayed their secondhand accounts in a memo to the White House.

The Jews of the movie industry have been listening to their old friend, Ambassador Joe, who was once one of them. And Joe has been giving advice to his Semitic Hollywood pals. He has been advising them to lie low, not to attract attention to themselves, and not to use their powerful medium of expression as a propaganda weapon against the Nazis. At a number of private luncheons with the jittery cinema moguls, Ambassador Joe has peddled the *sub rosa* information that anything the movies do to decry the horrors of Hitlerism will act as a boomerang and come back and knock over all the Jews. When he had concluded his missionary work, most of the screen rajahs were convinced that the best course open to Jews was to make themselves small, and walk gently as if they had a venereal disease. This would keep people from noticing them and calling them warmongers.¹⁵⁴

As Hecht's deployment of sexual imagery indicates, at stake for him in the antifascist fight was an ideal of Jewish potency. In his telling of the story, Kennedy, by trying to silence the Hollywood Jews, effectively emasculates them as well. Such analogies would come to dominate Hecht's writing about anti-Semitism throughout the war and afterwards.

Challenges from Right and Left

Many would have expected the period immediately following the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 to be a boon to antifascist activism in America. Hitler was now a proven aggressor and the fall of the European democracies seemed, for the first time, possible. But rather than expanding, antifascism in America faced more obstacles than ever over the next two years before Pearl Harbor—due to opposition from not only the right but the left, as well.

The treaty—or “nonaggression pact”—signed by Germany and the Soviet Union in August 1939 dealt a seismic blow to the Popular Front in America and internationally by effectively withdrawing Communist support for the antifascist coalition. Now that Russia was neutral, Communist spokesmen suddenly decried the new war as an imperialist venture on *both*

¹⁵⁴ Hecht, *1001 Afternoons*, 26-27.

sides (Germany and England), reverting to the party-line position of World War I and pre-Hitler pacifism on the left.¹⁵⁵

The fragility of the Popular Front's radical-liberal alliance was thus severely tested between September 1939 and June 1941 (when the pact was finally nullified by Hitler's invasion of Russia). And while more independent-minded liberals like the writers of the Playwrights' Company (namely Anderson, Sherwood, and Rice) continued to produce topical plays about Europe, it was some of the dramatists furthest on the left who now suddenly changed course. Irwin Shaw's tellingly titled 1940 comedy *Retreat to Pleasure* (about disillusioned New Dealers selling out) turned out to be the Group Theatre's final production. The same year the hero of Clifford Odets's *Night Music*, written just after war broke out, treats the prospect of being drafted with dread, not eagerness to fight. Even *Pins and Needles* found itself undergoing sudden revisions and reversals in the third year of its long run. After the Hitler-Stalin Pact, Harold Rome introduced a new song, "Stay Out Sammy," where an African American boy (named after Uncle Sam and also representing the ethnic minorities and working classes who inevitably pay the greatest price in war) is warned by his mother not to get dragged into schoolyard fights that are not his business. Politics also wreaked havoc with one of the show's staple numbers, "Four Little Angels of Peace," which, back in 1937, first mocked the disavowals of territorial ambitions by Hitler, Mussolini, and Emperor Hirohito. (The fourth figure was initially British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, representing the British Empire, and, the following year, Neville Chamberlain, who was derided for appeasing the other "angels.") With England's declaration of war against Hitler in September 1939, the prime minister's slot was spared and the song became "Three Little Angels"; but by October it was withdrawn altogether, partly out of the confusion over how

¹⁵⁵ The American Communist Party (CPUSA) now characterized the conflict only as "the Second Imperialist War" and "not a war against fascism." Quoted in Ceplair, *Under the Shadow*, 201.

to accommodate the Pact. That question was resolved in November when the song returned with Stalin himself as the fourth “angel,” after his post-Pact encroachments into Poland. The Broadway musical as a form has always been subject to incessant “doctoring,” but few shows have ever had to contend with constantly shifting global politics, diplomatic reversals, and ideological directives, as well.¹⁵⁶

The Pact did not deter all communist writers, however. Lillian Hellman’s *Watch on the Rhine*, which opened 1 April 1941, marked the peak of pre-Pearl Harbor antifascist drama on Broadway in terms of commercial success and audience reach.¹⁵⁷ Set one year earlier, in the Spring of 1940, it dramatized Americans’ reluctant awakening to the urgency of the European war by dropping a deadly battle between a Nazi agent and a German resistance fighter literally into America’s living room—in this case the home of a Washington, DC socialite. The inciting incident for the play is when the hostess’ daughter, Sara, returns home (after many years in Europe) with her husband, Kurt Müller, a German underground resistance leader. Unfortunately for them, another houseguest, an impoverished Rumanian count, sees an opportunity to betray Kurt’s whereabouts to the German embassy for money. The two foreigners end up fighting a proxy war that leads to a deathly struggle, after which Kurt must escape. The play ends with Sara’s mother beholding the strange and frightening scene: “We’re shaken out of the magnolias, eh?” It was Hellman’s warning to Americans—of all political affiliations, right and left—that they could not shield themselves from fascism any longer.

The character of Kurt Müller was perhaps Broadway’s most strident antifascist militant, clearly emblematic of the Popular Front resistance fighter. A veteran of the Spanish Civil War, he almost breaks the realist frame of the play at one point to sing a rebel “fight song” from the

¹⁵⁶ Stanley Green, *Broadway Musicals of the 30s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 152-154.

¹⁵⁷ After 378 performances on Broadway, *Watch on the Rhine* performed on a national tour in 1942 and was made into a successful Hollywood film in 1943.

parlor piano. Many believe that Hellman based the character on a real-life Czech Jewish Communist Otto Katz, who spent much of the late thirties in Hollywood raising funds for refugees.¹⁵⁸ While Kurt is never marked as Jewish, Hellman does raise the question, when the Romanian Count, Teck, asks his wife what she knows about him:

MARTHE: He had to leave Germany in '33.

TECK: A Jew?

MARTHE: No. I don't think so.

TECK: Why did he have to leave Germany?

MARTHE: Oh, I don't know, Teck. He's an anti-Nazi.¹⁵⁹

These lines have been cited by at least one critic as evidence of deliberate avoidance or disavowal by Hellman of any Jewish presence in the play.¹⁶⁰ But as a disavowal it is hardly resolute. Marthe's initial answer to Teck's inquiry may be "no," but, in fact, she is just guessing ("I don't think so"); neither she nor her husband know Kurt at all. Since the character is never identified as any religion or race, nothing ever rules out his being Jewish. Hellman leaves the question essentially unanswered for the entire play and yet clearly does not deem it irrelevant—otherwise it would not be raised. On Broadway Kurt was played by German actor Paul Lukas (a Gentile known, ironically, for many film roles as Nazis); but for the road company, director Herman Shumlin approached the most famous Jewish actor in America, Paul Muni.¹⁶¹ Muni turned the job down, but had he played it, audiences might have read into Hellman's play the story of not just a German antifascist refugee, but a Jewish avenger, one who needed Americans'

¹⁵⁸ Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition*, 106.

¹⁵⁹ *Six Plays by Lillian Hellman* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 239.

¹⁶⁰ Julius Novick, *Beyond the Golden Door* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3. Novick professes surprise that Hellman "managed to write a play about refugees from Nazi Europe in which there are no Jewish characters," but also concedes that this "probably had something to do with fears, not without foundation before Pearl Harbor, that Americans might see the struggle against Hitler as a merely Jewish concern." Hellman's status as a Jewish-American writer has long been complicated by the lack of explicitly Jewish characters or subject matter in her plays until her last work *My Mother, My Father, and Me* (1963), itself an adaptation of another writer's novel (*How Much?* by Burt Blechman, published 1961).

¹⁶¹ Jerome Lawrence, *Actor: The Life and Times of Paul Muni* (New York: Samuel French, 1974), 264-265. Muni's stated reason for declining the role was his reluctance to replace another actor.

support now more than ever.¹⁶²

The Pact certainly had a deadening impact on activism in Hollywood, but, contrary to later accusations, the Communist Party was not all-controlling enough to shut down all antifascist activity.¹⁶³ Its reversal did temporarily drive a wedge in the film industry's cultural-front coalition—between those drawn specifically to fighting anti-Semitism (including those motivated by their own Jewish identity) and those for whom antifascism was but one plank in a party platform. The Hollywood Anti-Nazi League—under the leadership of ardent communist (and non-Jew) Donald Ogden Stewart—conspicuously changed its name in December 1939 to the more amorphous-sounding “Hollywood League for Democratic Action.” Many rank and file members, however (including its high-profile Jewish members like Muni, Robinson, and John Garfield), continued their activism on screen and off.

Meanwhile, despite the waning of antifascist activism and the defection of Communists due to the Pact, the movement's right-wing opponents did not relent. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) had initially been formed in 1934, one year after Hitler came to power, to guard against Nazi infiltration. Three years later, the committee's founding chair, New York Representative Samuel Dickstein, was replaced by Texas conservative Martin Dies who soon pivoted its focus away from fascist and onto communist influence.¹⁶⁴ In his quest to expose all “subversive and un-American propaganda that is instigated from foreign countries or of a domestic origin,” Dies soon zeroed in on popular culture and the arts.¹⁶⁵ In June 1939 he

¹⁶² In the 1943 film version, the ethnicity of Kurt (played again by Paul Lukas) was no longer even questioned; Marthe and Teck's lines speculating about his Jewishness were cut.

¹⁶³ For discussion of the troubled relations between the Communist Party and Hollywood filmmakers, see Buhle and Wagner, *Radical Hollywood*, 79-102.

¹⁶⁴ Invoking the frequent charge that antifascist Jews unnecessarily brought on their own persecution, Dies claimed as justification for his power-grab, “Many of our Jewish citizens wanted Dickstein eliminated because they felt he was furnishing ammunition to Nazis and other anti-Semitic movements.” Quoted in Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 351.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 167.

successfully led the charge in Congress to defund and disband the Federal Theatre Project, accusing it of spreading Communist propaganda—which ostensibly included antifascist advocacy. The disappearance of this subsidized and highly visible platform was a severe setback to antifascist activists and theatre artists.

Next, Dies turned his attention to Hollywood, where he claimed “un-Americanism had made more progress...than in any part of the country,” due to the influence of Communist Party members and such “dupes” as the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League.¹⁶⁶ But Dies’ anticommunism was fueled as much by his anti-immigration and anti-Semitic beliefs as by any defense of capitalism.¹⁶⁷ When not outright accusing Jewish moviemakers of being active communists, Dies considered them, at best, pawns of Communist-driven antifascism due to their “sensitive” feelings about Nazi racial policies; in his investigations he urged “Jewish moguls and stars...to prove that they had not been duped by Communism but were patriotic Americans.”¹⁶⁸

While Dies did not go forward with public hearings in the House, in the Fall of 1941, a similar Senate committee did exactly that. Senators Burton Wheeler and Gerald Nye—both leaders in the isolationist movement—spent much of September and October 1941 (with Pearl Harbor just two months away) inveighing against pro-war “propaganda” in the film industry. (Their committee even singled out specific movies by name as objectionable for their

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 352.

¹⁶⁷ “The son of a conservative Texas congressman who fervently opposed immigration, Dies took up the cause and introduced legislation on his first day in the House [in 1933] to suspend immigration for five years. Some opponents suspected he was motivated by anti-Semitism. Dies waved off those accusations, but he spoke frequently of restoring “Christian influence” in America, and he openly consorted with anti-Semites. The committee’s first investigator was a prominent speaker for the Nazi Bund. A notorious anti-Semite from Chicago named Harry Jung collaborated with the [HUAC] committee, and so did Joseph E. Kemp, who published the Fascist magazine, *The Awakener*. Dies received verbal support from James True, the man who invented a blackjack nicknamed the ‘kike killer’; from the Reverend Gerald L.K. Smith, an anti-Semitic evangelist; from William Dudley Pelley, who headed the pro-Nazi Silver Shirts; and from James Colescott, the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.” Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 351-352.

¹⁶⁸ Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 170-171.

excessively belligerent antifascist content.)¹⁶⁹ Characterizing Hollywood as essentially Jewish was an integral strategy of the senators' attack. In a radio address announcing the launch of his hearings, Nye asked, suggestively, "Who has brought us to the verge of war? Who is pushing and haling at America to plunge us into this war? Who are the men? Who is putting up the money for all this propaganda?"¹⁷⁰ His answer: "In each of these companies there are a number of production directors, many of whom have come from Russia, Hungary, Germany, and the Balkan countries," making the film capital "a raging volcano of war fever" that "swarms with refugees" driven by their own "national and racial emotions."¹⁷¹ Going further, he singled out many famous studio heads and executive producers by name—Harry Cohn, Louis B. Mayer, Barney Balaban, Adolph Zukor, Joseph Schenk, Samuel Goldwyn, and the Warner brothers—prompting audible responses of "Jews" in the live audience.¹⁷²

Such nativist rhetoric was simultaneously being propagated across the country by the isolationist America First Committee (founded September 1940), which similarly linked the interventionist agenda to Jewish media interests. In September 1941 the organization's most famous spokesman, aviator Charles Lindbergh, identified the Roosevelt administration, the British government, and immigrant Jews as the three fonts of pro-war "agitation" attempting to manipulate an otherwise antiwar populace into fighting "their" war. While conceding that "the persecution [Jews] suffered in Germany would be sufficient to make bitter enemies of any race,"

¹⁶⁹ The eight film titles cited by the committee were *Sergeant York*, co-written by Abem Finkel; *The Man I Married* (a.k.a. *I Married a Nazi*), directed by future blacklistee Irving Pichel; *Escape*, directed by Mervin LeRoy and co-written by Popular Front radio pioneer Arch Oboler; *Man Hunt*, directed by Fritz Lang; Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*; Frank Borzage's *Flight Command*; and even two British films that were given wide release by U.S. studios, Ealing Studios' *Convoy* (about an endangered English crew transporting American arms) and Alexander Korda's "costume drama" about the secret love affair of Lord Nelson, *That Hamilton Woman*. (The double meaning of Nelson's speeches urging war against Napoleon's world domination resonated too clearly in Washington).

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 242.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 345; quoted in Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 243.

¹⁷² Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 243. Carr sites the source of the audience response in the 25 August 1941 issue of the journal *In Fact*.

Lindbergh still insisted, that American Jews’ “greatest danger to this country lies in their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio and our government.”

Implying that American Jews represented as foreign an entity as the British government, Lindbergh accused both—“both *races*,” he tellingly said—of trying to drag the country into war “for reasons that are not American.”¹⁷³

Fueled by the support for Lindbergh and Nye, isolationism was not at all waning as American came closer to war in December 1941. Had the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor not forced the country’s hand at that moment, there is no reason to assume it would not have continued building support by scapegoating Jewish antifascists in the arts, media, and entertainment fields. If the Communist betrayal of the Nazi-Soviet pact were not enough to finish the Popular Front, the xenophobic and reactionary campaign of the isolationists may have been.

Conclusion

Antifascist narratives routinely employed tropes and images of highly traditional patriotic “Americanism” as the antidote to Hitlerism. Thomas Jefferson was extolled for his faith in popular democracy and Lincoln for his commitment to racial justice. The Constitution (in Weill’s “The Old Glory,” for instance) and the Declaration of Independence (in HANL’s “Committee of 56”) were constantly lionized. So couched was antifascist rhetoric in seemingly apolitical language that many works were embraced as merely “patriotic” and adopted across the ideological spectrum—such as when Earl Robinson and John LaTouche’s “Ballad for

¹⁷³ “Transcript of Charles Lindbergh Address to America First Committee Meeting,” American Experience, Public Broadcasting Service, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lindbergh/filmmore/reference/primary/desmoinesspeech.html> (accessed 15 December 2010). (Emphasis added.) While professing mere neutrality from foreign affairs and paying lip-service to outrage the persecution of Jews abroad, Lindbergh made no secret of his friendship with the Nazi regime—which included accepting an honorary medal from the German air force in 1938. In his own private writings, he revealed an obsession with racial philosophy and the need to protect white Christian hegemony in the Western World. See A. Scott Berg, *Lindbergh* (New York: Berkley Books, 1999), 345-460.

Americans” was sung at both the Democratic and Republican nominating conventions of 1940. Such overlap between the left and the nationalistic right only increased when Popular Front antifascism “merged with the politics of war mobilization” after Germany became a common enemy.¹⁷⁴

But after the war, prewar antifascism became suspect again. The phrase “premature antifascist” implied that even the horrors of World War II did not retrospectively justify organized opposition to Hitler before 7 December 1941. Therefore, works that, in the thirties, were received as emphatically “American” later took on subversive baggage. The fact that screenwriter Sidney Buchman, for instance, had written the now-enshrined *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) did not exempt him from the postwar Hollywood Blacklist. Even noncommunist antifascists, like Edward G. Robinson, underwent long investigations and unofficial “greylisting” limbo.¹⁷⁵ The same fate befell radio dramatist Norman Corwin, whose Bill of Rights tribute “We Hold These Truths” (in which Robinson co-starred) brought together a shaken nation on 15 December 1941.¹⁷⁶

The Blacklist virtually erased the key role antifascism played in *defining* Americanism during the thirties. Flag-waving patriotism was crucial to its appeal across the country and beyond the politically committed—but it was also an attraction for the participants. “Popular Front participation,” write Buhle and Wagner, “became a major avenue of Americanization, redefining an imagined America in which former outsiders could properly belong.”¹⁷⁷ Just as the Popular Front helped immigrants and children of immigrants find their Americanism, it also spurred those “outsiders” who were Jews to reclaim their Jewishness. Of Murray Burnett’s

¹⁷⁴ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 11.

¹⁷⁵ Victor Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 111.

¹⁷⁶ William Grimes, “Norman Corwin, Pioneer of Radio is Dead at 101,” *New York Times*, 19 October 2011.

¹⁷⁷ Buhle and Wagner, *Radical Hollywood*, 58.

fateful trip to Europe that inspired *Casablanca*, Aljean Harmetz says, “He went to Austria as an American. He came back to America as a Jew.”¹⁷⁸ After the opening of *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, one Warner Brothers executive felt moved to write to Jack Warner, “Last night the motion picture had a Bar Mitzvah....It said, ‘today I am a man.’”¹⁷⁹ Actor Lionel Stander said of his experience on the HANL Committee of 56, “That’s when I became Jewish”—while also understanding, “It wasn’t enough to be Jewish; you had to be political.”¹⁸⁰

Of course, many American Jews were committed to antifascism out of purely political allegiances, such as, in some cases, to the Communist Party. Likewise, many non-Jewish Americans were just as ardent antifascists as Jews. But the Jewish-American theatre and film artists who joined this fight in the 1930s engaged in a unique experience of identity formation that merged their ethnicity, their politics, and their art. In the ensuing chapters I will turn to some extraordinary cases of theatrical Jewish activism in the wartime and postwar periods: the Ben Hecht propaganda pageants *Fun to be Free*, *We Will Never Die*, and *A Flag is Born*. In these works, Hecht and his collaborators—especially Kurt Weill, Paul Muni, and Edward G. Robinson, as well as other Popular Front stalwarts—took “being political” about their antifascism and their Jewishness to a new level, with performances that leapt off the stage into some of the most controversial political debates of the moment. Involving as much offstage campaigning as onstage performing, these unusual works marked a highpoint in American Jewish activism and self-expression that reached well beyond—and sometimes even alienated—the regular Popular Front constituency. But, as I aim to show, their performative and rhetorical roots are clearly traceable to the prewar and “premature” antifascist structure of feeling.

¹⁷⁸ Harmetz, *Round Up the Usual Suspects*, 53.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Ross, “*Confessions of a Nazi Spy*,” 49.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle, *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997), 613.

Chapter 2

Patriotic Pageantry as Antifascist Allegory: Ethnic Americanism in *Fun to be Free*

There is no question that the politics and poetics of Americanism lay at the center of the Popular Front social movement. But it is a mistake to see it simply as a “politics of patriotism,” a rhetorical invocation of unity and harmony.... The figure of “America” became a locus for ideological battles over the trajectory of US history, the meaning of race, ethnicity, and region in the United States, and the relation between ethnic nationalism, Americanism, and internationalism. Indeed, the ubiquity of “America” in the rhetoric of the period is less a sign of “deep reverence” or “harmony” than a sign of the crisis of Americanism, provoked by the crash of 1929 and the social conflicts of the depression.

—Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*

Jews used patriotic displays both to demonstrate loyalty to the nation and to articulate a sense of ethnic pride.... In these narratives, Jews portrayed themselves as model American citizens, often as the true and most vigilant keepers of the democratic ideal.... [C]ivic occasions offered the opportunity for American Jews to imagine the nation they desired, to criticize aspects of American culture, and to claim ownership of national ideals.

—Beth S. Wenger, *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage*

The mass rally *Fun to be Free*, held on 5 October 1941, marked a culmination of prewar Popular Front antifascist performance. An audience of 17,000 came to New York City’s Madison Square Garden that evening to support the interventionist cause and countless others listened to a live radio broadcast over New York’s WEVD—a network owned by the *Jewish Daily Forward* and whose call numbers stood for the name of the late Socialist Party leader, Eugene V. Debs. What they witnessed was a “mammoth revue” (as advertisements promised) consisting of a classical music program, an all-star variety show, and a thirty-minute “patriotic pageant” by the famous playwriting/screenwriting team of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. Such “fun,” the title signaled to audiences, could only be had within the “freedom” made possible by democracy—and specifically, as would be demonstrated on stage, a multiracial

democracy. This especially pluralist kind of patriotic display epitomized Popular Front cultural works, in which an “ethnic Americanism,” according to Michael Denning, exhibited “a paradoxical synthesis of competing nationalisms and internationalism—pride in ethnic heritage and identity combined with an assertive Americanism and popular internationalism.”¹

Fun to be Free was thus combined Popular Front antifascism, American civic pageantry, and Jewish ethnic pride. At a time of intense isolationism (even in these last months before the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December that would finally draw the nation into war), *Fun to be Free* was an aggressive theatrical attempt to reclaim and redefine patriotism and, in the process, recast all of American history as an antifascist project. To the extent that it was also a performance of Jewish patriotism, the event provided Ben Hecht, Kurt Weill, and other Jewish-American artists involved an opportunity to prove their “Americanism” at a time when it was frequently questioned by those who cast the war debate in racial terms. By dramatizing antifascism as something essentially American, they were situating this movement—and their place as Jews within it—on a continuum with the most iconic and enshrined national civic traditions, locating a Jewish identity in U.S. history and practicing patriotism via antifascism.

A Fight for (Jewish) Freedom

Even though the United States would be at war two months later, the debate between isolationists and interventionists raged more intensely than ever in October 1941. After severe Allied setbacks in 1940, including the fall of France and the British retreat at Dunkirk, President Roosevelt’s determination to enter the war before it was too late became increasingly clear to the nation, much to the consternation of isolationists. On 11 March 1941, Congress passed the “Lend-Lease” act, finally authorizing him to supply Great Britain with munitions and warships,

¹ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 9, 130.

as he had long wished; in April, U.S. forces occupied Greenland as a counter-threat to German U-Boats in the Atlantic; and, in September, Roosevelt authorized the Navy to preemptively “shoot on sight” any trespassing enemy vessels. Meanwhile, after the German invasion of Russia in June and the dissolution of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin pact, communists worldwide came back into the antifascist fold, thus bolstering the American interventionist cause amongst the broader ranks of the Popular Front.

Fun to be Free was presented by Fight for Freedom, a pro-intervention advocacy group that had been launched in April 1941 in opposition to the isolationist America First Committee.² The organization’s founders and leaders—consisting largely of university presidents, Wall Street executives, and newspaper editors³—were hardly radicals, but the organization operated in typical Popular Front fashion by building a broad coalition of antifascist allies, including special outreach to African Americans (through their “Harlem Division”) and Jewish organizations (including the Jewish War Veterans of the United States). The committee’s labor connections were especially important in weaving its activities into the preexisting fabric of the Popular Front; not only did it boast a large “Labor Division,” but the *Fun to be Free* event itself was co-produced by Labor Stage, the theatrical arm of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), which produced of *Pins and Needles*.⁴ Fight for Freedom also actively sought the

² America First had been rapidly gaining popularity and public exposure since its founding the previous September and now boasted famous aviator Charles Lindbergh as its unofficial spokesman. See chapter 1 for further details of Lindbergh’s role and ideology.

³ The formation of Fight for Freedom was formally announced on 18 April 1941. Its most prominent leaders were Herbert Agar and Ulrich Bell of the Louisville Courier-Journal; *PM* publisher Marshall Fields III; Rev. Henry Hobson; Senator Carter Glass; Harvard president James B. Conant; and Allen Dulles. Hollywood was represented on the Board of Directors by Twentieth Century Fox president Spyros Skouras; many other movie moguls were listed among the organization’s donors.

⁴ “Critical to the success of FFF [Fight for Freedom] was enlisting the support of labor unions and organizations such as the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, the American Federation of Labor, the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union, the United Automobile Workers of America, the United Rubber Workers of America, and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen, and Helpers of America. Leaders of these organizations worked closely with Abe Rosefield, Fight for Freedom’s Labor Division Chairman.”

participation of Broadway and Hollywood. Its “Stage, Screen, Radio, and Arts Division” enlisted many names familiar to earlier Hollywood campaigns, such as actor Melvyn Douglas, producer Walter Wanger, and writers S.N. Behrman, Dorothy Parker, George S. Kaufman, Moss Hart, Kurt Weill, and Ben Hecht—as well as some of those artists’ frequent (non-Jewish) progressive collaborators: playwrights Maxwell Anderson and Charles MacArthur and actors Helen Hayes and Burgess Meredith.⁵

With Charles Lindbergh’s blunt words of just a few weeks earlier (when he lashed out at “the British and the Jewish races,” for advocating war “for reasons which are not American”) still fresh in their minds, the night of October 5, for Jewish-Americans, seemed hardly a time for “fun” but for action in their own self-defense.⁶ Just as Madison Square Garden was itself haunted by a much publicized America First rally held there a few months earlier (as well as a German-American Bund meeting in 1939), the anti-Semitism permeating the war debate hovered over the proceedings of *Fun to be Free*. Even though Fight for Freedom was governed by Protestant and Catholic elites and *Fun to be Free* was never identified as a “Jewish” event, the evening as a whole still bore a clear and consistent subtext of the Jewish plight. The many “revue” elements in the three-hour performance worked together to make antifascism and Jews (as well as other “non-Aryans”) “American” once again.

Interviewed fifty years later, Helen Hayes—one of the rally’s hosts, co-chair of the Fight

Finding aid, Fight for Freedom, Inc. Records, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University. (Hereafter cited as Fight For Freedom Records.)

⁵ Hecht had become involved by 30 July 1941, when he attended a “Broadway Division” luncheon, at which plans for an all-star benefit performance were most likely initiated, since coordination of the event was already underway three weeks later. (“Luncheon Given by Broadway Division,” Fight for Freedom Records.) On August 19, Broadway Division co-chair Burgess Meredith invited New York Governor Herbert Lehman to join the event’s Honorary Committee, and Lehman agreed in a letter of August 22. (*Fun to be Free* souvenir program, Fight for Freedom Records.)

⁶ “Des Moines Speech,” PBS American Experience, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lindbergh/filmmore/reference/primary/desmoinesspeech.html> (accessed 15 December 2010).

for Freedom Stage, Screen, Radio and Arts Division, and the wife of Charles MacArthur—did not recall *Fun to be Free* as “particularly Jewish,” noting “Charlie wouldn’t allow that.”⁷

Although this suggests a possible conflict between the two frequent collaborators over what form an antifascist patriotic pageant should take, evidence suggests (despite Hayes’s recollections) that Hecht was the dominant partner in the composition of the pageant, and perhaps even of other parts of the evening, as well. Because much of the construction of the pageant entailed the editing and bridging of historical material, the only two passages requiring original content were the two that most bear Hecht’s voice—a prologue and epilogue whose heightened prose-poetry resembles that of Hecht’s own contemporaneous *PM* columns.⁸ As Hecht’s continued and escalating involvement in antifascism, pageantry, and Jewish rights throughout the ensuing decade attest, *Fun to be Free* bears his stamp more indelibly than that of any other collaborator on the bill.⁹

The timing of the rally amplified its import to American Jews, as well, since it coincided with the Senate’s investigation that fall into Hollywood “warmongering” and anti-German “propaganda”—hearings that frequently drew attention to the ethnicity of the moguls and moviemakers involved.¹⁰ As a result, *Fun to be Free* ended up almost as focused on defending the entertainment industry as on prosecuting the war in Europe. In the preceding days and weeks, Fight for Freedom waged a publicity campaign against the hearings, denouncing them in one statement as “the most barefaced attempt at censorship and racial persecution which has ever

⁷ Hirsch, *Kurt Weill*, 205.

⁸ Viking’s collection of Hecht’s *PM* pieces (*1001 Afternoons in New York*) was published almost simultaneously with *Fun to be Free* in October 1941.

⁹ “[D]espite the well-publicized legend of Hecht and MacArthur... the friendship became increasingly strained and sad.” MacAdams, *Ben Hecht*, 267. Hecht also appears to have been the uncredited author of much of the opening variety show content, as well. During rehearsals, Hecht wrote to his wife, “I had to write all the *spieler* stuff for Billy Rose’s part of the shindig.” Undated letter from Hecht to Rose Caylor Hecht. Ben Hecht Papers, Midwest Manuscript Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago, IL (hereafter cited as Ben Hecht Papers).

¹⁰ See chapter 1.

been tried in this country” and condemning their “racial and religious attacks” on antifascist filmmakers.¹¹ Audiences at *Fun to be Free* would have seen in their souvenir programs an essay by Dorothy Thompson called “The American Dreyfus Case,” likening the accused artists to the wronged French colonel. Also in the program was a statement by 1940 Republican presidential candidate Wendell Willkie, who had just broken with many in his party by serving at the hearings as counsel for the Hollywood studios; Willkie pointedly contrasted the divisive motivations of the committee with the racial equality promoted by the evening’s event:

During the past few weeks the American people have watched a sorry performance by a number of prominent citizens who, now that the tide has turned against them, have seen fit to inject religious and racial issues into the great debate on foreign policy. Tonight’s meeting is the peoples’ reply to them....

On the stage and in the audience Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic, native and foreign born, we join together renewing our faith in the democratic way. This method is a basic principle of American life, as we have known it for over 150 years. Because of our loyalty to it we despise the racial discrimination of Nazism.¹²

These remarks were later reprinted as the preface to the Dramatists Play Service’s published text of Hecht and MacArthur’s *Fun to be Free* pageant—forever framing the work in the context of combatting anti-Semitism.¹³

Such pronouncements did not just surround the performance but were spoken from the stage itself. Appearing as one of the evening’s closing speakers, Willkie appeared in person to accuse isolationists and their congressional allies of “resorting to one of the basest arguments to divide the United States on the basis of race and religion.”¹⁴ Earlier, emcee Burgess Meredith had put to a symbolic “vote” a resolution drafted by Actors Equity Association alleging that the

¹¹ Open letter, 8 September 1941, Fight for Freedom Records.

¹² *Fun to be Free* souvenir program, Fight for Freedom Records.

¹³ Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, *Fun to be Free: Patriotic Pageant* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1941), 3.

¹⁴ “Freedom Rally Thrills 17,000,” *New York Times*, 6 October 1941. The article’s subheading underscores, “Willkie Scores Appeals to Bigotry.”

Senate hearings were “designed to breed religious and racial discord.”¹⁵ With the anti-Semitic tensions emanating from Washington forming a key backdrop to *Fun to be Free*, the event was effectively a protest against Jewish persecution at home as well as intervention abroad.

A Non-Aryan Affair

The theme of racial equality was reinforced throughout the entire rally in many different forms of performance. The evening opened with a musical program featuring performers and songs emphasizing solidarity across boundaries of race, class, and nationality in the fight against fascism. The opening number, “Arms for the Love of America,” had been written by Irving Berlin earlier that year on commission from the U.S. Army to bolster support for munitions factories.¹⁶ Next, selections from George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*, sung by original cast members Anne Wiggins Brown and Edward Matthews, alluded to the collaboration between blacks and Jews in the American Popular Front. Flamenco guitarist Vicente Gómez represented the fallen Spanish Republic, just as tenor Jan Kiepura, a part-Jewish Polish refugee, embodied the suffering of his native land.¹⁷ Closing the musical segment was “I Hear America Singing,” a setting of Walt Whitman poems by Jewish-American composer George Kleinsinger, performed by the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union chorus and orchestra under the direction of Lazar Weiner—founder of the ILGWU chorus, conductor of the Yiddish-singing Workmen’s Circle Chorus, and a leading composer and champion of Yiddish art songs. “A great company of Americans from all walks of life are here,” boasted a radio announcer covering the performance

¹⁵ “Resolution,” Fight For Freedom Records.

¹⁶ Berlin’s “Arms for the Love of America” was soon adopted as the army’s official “Ordnance Song.” As with his other famous civic composition, “God Bless America,” Berlin relinquished all rights, in this case to the Army Ordnance Department. Robert Kimball and Linda Emmet, eds. *The Complete Lyrics of Irving Berlin* (New York: Hal Leonard, 2005), 372.

¹⁷ On Kiepura’s Jewish heritage see James S. Pula, ed. *The Polish-American Encyclopedia* (Jefferson, SC: McFarland, 2010), 225. *Variety* reported that Kiepura sang a “Polish folk song” at *Fun to be Free*. “17,000 See ‘Fun to be Free,’” *Variety*, 8 October 1941.

for WEVD, “to voice their thrilled desire to participate in the struggle for freedom for all men.”¹⁸

The cast assembled for the “variety show” portion of the bill also pointedly displayed American diversity. Billy Rose, a nightclub owner as well as a producer, enlisted George Jessel to host, while Jack Benny and a cross-dressing Eddie Cantor parodied Irving Berlin’s “Easter Parade.” Carmen Miranda’s “South American Way” represented the Roosevelt “Good Neighbor Policy”—of special importance as fears grew of German encroachment into Central and South America. But the most racially charged moment occurred when Bill “Bojangles” Robinson danced to another Irving Berlin song, the explicitly anti-Hitler “When That Man is Dead and Gone,” written earlier that year. Robinson dramatized the vengeful glee of the song by literally dancing on Hitler’s grave. A *New York Times* reporter described the moment:

Bill Robinson, no Aryan, tap-danced on Adolf Hitler's coffin in Madison Square Garden last night before 17,000 persons, as the band played "When That Man Is Dead and Gone"... Down one of the aisles paraded a funeral procession—a big black coffin, with silver-painted handles, borne on the shoulders of “storm troopers,” and guarded by “Nazi soldiers” in iron helmets. Before and behind the swastika was carried. With stiff ceremony the coffin was placed on the stage, and then Bill appeared, wearing the stupendous costume he made famous in “The Hot Mikado” a few years back, it being chiefly gold and ermine. With a smile of satisfaction he stepped to the top of the coffin and, to the guffaws of the audience, tapped gingerly with left foot and right, and then really went to town...with an abbreviated version of his stair-step dance from the coffin to the stage floor and, finishing his best grin, tap-tapped out of sight. When he had disappeared a group of jitterbugs grabbed the stage and put on a demonstration of hilarity and acrobatics that looked like the celebration of the end of the war.¹⁹

The number’s derivation from the 1939 Broadway hit *The Hot Mikado*—a Harlem-set, jazz update of Gilbert and Sullivan—especially empowered Robinson’s persona since in it he played the Mikado himself. The glittery, winged costume he wore in that role now made him look like

¹⁸ This announcer was James Waterman Wise (son of American Jewish Congress president Rabbi Stephen Wise). A recording of the WEVD broadcast of *Fun to be Free* is at the Library of Congress Recorded Sound Reference Center. The broadcast is divided among several different tracks, listed under two different headings: “American Pageant” (LWO 5404 R5) and “Fun to be Free (LWO 5404 R6).

¹⁹ “Freedom Rally,” *New York Times*, 6 October 1941.

an avenging angel, treating Hitler's coffin as mere "groundwork" (as one press release said) for the "stair-step dance" he made famous in the show.²⁰ Moreover, the "jitterbugs" referred to (also from *Hot Mikado*) were billed in the program as "Lindy Hoppers," referring to an acrobatic dance then popular in African American clubs that had been named—ironically—in honor of the aeronautical feat of Charles "Lucky Lindy" Lindbergh.²¹ The contrast between "Aryan" and "no Aryan" could not have been clearer in such a carnivalesque upending of multiple racial hierarchies: a black authority figure (literally, a "Mikado") travesties highbrow operetta, while burying (alive) a Nazi white supremacist, as Harlem dancers appropriate the name of America's leading isolationist and Hitler apologist—all to the bluesy melody and defiant lyrics of America's most famous Jewish songwriter.

After Robinson's number opened the variety show, the racial rebellion became more expressly Jewish when the orchestra began what was called a "Verboten Overture," a medley of Jewish composers comically interrupted in caricatured Prussian style:

As each renowned tune composed by a "non-Aryan" composer was played, a burly gent in a Nazi storm trooper's uniform stepped forward and apoplectically bellowed, "Verboten." Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" and "Wedding March," Strauss' "Waltz," Jerome Kern's "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," among others, were thus treated and the crowd roared.²²

So well acquainted was the audience with the Jewishness of the composers—even in the tenuous case of Johann Strauss—that no further explication was required for the joke.²³ These musical references added to an overall celebration of Jewish composers throughout the evening; along with music by Berlin, Gershwin, George Kleinsinger, and, later, Kurt Weill, they powerfully

²⁰ Undated press release ("News from Fight for Freedom"), Fight for Freedom Records.

²¹ For a history of the Lindy Hop see Lawrence McClellan, *The Later Swing Era, 1942-1955* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 10.

²² "17,000 Turn Out at 'Fun to be Free.'"

²³ On the Strauss family's partial Jewish lineage see Camille Crittenden, *Johann Strauss and Vienna: Operetta and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 104.

illustrated the true meaning of the title *Fun to be Free*; at the same moment these melodies were delighting Americans, they were ruled “degenerate” (and “verboten”) by the Third Reich due to the race of their authors.

Identity via Patriotic Cantata

Following the variety show was Hecht and MacArthur’s *Fun to be Free* pageant, which began with the question “What is America?” The two-page monologue that answered soon circulated as a popular set-piece of its own; the *New York Times* published it the week after the pageant and, during the war, Tallulah Bankhead read it on the 29 March 1942 “Command Performance” program on Armed Forces Radio, where it was introduced by George Jessel as a “patriotic poem.”²⁴ But, as the radio broadcast of *Fun to be Free* reveals, “What is America?” in its original performance was sung in a setting by Kurt Weill as a “Patriotic Cantata”—a flourishing Popular Front genre for framing questions of national identity.

After the text poses the question “What is America?” various arbitrary definitions are dismissed, such as geographical markers (“Some people think it’s a piece of map shaped like a wisdom tooth”) and measures of material abundance (“the goldarndest collection of railroad ties, window panes, manhole covers, wheatfields, electric signs, apple pies and steel mills ever assembled within the boundaries of one nation”).²⁵ But after concluding that the nation cannot be defined by such worldly, incidental details, the text shifts to purely ideological terms, prioritizing the nation’s debt to the liberal humanist tradition. “We’re here to tell you America is an idea,”

²⁴ “What is America?” *New York Times*, 12 October 1941.

²⁵ Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, “It’s Fun to be Free,” in *Best One-Act Plays of 1941*, ed. Margaret Mayorga (New York: Dodd Mead, 1942), 238. Because the text of the pageant anthologized in this collection was taken directly from the production script (as is evident from the typescript in the Fight for Freedom Records) all quotations from the play will be cited from this edition unless otherwise noted. Both the pageant and the overall event were sometimes referred to in contemporary documents and accounts as “It’s Fun to be Free.” But because the Dramatists Play Service publication of the pageant (over which Hecht and MacArthur presumably had more authorial approval than the anthologized version) is entitled *Fun to be Free* (without the *It’s*), I will use that form of the title.

the speaker says, “the simplest and yet most difficult idea ever hatched by the human mind—the idea of Freedom” (238).

Celebrating “freedom” in the abstract, of course, has always been routine in American oratory, but a particularly antifascist point of view emerges in the concrete imagery provided of the obstacles facing freedom in 1941:

America is an idea that people can live without having the wits scared out of them, without a gag in their mouths or a straitjacket on their spirits. The USA is the dream that a human being is better than a red ant and that the soul of man is a bigger flag than the biggest Swastika ever tacked up on a Nazi platform.

Then, claiming the mantle of the American Revolution itself, the speech announces the pageant’s thesis that America’s history is not one of isolation but engagement—and that the cause of freedom is not merely nationalistic, but includes the plight of those overseas:

This idea and this dream were born in the blood shed at Lexington. And ever since that blood ran, Americans have died in defense of the idea of Freedom. No foreign nation has ever held our land—yet we have fought. No nation has come goosestepping to our shores—as of tonight—and yet we have fought. We have fought because our frontiers have been those of the spirit.

And, finally, directly taking on domestic “enemies” (the isolationists), Hecht aligns his cause of internationalism and ethnic liberation with the mission of the Founding Fathers:

This, say our enemies, is democratic twaddle. This, say our enemies, is the cry of a war-monger. They lie. History proves they lie. History proves that our battlefield has never been the line of conquest but always, since the barefoot soldiers of Stony Point and Valley Forge—the frontiers of Freedom. Our history reveals that Americans have fought—and fought damned well—only for the defeat of things that tormented the soul of man—tyranny, slavery and intolerance. (238-239)

The phrase “tyranny, slavery and intolerance” pithily brings together under one flag the colonists’ rebellion against George III, the Civil War, and the struggle of the moment against racial and religious discrimination. Linking these various campaigns constituted the overarching mission of *Fun to be Free*.

Given the relatively scant surviving evidence of *Fun to be Free*'s backstage development, little can be known of the decision to set this speech to music. But the resulting score (of which a manuscript survives) indicates a profound contribution by Weill in transforming it from an individual monologue into the expression of a community.²⁶ With the lines divided up between multiple narrators (both male and female) and echoed by a full chorus, the sentiment is a collective one, especially when expressed in counterpoint and quickly exchanged shared lines.²⁷ The chorus and the music (scored for orchestra but played in performance by a solo organist) shape the thrust of Hecht and MacArthur's rhetoric. During the opening lines (when the question "What is America?" is posed and various answers are proposed and discarded) the chorus periodically interrupts the speakers—singing "What is America?"—undercutting their initial answers and intensifying the question's urgency. When the text finally turns to the "correct" answer ("the idea of freedom"), Weill shifts from agitated uncertainty to a more stable martial mode, a lyrical walking-tempo march that underscores the text's idealist paeans to democracy with a calm, determined spirit. Hardly bombastic, this common-man march counters isolationist fears of bloodthirsty "warmongering."

With its musical underscoring of patriotic oratory, and its juxtapositions of song and speech, Weill's "What is America?" resembles the era's many "patriotic cantatas" by Popular Front composers. The text lent itself easily to such a setting since the defining characteristic of this form was a search for American identity. The most widely known example of the genre was

²⁶ Weill's manuscript draft of the score accompanying the "What is America?" speech is in Papers of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya, Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT (hereafter referred to as Weill Lenya Papers).

²⁷ It is difficult to tell from the recorded radio broadcast exactly how many different actors were used to speak the text of "What is America?" An opening announcement mentions six "narrators" for the entire pageant: Burgess Meredith and Tallulah Bankhead; journalists Wythe Williams, Johannes Steele, and George Hamilton Combs who were featured in the final scene; plus one inaudible name. The official printed program mentions actors Franchot Tone and Melvin Douglas as additional pageant narrators, but they are not named on the recording or in subsequent press reports.

Earl Robinson and John LaTouche's "Ballad for Americans," which became an instant sensation 5 November 1939 when Paul Robeson sang it on Norman Corwin's "Pursuit of Happiness" radio program.²⁸ In its cavalcade of American history highlights (much like that of *Fun to be Free*, even including many of the same highlights) a speaker walks the chorus through the progression of liberty and equality over time. As in Weill's arrangement of "What is America?" the chorus in "Ballad" frequently interrupts the soloist, asking him "Who are you, mister?", "What's your racket?" and (almost skeptically) "Are you an American?"—to which the soloist responds in all-embracing polyglot terms:

Am I an American? I'm just an Irish, Negro, Jewish, Italian, French and English,
Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Polish, Scotch, Hungarian, Litvak, Swedish, Finnish,
Canadian, Greek and Turk, and Czech and double Czech American.²⁹

"The song is a continual deferral and refusal of a single identification," notes Denning. "The drama of the cantata is the continual questioning."³⁰ Hence the pluralism represented in these cantatas is not one of homogenized classical harmony, but one characterized by the modernist dissonances and irregular meters of twentieth-century music. Such was the difference between the older assimilationist "melting pot" ideal and the "ethnic nationalism" of the thirties, which embraced difference while simultaneously seeking to belong to a collective whole.

It is no coincidence that the "Ballad for Americans" speaker concludes on such a Whitmanesque note, saying, in effect, that he "contains multitudes." Whitman was a favorite source for patriotic cantatas, as Kleinsinger's "I Hear America Singing" attests.³¹ Aaron Copland's 1942 "Lincoln Portrait"—lacking a chorus, but otherwise similar to the cantata format

²⁸ "Radio: Bravos," *Time*, 20 November 1939. "Ballad for Americans" actually originated in a short-lived Federal Theatre Project revue, *Sing for Your Supper*, in which it was called "Ballad of Uncle Sam."

²⁹ Quoted in Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 128.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Kleinsinger's "I Hear America Singing" was recorded by RCA Victor on 18 March 1941 with baritone John Charles Thomas (who performed the piece at *Fun to be Free*) and the ILGWU chorus and orchestra. RCA reissued this recording and Robeson's "Ballad for Americans" on the same LP in 1976 as part of its Victrola America Historic Series (RCA Victrola, AVM1-1736).

in its combination of music with spoken historical text—might have been a “Whitman Portrait” had the composer followed through on his initial plans for that piece’s commission.³² In January 1942, just months after *Fun to be Free*, Weill himself completed settings of three Whitman war poems expressly for Fight for Freedom and for Paul Robeson to sing. (As David Drew notes, the songs “are clearly not intended as ‘art songs’ in the European sense,” but are noticeably geared toward national “morale-boosting” in the wake of the Pearl Harbor attack.)³³ While that performance never came about, Weill adapted one of the selections (“Beat! Beat! Drums!”) into a cantata format for Helen Hayes to recite with accompaniment by chorus and orchestra as part of a March 1942 record album titled *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, co-sponsored by Fight for Freedom.³⁴

Weill had long been working in the vein of the political cantata even if not under that name. The presentational didacticism of the form echoes earlier experimental concert works mixing music and speech (in the *Sprechstimme* form of German modernist opera), such as his 1929 *Lindberghflug* with Bertolt Brecht.³⁵ Weill hardly gave up such pursuits after arriving in America. Alongside his efforts to master Broadway techniques, he continued to develop this other form of musical theatre. Burgess Meredith—whose appearance in *Fun to be Free* was one of many of his collaborations with Weill during the war era—recalled that, as early as December 1937, he and Weill made plans for a never realized series of works in which

³² Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 357.

³³ Drew, *Kurt Weill*, 321. The three Whitman poems Weill adapted were “O Captain, My Captain,” “Beat, Beat, Drums”, and “Dirge for Two Veterans.” Later, in 1947, he added a fourth poem to the cycle, “Come up from the Fields, Father.”

³⁴ *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 1942, Victor Records M 909.

³⁵ Weill and Brecht’s *Der Lindberghflug* (1929) and revised *Der Flug der Lindbergh* (1930) both recounted Charles Lindbergh’s 1927 flight over the Atlantic. However, they did not anticipate the aviator’s embrace of fascism in the thirties. Brecht thoroughly revised the text after World War II to remove Lindbergh’s name and identity from the piece.

a chorus of singers, like a musical Greek chorus, would sing the story line, and the actors would go into the action only when the mood was prescribed by the chorus. The chorus would be large and varied and, most important, would replace the orchestra.... In short, it was to be a “Ballad Theatre.”³⁶

Weill and Meredith’s abandoned 1938 play, “The Ballad of Davy Crockett,” was the only project developed for this proposed troupe; but if Drew is correct in detecting Weill’s “Davy Crockett” march theme in the underscoring of “What is America?,” the spirit of Weill and Meredith’s “Ballad Theatre” lived on in *Fun to be Free*.³⁷

The “Ballad Theatre” ethic also clearly informed Weill’s *The Ballad of Magna Carta*, his radio cantata written with Maxwell Anderson that Meredith narrated on Norman Corwin’s *The Pursuit of Happiness* in February 1940. Even Weill and Anderson’s “How Can You Tell an American?” (from *Knickerbocker Holiday*) echoes the form; the very title mirrors that of “What is America?” and also sums up the driving question behind Earl Robinson’s “Ballad for Americans.”³⁸ In defining “Americanism” all of these songs first renounce any particular racial, geographic, or religious identification in favor of the sheer commitment to freedom itself. This sentiment is spelled out in the lead-up to “How Can You Tell an American?” where the hero of *Knickerbocker Holiday*, a seventeenth-century Dutch settler, suggests to his 1938 audience that his habitual disobedience and unruliness (in other words, his urge to freedom) make him, in retrospect, “the first American.”³⁹ That Weill might have contributed to these lines is supported

³⁶ Burgess Meredith, *So Far, So Good* (Boston: Little, Brown and company, 1994), 59-60. Meredith goes on to liken the concept to methods later employed by “Ballad for Americans” lyricist John LaTouche in the opera *Ballad of Baby Doe* (1956) and the “dance cantata” *Ballet Ballads* (1948).

³⁷ Drew, *Kurt Weill*, 319. Davy Crockett was an icon of Popular Front Americana and is also referenced in the *Fun to be Free* pageant.

³⁸ Robinson’s postwar song, “The House I Live In” (1945) with lyrics by Lewis Allan, begins with an almost identical line: “What is America to me?”

³⁹ Anderson, *Knickerbocker Holiday*, 30. Anderson’s lyrics for “How Can You Tell an American?” however, occasionally undermine this universalist sentiment with essentialist ideas of race and nationality: “Is there any virtue or particular vice/ Like a Scotchman’s whiskey or a Chinaman’s rice/ Or a gypsy’s addiction to the moving van/ That marks him among the races?” Weill, with his own personal experience of racial categorization, was able to more completely embrace an “Americanism” not determined by circumstances of birth.

not only by his reputation for working closely and collaboratively on his librettos, but by a very similar statement he gave in 1941 to an interviewer on a government-sponsored program fittingly called, *I'm an American*: “Those who come here seeking the freedom, justice, opportunity and human dignity they miss in their own countries,” Weill said, “are already Americans before they come.”⁴⁰ By virtue of what Emma Lazarus dubbed their “yearning to breathe free,” the refugee, Weill daringly implied, was perhaps the most “American” American of all.

Fun to be Free was one of many occasions for Weill to explore his interest in historically traditional American music. His pageant-like spectacle for the 1939 World’s Fair, *Railroads on Parade*, was distinguished by a “strikingly personal treatment of folk song” based on extensive research.⁴¹ In *Fun to be Free*, his prominent use of the closing phrase from “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” to punctuate each historical tableau (“His truth is marching on...”) reflected a long fascination with the song, which he once called “the most exciting stirring hymn I have ever known.”⁴² His 1942 suite for narrator and orchestra, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, included cantata-like arrangements of “Battle Hymn of the Republic” (the first line of which gave the album its title), “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and the “Pledge of Allegiance.” (Instead of cantatas, Weill called these arrangements “Patriotic Melodramas.”)⁴³ The appeal to Weill of these anthems—to which he added his setting of Whitman’s “Beat! Beat! Drums!”—was hardly just musical; for him they served as models for new songs of action:

⁴⁰ “I’m an American,” Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, <http://www.kwf.org/kwf/kurt-weill/for-further-reading/354-im-an-american> (accessed 14 February 2011).

⁴¹ Drew, *Kurt Weill*, 304.

⁴² “I’m an American.”

⁴³ In his liner notes for *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, Weill reveals these cantatas’ debt to modernist operatic *Sprechstimme*: “What I wanted to do was write musical settings for the spoken word, which would allow both arts (poetry and music) to exist harmoniously, supplementing each other in a perfect organism. . . . When I write down these ‘spoken songs,’ I indicate exactly the rhythm of the recitation, the value of each syllable, the dynamics (piano and forte), the expression, the rising and falling of the voice. In other words, the spoken word becomes part of the musical composition.” “Liner Notes for ‘Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory,’” Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, <http://www.kwf.org/kwf/liner-notes-for-qmine-eyes-have-seen-the-gloryq> (accessed 14 February 2011).

The music as well as the words are far superior those martial hymns of hate that are coming out of Europe lately. Any new national song written in the same spirit and with the same dignity would be an enormous contribution to the welfare of the country—because it seems to me when people sing a song together they are sharing a common emotion. And songs that express devotion to our great ideals of liberty and justice would certainly help to unite Americans of all races and occupations to defend these ideals.⁴⁴

On the one hand, this statement indicates Weill's devotion to the study of American history and folklore ever since his arrival in the country. (A 1945 profile claimed that the subject was his "number one hobby...on which he has become a great expert.")⁴⁵ By the time of his death in 1950, his oeuvre would consist of many projects reflecting this interest: the abandoned "Common Glory" project with playwright Paul Green about the Revolutionary War and the birth of the Constitution; "Railroads on Parade" about the nation's Westward expansion and industrialization; an extended musical sequence about Christopher Columbus in the 1943 film, *Where Do We Go From Here; Down in the Valley*, a "folk opera" of original music inspired by Americana; and two adaptations of literary classics with Maxwell Anderson left unfinished, *Huckleberry Finn* and *Moby Dick*. Even *Knickerbocker Holiday* is a national origin story, "a comedy about the childhood of American democracy," as Weill called it.⁴⁶

With the non-representational dramatic forms in projects like "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory" and *Fun to be Free*, Weill wedded his fidelity to his new country with the modernist compositional practices he pioneered back in the Weimar Republic—particularly that of *Gebrauchsmusik*, or "useful music." If works like these at first appear to lack Weill's personal voice because they adopt music by others or seem merely to "accompany" the spoken word, it is because to him the importance of originality, per se, paled in comparison to the social crisis at

⁴⁴ "I'm an American."

⁴⁵ "Biography of Kurt Weill," Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, <http://www.kwf.org/kwf/kurt-weill/for-further-reading/357-biography-of-kurt-weill> (accessed 14 February 2011).

⁴⁶ "I'm an American." *Knickerbocker Holiday* could even be construed, obliquely, as an origin story for American Jews, whose history in the New World dates to the 1654 founding of Congregation Shearith Israel in Peter Stuyvesant's New Amsterdam. By setting his story "circa 1647," Anderson avoided depicting how Stuyvesant—the play's fascist dictator stand-in—tried to oust the city's Jewish settlers.

hand. In these musical adaptations, Weill “assimilated” music from his new country but without assimilating (i.e. subjugating) his Jewish identity to any preexisting nationalistic meaning for that music. In the process of adapting it he also transformed it by applying it to new dramatic and political contexts.

An Antifascist History Lesson

“Show business poured it on for democracy Sunday night at Madison Square Garden,” reported *Variety*, “making of Fight for Freedom’s *It’s Fun to be Free* rally and entertainment a literate and stirring affair. Some of the best talent in the theatrical field, plus writing and managerial top-notchers, combined to deliver the message that America must fight to preserve its Revolutionary War heritage.”⁴⁷ Like many pageants, *Fun to be Free* featured reverential enactments of iconic scenes from American history, from the signing of the Declaration of Independence to Lincoln’s Gettysburg address. But Hecht and MacArthur’s history was, at its core, a revisionist one, reframing each of these familiar scenes as a conflict between militant liberalism and corrupt “appeasement.” It was American pageantry doubling as antifascist allegory.

The authors were consciously working within a tradition of American historical pageantry that was especially popular during the Progressive Era of the early twentieth century.⁴⁸ (According to Atay Citron, Hecht was even personally involved in staging such civic spectacles at the movement’s highpoint.)⁴⁹ Even recent Jewish immigrants adopted the genre as

⁴⁷ Joe Schoenfeld, “17,000 Turn Out at ‘Fun to be Free’ Rally for Democracy in New York,” *Variety*, 8 October 1941.

⁴⁸ See David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

⁴⁹ “Between 1916-1918, as a member of the Chicago Stage Guild, [Hecht] co-authored some civic pageants with Kenneth Sawyer Goodman and with Thomas Woods Stevens, both central figures in the American Pageant Association.” Citron, “Pageantry and Theatre,” 284.

part of their acculturation to their new land. Beth Wenger describes how holiday celebrations in particular provided Jews “occasions to write themselves into the narratives of American history and to make themselves and their culture pivotal actors in the most fundamental events of the American past...When they honored America’s heroes and joined in national observances, Jews conjured and performed myriad versions of American history and sketched a Jewish place within it.”⁵⁰

The nine historical episodes of *Fun to be Free* served to illustrate the announced thesis that the United States had always been actively antifascist. Proceeding chronologically from 1775 to 1941, silent actors realized iconographic “tableaus” on stage while narrators at microphones supplied the famous quotations and highlighted current political parallels.⁵¹ Before we hear Patrick Henry cry “Give me liberty or give me death,” for instance, he is harassed by a mob that the stage directions label as “a gallery of appeasers” who accuse him of “treason” and “rabble rousing”; Henry’s answer—a conveniently authentic quotation—is: “Gentlemen may cry peace, peace—but there is no peace. The war is actually begun” (240). Next, Thomas Jefferson is shown triumphing over others in the Continental Congress who “yammered for appeasement” of Great Britain (241). While George Washington was frequently cited by isolationists for his Farewell Address (with its warning against alliances and foreign wars), here he is transformed into a spokesman for the interventionist cause via his more bellicose 1793 State of the Union speech: “If we desire to secure peace, it must be known we are at all times ready for war”(246). Even Lincoln is pitted against isolationist stand-ins like Clement Vallandigham, leader of the northern pro-Confederate “Copperheads” who advocate “acquiescence in the doctrine of

⁵⁰ Beth Wenger, *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 59.

⁵¹ *Variety* described the staging as follows: “Supers [supernumeraries] in colonial costume represented Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson, while narrators, including Burgess Meredith and Tallulah Bankhead, worded their speeches over mikes from a box right-rear of the stage.” “17,000 Turn out at ‘Fun to be Free’ Rally.”

secession”; Lincoln’s answer echoes the Popular Front’s universal, borderless application of “American” democratic ideals when he says (in the words of his 1861 Independence Hall speech), “the sentiment in the Declaration of Independence...gave liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to all the world, for all future time” (249). That the Copperheads, like 1941 appeasers, were also countenancing racial persecution (in the form of slavery) made parallels between the Civil War and World War II even stronger.⁵²

“The Jewish Warmonger of 1776”

Fun to be Free explicitly links antifascism to Jewishness by including among its pantheon of heroes Haym Salomon. Long a footnote to American Revolution lore due to his financial assistance of Washington’s Continental Army, Salomon had been increasingly embraced by Jewish-American groups in the early twentieth century as a symbol of Jewish patriotism. As Wenger writes, Jews of this era regularly sought “occasions to write themselves into the narratives of American history and to make themselves and their culture pivotal actors in the most fundamental events of the American past.”⁵³ The figure of Salomon—although his actual historical significance was contested, even by many Jews—provided Hecht the perfect dramatic character with which to write Jews into the American origin story and merge contemporary antifascism with the iconography of the American Revolution.

The *Fun to be Free* narrator minces no words in introducing this forgotten hero, restoring Jews to the fabric of the nation’s founding legend and reclaiming that iconic moment of 1776 as

⁵² The figures of Washington and Lincoln held special significance for Jewish Americans. Washington was likened in many images and speeches to Judah Maccabee, and Lincoln was embraced as a fellow Jew when linked to the biblical Abraham. Wenger, *History Lessons*, 58-95. One pageant—a 1919 Milwaukee event entitled *The Wanderer Finds Liberty in America*—featured a scene of “immigrant Jews being beckoned to their new promised land by the Statue of Liberty and welcomed by the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln.” Wenger, 89.

⁵³ Wenger, *History Lessons*, 59.

a Jewish moment:

There were Jews in the American Revolution—thousands of them. They went without food, stood by shoeless, and with guns in their hands—and fought for the new idea for freedom and liberty for all...Here is one of them—the Jewish warmonger of 1776, Colonial Soldier, the Paul Revere of the Jews (244).

Salomon thus entered the stage as not just a stand-in for Jews in general, but particularly for those advocating war in 1941—those like Hecht sounding a Paul Revere-like alarm in *PM*, as well as those “warmongers” from Hollywood currently defending themselves in the Senate. In the scene, Salomon interrupts the holiest of all synagogue services, Yom Kippur, to collect funds from his community for General Washington’s immediate needs. The dialogue between the revolutionary and his rabbi encapsulates the oldest of Jewish-American dilemmas—how to practice modern civic duty without interfering with ancient pious observance:

(Tableau. Synagogue—Jewish music playing. All Jews are in their praying shawls, and present is Rabbi leading them in their chanting. Into the scene comes Chaym Solomon [sic])

SOLOMON: Gentlemen! Ladies!

RABBI: We are holding services—this is the Sabbath. Quiet, please!

SOLOMON: Forgive me, Rabbi, but on this Sabbath we can do more than pray to God—we can fight for Him.

(He turns to the congregation and addresses them.)

Your sons are in the battle, but they are without food and without guns. They need more than your prayers—they need your money and your goods. Jews, the world knows how you love God. Do you also love liberty? Your shillings and your dollars, citizens, for the army of Washington! Who will give?

CONGREGATION: Take all! Come with us to our homes—our money is there! Take all! Take all! (244-245)

Solomon’s implied direct address to the audience (“the congregation”) highlights another parallel—the “pledge drives” and fundraising pitches these artists were routinely making to their show business colleagues for contributions to their antifascist causes.

This short scene was just one of many tributes by Jewish-American artists and writers to Haym Salomon during the Popular Front era. The storied sacrifices of this colonial-era, Polish-

born merchant to the cause of the Revolution had already been taken up by various Jewish advocacy groups at the turn of the century, as if to counter the increased anti-Semitism of “nativist” anti-immigration sentiment. In her study of the evolution of the Salomon myth in the twentieth century, Wenger writes,

The legend of Haym Salomon often took center stage as American Jews worked to establish Jewish institutions and construct an American communal self-definition. For Jews positioning themselves within American culture, Haym Salomon provided an ideal representative to demonstrate how thoroughly Jews belonged in the United States and how much they had contributed to their adopted homeland.⁵⁴

The many inventions and historiographical shortcuts required to create the Salmon narrative suggests that had Haym Salomon never existed, Jewish Americans would have had to invent him. The very synagogue scene Hecht dramatizes—so neatly encapsulating American Jews’ ability to serve their country loyally, even in spite of religious law—was itself apparently based on “a completely fictitious account” invented for a 1925 promotion and recycled in numerous subsequent Salomon biographies and dramatizations.⁵⁵

Among these retellings was the 1939 film *Sons of Liberty*, part of the Warner Brothers “Old Glory” series of patriotic shorts. Originally developed as a feature film for one of the studio’s prominent Jewish stars (first Paul Muni, then John Garfield), *Sons of Liberty* eventually starred Claude Rains and was directed by Hungarian émigré Michael Curtiz as a lavish (if brief) Technicolor 1776 costume picture, including an elaborately staged and sung Yom Kippur scene in the synagogue, unusual in Hollywood cinema at the time for its thorough attention to the detail of Judaic ritual.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Wenger, *History Lessons*, 186.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁵⁶ Claude Rains, a frequent Warner Brothers contract player, was not considered Jewish by anyone except, possibly, himself. According to a biography co-authored by his own daughter, “Rains had strong personal feelings on the topic [of anti-Semitism]; his wife [Frances Proper] was Jewish, and he believed there might be Jewish blood far back in his own lineage.” David J. Skal with Jessica Rains, *Claude Rains: The Actor’s Voice* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 124. For Warner Brothers’ protracted development and casting of *Sons of Liberty* see

As the United States' entry into the war approached, Salomon's shadow loomed larger and larger. Howard Fast published a Salomon book in 1941 and, a week after Pearl Harbor, a public statue by Lorado Taft commemorating Washington and Salomon's partnership (along with banker Robert Morris) was unveiled to much fanfare in Chicago under the title "Great Triumvirate of Patriots."⁵⁷ Even "Ballad for Americans" named Salomon alongside the Founding Fathers.⁵⁸ As in all of these concurrent tributes, the figure of Salomon in *Fun to be Free* served as a perfect historical analog for the Jewish-American antifascists to invoke for themselves—an immigrant Jew who was also a militant patriot. Moreover, Salomon's endorsement of war for freedom's sake, over the objections of those colonists opposing an independent American democracy, made for an even more effective parallel to the war debates of 1941.

Agitprop for America

Another difference between *Fun to be Free* and earlier Progressive Era or Zionist pageantry was the debt its staging techniques owed to 1930s labor and agitprop theatre, rather than from earlier community-building civic performances. Hecht and MacArthur's interpolations into their pageant of verbatim historical texts (including extended speeches from Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln) lent *Fun to be Free* a documentary theatre quality not unlike the "Living Newspaper" series popularized by the Federal Theatre Project. This link was especially clear in the final present-day scene in which Franklin Roosevelt was depicted as heir to the legacy of all the patriots seen preceding him. "On the same platform today stands another of our spokesmen,"

"News of the Screen," *New York Times*, 3 August 1937; and "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times*, 29 November 1938. Actor-comedian George Jessel also tried to develop the project as a producer. "The Grave Situation," *New York Times*, 7 November 1937.

⁵⁷ Howard Fast, *Haym Salomon: Son of Liberty* (New York: J. Messner, 1941). Two years later, another colonial – era political allegory by Fast, *Citizen Tom Paine*, would make him a leading Jewish-American (and communist) novelist of the wartime Popular Front.

⁵⁸ Quoted in John Bush Jones, *The Songs that Fought the War: Popular Music and the Home Front, 1939-1945* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2006), 67.

the narrator's part reads, "He isn't in the history books yet. But he is heading for them" (249-250). The text chosen to represent Roosevelt was a "fireside chat" from only three weeks earlier—an address that soon became known as the "shoot on sight" speech after the president's authorization for U.S. vessels to attack German submarines trespassing into American waters.⁵⁹ Instead of an actor reciting the text, a recording of the president's voice (accompanied by a magnified projection of his face on screen) was played over loudspeakers filling the Madison Square Garden auditorium with his admonition to "repel Hitlerism" and that "the time for active defense is now." Use of electronic recordings (especially of political speeches) was one of the defining characteristics of the new documentary theatre (or "total theatre") pioneered by Erwin Piscator in 1920s Berlin and became a staple of Federal Theatre Project Living Newspaper stagings. According to Attilio Favorini, American director Joseph Losey first translated Piscator's writings into English in the early 1930s and "was largely responsible for introducing Piscator's stage vocabulary into the Living Newspapers, not only the epic scene progression but also his technical innovations: multilevel sets, projections, [and] loudspeakers."⁶⁰ Hecht and MacArthur may have had no involvement with the FTP themselves, but *Fun to be Free's* director, Brett Warren, was a veteran of the Living Newspaper series, having staged the premiere of Arthur Arent's *Power* in 1937.

The agitprop approach of *Fun to be Free* was most apparent in the "shock tactics" of its surprise ending: a simulated "air raid" announcing a German aerial invasion of New York City. Immediately following the Roosevelt recording, when the pageant appeared to reach its conclusion, the narrator (Burgess Meredith in the Madison Square Garden performance) urged the audience to "hold your seats, hang on to your hats" for "a present of tomorrow—the

⁵⁹ Roosevelt's "shoot on sight" radio address was broadcast 11 September 1941.

⁶⁰ Attilio Favorini, *Voicings: Ten Plays from the Documentary Theater* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1995), xxii.

tomorrow that rides on the Panzer tanks and on the dive bombers of the Luftwaffe” (250-251). At this point, sounds of planes (reportedly a recording of “the horrible noises of an actual air raid on London”) began to crescendo as real journalists and known radio voices appeared at microphones as if broadcasting the incoming attack live.⁶¹ “An air armada is heading for New York,” one told the crowd, “The roar of its thousands of propellers is already in our ears.” With the loudspeaker noise intensifying, air raid sirens began to blare as another announcer alerted, “They’re coming...guns and tanks out of the sky. An enemy out of the clouds. Stand by your posts...lights out...Black out. The alert is sounding...Here they are” (251-252). As the Madison Square Garden lights went out, plunging the audience into darkness, and the speakers continued to bombard them with sound effects, miniature parachutes were then released from the rafters, each carrying small cardboard cutout of a German infantryman.⁶²

While the toy soldiers may have provided some comical relief as they dropped into spectators’ laps, the two minutes of anxiety fomented in the hall leading up to this effect worked on the audience in many ways. Over the preceding year, many had already become familiar with radio broadcasts of air raids from London—like the one dramatized in Hecht’s ending for Hitchcock’s *Foreign Correspondent*.⁶³ This gesture established a visceral audience identification with the victims of the London Blitz at a time when aid to Britain was the pivotal issue of debate

⁶¹“17,000 See ‘Fun to be Free.’” The guest-star journalists who eventually appeared in the Madison Square Garden performance were: newspaper editor and foreign correspondent Wythe Williams; *Nation* columnist and German refugee Johannes Steele; and WHN commentator, and former congressman, George Hamilton Coombs. Hecht and MacArthur’s script originally listed other personages who were ultimately unable to appear: Mutual Broadcasting’s Raymond Gram Swing, Louisville broadcaster Paul Sullivan, CBS’ Elmer Davis (who later became director of the government’s Office of War Information), and NBC’s H.V. Kaltenborn. Kaltenborn had appeared in a similar fictional news capacity as a voiceover in Orson Welles’ 1938 Mercury radio broadcast of *Julius Caesar* (Denning, 383).

⁶²The rehearsal script includes a handwritten line inserted for one of the radio announcers to read, adding the even more chilling detail of “air wardens tak[ing] to the street.” *Fun to be Free* typescript, Fight for Freedom Records.

⁶³ See chapter 1 for more on *Foreign Correspondent*.

between isolationists and interventionists.⁶⁴ But if putting the audience at “ground zero” of a “New York Blitz” succeeded at transforming Americans, temporarily, into Londoners, then it also, by extension, potentially made them empathize with the plight of another overt target of the Nazis, the Jew—especially considering that, in the terms outlined by America First and Father Coughlin followers, only Jews in America took the German threat personally.

This staging of mass panic under the cloud of war evoked another famous fictional air attack of the era’s popular culture: the “hoax” Martian invasion of Orson Welles’ 1938 *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast, which reportedly convinced many listeners that a real extraterrestrial attack was occurring. (Indeed, for someone tuning into WEVD’s airing of *Fun to be Free*, in *medias res*, the effect might have been eerily similar.) In Michael Denning’s reading, Welles’ infamous stunt was not a prank but a deliberate political gesture in an emerging genre of “air raid” radio dramas—including Archibald MacLeish’s 1938 “Air Raid” and Norman Corwin’s “They Fly Through the Air” the following year.⁶⁵ While Hecht and MacArthur may not have achieved the level of public panic Welles did, press accounts testified to at least a momentary credulity within the hall of seventeen thousand. As *Life* magazine reported, “searchlights flashed,

⁶⁴ The variety show segment of *Fun to be Free* also elicited sympathy for London Blitz victims when Ethel Merman sang Cole Porter’s “Let’s Be Buddies” (from *Panama Hattie*, which Merman was then starring in) with two English children. In this respect the pageant did cultural work similar to that done in films like the Warner Brothers documentary-short *London Can Take It* (released September 1940) and Fox’s *Confirm or Deny* (premiered November 1941), both of which showed images of common Londoners braving air raids. This film genre reached its peak with MGM’s wartime Oscar-winner *Mrs. Miniver*, released just six months after Pearl Harbor. Winston Churchill reportedly considered *Miniver* “propaganda worth a hundred battleships” and Roosevelt himself is said to have intervened to hasten the film’s release in the summer of 1942. Jan Herman, *A Talent for Trouble: The Life of Hollywood’s Most Acclaimed Director, William Wyler* (New York: Da Capo, 1997), 235.

⁶⁵ “*The War of the Worlds* did not have to be an explicit ‘parable of fascism’ because its very form was part of the anti-fascist aesthetic... [T]he use of the radio announcer as a character had been created in the experimental radio dramas depicting fascist invasions and air raids.” At least one *War of the Worlds* listener also “assumed that the invasion by Martians that the radio reported was actually an invasion by the Nazis with a terrifying new weapon.” Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 382.

gunfire sounded, women screamed.”⁶⁶

After the air raid scene ended—with a cry of “all clear” from the stage—the pageant concluded with a direct address to the audience that evoked yet another touchstone of Popular Front culture, John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Just as that book’s everyman hero Tom Joad promises near the novel’s end, “Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there,” Hecht and MacArthur’s speaker (Tallulah Bankhead at the premiere) posits a similar guardian-angel role for America:⁶⁷

Tomorrow is coming. Not an easy tomorrow. Not a tomorrow of waltzes and jack-o’-lanterns. But a tomorrow with a steel measure for the soul of man. And we’ll be there! We who in the past have flung our spears at all tyrants, we who proclaimed the rights of the poor and the lowly, we who held our arm above the heavily laden, we the New World never yet daunted—we’ll be there... Tomorrow will not sit cowering in Nazi fetters. That clock of Nazi doom will never tell that final hour. For we’ll be there! Our sweat, our toil, our riches, our hearts, our bodies, and our valor—they will all be there.⁶⁸

The Steinbeck speech had been made even more famous by Henry Fonda’s rendition in the final moments of the 1940 film version, a moment the Hollywood progressive community would have been especially familiar with. The phrase “I’ll be there” made for an effective rallying cry in the context of both domestic justice and of international freedom by calling for heroic intervention to protect the most vulnerable—from Steinbeck’s common man beaten by the police to the Jews of Europe savaged by the S.S.

Antifascist Theatre in the Pearl Harbor Moment

Fun to be Free continued to have a life well after its October 5 premiere and even for some time after the Pearl Harbor attack and the United States’ entry into the war. Fight for

⁶⁶ “Fight for Freedom Fun,” *Life*, 20 October 1941, 38. The *New York Times* review similarly ascribed gullible reactions to women: “When it was all over one woman shouted: ‘My God, I thought it was real!’” “Freedom Rally Thrills 17,000.”

⁶⁷ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 439.

⁶⁸ *Best One-Act Plays of 1941*, 253-254.

Freedom had originally planned a tour to several cities—initially announcing as many as “forty or fifty.”⁶⁹ While that goal proved overly optimistic, a follow-up staging was mounted shortly after the New York showing in Washington, DC on 4 November 1941.⁷⁰ And three days after Pearl Harbor, on 10 December 1941 a planned performance in St. Louis went ahead as scheduled, with Humphrey Bogart among the Hollywood luminaries joining the cast of narrators.⁷¹ Later bookings, however (for Cleveland in January and Chicago in February) were cancelled and Fight for Freedom—its mission having been accomplished—ceased operations altogether by March 1942.

Even without Fight for Freedom’s backing, the script of the Hecht-MacArthur pageant lived on thanks to a quickly released Dramatists Play Service acting edition (published in late 1941) aimed at inspiring amateur and school productions—for which the playwrights waived all royalty fees. The edition’s “Notes on Production” indicates the piece’s proselytizing intent:

The authors who wrote this play for the purpose of stirring the American people to a sense of their national destiny by reminding them of the glories of their consistent struggle to attain freedom and preserve it, believe that *Fun to be Free* can and should be widely used by our schools, and that the easiest and quickest way for large numbers of our young people to see it is to act it out in classrooms and school auditoriums, without scenery or costumes.⁷²

The text was also published, in abbreviated form, in a *Fun to be Free* “souvenir program” sold to audiences and in the annual Dodd, Mead series *Best One-Act Plays* the following year. Both the authors and the Fight for Freedom organization were clearly interested in circulating the text as

⁶⁹ “Stars Will Join Patriotic Revue,” *New York Times*, 20 September 1941.

⁷⁰ “McNutt and Other Speakers Emphasize Sea Freedom Need,” *Washington Post*, 5 November 1941. According to this article, Hecht seems to have added to this performance a reference to Lindbergh’s infamous 1938 meeting with Hermann Göring in which he was honored with a German military decoration.

⁷¹ Memo, 21 November 1941, Fight for Freedom Records. This pre-Pearl Harbor memo explained the importance of the planned December 10 St. Louis performance as a strategic protest against Missouri Senator Bennett Clark, “leader of isolationist sentiment in the Senate and a Lindbergh stronghold.”

⁷² Hecht and MacArthur, *Fun to be Free* (1941), 5. An advertisement on the back page of this Dramatists Play Service edition for other “American Plays on Patriotism and Democracy” link the pageant to the broader patriotic-antifascist genre with titles like Elmer Rice’s *American Landscape*, Kaufman and Hart’s *The American Way*, Sinclair Lewis’ *It Can’t Happen Here*, and Anderson and Weill’s *Knickerbocker Holiday*.

widely as possible, for both reading and staging purposes.

Amateur stagings were what Hecht and MacArthur had to settle for, at least, when intensive planning went awry for an expensive Broadway transfer of the entire *Fun to be Free* program in early 1942. Despite the political shift following Pearl Harbor and the seeming disappearance of the work's *raison d'être*, *Fight for Freedom* and many of the artists associated with it were intent on updating and adapting the original *Fun to be Free* evening into a professional Broadway revue. (Not “merely a benefit staged for a few performances only,” reported gossip columnist Wilella Waldorf, but “a bang-up Broadway musical schedule to run for months, perhaps even years.”)⁷³ Hecht and MacArthur, *Fight for Freedom* claimed, had already “revised and elaborated” their pageant (though no revised script is extant) and other celebrated playwrights and composers were ready to join the project, including such formidable teams as Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern, George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, and Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse.⁷⁴ Songwriters Irving Berlin and Harold Rome agreed to contribute new material along with Weill, who wrote to his wife, Lotte Lenya, of attending many planning meetings and even auditions throughout February 1942.⁷⁵ Even Groucho Marx, active in the Hollywood antifascist movement for many years, tentatively agreed to star. By the time that the project officially collapsed in late March, due to lack of funds, much material had been written, some of it soon recycled in other war-effort projects. Billy Rose announced he was purchasing the rights to sketches by Rome and Kaufman and Hart for entertainment at his own Diamond Horseshoe nightclub.⁷⁶ When Berlin's own morale-boosting revue, *This is the Army*, was announced to open on Broadway that summer, one press report speculated “some of the

⁷³ “Forecasts and Postscripts,” *New York Post*, 5 March 1942.

⁷⁴ “Memo on Proposed ‘Fun to be Free,’” (undated), *Fight for Freedom* Records.

⁷⁵ See Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke, eds. *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 287, 297, 303, 315.

⁷⁶ “The ‘Autumn Hill’ Will Open Tonight,” *New York Times*, 13 April 1942.

material of the once planned ‘Fun to be Free’ may go into the revue.”⁷⁷ Berlin’s show went onto considerable success and offered a hint of the place a revived *Fun to be Free* might have occupied in the Broadway theatre of the early war years.⁷⁸

The greatest beneficiary of *Fun to be Free*’s demise was Weill’s own “Lunchtime Follies” series—a traveling cabaret sponsored by the American Theatre Wing to entertain munitions factory workers. The February–April timespan David Drew proposes for the composition of several Weill “propaganda songs” eventually used in the Follies coincides with the composer’s work on the *Fun to be Free* Broadway transfer (which ended in March). One of the most notable of these songs, “Schickelgruber,” seems to be identified (under the title “Hitler’s Mother”) in a February 22 newspaper article as one of the upcoming songs in *Fun to be Free*.⁷⁹ With lyrics by Howard Dietz, “Schickelgruber” is an acerbic ballad, using Hitler’s concealed family name and past as a means of exposing all that was lowly and dysfunctional in the feared dictator’s personal background (e.g., his near-illegitimate birth, his failed artistic aspirations).⁸⁰ As a gesture of Jewish defiance, the song not only jokes, “had he been christened Abie / [he] maybe might have never played the monster’s part,” but also alludes to one of the most common facts of Jewish-American life, especially in show business: changing one’s foreign-sounding name.⁸¹ Indeed, the comical otherness with which the song endows the name “Schickelgruber” virtually treats it as a stand-in for a Jewish name, in the spirit of the popular ethnic novelty songs

⁷⁷ “Gossip Along the Rialto,” *New York Times*, 5 April 1942.

⁷⁸ Among the more intriguing “lost” *Fun to be Free* pieces is a musical sketch called “The Aryan Mikado” attributed to George S. Kaufman and Harold Rome. “Equity Grants Concessions,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 4 March 1942.

⁷⁹ “News and Gossip on the Rialto,” *New York Times*, 22 February 1942. Weill and Dietz’s “Schickelgruber” is distinct from a song with the same title that E.Y. Harburg and Sammy Fain wrote for the 1944 film, *Meet the People*. The opportunities for vengeful ridicule in the name were apparently too hard for Jewish-American songwriters to resist.

⁸⁰ Schickelgruber was the birth name of Adolf Hitler’s father, Alois, born out of wedlock. Dietz capitalizes on the story to extend the taint of illegitimacy to Adolf in lyrics like, “You were born a child of shame./ You have always been a bastard/ Even though you changed your name.”

⁸¹ “Schickelgruber,” *The Unknown Kurt Weill: A Collection of Fourteen Songs as Sung by Teresa Stratas* (European American Music Corporation, 2005), 50-55.

of Tin Pan Alley earlier in the century. Like Irving Berlin's "Sadie Salome" and "Yiddle, On Your Fiddle, Play Some Ragtime," Weill and Dietz's song plays on the contrast between a "funny" name and an incongruous role, in this case a dictator named Shickelgruber. This musical turning of tables inflicts upon Hitler the greatest humiliation—that he is no better than a comical immigrant Jew.⁸²

The overlap between the abandoned *Fun to be Free* Broadway revival and the Lunchtime Follies involved many other collaborators. At least one Kaufman and Hart sketch written for *Fun to be Free*, "The Man Who Went to Moscow" (the "man" being Hitler), was definitely performed at a Lunchtime Follies show.⁸³ Two lyricists Weill was working with on *Fun to be Free* who also contributed to Lunchtime Follies were Oscar Hammerstein and Lewis Allan (aka Abel Meeropol). The songs Weill wrote with them—"Buddy on the Nightshift" and "Inventory," respectively—typify the mission of Lunchtime Follies to merge wartime morale-boosting with the continuing labor advocacy of the Popular Front by honoring the efforts of the munitions workers. In Hammerstein's "Buddy on the Nightshift," one machinist thanks the man he replaces in the morning for having worked all night to ensure that production never stops. In "Inventory," an up-tempo march about workers' ownership of their labor, Allan's lyrics describe the dazzling chain of labor that makes the American war machine run as a collective effort—elevating even the seemingly lowliest assembly line worker to the status of hero: "the man, who worked the drill, that screwed the bolt, that held the shaft, that turned the wheel, that ran the belt, that made the things, that built the plane, that held the bomb, that dropped on Hitler!"⁸⁴

⁸² Later that same year, in November 1942, Weill was contemplating yet another satirical anti-Hitler song with Ira Gershwin, with whom he had just written the musical *Lady in the Dark*; Weill proposed rewriting the lyrics to that show's "Saga of Jenny" substituting *Adolf* for *Jenny* in a series of silly episodes. Kurt Weill to Ira Gershwin, 24 November 1942, Kurt Weill Foundation.

⁸³ "The 'Autumn Hill' Will Open Tonight," *New York Times*, 13 April 1942; "Whistle While You Work," *New York Times*, 23 June 1942.

⁸⁴ "Inventory," *Unsung Weill* (European American Music Corporation, 2002), 90.

With the inclusion of labor-related material, this greater *Fun to be Free* project encompassed what Denning considers the “three distinctive political tendencies” of Popular Front cultural work:

a social democratic laborism based on a militant industrial unionism; an anti-racist ethnic pluralism imagining the United States as a “nation of nations”; and an antifascist politics of international solidarity.⁸⁵

It was a combination Ben Hecht pursued as well in the early phase of the war effort with his *Pageant of American Labor*—commissioned by the ILGWU, co-produced by the American Federation of Labor, and broadcast on the NBC program “Labor for Victory” on 30 May 1942. (It was also published in the AFL newsletter and performed on stage the following year as part of an ILGWU May Day event at Carnegie Hall.)⁸⁶ Just as *Fun to be Free* sought to restore the place of progressive liberalism (and, in the Haym Salomon scene, of Jews) in U.S. history, the *Pageant of American Labor* is a “history from below” of organized labor’s contributions to America’s wars. “In history the Captains and Kings and the flimflam boys have all the slogans,” Hecht writes in the opening narration. “There is a silence in history that makes all its echoes often say nothing. This silence is the history of Labor. The history of Labor is an epic of silence. It is this silence that is being broken in our day. A new tongue is being added to history—the Voice of Labor.”⁸⁷ In writing a self-professed “pageant” for radio, Hecht approximates the historical sweep and reenactment of *Fun to be Free* in a similar tour of historical highlights. In this procession from 1776 to the Civil War to World War I to the crisis of the moment in 1942, the only difference is that here the individuals introduced to us are mostly anonymous—laborers who organize against the tyranny of George III, fight for the Union Army, and rally around

⁸⁵ Denning, *the Cultural Front*, 125.

⁸⁶ “The Pageant of American Labor,” *American Federation of Labor Weekly News Service*, 2 June 1942. The pageant’s performance at the 1943 May Day celebration is noted in Citron, “Pageantry and Theatre,” 284, n.15.

⁸⁷ “Labor Pageant,” 2, Ben Hecht Papers.

Woodrow Wilson's call to make the world "safe for democracy." In the present, Hecht stresses labor's alliance with Jews by interpolating AFL president William Green's call for an anti-German boycott back in 1933:

This boycott of German made goods and German services will continue until the German government recognizes the right of the working people of Germany to organize into independent trade unions of their own choosing, and until Germany ceases its repressive policy and persecution of the Jewish people.⁸⁸

No speech could more neatly encapsulate all three Popular Front touchstones of trade unionism, anti-racism, and international human rights.

Once antifascism became official US policy after 7 December 1941, the artists who had been campaigning for action in Europe for the past decade were no longer protesters but partners with government. Not only did they continue working with private organizations like AFL and the American Theatre Wing, but as the "antifascist politics of the Popular Front merged with the politics of war mobilization," many artists were directly employed by the Office of War Information (OWI) itself for propaganda purposes.⁸⁹ Hecht was a member of the Writers War Board and wrote two documentaries for OWI toward the end of the war, *The Negro Soldier* (1944) and *Watchtower For Tomorrow* (1945).⁹⁰ Weill scored a 1944 OWI documentary *Salute to France*, written by Maxwell Anderson, directed by Garson Kanin and Jean Renoir. Two of Weill's last German-language songs were recorded by OWI for distribution behind German lines; one of them was a rare late collaboration with Bertolt Brecht ("*Und was bekam des*

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 11.

⁹⁰ "Ben Hecht and War Writing," Snickersnee Press, http://benhechtbooks.net/ben_hecht_war_writing (accessed 15 February 2011). According to screenwriter George Oppenheimer, Hecht had also been asked by a government agency earlier in the war to produce films about air raids and plane spotting and he rounded up many of his usual antifascist collaborators. "Ben assembled quite a group—Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman, Maxwell Anderson, George S. Kaufman, Moss Hart, Gene Fowler...with Burgess Meredith as director. We had a meeting at which Ben gave out assignments and asked that the finished scripts be back to him within a week. George Kaufman and I collaborated on our two and in the time specified every script was in Ben's hands. A month or so later the three-lettered agency was disbanded and our scripts disappeared somewhere in the limbo of Washington bureaucracy." Quoted in MacAdams, *Ben Hecht*, 217.

Soldaten Weib?”) recorded for OWI by Lotte Lenya.⁹¹ Weill even volunteered for the draft, even though he was over forty years old and did not receive formal citizenship until 1943. Instead, he volunteered to be a “plane spotter,” keeping watch for German aircraft along the Atlantic coast near his home in Rockland County, New York.

Uncle Samuel Stands Up

Late in the evening of 7 December 1941, after that day’s attack on Pearl Harbor seemed to guarantee U.S. entry into the war, Ben Hecht telegraphed his wife to say that hearing the news was “like the end of a bad dream” and that he had already written a poem to appear in the next day’s issue *PM*.⁹² Called “Uncle Sam Stands Up,” the 48-line ballad portrayed the United States as a sleeping giant finally spurred into action. The following year it was set to music by Ferde Grofé and took on new life as a “patriotic cantata” (as the published sheet music classified it), joining that Popular Front musical tradition redefining American icons and identity.⁹³

Most striking about Hecht’s verses is how initially irreverent and iconoclastic a view they take of such a beloved national symbol:

He sat around and gabbled
And fiddled with his gun
And sort of half regretful
Watched half the world undone.

He huffed and puffed and argued,
He yodeled and he sighed

⁹¹ The other song, also recorded by Lenya, was “*Wie Lange Noch?*” from 1943, with lyrics by Walter Mehring. “Kurt Weill: A Detailed Chronology,” Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, <http://www.kwf.org/kwf/kurt-weill/chronology> (accessed 1 July 2012).

⁹² Telegram from Hecht to Rose Caylor Hecht, 8 December 1941, Ben Hecht Papers.

⁹³ “Uncle Sam Stands Up: A Patriotic Cantata” (New York: Robbins Music Corporation, 1944). On the back page of the sheet music, the publisher even groups this song with more of “America’s Best Loved Cantatas”—including the touchstone of the genre, “Ballad for Americans.” “Uncle Sam Stands Up” debuted on radio 28 May 1942, performed by Frank Morgan speaking the text to the accompaniment of chorus and orchestra. (Grofé’s score, however, notates the soloist’s part as sung.) “The Post Radio Highlights,” *Washington Post*, 28 May, 1942. Recording of broadcast available at Library of Congress Recorded Sound Reference Center, LOC Preservation Tape RWE 4607.

And watched his fine blood brothers
Get taken for a ride.

But after chiding Uncle Sam, Hecht hails with relief his belated ride to the rescue of the world's oppressed. What gives him the power to do so is not so much America's armaments as its moral authority:

But dry your eyes, good Poland
And lift your head, Paree
And grin with hope, old England—
He's drawn his snickersnee.

Look on him from the shell holes
In all the tortured lands
And now that he's stood up
Behold how tall he stands.

There's more to him than marrow
And more to him than bone
And he's not made of bayonets
And battleships alone.

He's made of cloud and thunder,
Of Freedom's finest weave,
Of Justice and of Honor—
With Jehovah up his sleeve.⁹⁴

While Hecht here is not writing explicitly as a Jew, considering his regular output in the very same pages of *PM*, readers would have known that the author was one of America's most outspoken Jewish antifascists and might have inferred that one source of his happiness at Uncle Sam's (overdue) reawakening was his hope for the rescue of the Jewish people of Europe (especially of "Poland" and "Paree"). Uncle Sam's transformation from indecisive, flaccid loafer (the opening lines call him a "gabble-headed red, white, and blue galoot") to awesome avenger in the name of "Jehovah," no less ("how tall he stands"), also mirrors the dual qualities of legendary Jewish figure of the *Golem*—who in popular folklore protected the medieval ghetto of

⁹⁴ "Uncle Sam Stands Up," *PM*, 8 December 1941.

Prague, but in Yiddish vernacular was also a derogatory term meaning “a stupid or lethargic person.”⁹⁵

Just as Hecht was reinventing the iconic figure of Uncle Sam, so was Weill in a 1942 propaganda song written with Maxwell Anderson called “Oh, Uncle Samuel!” While the name “Uncle Sam” has traditionally been traced to War of 1812 hero Samuel Wilson, the song’s unexplained use of the Hebrew form “Samuel” in Anderson’s lyrics invites the possibility of a “Jewish joke”—especially when the title is pronounced with the emphatically drawn out syllables, as spelled out on the top of Weill’s manuscript score: “Sam-u-el.”⁹⁶ On the surface the song is a good-natured GI’s lament very much in the vein of Berlin’s “Oh How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning.”⁹⁷ (“Oh Uncle Samuel, please take me off K.P./ I’m going to eat my Christmas dinner in a land beyond the sea!”) But the main work of the song is done in the melody—which Weill openly borrowed from the Civil War-era song “Kingdom Coming” by Henry Clay Work. In adopting this familiar patriotic tune from an earlier war, Weill and Anderson count on the music to stir up images of the triumph over slavery. This would have been especially palpable to anyone who knew Work’s original lyrics for “Kingdom Coming,” which depict emancipated slaves celebrating the dissolution of their plantations. Sometimes known under the title “Year of Jubilo,” the song enjoyed years of popularity as a minstrel-show favorite and was written in grossly exaggerated negro dialect. (“De massa run, ha, ha! De darkey stay, ho, ho! It mus' be now de kingdom coming, an' de year ob Jubilo!”)⁹⁸ But in resurrecting such a piece—as part of

⁹⁵ Gene Bluestein, *English/Yinglish: Yiddish in American Life and Literature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 32-33. Also see Dovid Katz, *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 41-42, 147; and David Bridger and Samuel Wolk, eds. *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism* (New York: Behrman House, 1976), 252.

⁹⁶ Manuscript score of “Oh, Uncle Samuel,” in Papers of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya, Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University.

⁹⁷ “Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning” was written (and performed) by Berlin in his 1918 World War I review *Yip Yip Yaphank*, and then revived twenty-four years later for *This is the Army*.

⁹⁸ Irwin Silber, ed. *Songs of the Civil War* (New York: Dover, 1995), 317-319.

his fascination with the history of American popular song—could Weill have been compelled by the original’s dramatization of the joy of liberation from racial oppression?⁹⁹ Like the name “Samuel,” the concept of “Jubilee” comes from the Hebrew bible—where it refers to the release of all men from debt or slavery in the sabbatical year. The slaves in Work’s song interpret their own emancipation as a biblical “Jubilo.” As a cantor’s son, Weill certainly would have known that one of the holiest occasions for the blowing of the *shofar* is to ring in the year of Jubilee.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

In *Fun to be Free* and such offshoots as these “Ballads of Uncle Sam,” Jewish-American dramatists absorbed and reinvented the narratives of American political history.¹⁰¹ While their work could be—and was—enjoyed on a surface level by many Americans as a normative patriotic display of uncritical reverence to authority, such tropes were actually being employed in these works very selectively and strategically to advance an internationalist and ethnically pluralist political program.

Reclaiming American history, these artists re-centered it around the progressive politics of liberation instead of the white, Christian iconography of the Pilgrims and the Puritans. As Louis Adamic posited in 1938, Ellis Island was emerging as a new Plymouth Rock in the iconography of American origins.¹⁰² While not explicitly about immigration, *Fun to be Free*—as largely a product of Jewish immigrant culture—challenged origin stories built upon ideals of “splendid isolation” and white supremacy, substituting for them a pluralist declaration of

⁹⁹ Weill’s interest in American popular song traditions certainly extended to Minstrelsy. He wrote a minstrel-song sequence for his 1948 musical *Love Life* as well as for *Lady in the Dark*, from which it was cut. Bruce D. McClung, *Lady in the Dark: Biography of a Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 56, 165.

¹⁰⁰ The word “Jubilee” itself derives from the Hebrew *yobel*, for ram’s horn. “jubilee,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online, Second Edition 1989*, Oxford 2001 (accessed 15 February 2011).

¹⁰¹ “Ballad of Uncle Sam” was also the original title for Robinson and LaTouche’s “Ballad for Americans.”

¹⁰² Louis Adamic, “Ellis Island and Plymouth Rock,” *My America* (1938; repr. New York: Da Capo Press, 1976), 185-259.

solidarity with the world's oppressed. To take this argument into the arena of Madison Square Garden in October 1941 was to invite accusations of fanning the flames of a "Jewish war"—a cause "real" American supposedly had no stake in. But the Jewish artists behind the performance were eager to demonstrate that these so-called Jewish interests were quintessentially American.

Chapter 3

From Bar Kochba to Barney Ross:

Staging the Fighting Jew in *We Will Never Die*

Given the opportunity and requirement to defend their country, American Jews would discover not only how American but also how deeply Jewish they felt. “They learned,” [one rabbi] explained to his congregants, “that unless you stand up for yourself, nobody is going to stand up for you.” Standing up for oneself as a Jew turned out to be the American thing to do.

Deborah Dash Moore,
GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation

American Zionists, believing themselves engaged in a holy crusade to change the course of Jewish history, knew that in all wars, soldiers fell. The Jewish nation, just like the Allied nations, had to be willing to make huge sacrifices in the struggle against tyranny. Thus, American Zionists tended to perceive of the Holocaust victims as fallen soldiers of a great Zionist army.

Aaron Berman,
Nazism, the Jews, and American Zionism: 1933-1948

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, antifascists finally won the argument of isolation versus intervention. But the war most Americans rallied to fight that day was not necessarily committed to the saving European Jews from persecution. Isolationists had long warned against fighting a “Jewish war,” and Americans, by and large, remained uninterested in doing so throughout the conflict. The liberation of the enemy’s captive Jews would never become an official U.S. or allied military objective. With American forces not setting foot on the European continent until the summer of 1943, for most of its first two years, the country’s war effort seemed more concerned with the Japanese in the Pacific than events across the Atlantic. As Paul Fussell recalls, “The slogan was conspicuously ‘Remember Pearl Harbor.’ No one ever shouted or sang ‘Remember Poland.’”¹

¹ Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford, 1989), 137-138.

While today the Holocaust may seem, in retrospect, an essential justification for the war, at the time the details of Hitler's "Final Solution" unfolded only gradually for most Americans and would not have their full impact until images of the concentration camps were seen by the public at war's end. To those who were aware, a new campaign like the 1930s antifascist crusade became necessary to alert other Americans once again about a danger they could not see: the gradual and systematic annihilation by the German army of the Eastern European Jewish population.

In March 1943, teaming up with a band of renegade militant Zionists (led by the exiled Palestinian Jew, Peter Bergson) who had taken up an aggressive lobbying effort to convince the United States to intervene into this crisis, playwright-screenwriter Ben Hecht reunited several Popular Front antifascist colleagues to mount a theatrical mass spectacle, *We Will Never Die*, in the hopes of raising awareness and inspiring action. The Jewish-American theatre artists behind this unusual performance were determined not only to save the Jews of Europe but also to change the public perception everywhere of Jews as defenseless victims—a stereotype that they believed only encouraged neglect of and indifference toward their cause. ("Acton, not pity," was the project's motto.)² In its place they would offer a kind of "Muscular Judaism" that had hitherto rarely been seen in the American public sphere and sent a message to Jews everywhere to not wait for help from the politicians of world powers, but to fight for themselves. From the ancient Maccabees to the new generation of "GI Jews," *We Will Never Die* foregrounded the bodies of Jewish soldiers along with the ideal of the "Fighting Jew" as a recognizably *American* hero. And, armed with the stagecraft techniques of 1930s agitprop and protest performance, these claims of Jewish empowerment, agency and self-determination marked a turning point in the representation of Jews in the American theatre.

² "We Will Never Die" Madison Square Garden souvenir program, 2, Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, New York.

Revisionist Zionism and the “Muscle Jew”

One thing that made *We Will Never Die* uniquely notable was its fusion of Popular Front antifascism with the super-nationalistic “Revisionist Zionist” movement of Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky.³ Central to Jabotinsky’s appeal was his adherence to “Muscular Judaism,” a philosophy that had circulated in Zionist circles ever since the German-Hungarian writer Max Nordau extolled the ideal of the “Muscle Jew” at the 1898 World Zionist Congress. Nordau sought to overcome the anti-Semitic stereotype of Jewish men as intellectually strong but physically weak by promoting a new, more formidable image on the world stage.⁴ During World War I, Jabotinsky put this idea into practice when he successfully lobbied the British military in 1917 to create a division of Palestinian Jews (a “Jewish Legion”) to fight Ottoman forces under the British flag. While Nordau’s terms and ideas filtered through Jewish culture in many ways during the early twentieth century, Jabotinsky (whom Bernard Avishai calls the main “theoretician of Jewish militarism”) was probably more responsible than anyone for injecting this discourse into midcentury American Jewish and Zionist politics.⁵

Peter Bergson arrived in the United States from Palestine in 1940, accompanying Jabotinsky as a representative of the Revisionists’ anti-British underground army in Palestine, the *Irgun Zvai Leumi*.⁶ After Jabotinsky’s death shortly upon his arrival, Bergson set about emulating his mentor’s “Jewish Legion” and created, in the pre-Pearl Harbor summer of 1941,

³ Born in Russia in 1880, Jabotinsky emerged after Theodore Herzl’s death in 1904 as among the most charismatic of the next generation of Zionist leaders. But by 1925 his insistence on maximal territorial demands for Jewish settlement in Palestine, as well as his endorsement of violent resistance to British governance, led to a split with the dominant Labor Zionist faction of David Ben-Gurion that would later lead the new State of Israel in 1948. Jabotinsky’s differences with the mainstream leadership were not religious (he lived as a secular Jew), but political.

⁴ This aspiration was accompanied by a conspicuous movement to build gymnasiums for Jewish boys and young men in many middle class European Jewish communities. See Todd Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁵ Bernard Avishai, *The Tragedy of Zionism: Revolution and Democracy in the Land of Israel* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985), 120.

⁶ Bergson was born Hilel Kook, but adopted a *nom de guerre* while in America during the war. The phrase *Irgun Zvai Leumi* translates as, “National Military Organization.”

the Committee for a Jewish Army. It was during this period that Bergson reached out to Ben Hecht after noticing Hecht's virulently antifascist and proudly Jewish columns in *PM*. "Hecht and Bergson were a perfect match from the start," writes historian Rafael Medoff. "Both men were fired by a determination to shatter the image of the Jew as weakling, and replace it with the image of Jew as soldier."⁷

Outside of their common dedication to Jewish empowerment, though, the Bergson-Hecht partnership was an unusual one. The Revisionist Zionist movement was on an ultra-nationalist trajectory that led it to become the foundation of the right-wing *Likud* party of modern-day Israel. Other Zionist organizations in the United States had more longstanding ties to American liberalism; but Hecht had grown impatient with their cautious approach to lobbying and their deference to Franklin Roosevelt and his reportedly anti-Semitic State Department. Bergson's insistence on immediate action and his penchant for bold political demonstration also appealed to the Popular Front sensibility of public protest and vigorous campaigning (through rallies, petitions, advertisements, etc.). Therefore, ironically, "although the Palestinian *Irgun* was a right-wing organization, Bergson and his *Irgun* associates won a surprising level of support from American progressives" and he "succeeded in creating an almost impossible synthesis between...left-wing Jews and [his] right-wing Zionist organization."⁸

Hecht officially joined Committee for a Jewish Army, as Executive Board Co-chairman, at its inception on 4 December 1941 and, after the United States entered the war just a few days

⁷ Rafael Medoff, *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926-1948* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 79-80.

⁸ Aaron Berman, *Nazism, the Jews, and American Zionism: 1933-1948* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 142-143; Judith Tydor Baumel, *The "Bergson Boys" And the Origins of Contemporary Zionist Militancy* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 218. Berman adds: "Dean Alfange, a New York Labor party leader, served as co-chairman of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe (ECSJPE) until his resignation in the summer of 1944. The presidents of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations gave at least nominal support to the Bergson rescue committee. *The New York Post*, at that time a strong supporter of liberal and left-wing causes, was the ECSJPE's closest media ally."

later, Bergson solicited his journalistic skills in an aggressive advertising campaign in national newspapers publicizing their cause. (“Our mission in the United States,” claimed Bergson associate Yitshaq Ben-Ami, “would not have attained the scope and intensity it did if not for Hecht’s gifted pen.”)⁹ But a year into that effort, reports from Europe started appearing about the extent of the German massacres of Jews, beginning with a report appearing on page six of the 25 November 1942 edition of the *Washington Post*.¹⁰ Outraged that American newspapers were only running brief items, not even on their front pages, about these developments, Bergson and his colleagues vowed to focus more public attention on them and shock the American public as much as the news shocked them.

The Committee had already benefited from Hecht’s copywriting assistance and connections to Hollywood donors, but now, recalls Bergson colleague Yitshaq Ben-Ami, they needed “Hecht’s dramatic talents” to “break through the apathy and wariness of the Jews of America.”¹¹ Hecht agreed that “a theatrical representation of the extermination might shake up the Jewish community and exert some pressure on the [Roosevelt] administration,” and perhaps recalling his *Fun to be Free* success, he “had an inspiration for a possible dramatic presentation at Madison Square Garden which would also be shown in Washington and elsewhere.”¹²

A Divided Front

Hecht initially envisioned the performance as a collaborative effort of the entire Broadway Jewish community—all the better to make its impact felt in the media. But unlike in

⁹ Quoted in Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 179.

¹⁰ “2 Million Jews Slain, Rabbi Wise Asserts,” *Washington Post*, 25 November 1942. This two-paragraph Associated Press bulletin on page six of the *Washington Post* reported the details of a statement by Rabbi Stephen Wise (president of the American Jewish Congress) who in turn was relaying information from “sources confirmed by the State Department” that “approximately four million Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe had been slain in an ‘extermination campaign’” and that “Hitler has ordered the extermination of all Jews in Nazi-ruled Europe in 1942.”

¹¹ Yitshaq Ben-Ami, *Years of Wrath, Days of Glory: Memoirs from the Irgun* (New York: Sheingold, 1983), 284.

¹² *Ibid.*, 285.

the prewar antifascist campaign of the thirties, he now found politically-active Jewish colleagues more reluctant to participate when the cause focused explicitly on Jews. In his 1954 memoir *Child of the Century*, Hecht tells a story about a meeting he convened in January 1943 at the home of playwright George S. Kaufman with what he describes as a group of thirty celebrated writers who, together, constituted “the box-office flower of American culture,” who “could command the press of the world,” and “in addition to wit, success, wit, and influence, they had in common the fact that they were all Jews.”¹³ Most, presumably, had also been Popular Front allies of Hecht’s in the thirties. In a passionate plea, he says, he tried to appeal to their ethnic roots:

What would happen if these brilliant Jews cried out with passion against the German butchers? If these socially and artistically celebrated Jews spoke up in rage at the murder of their people! How they could dramatize the German crime! How loudly they could present the nightmare to America and the world! ...I recited all the facts I knew about the Jewish killings. I said I felt certain that if we banded together and let loose our talents and our moral passion against the Germans we might halt the massacre. The Germans now believed that the civilized world looked with indifference on their extermination of Europe’s Jews. How could they think anything else? Had anybody (but the biased kinsmen of the victims) protested? Or our great keeper of the rights of man—Roosevelt? Consider (this was part of my speech to the thirty Jewish geniuses of New York City), consider what would happen to the Germans if they were to hear that their crime was sickening the world!¹⁴

Despite his efforts to rouse the crowd, Hecht says his speech was met with silence, followed by hostility. “Who is paying you to do this wretched propaganda,” he quotes playwright Edna Ferber objecting. “Mister Hitler? Or is it Mister Goebbels?”¹⁵ Many other attendees simply left in silence, he claims. Confounded by the rejection, Hecht says he turned to Kaufman’s wife

¹³ Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 550-551.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 551-552.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 552.

Beatrice, who offered an explanation for the disappointing response: “You asked them to throw away the most valuable thing they own—the fact that they are Americans.”¹⁶

Hecht was frustrated that the ability to mobilize against this unprecedented threat was impeded by the unwillingness of many American Jews to speak out *as Jews*. (“Did they think they would be mistaken for ‘real’ Americans if they proved they had no hearts?” he sarcastically suggests in his account.)¹⁷ But the sentiment attributed to Ferber was echoed often during the war; many American Jews feared that if they called upon the country to redirect war resources to saving other Jews, they would be seen as selfish, just as Jewish antifascists were called “warmongers” in the thirties.¹⁸ Others believed that protesting anti-Semitic violence abroad would only fan the potential flames of it at home. There was also the risk of being perceived as disloyal for challenging their own government—during wartime, no less—from a Jewish standpoint. Moreover, many of these Jewish-American antifascists fought hard during the thirties to reassure their countrymen that this war would *not* be a “Jewish war.” To hear Hecht now suggest they prioritize the impact on Jews after all must have stirred fears of old accusations coming back to haunt them. After all, rather than abating, anti-Semitism on the home front had actually increased during the war; “By 1943 hostility toward Jews in the United States had grown enormously,” writes historian Leonard Dinnerstein, leading him to dub the wartime period as one of “anti-Semitism at high tide.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ferber’s quoted statement also seems to reference the fact that in the thirties the Nazis encouraged the “warmonger” libel by propagandizing to Americans that only Jews would want a fight between the two countries. Presumably she did not want to risk the perception of fulfilling that prophecy.

¹⁹ Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*, 136. The book’s seventh chapter is entitled “Antisemitism at High Tide: World War II (1939-1945).” Ibid., 128-149.

Ultimately, what Hecht was up against within his own artistic community was the still-unresolved nature of Jewish-American identity itself in 1943. He had hoped that his peers finally did not need to fear accusations of political disloyalty simply for fighting on behalf of other Jews. But the day had not yet come when most Jewish Americans could feel confident being accepted as both Jewish and American equally.

Fortunately for Hecht, some colleagues did come forward to help. Just two of the guests at the Kaufmans' approached him: Moss Hart and Kurt Weill.²⁰ Both men had been involved in war-effort performances since Pearl Harbor: Weill with the Lunchtime Follies cabaret and his radio pieces with Maxwell Anderson (*Ballad of Magna Carta* and *Your Navy*); Hart had contributed to Lunchtime Follies (in collaboration with Kaufman) and was in the process of developing an Air Force revue featuring active servicemen (*Winged Victory*) modeled after Irving Berlin's *This is the Army*.²¹ Hart agreed to direct the spectacle, Weill to score it and after they were joined by producer Billy Rose (who also helped mount *Fun to be Free*), these four Jewish-American theatre artists set out in February 1943 to stage a controversial political rally that also turned out to be the first dramatic representation of the Holocaust in the American theatre.

“The Victory of their Dying”: Mourning and Martyrdom

In a *PM* article promoting *We Will Never Die*, Hecht announced its intention “to bring a Madison Square Garden audience to the large grave of Jewry and let them stand for two hours

²⁰ “Two of the thirty guests came into the vestibule to say good night to me. ‘I thought I’d tell you that if I can do anything definite in the way of Jewish propaganda, call on me,’ said Moss Hart. Kurt Weill, the lone composer present, looked at me with misty eyes. A radiance was in his strong face. ‘Please count on me for everything,’ Kurt said.” Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 552-553.

²¹ *Winged Victory* opened on Broadway in November 1943 after Irving Berlin's similar revue *This is the Army* played the previous summer. Hart had been politically active in his work since his 1933 topical revue *As Thousands Cheer* and he also served on the board of the labor company Theatre of Action. Jay Williams, *Stage Left* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 159.

looking into its remarkable contents.”²² The image is both one of a funeral (standing beside a grave) and of a reckoning. This confrontation with mass death was not meant to elicit mere sympathy but to inspire action. The pageant thus employed the imagery and stagecraft of mourning and memorials as agitprop for inspiring militant revenge.

We Will Never Die was publicized not as an entertainment, but as a civic and religious event. (It was billed as a “Mass Memorial Dedicated to the Two Million Jewish Dead of Europe.”)²³ Rose persuaded New York governor Thomas Dewey to declare March 9, the day of pageant’s Madison Square Garden premiere, an official day of mourning throughout the state.²⁴ The frame of a ritual memorial and religious service dominated the presentation from beginning to end, and Madison Square Garden—a venue more frequently used for sporting events and political conventions—was transformed into a sacred space. The auditorium was draped in black curtains (resembling “a temple of mourning”) and the stage dominated by two forty-foot-tall tablets of the Ten Commandments, between which actors entered and exited.²⁵ In a signal embracing both Jewish and American identities, atop the tablets hung both a Star of David and an American flag.

Given the somber trappings of ritual mourning, however, and the potentially dispiriting effects upon an audience witnessing so much suffering, the challenge of the pageant was to still convey the message of “Action, not Pity.” The dramatic means of doing so was to counter the public perception of the Jewish victim by embodying on stage the ideal of the Jewish soldier.

²² “A Letter from Ben Hecht,” *PM*, 22 February 1943, 19.

²³ “We Will Never Die” Madison Square Garden souvenir program, Kurt Weill Foundation. The phrase “mass memorial to the two million Jewish dead” appeared frequently in advertising and press reports about the pageant.

²⁴ The proclamation referenced the pageant explicitly: “I, Thomas E. Dewey, Governor of the State of New York, do hereby appoint and proclaim Tuesday, March ninth, [1943], as a day to be set aside by the citizens of our State to offer prayer to Almighty God for the Jews who have been brutally massacred.” Quoted in Ben-Ami, *Years of Wrath*, 286.

²⁵ “We Will Never Die” Madison Square Garden souvenir program, 3, Kurt Weill Foundation; Citron, “Pageantry,” 311-312. The design “scheme” was credited to S. Syrjala (who also designed *Fun to be Free* and, before that, *Pins and Needles*) and carried out by Broadway veteran Lemuel Ayers, who was simultaneously designing *Oklahoma!*.

Amidst all the solemnity and grief of *We Will Never Die*, Hecht and Weill infused each of its episodes with a militant Jewishness, the kind of which had rarely before been portrayed on the (non-Yiddish) American stage.

The event began with Weill's seven-minute overture, encoded with a history of Jewish liturgical and traditional music.²⁶ Its opening of *shofar*-like calls (played by brass instruments) conjures up a complex wealth of meanings; the *shofar*, or ram's horn, may be most commonly associated with the celebration of the new year at Rosh Hashanah, but as a note in the Los Angeles performance reminded audiences, it also served as "the Hebrews' clarion call for battle."²⁷ Weill follows this with a brief medley alternating between the Zionist anthem "Hatikvah" and the ancient Aramaic litany *Kol Nidre*. The two melodies functioned as commonly recognized musical signifiers of Jewishness; "Hatikvah" would have been familiar to the many Zionists in the audience and *Kol Nidre* had become, by mid-century, the "most characteristic tune of the synagogue" and the "the most familiar musical marker of the Jewish faith" in U.S. popular culture.²⁸ Given the celebration of a Jewish homeland in "Hatikvah" and the *Kol Nidre*'s more stern association with the Day of Atonement (as the formal opening of the Yom Kippur service), the juxtaposition of the two melodies in performance would have created a

²⁶ Very little of Weill's written score for *We Will Never Die* is extant. The Kurt Weill Foundation in New York and the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library of Yale University hold the few remaining fragments and sketches. My analysis is mostly based on listening to the score as played on a recording of a radio broadcast of the 21 July 1943 Los Angeles performance on station KFWB. (A copy of the recording is at the Kurt Weill Foundation.)

²⁷ "Significance of References to the Jewish Tradition in the Memorial," "We Will Never Die" Hollywood Bowl official program, 15, Kurt Weill Foundation. The *shofar* has also, throughout Jewish history, connoted funereal rites, "clarion calls to war," "the beginning of the ten days of repentance," and a "summons to the Heavenly Court on the Day of Judgment." Albert L. Lewis, "Shofar," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., Vol.18 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 506-508.

²⁸ Alison Tara Walker, "The Sound of Silents: Aurality and Medievalism in Benjamin Christensen's *Häxam*," *Mass Market Medieval: Essays on the Middle Ages in Popular Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 49. The diverse American audiences that flocked to the 1927 film of *The Jazz Singer* watched and heard Al Jolson sing the *Kol Nidre* at the story's climax, which was not shown in the original play.

challenging tension—especially for audiences who knew the original 1878 Naphtali Herz Imber poem from which "Hatikvah" was adapted:

Listen, my brother, in all the lands
Listen to the voice of our prophets who spoke.
Only the death of the one last Jew
Will mark the end of our hope.²⁹

Answering this song, as Weill does, with the atoning gesture of *Kol Nidre* implied a challenge to American—and especially Jewish-American—wartime audiences to look inward and ask if they had done all they could to prevent the “death of the one last Jew.”

The *Kol Nidre* sentiment continues to dominate the overture in an extended arrangement for solo tenor with orchestra, one that alters the original text of the chant to shift the emphasis from atonement to defiance.³⁰ In its ancient Aramaic form, the traditional *Kol Nidre* is a release from “all vows” (*kol nidre*) taken in bad faith during the preceding year and a basis for the divine forgiveness sought on the Day of Atonement.³¹ But Weill’s *Kol Nidre* is set to an entirely different text; a surviving recording of the Los Angeles performance of the pageant indicates the lyrics (not all intelligible) were taken mostly from the twenty-second Psalm.³² “My God, My God, do not forsake me in this dark hour,” the tenor soloist begins, continuing, “I cry unto thee and thou hearest me not.”³³ By invoking this, the “greatest of the laments within the Psalter, akin

²⁹ Michael Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry Before the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 21-22.

³⁰ My reading of the use of *Kol Nidre* in *We Will Never Die* owes much to Tamara Levitz’s analysis in her lecture, “Kurt Weill’s *Kol Nidre* and Jewish Memory,” given at the Center for Jewish History in New York, 6 May 2007. I have also consulted a video recording of the lecture at: <http://www.jewishsparks.net/Levitz/Levitz-Index.htm> (accessed 11 May 2011).

³¹ Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2005), 210.

³² Musically, Weill’s *Kol Nidre* here is taken almost exactly from his setting of it for his 1937 biblical opera *The Eternal Road*, in which the melody is sung by King David praying to God to spare the life of his infant son. This version also borrowed text from Psalm 22, but there Weill and librettist Franz Werfel also added a line from Psalm 51, known as the “Penitent’s Prayer.” For *We Will Never Die*, Weill included none of the “penitent” lyrics. For the opera’s *Kol Nidre* text, see Werfel, *The Eternal Road*, 113.

³³ These words sung by the soloist lines appear to paraphrase two phrases from the King James translation of the Psalm: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Ps.22:1); and, “O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou

to the book of Job,” where “despair almost drives out hope,” Weill musically links the crisis of Jewry in 1943 back to Biblical persecutions.³⁴ Jewish tradition also associates the text with political upheaval, interpreting it as “a lament by David over the future exile” and “the threat against the Jews by Haman in the book of Esther.”³⁵ Intimations of exile already encoded in the text were only further intensified in Weill’s setting by the singing of the soloist, Metropolitan Opera tenor Kurt Baum, a recent Jewish refugee from Czechoslovakia.³⁶

Weill borrowed much of his score for *We Will Never Die* from his 1937 biblical opera *The Eternal Road*, for which he had conducted extensive research into Jewish liturgical music. The pageant’s themes of exile and persecution would have been only strengthened by these musical references to the earlier work’s narrative of a besieged synagogue congregation in the present reflecting upon the tribulations of the ancient past. The overture of *We Will Never Die* features the highly agitated music that underscored the opera’s climactic depiction of the sacking of Solomon’s Temple, as well as Rachel’s lament in the wake of the Temple’s fall—a moment in which the Book of Jeremiah says she wept “bitterly” and “refused to be comforted.”³⁷ Franz Werfel’s text for this passage in *The Eternal Road* (the basis of the choral lyrics in the overture) has Rachel lay the responsibility for the death of her children (figuratively all the sons and daughters of Israel) directly in God’s hands:

Lord, King of the world, Thou, regarding my woe,
Eternal children on me didst bestow.

hearest not” (Ps.22:2). Another audible phrase on the recording is, “Deliver my soul from the sword of the dog,” which echoes “Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog” (Ps.22:20).

³⁴ John Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 374.

³⁵ Adele Berlin et al, *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1305. Some in the audience, especially Christians, might have also recognized the phrase “My God why hast thou forsaken me,” as the “Seven Last Words of Christ”—the words of Psalm 22 that the Gospels of Mark and Matthew report Jesus speaking from the cross. The phrase has, thus, long been associated with martyrdom across faiths.

³⁶ For Baum’s background, see Walter Price, “Kurt Baum: Ending on a High Note,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 February 1987. Baum traveled with the pageant to sing the *Kol Nidre* not only at the Madison Square Garden premiere but on tour as well.

³⁷ Jer. 31:15 (King James Version).

In grace thou gavest them when I cried to Thee,
And now Thou destroyest and tak'st them from me?³⁸

As the plaintive chant of a ghost witnessing the expulsion of her people into Babylonian Captivity, Rachel's lament—especially when left unanswered—is a text haunted by exile, destruction, and oppression.

Weill's overture of mourning complements the invocation of Jewish martyrdom in Hecht's opening prologue. Theatrically, this two-page monologue is presented as a prayer, delivered by a "Rabbi" wearing "a satin robe and a white satin hat," who was in fact portrayed by actor Jacob Ben-Ami, former star of the Yiddish Theatre.³⁹ In the spirit of "Action, not Pity" the character of the rabbi presents the dead as martyrs, not helpless victims:

We are not here to weep for them although our eyes are stricken with this picture and our hearts burdened with their fate. We are here to honor them and to proclaim the victory of their dying. (11)

The "victory" Hecht posits is in the persistence of Jews and Judaism in spite of these losses. Such persistence stems from the heroic martyrdom of the dead, which will inspire others to take action. "We are here to strengthen our hearts, to take into our veins," the Rabbi tells the gathered audience, "the pride and courage of the millions of innocent people who have fallen" (12).

The rabbi then enacts this defiance and resilience by ending the prologue with a recitation from the stage of the prayer of *Shema Israel*, the core profession of faith in the Hebrew liturgy and a prayer linked to martyrdom throughout Jewish history. Reinforcing the pageant's frame of a religious ceremony, he announces, "Our service will begin with the prayer, *Shema Israel*, the prayer that holds the last words of the millions who have died in the massacres by the Germans," adding that "it has risen from the stricken and the dying in all the lands of the earth—for many

³⁸ Werfel, *The Eternal Road*, 141.

³⁹ Ben Hecht, *We Will Never Die: A Memorial Dedicated to the 2,000,000 Jewish Dead of Europe* (New York: Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews, 1943), 11. Further citations of this edition are given in the text.

centuries” (12).⁴⁰ Then, as if to embody this heritage, the script calls for “twenty rabbis, dressed in the various costumes of their sects and countries come upon the stage” (12). These were meant to be real-life rabbis (unlike Ben-Ami) who had recently escaped German-occupied Europe. In a pageant so concerned with marking the absence of victims, it was important to take any opportunity to assert presence as well, to demonstrate that the Jews as a people “will never die.”⁴¹

His Shield. His Sword. His Roll Call.

Following the prologue of prayer, two narrators appear to begin the pageant proper with what Hecht calls a “Roll Call.” Just as *Fun to be Free* empowered Jewish-American progressives by recasting American history as an antifascist project, the “Roll Call” section of *We Will Never Die* aimed to elevate Jews historically from marginalized victims to integral players in not only American but Western Civilization. Proclaiming “the halls of fame of a hundred nations hold the names of Jews who have given value to life,” the narrators proceed to list over 100 names of kings, prophets, statesmen, writers, philosophers, artists, and philanthropists—beginning with the ancient Israelites and continuing up to present-day luminaries from the arts and sciences (21).⁴²

On one level the scene functions as a veritable stage history of the Jewish people. “Hecht immersed himself in research,” Yitshaq Ben-Ami recalls, “delving into Jewish history and lore

⁴⁰ Ibid. The legacy of the *Shema Israel* as a martyr’s prayer goes back to Roman-ruled Judea, when “generally Jewish martyrs recited it as they went to their deaths.” Louis Jacobs, “Shema, Reading of,” *Encyclopedia Judaica: Second Edition, Volume 18*, 455.

⁴¹ Weill’s setting of the *Shema Israel* prayer is another borrowing from his score for *The Eternal Road*, where it is sung not at a moment of martyrdom but of elation—when Moses leads his people across the Jordan into the Promised Land at the end of the opera’s second act.

⁴² The total number of names in the “Roll Call” episode varied throughout the pageant’s writing, revision, and performance. An early typescript (at New York Public Library’s Billy Rose Theatre Collection) contains 121 names, the published script has 124, and a production script from the Philadelphia performance (at the Morgan Library in New York) shows 118, which matches the Los Angeles radio recording at the end of the run. At each step in the process a few names appear to have been excised and a few new ones added, but the vast majority remained.

with a vengeance.”⁴³ One source Hecht likely consulted was Oxford professor Cecil Roth’s *The Jewish Contribution to Civilization*, published in America in 1940.⁴⁴ What would have made Roth’s work especially valuable to Hecht was his stated mission to supplant a common “lachrymose” narrative of Jewish history with one that publicized Jews’ various successes within and positive impact upon Western Christian society.⁴⁵ Such an approach was not limited to academic books; the same intentions motivated Warner Brothers’ series of historical film biographies addressing implicitly or explicitly Jewish subjects—such as *The Life of Emil Zola* and *Dr. Ehrlich’s Magic Bullet*, both of which celebrated real-life Jewish heroes (Alfred Dreyfus and Paul Ehrlich) who overcame discrimination. Fittingly, Ehrlich is one of the names in Hecht’s roll call, read in some performances by none other than the actor who played him in the film, Edward G. Robinson.

Hecht shared Roth’s thesis that “there is no branch of human culture or civilization which Jews have not touched or enriched” and that “Western civilization would not stand where it does today without [Jews’] collaboration.”⁴⁶ The “Roll Call” also continued the work of *Fun to be Free* in reminding audiences of Jews’ integral role in American history in particular. Haym Solomon—a hero of the earlier pageant—receives mention in the roll call, as does Revolutionary War soldier Isaac Franks, “one of the hundreds of Jewish heroes of ’76” (17). The inclusion of two writers of nineteenth-century Americana—California Gold Rush chronicler Brett Harte and

⁴³ Ben-Ami, *Years of Wrath*, 285.

⁴⁴ Cecil Roth, *The Jewish Contribution to Civilization* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940). (The book was first published by Macmillan in the United Kingdom in 1938.) Not only are over seventy-five percent of the names from Hecht’s roll call discussed in Roth’s study, but some lines of the script clearly paraphrase or copy from it verbatim. Both writers, for example, refer to nineteenth-century linguist Graziadio Ascoli as “the foremost Italian philologist” (Roth, 140; *We Will Never Die*, 19). Other textual similarities include: “Luis Ponce de Leon was perhaps the greatest lyric poet that Spain has produced” (Roth, 111-112) and “Luis Ponce de Leon, the greatest lyric poet of Spain” (*We Will Never Die*, 18). Also: “Ludwig Traube, to whom a monument was erected in the court of the Charité... was the founder of experimental pathology” (Roth, 242) and “Ludwig Traube, founder of the science of pathology whose statue still stands in Paris” (*We Will Never Die*, 19).

⁴⁵ Michael Brenner, *Prophets of the Past: Interpreters of Jewish History*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 131-137.

⁴⁶ Roth, *The Jewish Contribution*, xiii, 363.

“Home Sweet Home” composer John Howard Payne—goes further in arguing how intertwined Jews have been in even the most seemingly “white” aspects of American heritage.⁴⁷ Even reminders of Americans already widely known to be Jewish reinforce their links to American folklore and patriotism. Not only is Emma Lazarus, for instance, mentioned, but the final lines of her verses for the Statue of Liberty are recited. The mention of Irving Berlin, composer of the wartime anthem “God Bless America” and the previous Broadway season’s hit revue *This is the Army*, reminds audiences of American Jews’ contributions to the nation’s war effort.⁴⁸

Aside from extolling Jewish cultural contributions, the overriding aim of *We Will Never Die* was to inspire a more physical heroism. Making the honorees of “Roll Call” into heroes, then, was essential to the enterprise. “We summon this fame not to boast,” Hecht’s narrator says of the procession, “but to give strength to the hearts that have forgotten in their sorrow, the shield, the sword, the valor and the indestructability of their people” (15). The narrators commence the reading of the roll call proclaiming:

FIRST NARRATOR: This is his shield.

SECOND NARRATOR: This is his sword.

FIRST NARRATOR: This is his indestructibility.

SECOND NARRATOR: This is his valor and his victory.

FIRST NARRATOR: Here is his roll call.⁴⁹ (15)

Until actual armies can rescue European Jewry, the examples of these luminaries must provide the victims a spiritual “shield” and “sword,” as well as the “valor” to withstand their trials.

In many contexts, a “roll” is called for purposes of attendance, letting people stand and be counted.⁵⁰ In *We Will Never Die*, however, the names called are not expected to answer; on the

⁴⁷ In one draft, Hecht even included Salvation Army founder William Booth, an Englishman cited in Roth’s book as only possibly from Jewish ancestry. “We Will Never Die” typescript, 14, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library; Roth, 337.

⁴⁸ Popular composers Jerome Kern and George Gershwin are also mentioned, but no other Jewish Americans from the entertainment industry.

⁴⁹ In the final production script, the last line is changed to, “Here is his scroll.” “We Will Never Die” typescript, 15, Morgan Library.

contrary, their very absence was what Hecht sought to dramatize. Hecht's "roll call of the Great Jews" (as he calls it in his stage directions [15]) more resembles an "honor roll"—a term that historically has meant both "a list of people whose achievements are honored" and listing those "who have died in battle."⁵¹ Although very few of the people named on stage held any official martyrdom status—and some of the more contemporary honorees were even still alive in 1943—in the context of the entire event's "memorial to the two million Jewish dead of Europe," they are all effectively "mourned" in the scene nevertheless. As in other recitations of names of "the fallen," the deceased personages listed in *We Will Never Die* take on martyrdom in retrospect, regardless of the precise circumstances of their deaths.

In addition to the calling of names, in performance it was the stage picture accompanying the recitation that most lent the scene the quality of a memorial. While Hecht originally imagined that "as the Narrators call the roll of the great Jews, each of them appears" and that "the costumes and faces of all the centuries light up one by one," this stage direction was abandoned in performance in favor of a less literal-minded approach.⁵² Instead of individually costumed supernumeraries impersonating the "Great Jews," a procession of over one hundred "black robed figures" carried lit candles, "offer[ing] themselves to the audience as symbols of the light the Jews have brought into the world" (15). The association with funeral rites was not lost on observers; the *Washington Post* described the torch-bearers as "a black-veiled choir...with a candle for each of the dead Jewish luminaries."⁵³ While the effect on stage of the first few candles would have been indiscernible, the stage gradually flooded with light as the hundred-plus

⁵⁰ An earlier dramatic use of the ritual was in Percy MacKaye's 1918 pageant *Roll Call: A Masque of the Red Cross*, written during World War I for the annual Red Cross "Christmas Roll Call" which called upon audience members to join the rolls of supporters by pledging a donation. Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 216.

⁵¹ "roll, n.1". OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/166976> (accessed May 22, 2011). The term "roll call" itself is of military origin, as well. "roll-call, n.". OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/166987> (accessed May 22, 2011).

⁵² "We Will Never Die" typescript, 8, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

⁵³ "Official Washington Attends 'We Shall [sic] Never Die' Pageant," *Washington Post*, 13 April 1943.

names were called—thus creating the visual impression of the light of the Jews growing only stronger in the process of mourning and remembering.⁵⁴ “The scroll overruns,” says one of the narrators of the final stage picture. “The prophet Hoshiah spoke of Israel that it was destined to bloom and bud and fill the world with its fruit. Here is that fruit. Here is that Jew who shall never die” (21).

The candlelit procession not only symbolized an undying Jewish spirit, but also reinforced the intent of *We Will Never Die* to make Jews *visible* and thus “destroy the anonymity of the victim.”⁵⁵ At a time when reports from the battlefield brought news of carnage every day, the American public had not yet paid special attention to the systematic annihilation of Jews as separate from other German military atrocities. To Hecht, such blindness to the unique nature of the Nazi war against Jews was only helping Germany get away with its crimes. “The killing of the Jews is a special challenge to history makers,” Hecht’s narrator says at the pageant’s conclusion. “Other peoples have been villainously slain by the Germans in the effort to reform them, subjugate them, silence them or frighten them. The Germans have no such program for the Jews. They desire neither their reform, nor subjugation. They desire only their extermination.”⁵⁶

The Roll Call went further than “destroying the anonymity of the victim” by offering something more than victimhood. By revealing (or “outing”) the Jewish identity of so many notable figures in Western Civilization (both past and present), the “Roll Call” made visible a Jewish presence that had been erased by centuries of official historiography. The image of Jews

⁵⁴ Director Moss Hart’s use of candles and other sacred imagery might have recalled for some in the audience another religious performance in recent memory, Max Reinhardt’s *The Miracle* (1924), for which a Broadway theatre was transformed into a medieval cathedral. Kurt Weill seems to have seen the resemblance when he joked in a letter, “Moss did a wonderful job of staging. I called him Moss Rein-Hart.” Kurt Weill to Ira Gershwin, 5 April 1943, Kurt Weill Foundation.

⁵⁵ Samuel Merlin (associate of Peter Bergson) quoted in David Wyman and Rafael Medoff, *A Race Against Death: Peter Bergson, America and the Holocaust* (New York: New Press, 2002), 71.

⁵⁶ Ben Hecht, *We Will Never Die* (New York: Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews, 1943), 38. This text was published in a limited addition by the Committee sometime in the summer of 1943. All ensuing citations from *We Will Never Die* will be from this edition unless otherwise noted.

as always-already disenfranchised outcasts was de-naturalized and shown not to be a permanent or necessary condition.⁵⁷

Remembrance as Vengeance

Just as the Roll Call gave visibility to the Jews of history, the final episode of *We Will Never Die*, “Remember Us,” gave voice to the current victims of genocide themselves. Set in an imagined peace conference after a presumed Allied victory, the scene conjures ghosts of recent Nazi massacre victims to confront their murderers. Hecht based the scene on an article he had recently published in the *American Mercury* detailing European reports of numerous mass-killings that were unknown to the American press.⁵⁸ In the article Hecht presents the information not with third-person objectivity but from the point of view of the victims themselves, lending them a subjectivity that elevates them above passive victimhood. He writes not from the present, but the future—looking ahead to the war’s end. But rather than exult at the thought of bringing German officers to a “peace table,” Hecht mourns the absence of those who cannot exact their own terms of surrender.⁵⁹ He then proceeds to tell the stories of fifteen separate massacres from

⁵⁷ The use of candles in the “Roll Call” also evokes the tradition of *ner tamid* (“eternal flame”) observed in the lighting of the menorah during Hanukkah (the “Festival of Lights”), which commemorates the revolt of the Maccabees. Weill underscoring the procession with the traditional Hanukah melody *Maoz Tsur* (“Rock of Ages”), a song whose lyrics explicitly reference persecution and divine vengeance. As a cantor’s son and a collector of Jewish liturgical and folk music, he would surely have known the song’s full text and seen its aptness for both the “Roll Call” of candles and for the “action, not pity” message of the event as a whole. Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997), 115. *Maoz Tsur* is not to be confused with the Anglican “Rock of Ages” nor with the Lutheran “Nun freut euch lieben Christen gmein,” which is set to the same melody. Christian Kuhnt actually misidentifies Weill’s quotation from *Maoz Tsur* in the “Roll Call” as the Lutheran hymn. Christian Kuhnt, *Kurt Weill und das Judentum* (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2001), 150.

⁵⁸ Ben Hecht, “Remember Us,” *American Mercury*, February 1943, 196-199. Hecht recounts in his autobiography receiving these dispatches in December 1942 from Hayim Greenberg, émigré activist and editor of the New York-based journal *Jewish Frontier*. Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 548-550.

⁵⁹ “The dead of many lands will speak for justice, but the Jew alone will have no one to speak for him. His voice will remain outside the hall of judgment, to be heard only when the window is opened and the sad, faint cry drifts in—*Remember us!*” Hecht, *American Mercury*, 196.

across Eastern Europe (in Germany, Poland, Romania, and Russia) all in the second-person “we” of the now-silenced dead. “Only this that I write,” he says, “will be their voice.”⁶⁰

In adapting his own journalism for the stage, Hecht was once again—as he had in *Fun to be Free*—working in the vein of documentary theatre traditions of the 1930s that foregrounded reportage as reportage without filtering it through the conventions of realist drama. Rather than dramatizing the atrocities referenced in the dispatches through visual or mimetic representation, the staging of “Remember Us” in *We Will Never Die* maintained the distant voice of the dead as they narrated their martyrdom. What in print was a literary device, on stage became a distancing tactic to inspire revenge and not despair. In his original draft, Hecht went as far as to suggest the voices even be disembodied from the actors:

Their faces are grey. They move slowly and stiffly, the fingers of their hands are curled inward. They advance down two steps and remain motionless facing the peace table. They are the dead and their heads are bowed. One of the dead raises his head. He speaks in emotionless tones. (The voice is that of an actor off stage.)⁶¹

The final published script omits any mention of offstage voices, and extant newsreel footage confirms that, in performance, the onstage actors spoke the lines themselves.⁶² Still, even the highly presentational nature of characters narrating their own destruction was already a distancing gesture that put them at a remove from the audience when they proceeded one by one onto the stage to tell their stories of their own slaughter:

⁶⁰ Ibid., 199. The article not only exposed these atrocities to thousands of *American Mercury* readers, but many more in *Readers Digest* where it was instantly reprinted in only slightly abridged form. The following year it was included in *The American Mercury Reader*, the magazine’s bound collection of its most notable pieces of the previous two decades. “‘Remember Us’: Condensed from *The American Mercury*,” *The Reader’s Digest*, February 1943, 107-110; Ben Hecht, “Remember Us,” *The American Mercury Reader* (Philadelphia: The Blakiston Company, 1944), 51-54. It also continues to be anthologized today as an historic milestone in early Holocaust reporting. Robert H. Abzug, *America Views the Holocaust, 1933-1945: A Brief Documentary History* (Boston: Bedford, 1999), 146-149.

⁶¹ Ben Hecht, “We Will Never Die” typescript, 26, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

⁶² A two-minute newsreel by Fox Movietone News reporting on the pageant’s New York premiere is in the Moving Image Research Collections of the University of South Carolina and is viewable on their website: <http://library.sc.edu/mirc> (accessed 1 July 2012).

Remember us. In the town of Freiberg in the Black Forest two hundred of us were hanged and left dangling out of our kitchen windows. We watched our synagogue burn and our rabbi flogged to death. (33)

Another said,

Remember us in Wloclowek. The Germans came when we were at prayer. They tore the prayer shawls from our heads. Under whips and bayonets they made us use our prayer shawls as mops to clean out German latrines. We were all dead when the sun set—a hundred of us. Remember us. (34)

As did Hecht's magazine article, these speeches "destroy the anonymity of the victim" by foregrounding the uniquely anti-Semitic nature of the attacks—the singling out of rabbis, for instance, and the desecration of holy garments. The heavily descriptive, relatively unemotional recounting of the events also worked to convey the air of authenticity.

The framing of the scene around an imagined "Peace Table" hardly softens the stories' impact with any optimism about Germany's defeat. Anticipating the postwar Nuremberg trials, it takes on the air of a murder trial more than a peaceful reconciliation. And by positioning the defeated Axis Power representatives facing upstage, "sit[ting] down with their backs to the audience," Hecht sought to place the audience in the dock as well (34).⁶³ The actors playing the dead, facing downstage, not only spoke to their persecutors, but, in looking out over their heads, to the audience as well. In performance, then, their repeated refrain of "remember us" would clearly have been addressed to the spectators of 1943, not to the fictional audience of the postwar future. The reporter for the *Philadelphia Record* perceived the intimation of collective guilt this communicated to Americans, not just Germans:

The bare and crippled feet of the dead faltered across the stage of Convention Hall last night, and their haunting wail, "Remember Us," rose to the rafters that have echoed so

⁶³ While Hecht's written stage directions call for "Three Germans" to be visible in the dock, the Fox Movietone newsreel, as well as photographs and some reviews, indicate that the three actors wore uniforms and armbands showing the insignias all three Axis Powers—Germany, Italy, and Japan. Perhaps the late change was intended to communicate solidarity with the larger U.S. war effort, and to counter any impression of treating the global conflict as solely a "Jewish war" against Nazis alone.

many promises never kept...always whipping into its 15,000 listeners the message that we, too, have failed those who will never die.⁶⁴

The staging also echoed that of the “Roll Call” in once again gradually filling the stage with (dead) Jewish bodies—in this case a stage picture implying the prevailing of Jewish victims over their enemies. “By the time the last group reached the stage,” wrote another reviewer, the eleven separate “Remember Us” narrators and assorted extras “virtually surrounded” the Peace Table and the defeated Axis officers.⁶⁵

In a dramatic context, the repeated use of the words “remember us” also invoked a theatrical tradition that further strengthened the conveyance of responsibility and admonition: the Revenge Tragedy. The phrase recalls many such utterances in plays of that genre—none more so than perhaps the most famous revenge tragedy, *Hamlet*, where the ghost of the prince’s father (after recounting his own death in graphic detail) tells his son to “revenge his foul and most unnatural murder” (1.5.25) and to “remember me” (1.5.91). While the ghosts common to Elizabethan revenge tragedies address (and rouse to action) an onstage hero, the spectral figures in *We Will Never Die* charge the audience, as well, with taking up the task of avenging their murders. This parallel to classical dramatic tradition is further strengthened by the feelings of disempowerment and powerlessness encoded in the Revenge Tragedy genre, where “revengers are typically frustrated victims who want retribution for a crime that goes unpunished.”⁶⁶ Just as the Revenge Tragedy hero “tak[es] matters into his own hands because the institutions by which criminals are made to pay for their offences are either systematically defective or unable to cope with some particularly difficult situation,” Hecht and his collaborators appoint themselves

⁶⁴ “Memorial to Slain Jews Stirs Throng of 15,000,” *Philadelphia Record*, 23 April 1943.

⁶⁵ Frank Brookhouser, “15,000 at Pageant Mourn Jews Slain by Nazis,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 April 1943.

⁶⁶ Tanya Pollard, “Tragedy and Revenge,” in *A Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*. eds. Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 59. She adds: “The genre’s popularity speaks to the attraction of seeing frustrated victims satisfy their demand for justice.”

avengers in light of the failure of the United States and the Allies to intervene into the progress of Hitler's Final Solution.⁶⁷ The projected formation of a "Jewish Army"—and even the mounting of *We Will Never Die* itself—constituted such an act of "taking matters into one's own hand" in righting the injustices perpetrated against those who had no champion in the corridors of legitimate state power.

In the tragedy of "Remember Us," remembrance is vengeance and vice-versa. The narrator concluding the scene puts it bluntly: "This is the message from the dead—avenge us" (36). In another section of the pageant, he says, "Every Jew who fights today is not only a soldier, but an avenger."⁶⁸ After the ghosts' call to arms, it is left to the audience to take on the role of avenging hero, either by taking up arms themselves (in a "Jewish Army") or by mobilizing politically to enlist government and military authorities in their cause.

Fighting Jews in Uniform

Paul Breines applies the moniker "tough Jews" to the postwar emergence in American culture of "Jews who fight, who are violent in the public political sphere," in contrast to the "weak Jew" ("the image of the Jew as victim, as the frail and meek object of anti-Semitic initiatives") and the "gentle Jew" ("those who uphold in theory and practice the conviction that Jews *must* not be violent").⁶⁹ And yet, he maintains, "the tough Jew and the weak and gentle ones are not opposites but intimates."⁷⁰ As early as 1943, *We Will Never Die* enacted just such a dialectical relationship between these cultural constructions. In it, liturgical mourning and

⁶⁷ Katherine Eisaman Maus, "Introduction," *Four Revenge Tragedies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), ix.

⁶⁸ "We Will Never Die" typescript, 31, Morgan Library. This line was evidently added to the "Jews in the War" episode after the New York premiere and is heard on the KFWB radio broadcast.

⁶⁹ Paul Breines, *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), ix.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, x.

supplication appear side by side with bursts of spiritual defiance and physical combat. Steeped in ancient Judaic text, music, and prophecy, it also barrages the audience with gunshots, loudspeakers and drumrolls. Its sights are set ultimately not on past suffering but a future victory when the vanquished become vanquishers.

In contrast to the beginning and concluding mourning passages, the middle sections of *We Will Never Die* more explicitly dramatize Jewish militarism and showcase the “Fighting Jew” instead of the victim. But rather than eclipsing the helpless dead of the other episodes, the alternation in the pageant between “tough” and “weak” Jews reveals how interdependent those figures are. “The image of Jewish victimization,” argues Breines, “vindicated the image of Jewish victimizer.”⁷¹ In the pageant’s second segment, “Jews in the War”—and in the “Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto” scene added later in its tour—Hecht dramatizes Muscular Judaism in action by extolling the figure of the Jewish soldier, representing his emergence, like a Phoenix, out of the ashes of the fallen victims of Nazism.

In early twentieth-century America, writes Joseph Bendersky, “the American cultural panorama simply did not include the image of Jews as soldiers.”⁷² Displays of Jewish physical sacrifice in the American armed forces had therefore long been part of Jewish-American acculturation. “The notion of Jews as war dodgers,” writes Beth Wenger, “haunted European Jews throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and lingered in the consciousness of Jewish immigrants and on the agendas of Jewish organizations long after arrival in the United States.”⁷³ That lingering European prejudice was characterized, as Sander Gilman explains, by an “increasingly intense anti-Semitic critique of the Jewish body as inherently unfit for military

⁷¹ Ibid., 50.

⁷² Joseph W. Bendersky, *The “Jewish Threat”: Anti-Semitic Politics of the US Army* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 38.

⁷³ Wenger, *History Lesson*, 98.

service.”⁷⁴ Therefore, claims Wenger, “rehearsal of military contributions,” became “a standard element in popular narratives of American Jewish history” in which “litan[ies] of Jewish military service to the United States appeared regularly.”⁷⁵

By World War II these displays of Jewish martial heroism became more necessary than ever, in the wake of persistent isolationist accusations that Jewish Americans dodged the draft and were happy to send others to their deaths to die for their own cause. In reality, according to Deborah Dash Moore, “approximately 550,000 Jewish men and women served in the United States armed forces during World War II, the equivalent of thirty-seven divisions.”⁷⁶ But such facts did not entirely put the accusations to rest—not even within the ranks of the military itself, where anti-Semitic literature unofficially circulated on bases, and even “at the highest levels of both the War and Navy Departments, there were fears that integration [of Jewish and Gentile troops] would lower or ‘destroy’ the morale of the white fighting forces.”⁷⁷ Public opinion polls taken throughout the war years signaled a continuing distrust among many Americans of Jews’ willingness to serve: “About a third of the population thought Jews wanted to avoid military service and Jews were far more frequently accused of such desires than any other ethnic group.”⁷⁸ No wonder that, as early as October 1941, two months before Pearl Harbor, “the

⁷⁴ Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 42. He adds: “What had long been an objection based on the Jew’s religion,” he adds, “came to be pathologized as an objection to the Jewish body.” *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁵ Wenger, *History Lessons*, 114.

⁷⁶ Deborah Dash Moore, “When Jews Were GIs: How World War II Changed a Generation and Remade American Jewry,” in *American Jewish Identity Politics*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 29. This amounted, she adds, to “11 percent of the (U.S.) Jewish population” and “50 percent of [Jewish-American] men age eighteen to forty-four.”

⁷⁷ Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 137. Some pamphlets featured doggerel songs in which “the heroes were always called O’Hara or Murphy or Flannegan while the first one to get a new set of tires or a defense contract would always be a Finkelstein...or some other obviously Jewish person.” A song set to the tune of the Marine Corps Hymn featured a verse contrasting Gentile valor with garment-trade pettiness: “Oh, we Jews are not afraid to say/ We’ll stay home and give first aid/ Let the Christian saps go fight the Japs/ In the uniforms we made.” *Ibid.*, 139, 140.

⁷⁸ Charles Herbert Stember et al, *Jews in the Mind of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 117. For further anecdotal evidence of accusations against American Jews “shirking” combat and the draft, see Bendersky, *The Jewish Threat*, 295-301.

Jewish Welfare Board established a Bureau of War Records to assure that the Jewish contributions to the war effort were made known to the American public.”⁷⁹

Just as the “Roll Call” in *We Will Never Die* served to document the cultural contributions of Jews throughout Western Civilization, the next scene, “Jews in the War,” theatrically represented their participation in the fight against fascism in the present. Its purpose was to remind audiences that not all European Jews were defenseless victims of Nazi domination and that some were fighting back already. The scene’s climax consists of an international cavalcade of Jewish soldiers fighting for the United States and all the Allied forces. “In the legions under every flag that moves forward will be Jews,” says the narration. “They are under the fighting flags now. They have been under them since the first guns sounded in Poland” (23). A procession of actors dressed in the uniforms and, literally, bearing the flags of each nation are then introduced. “They were under the brave flags of the Greeks,” begins the litany, followed by men representing the French, Dutch, Soviet, British, and, finally, American armies. There is even a figure representing Bergson’s not-yet realized Palestinian “Jewish Army.” (Regarding him, a narrator proclaims, “We Jews of Europe are being killed as Jews. Give us the right to strike back as Jews. Let the Star of David be one of the flags that enters Berlin” [24-25].)⁸⁰ Each soldier’s entrance is accompanied by a musical quotation of the appropriate national anthem, which Weill arranged for the orchestra: “The Marseillaise” signals the French soldier, “Tipperary” the British, the “Red Army Song” the Russian; and George M. Cohan’s “Over There” greets the American GI. Weill also, once again, introduces the “Hatikvah” into the score, to stand for the Palestinian soldier.

⁷⁹ Henry L. Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and its Jews Responded to the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 222.

⁸⁰ Unlike with the formally uniformed soldiers from the other armies, the stage directions call for the Palestinian to appear as “a young man in civilian dress, trousers and a white shirt open at the throat...carrying the Palestinian flag.” The flag, bearing the Star of David, was the essentially the same flag adopted by the future Israeli state.

But before this procession, the “Jews in the War” segment began with the story of just one soldier, Private Irving Strobings, who had recently fought in the failed battle for the Philippine island of Corregidor in May 1942. In another example of documentary theatre techniques, Hecht interpolates the text of Strobings’s final telegraphed dispatches from the front, reports that instantly became legendary when released by the War Department in the wake of the defeat (and subsequently shared on radio and in newspapers) as a way to salvage an uplifting tale of American morale.⁸¹ (What stood out in these dispatches were Strobings’s irreverent attempts to keep his spirits up in defiance of the bleak outlook; during lulls in the action he tapped out diverting thoughts like, “How about a chocolate soda?”)⁸² Especially compelling to Jewish-Americans (and to the New York Jews in the opening night audience) was Strobings’s would-be farewell to his Brooklyn family: “Get this to my mother, Mrs. Minnie Strobings, 605 Barbey Street, Brooklyn, NY. They are to get along OK.”⁸³ Hecht presents the determination of this common Signal Corps operator as exemplary of not just American, but *Jewish-American* resilience and courage. “This is how an American soldier sounds in defeat,” the narrator says, introducing the dispatches. “Here’s how a Jewish boy from Brooklyn sends in his last words” (22). Even though Strobings was taken prisoner and not killed in action, Hecht implies his death anyway (and hence martyrdom) by calling for the bugle call “Taps” to be played after the final message is read.⁸⁴

⁸¹ In performance, the reading of this text to the accompaniment of a percussive tapping to mimic a telegraph, was reportedly arresting: “The surrender of the Philippine fortress was depicted with a telegraph key clicking in the darkness of the Garden, and the assemblage listened in emotional silence as a narrator gave the last words” (“40,000 at Garden Hail Dramatic Pageant of Jews,” *New York World*, 10 March 1943).

⁸² “Defenders Wept After Shelling, ‘Too Much for Guys to Take’—Strobings Ended with Message to Mother,” *New York Times*, 1 June 1942.

⁸³ *Ibid.* The line is also repeated in *We Will Never Die* (22).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* So famous was Strobings’s message that when he returned home after his wartime internment, he was called upon to reenact it on stage himself in another Jewish-themed pageant at Madison Square Garden in October 1945. Richard Goldstein, *Helluva Town: The Story of New York City During World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 259.

Also recognized in the scene was another Brooklynite who did die in combat, Meyer Levin. Levin won renown as a war hero as the bombardier of the first American air raid on Japanese forces, three days after the Pearl Harbor attack; while he survived that mission, he perished in another battle in January 1943, just two months before *We Will Never Die*.⁸⁵ The script of *We Will Never Die* calls for a moment of silence in Levin's honor—a moment made all the more poignant in at the Madison Square Garden premiere when Levin's parents were known to be in attendance.⁸⁶ In subsequent performances, the gesture was expanded to include “all our soldiers, Jew and Gentile, who have died in this war,” rendering the moment one of wartime mourning in general, linking the Jewish soldier's sacrifice to the greater national cause—a sentiment reinforced by the singing of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” immediately following, which concluded the scene.⁸⁷ Ending the “Jews in the War” segment with this iconic abolitionist anthem, a symbol of America's own Civil War sacrifices on behalf of racial equality, returns the focus of *We Will Never Die* to the broader American “Fight for Freedom.”⁸⁸

“Hundreds of Jewish soldiers, sailors, fliers and marines have been decorated and cited for valor,” Hecht's narrator attests. “Thousands of them lie dead and wounded on our battlefields” (23). On tour in Chicago, Hecht added two additional names to the scene, both of

⁸⁵ As the first Jewish hero of the war, Meyer Levin's stature as a Popular Front icon lasted throughout the entire era. His partnership with his captain, Colin Kelly, was cited as an example of inter-ethnic bonding in the postwar Frank Sinatra short, *The House I Live In* (1945), written by Albert Maltz. (Levin was of no relation to Meyer Levin the Jewish-American novelist, who lived until 1981.)

⁸⁶ Robert Skloot, “‘We Will Never Die’: The Success and Failure of a Holocaust Pageant,” *Theatre Journal* 37, no.2 (May 1985): 177. After the mention of Levin's name, Hecht's stage directions read: “the soldiers dip their flags and all stand silent for a minute” (26).

⁸⁷ “We Will Never Die” typescript, 32, Morgan Library.

⁸⁸ Weill called “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” “the most exciting, stirring hymn I have ever known.” “I'm an American” interview, Kurt Weill Foundation, <http://www.kwf.org/kurt-weill/for-further-reading/33-foundation/kwp/354-im-an-american> (accessed 1 July 2012). However, Weill's arrangement of “Battle Hymn of the Republic” for *We Will Never Die* is substantially different from the one he did for the 1942 Fight For Freedom recording, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*. In that version the words were foregrounded, spoken by Helen Hayes with orchestral and male choral accompaniment. In *We Will Never Die* (as is evident in the KFWB recording), there is no “narrator” and the choral writing, for mixed voices, is more prominent and elaborate. Weill, therefore, did not merely recycle the earlier arrangement but possibly wrote it specifically for the pageant.

local significance and both casualties of the recent fighting that January in New Guinea: Maurice Levy, a Chicago-born sharpshooter decorated posthumously with a Distinguished Service Cross for killing twenty-five Japanese soldiers in a single battle; and Hymie Epstein, a medic who sacrificed himself in the process of treating wounded GI's.⁸⁹ The recitation in *We Will Never Die* of the heroics of Strobing and Levin (and Levy and Epstein) worked to disprove widespread anti-Semitic libels by claiming these already acknowledged war heroes as Jewish—and by asserting that their Jewishness was an essential quality of their heroism.⁹⁰

The one “fighting Jew” hovering over all these contemporaries is the ancient figure of Bar Kochba, the Judean warrior who briefly overthrew Roman rule in 132 AD and presided over (until his defeat three years later) the last Jewish state in Palestine prior to 1948. The figure of Bar Kochba was central to the Muscular Judaism movement and was invoked frequently by Nordau, Jabotinsky, and other early Zionist leaders.⁹¹ But he has also been a controversial figure who has long divided Jewish scholars over whether his failed revolt should inspire Jews to take up arms or warn against reckless violence.⁹² Hecht transforms the complicated story into a defiant triumph when he first includes Bar Kochba in the pantheon of the “Roll Call”:

If you would know whence the Jewish soldiers in the fox holes, tanks and bombers of today derive their fierceness, look on Bar Kochba. Bar Kochba, the mighty warrior who marched forth against the Roman legions and scattered and terrified them for three years.

⁸⁹ Edward Barry, “Pageant Stirs 15,000 to Vow: Jew Must Live,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 May 1943. For Maurice Levy’s Distinguished Service Cross citation see the website of the National Museum of American Jewish Military History, <http://www.nmajmh.org/exhibitions/catalog-hallofheroes/cat33.php> (accessed 10 June 2011). Hymie Greenberg’s heroics were recounted in the *Chicago Daily News* by war correspondent George Weller. See “Hymie Epstein Wouldn’t Quit, Hero in Guinea,” *Weller’s War: A Legendary Foreign Correspondent’s Saga of World War II on Five Continents* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009), 393.

⁹⁰ Again, Hecht qualifies his most strident tributes to Jewish valor with deference to the non-Jewish public: “If we stress for these minutes the deeds of fighting Jews on the battle fronts, it is not because they are the greatest of the most numerous. It is because they are our own” (23).

⁹¹ Many of the Nordau-inspired Jewish gymnasiums that sprouted up in Europe were named Bar Kochba clubs. Jabotinsky named his own youth league “Betar” after the fortress of Bar Kochba’s last stand.

⁹² Breines, *Tough Jews*, 83-87. Also see Richard G. Marks, *The Image of Bar Kochba in Traditional Jewish Literature: False Messiah and National Hero* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). Bar Kochba was also the hero of a popular Yiddish Theatre play by Abraham Goldfaden. Seth L. Wolitz, “Forging a Hero for a Jewish Stage: Goldfaden’s *Bar Kokhba*,” *Shofar* (Spring 2002): 53-65.

And who for a year stood with his small army against the entire might of the Roman world and died with all his soldiers on the ramparts of the ancient city of Bethar (15).

In “Jews in the War,” the narrators boast that, during the present war, “Bar Kochba’s boys are scattered in a hundred armies” (23). The scene concludes with a tribute to Jewish GI’s that Americanizes the ancient warrior by association: “their spirit is the spirit of Washington, Lincoln and Roosevelt—of Yankee Doodle and the Battle Hymn of the Republic—of Bar Kochba and Irving Strobinger—and Meyer Levin” (25-26).⁹³ If America itself is, as the Rabbi says in the pageant’s opening prayer, “our David” against the Nazi Goliath, then for Hecht it is their Bar Kochba as well (12).⁹⁴

The ultimate fusing of ancient Judean iconography with the contemporary Jewish-American experience comes in Hecht’s passing but prominent reference to another Jewish GI war hero, Barney Ross. In the thirties, Ross had been one of the most famous prize fighters in America before enlisting at age thirty-two shortly after Pearl Harbor. “In Ross’s boxing prime,” writes biographer Douglas Century, “he’d been seen by Jews around the world as a living embodiment of what Max Nordau had spoken of.”⁹⁵ In November 1942, during the battle of Guadalcanal, his heroics and subsequent decoration for bravery were well publicized, and “by early March his beaming, gap-toothed smile was once again on the front pages of newspapers across the nation.”⁹⁶ By the time of *We Will Never Die*, then, the name Barney Ross had great currency in the public sphere, and Hecht seized the opportunity to extol him as exemplary of the

⁹³ This lines was immediately followed by the moment of silence for Levin and then the singing of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” itself.

⁹⁴ The Rabbi’s full statement is, “We are here to strengthen our hearts, to take into our veins the pride and courage of the millions of innocent people who have fallen and are still to fall before the German massacre. They were unarmed. But not we! We live in a land whose arm is stronger than the arm of the German Goliath. This land is our David” (12).

⁹⁵ Douglas Century, *Barney Ross* (New York: Schocken Books, 2006), xvi.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

Fighting Jew. “The Jew, said the Nazis, cannot fight,” the narrator says. “Wait till Barney Ross gets to Berlin” (23).⁹⁷

Even as a boxer, Ross had already taken on a mythic status for American Jews. Embodying the athletic ideals extolled by the Muscular Judaism movement, Ross and other champion Jewish boxers (like Benny Leonard, Max Baer, and “Slapsie Maxie” Rosenbloom) were allowed by the sport to exhibit a capacity for aggression and violence otherwise absent from representation of Jews in American culture. As Stephen Norwood writes,

From the turn of the twentieth century until World War II... American Jews used sports to forge a new muscular identity. American Jews’ success in boxing, a sport in which they were heavily represented, came to symbolize working- and lower-middle class Jews’ determination to challenge anti-Semitism *and, in the 1930s, Nazism*. Their prowess in the ring helped undermine hoary stereotypes of Jewish males’ physical incapacity, cowardice, and effeminacy.⁹⁸

Adding even further heft to their image were explicit comparisons between these modern gladiators and the warriors of the ancient Israelites. “From David’s knockout of Goliath down to Benny Leonard and Barney Ross,” wrote one Jewish sportswriter in 1935, “the Jew has liked a fight as well as the next fellow.”⁹⁹ The comparison did not escape Peter Bergson either; in the weeks and months following *We Will Never Die*, he enlisted Ross himself to appear at various other rallies and fundraisers for his committee.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ At a time when no U.S. forces had yet been deployed on the European continent (their first such engagement, in the Italian Campaign, was still six months away), the call to send Ross to Berlin also served as an implicit push for a “second front” to finally focus the Allied war effort, militarily, on the antifascist cause and, by extension, the rescue of European Jewry. This wish would not be truly fulfilled until the D-Day Invasion of Normandy in June 1944, over one year after *We Will Never Die*.

⁹⁸ Stephen Norwood, “American Jewish Muscle: Forging a New Masculinity in the Streets and in the Ring, 1890-1940,” *Modern Judaism* 29, no.2 (May 2009): 167, emphasis added. For more on the significance of boxing to interwar Jewish-American culture see Peter Levine, *Ellis Island to Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) and Allen Bodner, *When Boxing was a Jewish Sport* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

⁹⁹ Stanley B. Frank, *The Jew in Sports* (New York: Miles Publishing, 1936), 99, cited in Beth Wenger, “Constructing Manhood in American Jewish Culture,” *Gender and Jewish History*, Eds. Marion A. Kaplan and Deborah Dash Moore (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 358.

¹⁰⁰ Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 151, 176. Also see Century, 151-158. Ross again worked with the Bergson committee in the postwar period, as attention turned to the goal of a Jewish state in Palestine. He even helped secretly transport

In the “Roll Call,” Hecht refers to the Jewish scientists and doctors that were among the first Nobel Prize winners as “our world champions,” almost inadvertently reinforcing the stereotype of Jews being athletes of the brain and not the body. But with the evocation of a genuine “champion” of the ring, he reminds his audience that Jews need not choose between being either smart or strong. They may, as Paul Breines says, “enter the world of bodies,” the necessary pre-condition for the modern cult of “tough Jews.”¹⁰¹ Breines explains:

Prior to the articulation of tough Jewish imagery in [the twentieth] century...virtually the only operative images of Jewish force, strength, or power involved the Jewish *brain*, which would typically be housed in frail (the Jewish scholar) or fat (the Jewish merchant) male bodies, but never in rugged, muscular or lithe ones.¹⁰²

As opposed to the phantoms that populate the mournful “Roll Call” and “Remember Us” processions, the actors in “Jews in the War”—and the later-added “Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto”—are the ones who more corporeally represent Jewish bodies on the stage of *We Will Never Die*.

“Rally, Jews!”

Soon after *We Will Never Die*’s New York premiere in March 1943, the Bergson committee arranged for performances in Washington, DC (April 12), Philadelphia (April 22), Chicago (May 19), and Boston (June 6). For the final performance at Los Angeles’ Hollywood Bowl on July 21, Hecht added an entirely new scene that would significantly increase the militancy of the pageant’s tone.

By late April 1943, while *We Will Never Die* was touring, Americans were finally learning about the Jewish revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto that had begun in January. Even though

guns to *Irgun* fighters and promised to join the fight against the British himself, before being denied permission to travel to Palestine by the U.S. State Department.

¹⁰¹ Breines, *Tough Jews*, 48.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 44.

the rebellion was crushed in May, it was the first reported instance of organized Jewish resistance against Nazi occupiers, and it provided Hecht with exactly the example he needed to transform the image of European Jewry from that of victims to fighters. Even in defeat, the guerilla fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto—unlike the Pacific-stationed Strobing and Ross—fulfilled the Jewish desire for anti-Nazi vengeance.

The new scene also differed sharply in dramatic form from the rest of the pageant. While the original three episodes—“Roll Call,” “Jews in the War,” and “Remember Us”—were all built around expository narration and presentational processions (of the candle-bearers, the parading soldiers, and the dead massacre victims), Hecht conceived of the Warsaw scene as an action-driven war narrative, actually showing the battle on stage. As opposed to the distancing effects in “Remember Us” that denied audiences any view of German violence upon Jews, Hecht shifted to a more direct representational style now that Jews were the aggressors.

In the scene, two narrators relate details about the uprising while, behind them, a cast of silent supernumeraries play out the events before a replica of “the ghetto wall of Warsaw” that stood “ten feet high and extend[ed] across the stage center”(26). The narration is not just expository, but lends the event a tragic inevitability, revealing from the outset the “doomed” failure of the uprising and using the audience’s foreknowledge of the story’s conclusion to underline the bravery of its heroes (27).¹⁰³ The narrators thus frame the Jews’ fatal April 19 confrontation with German troops in terms of other recent war battles, as well as of classical tragedy and even American folklore:

Bright in the history of man are the battles that were fought with this spirit—the unconquerable spirit that shines forever above the victory of its enemies—Thermopoli [sic], the Alamo, Bataan, Stalingrad—here is another battle to place beside them—the battle of the Warsaw ghetto. Here is a battle in which Jews, outnumbered one thousand to one, fought the might of the Germans to a stand-still for three weeks. And though every

¹⁰³ One of the narrators even dubs the onstage wall “the wall of doom” (26).

one of those Jews is dead today, though every man, woman, and child who battled behind the ghetto ramparts has been exterminated, though the ghetto today is empty...the spirit of these doomed and half-starved warriors will rise forever among the highest flags of history. (27)

The Bergson group often argued that one value of their proposed Jewish Army was that they would willfully volunteer for “suicide squads.”¹⁰⁴ In this, the Jewish soldier/martyr is presented as even more courageous than the average GI.

Another element in the Warsaw Ghetto scene’s construction of the Fighting Jew is its similarities to several contemporaneous Hollywood films celebrating underground European resistance fighters—the most famous being *Casablanca*, which opened nationally in January 1943 and was still playing in many theatres while *We Will Never Die* performed around the country.¹⁰⁵ However, not only were none of the rebels in these films identified as Jewish, but because studios still remained reluctant throughout the war to explicitly address anti-Semitism, Hollywood persisted in avoiding explicit depictions of Nazis targeting Jews at all. Hecht’s “Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto,” then, rewrites the genre of the European resistance narrative, recasting it with Jewish heroes.

One particular film that may have been on Hecht’s mind at the time was Fritz Lang’s *Hangmen Also Die*, which was released on 15 April 1943 during *We Will Never Die*’s tour. (The film has long been notable for bearing Bertolt Brecht’s only Hollywood screenplay credit.)¹⁰⁶ It

¹⁰⁴ Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 50.

¹⁰⁵ *Casablanca* first premiered in Hollywood in November 1942. Two other films about resistance movements opened the following month: *Reunion in France* (directed by Jules Dassin, formerly of the Yiddish ARTEF company and the Federal Theatre Project) and *Commandos Strike at Dawn* (starring Paul Muni, with a screenplay by Irwin Shaw). March 1943 brought *Assignment in Brittany* and *The Moon is Down*—the latter based on John Steinbeck’s popular novel about the Norwegian resistance. For more on the resistance film genre see Bernard Dick, *Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 146-187.

¹⁰⁶ Brecht was ultimately only given a “story” credit for *Hangmen Also Die*. While co-writer John Wexley (Popular Front playwright of *They Shall Not Die* and screenwriter of *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*) would later claim Brecht wrote very little of the final screenplay, Lang and Brecht clearly developed the initial premise and narrative of the film together, leaving Wexley to write the dialogue. James Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 58-71; McGilligan and Buhle, *Tender Comrades*, 713-715.

depicted the May 1942 assassination in Prague of Reinhard Heydrich, Hitler's deputized ruler over conquered Czech territories.¹⁰⁷ The Nazis' retaliatory mass-execution of suspected Czech insurgents in the nearby village of Lidice had quickly become a cause of international outrage—one often cited by Hecht and Bergson as a sign of the Allies' hypocrisy regarding their relative silence about the ongoing massacres of Jews in the same region. "When they burned Lidice," read a Bergson committee ad (possibly written by Hecht), "a cry of horror went up from the civilized world. The Jew...has witnessed and experienced the horrors of a thousand Lidices."¹⁰⁸ In the wake, then, of Hollywood memorializing the non-Jewish victims of Lidice, Hecht's writing of "Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto" (between June and July of 1943) can be read as a corrective Jewish response.

Hecht's opening stage directions for the scene—written in atmospheric detail probably not completely visible to many in the Hollywood Bowl audience—seem more fitting for a "fade-in" from one of his film scenarios than a play:

We see a street inside the ghetto wall. It is night. The street is empty....[G]roups of men, women and children have been appearing in the street. Old men with prayer books in their hands have appeared and stand facing the wall and praying. Women, holding fast to their children have appeared and stand in huddles....[T]he street continues to fill. Ragged gaunt figures appear. In the corner a women falls dead. Her children sit crouched around her until she is picked up and carried away. Women sit weeping against the wall. (26-27)

Then, in the midst of the squalor and suffering, the rebellion begins quietly in the stage action:

Four men pass through the crowd in the street, bearing a coffin on their shoulders. They lower the coffin and open it. They remove old rifles and ammunition from it and distribute these to the men and women. (27)

As recorded sound effects soon signal the approach of German tanks, the stage action explodes to Hollywood proportions. We see "groups of twenty and thirty men and women, carrying

¹⁰⁷ *Hangmen Also Die* was one of two 1943 films to depict the Heydrich assassination and the thwarted Czech rebellion; the other was the lower-budget B-picture, *Hitler's Madman*, released by MGM in June.

¹⁰⁸ "To the Conscience of America," *New York Times*, 5 December 1942.

various arms, run through the street, shouting and waving their guns” as “the street inside the ghetto wall becomes a hospital [where] wounded are brought and laid out” and “fires light up the city beyond the wall” (29). For a scene written specifically for performance at the Hollywood Bowl, located at the heart of the “film colony,” Hecht deployed an appropriately cinematic sense of *mise-en-scène*.

(The scene’s affinity with Hollywood resistance films was further heightened by the casting of the narrators, who spoke at microphones stage left and right while this *tableau vivant* unfolded upstage. Both actors were at that very moment appearing on screen in two of the most popular examples of the genre; the Austrian-born Paul Henreid played French Resistance leader Victor Laszlo in *Casablanca*, and Greek actress Katina Paxinou had just made her Hollywood debut in the role of republican partisan Pilar in Paramount’s film of Ernest Hemmingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.)

Parallels to cinema become even clearer when, at the height of the fighting, the Warsaw Jews sing a battle song. With Kurt Weill unavailable to score this new scene (he was working in New York on his next musical, *One Touch of Venus*), Hecht engaged famed Hollywood composer Franz Waxman—himself a German-Jewish refugee—to provide the music.¹⁰⁹ In addition to underscoring, Waxman composed, with lyricist Frank Loesser, a “Battle Hymn of the Ghetto”—its title echoing the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” and its words resounding with defiance:

We the scum of the human chattel
 We of everlasting flight
 We will rise in fearless battle
 We who cannot live the night.

¹⁰⁹ Waxman, who also conducted the Hollywood Bowl performance, experienced Nazi persecution firsthand in Germany when he was assaulted in the street by SS officers. Tony Thomas, *Film Score: The Art and Craft of Movie Music* (Burbank, CA: Riverwood Press, 1991), 35.

Tears no longer—
 Tears no longer
 Let them taste the death they deal.
 And though we die, we die in battle
 Not beneath the tyrant heel.¹¹⁰

Such ballads (often written by Jewish songwriters) became a staple of resistance movies.

Hangmen Also Die featured a very similar *kampflied* by Brecht and Hanns Eisler called “No Surrender.”¹¹¹ That same year Aaron Copland and Ira Gershwin wrote “Song of the Guerillas” for the pro-Soviet film *The North Star*; for *Thousands Cheer*, Harold Rome and E.Y. Harburg contributed lyrics to “United Nations on the March” set to a melody by Dmitri Shostakovich; and in 1944, Harburg teamed up with Jerome Kern to write “And Russia is Her Name” for *Song of Russia*. For American Popular Front composers and songwriters, such songs appear to have been *de rigueur* when dramatizing antifascist resistance. The Waxman-Loesser “Battle Hymn of the Ghetto” is the only battle song, however, sung by Jewish battlers.

The Warsaw scene’s ties to Popular Front (and even more radical) forms of political performance were also evident in the links of its participants to three prominent organs of 1930s American political theatre: the Group Theatre, Labor Stage, and the Federal Theatre Project. Since director Moss Hart was not available for the Los Angeles performance (he was busy working on his own Broadway pageant, *Winged Victory*), the scene was most likely directed by the pageant’s assistant director, Herman Rotsten, who previously served as director of the

¹¹⁰ *We Will Never Die* Hollywood Bowl souvenir program, 27, Kurt Weill Foundation. Before his postwar Broadway successes *Where’s Charley* and *Guys and Dolls*, Jewish American composer/lyricist Frank Loesser spent the war years in Hollywood writing many patriotic songs—most successfully “Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition” (1942)—as well as several shows for servicemen. See Thomas Riis, *Frank Loesser* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 39-49.

¹¹¹ Songwriter Sam Coslow (lyricist for “Cocktails for Two” as well as a collaborator with Weill on Lang’s film *You and Me*) received the official credit for lyrics to “No Surrender” in *Hangmen Also Die*. But as Sally Bick proves, Coslow was hired only to render Brecht’s German lyrics into acceptable Hollywood English. Sally Bick, “A Double Life in Hollywood: Hanns Eisler’s Score for the Film *Hangmen Also Die* and the Covert Expressions of a Marxist Composer,” *Musical Quarterly*, 93, no.1 (2010): 131-132.

national tour for Labor Stage's *Pins and Needles*.¹¹² Rotsten was one of three *Pins and Needles* alumni to play a key role in *We Will Never Die*; S. Syrjala conceived of the original stage design and Louis Schaeffer, the head of Labor Stage, served on the New York producing committee.

Another new contribution to the Hollywood Bowl production was the involvement of members of the Actors' Laboratory who played the ghetto residents.¹¹³ Founded in 1941, the "Lab" was an outgrowth of an earlier "Hollywood Alliance" made up of discharged alumni of the "Experimental Wing" of the Los Angeles Federal Theatre Project in 1939.¹¹⁴ The Lab's leadership was comprised of many former Group Theatre actors who had moved west to work in the film industry after that company dissolved in 1941. Three Group actors (J. Edward Bromberg, Roman Bohnen, and Art Smith) had prominent speaking roles in the Los Angeles *We Will Never Die* performance, as did Lab-associated artists John Garfield and Sam Levene.¹¹⁵ And the many extras clearly required for the Warsaw Ghetto scene were likely drawn from the approximately one hundred actors taking Lab classes in 1943.¹¹⁶ Founded as it was by some of the most politically engaged (and later blacklisted) Group Theatre members, the Actors' Laboratory expressly promoted a "social approach to acting" and, in their mission statement, declared themselves

an organization with the primary purpose of developing for actors a real understanding of and participation in the life of our times—based on an intelligent appraisal of the social

¹¹² "Herman Rotsten directed the local performance for Hart." "Stage Review," *Los Angeles Daily News*, 22 July 1943. Rotsten was listed as "Assistant to Mr. Hart" in the Madison Square Garden Program and so was evidently involved with the pageant from the very beginning. Rotsten's involvement with *Pins and Needles* is documented by actress Shelley Winters, who recalls auditioning for him for the *Pins and Needles* tour. Shelley Winters, *Shelley: Also Known as Shirley* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), 37-39.

¹¹³ The program offers special thanks to "Actors of Actors' Laboratory for their participation in the Warsaw Scene." *We Will Never Die* Hollywood Bowl souvenir program, 8, Kurt Weill Foundation.

¹¹⁴ Delia Nora Salvi, "The History of the Actors' Laboratory, Inc. 1941-1950" (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1970), 25-26.

¹¹⁵ Howard DaSilva, also an active Actors' Lab member (and a star of Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*), appeared in the Boston performance of *We Will Never Die*.

¹¹⁶ Salvi reports that Lab membership grew from 54 in January 1942 to 144 in May 1944, the only figures recorded for this time period. Salvi, *History of the Actors' Laboratory*, 45-49.

forces at work in this particular political period—and as people who consider the preparation of democracy and democratic culture a matter of life or death.¹¹⁷

The Lab also regularly participated in the war effort by performing for soldiers both in California and overseas.¹¹⁸ But despite this service, their leftist political connections later made them one of the first targets of the postwar anticommunist Tenney Committee investigation in the California State Senate, an adjunct of the simultaneous House Un-American Activities Committee hearings.¹¹⁹

“The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto” resembles the FTP’s Living Newspaper plays in its deployment of “actualities” (reportage and found text), as well as in its reliance upon recorded sound effects, voiceover narration, and direct-address commentary. In his stage directions, Hecht calls for “the faint distant blare of a German march tune,” “the rumble of [tank] wheels,” and “the sounds of distant shooting and the cries of battle” (29). At two pivotal moments, a disembodied offstage voice speaks over a loudspeaker: once quoting the enemy (“GOEBBEL’S VOICE: The extermination of the Jewish race is of historic importance”) and once speaking the final dispatch sent out by the heroes broadcasted from an underground radio station (28, 30).¹²⁰ The recreation of this moment in performance effectively extended the life of this single brief transmission; between the ten thousand spectators in the Hollywood Bowl and the countless other thousands listening to the KFWB broadcast, the pageant relayed their message to more people than would have otherwise heard of it—albeit too late.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 241.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 41-44.

¹¹⁹ These hearings precipitated the closing of the Actors’ Lab in 1950.

¹²⁰ The “Radio Voice” reads the text of ghetto residents’ only received dispatch verbatim: “Death sentence has been proclaimed on the last 35,000 Jews in Warsaw. Gun salvos are echoing in the streets. Women and children are defending themselves with their bare hands. Help us.” Both voiceover lines were spoken in the Hollywood Bowl performance by Mercury Theatre actor Paul Stewart.

Such use of amplification and recorded sound was typical of the Living Newspapers, which, in turn, adapted the practice from the path-breaking 1920s German agitprop performances of Erwin Piscator, the father of “Epic Theatre.” Piscator’s stagecraft, writes Attilio Favorini,

invented a new kind of theatrical piece composed exclusively from documents, both verbal and visual. His innovation was to create a drama based on the principles of news reportage, constructed in an epic succession of tableaux and stations, and designed to promote direct social action....In the process Piscator discovered the elements of what he would later call “Total Theater,” bombarding the emotions with an arsenal of theater technology to achieve maximal audience manipulation.¹²¹

“Bombarding” is precisely what Hecht and his collaborators seem to have aimed for in “The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto,” a scene with dozens of actors vigorously simulating battle while accompanied by Waxman’s agitated and discordant musical score, impassioned narration, and the percussive sounds of battle. The desired result was not only the “direct social action” of lobbying the U.S. government to save the remaining Jews of Europe, but to inspire in American Jews feelings of not just sympathy but pride, confidence, and vengeance.¹²²

If Hollywood resistance movies invited homefront American audiences to fight the war vicariously via the “common folk” of Europe (“Since resistants were ‘just people,’ audiences could identify with them,” writes Bernard Dick), the Warsaw Ghetto scene in *We Will Never Die* represents Jewish Americans by proxy.¹²³ Because Barney Ross and the other “GI Jews” could not yet “go to Berlin” themselves, Hecht invites his audience to embrace the Warsaw Jews as models of the kind of Fighting Jew he wants them to aspire to. When his narrators repeatedly cheered on the fighters by crying “Rally, Jews!” as they recounted the uprising, they were

¹²¹ Favorini, *Voicings*, xviii-xix.

¹²² While neither Hecht nor Hart may ever have seen Piscator’s landmark German productions, they might have seen his work during his wartime exile at the New School for Social Research in New York. (In May 1942 he directed an epic-style adaptation of *War and Peace* there, for example.) Assistant director Rotsten—who most likely staged the Warsaw Ghetto scene in Hart’s absence—would have been even more likely to know Piscator’s theories and practices from his experiences in New York labor theatre of the thirties.

¹²³ Bernard F. Dick, *Star-Spangled Screen*, 147.

addressing the live spectators in front of them (as well as the radio audience at home) as much as—if not more than—the spectral warriors upstage (29-31).¹²⁴

We Will Never Die and the Popular Front

Despite the initial misgivings toward *We Will Never Die* of many of Hecht's colleagues, some Jewish-American Popular Front stalwarts did still join him, in addition to Weill and Hart. Almost as bold a statement as Hecht's written pleas and polemics in the pageant was the sheer presence of successful Jewish actors who, after a career of assimilating to Hollywood deracinating norms, were more publicly embracing their Jewish identity than ever before. Not all the leading actors in each performance were Jewish, but when they were, the appearance provided them a powerful opportunity to embrace a dual Jewish-American identity in the course of advocating for both European Jews and the American war effort.¹²⁵ This was especially true for three leading Warner Brothers stars: Paul Muni, Edward G. Robinson, and John Garfield.¹²⁶ All three had been highly active in Hollywood Popular Front circles, especially in antifascist organizations like the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League.¹²⁷ *We Will Never Die* provided these

¹²⁴ The Los Angeles audience was even more directly exhorted to avenge the Warsaw dead when Hecht added, for this performance only, a dead fighter from the ghetto uprising to the "Remember Us" scene at the pageant's end.

¹²⁵ Among the many non-Jewish Hollywood stars participating were other veterans of the Popular Front antifascist campaign: Edward Arnold, Claude Rains, Ralph Bellamy, and Burgess Meredith. However, despite numerous claims (by Stephen J. Whitfield and others) that Frank Sinatra also took part, no programs or contemporary press accounts link him to any one of the six performances. The confusion may stem from Hecht, in his autobiography, including Sinatra in a long list entertainment figures who participated in any of Hecht's many political performances and rallies during the period. Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 558.

¹²⁶ Other notable Jewish actors appearing in the course of the six performances were the Group Theatre's Luther Adler (who played Private Strobing in New York) and his then-wife, movie actress Sylvia Sidney. His sister Stella Adler, also a Group Theatre star, served on the *We Will Never Die* producing committee. Luther and Stella were both children of the famous Yiddish Theatre star Jacob Adler (1855-1926).

¹²⁷ See chapter 1 for details of Muni and Robinson's 1930s political activism. Garfield became involved slightly later, after his breakout success in Warners' *Four Daughters* in 1938. His involvement with the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League was reported regularly in *Hollywood Now*. "Garfield, Keating in Circus Lineup," *Hollywood NOW*, 16 September 1938; "John Garfield Will Speak for China Aid," *Hollywood NOW*, 4 November 1938.

successful stage and screen actors a unique opportunity to embody and represent the Fighting Jew on stage in a way they were rarely (if ever) allowed to on screen.¹²⁸

John Garfield's participation in *We Will Never Die* cemented his already well-established public image as a Fighting Jew. Born in New York as Julius Garfinkle and discovered by the Group Theatre in the early thirties, Garfield's elevation to movie stardom at Warner Brothers (beginning with his role as a streetwise musician in *Four Daughters* in 1938) reflected how naturally he fit the studio's mold of ethnic masculinity, as established by Muni and Robinson.¹²⁹ But after beginning in movies playing urban criminals, during the war he rose in studio casting from hoodlum to hero in a series successful wartime pictures—beginning with *Air Force*, which opened 3 February 1943 and was still playing in cinemas throughout the tour of *We Will Never Die*.¹³⁰ When he was denied the opportunity to engage in real-life combat (a weak heart made him ineligible for the draft), he became a prominent off-screen cheerleader for the armed forces—most notably in his founding of the Hollywood Canteen, a nightclub for servicemen staffed by volunteer stars.¹³¹

¹²⁸ At the time of the *We Will Never Die* premiere in March 1943, Muni was reviving his early-career success as the powerful Jewish lawyer, George Simon, in Elmer Rice's *Counselor-At-Law*. While Muni initially appeared to distance himself from the role in Hollywood (see chapter 1), his return to it in 1943 alongside his leading role in *We Will Never Die* (a convergence so close that the play had to be canceled on the night of the pageant) served to amplify his Jewish identity.

¹²⁹ Garfield was even, at first, portrayed in the press as Muni's heir. A 1938 Hedda Hopper column depicts a virtual passing of the torch from Muni to Garfield: "When asked [in 1933] by a newspaper reporter what raw material he saw on Broadway that seemed destined for Hollywood success, Muni unhesitatingly picked John Garfield....A few months ago Muni walked onto a set on the Warner lot and watched John Garfield play a scene. The scene over, Muni walked over to Garfield, complimented him on his performance and thanked him for fulfilling a five-year-old prophecy." "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 September 1938.

¹³⁰ *Air Force* was the first of five war-era movies featuring Garfield as an enlisted man; it was followed by *Destination Tokyo* (1943), *Pride of the Marines* (1945), *Nobody Lives Forever* (1946) and *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947). He also played a Spanish Civil War veteran in the antifascist espionage film *The Fallen Sparrow*, which opened in August 1943.

¹³¹ Garfield appeared as himself in two Warner Brothers films that showcased the film industry's charitable work on behalf of the military: *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (1943) and *Hollywood Canteen* (1944), the latter a tribute to the club he co-founded.

We Will Never Die was a rare opportunity for Garfield not only to campaign for a Jewish cause, but to play a Jewish character.¹³² While he did not appear in the New York premiere, in Chicago he was one of the chief narrators (Muni and Robinson's roles in New York), and in Los Angeles he starred in the "Jews in the War" scene, playing Private Irving Strobing and reading his famous telegraph dispatches. In this performance it was he who spoke the rallying cries, "Every Jewish soldier is an avenger!" and "Wait till Barney Ross gets to Berlin!" As an onscreen embodiment of the GI Joe and one of America's most visible Jewish actors, Garfield was a perfect Hollywood analog to real life Jewish servicemen like Strobing and Ross—especially considering that Garfield was already in negotiations to play Ross on screen.¹³³ While the Ross film never materialized, he finally was able to play an explicitly Jewish soldier in the postwar drama *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), one of Hollywood's first films directly addressing American anti-Semitism. Not only does his character, Dave Goldman, not hide his ethnicity, but the screenplay (by Moss Hart, based on Laura Z. Hobson's novel) even provided him the rare opportunity to express his Jewishness with physical force—in a scene where he lunges at a man in a restaurant over an anti-Semitic slur. As a decorated officer seen throughout the film in uniform, Dave Goldman marked the culmination of Garfield's wartime Fighting Jew persona.

Where *We Will Never Die* broke most from Popular Front orthodoxy was in its inherent criticism of Franklin Roosevelt, a popular wartime president whose New Deal coalition of the 1930s provided much to enable and hold together the movement. Hecht was an open Roosevelt

¹³² After appearing sometimes on stage as Jewish characters with the Group Theatre (notably in Odets's *Awake and Sing!*), Garfield, upon arrival in Hollywood, was remade as a more generically ethnic persona. (For a start, the first name of his already modified stage name, Julie Garfield was changed to John.) Still, "Garfield was known to be Jewish, at least by readers of the Jewish American press, where Warner Brothers frequently directed publicity for his films." Henry Bial, *Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage and Screen* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 38.

¹³³ Century, *Barney Ross*, 131, 135. Garfield came close to producing and starring in a Barney Ross biography in 1943 and 1944 until the project was abandoned and transformed into his postwar film noir boxing drama, *Body and Soul* (1947). Century, 144-146. Also see Robert Nott, *He Ran All the Way: The Life of John Garfield* (New York: Limelight, 2003), 196-198.

supporter and actively campaigned for him in both the previous (1940) and following (1944) elections. But Bergson engaged in an all-out effort to pressure the White House to take urgent action, either diplomatically or militarily, to intervene into the massacres and mass deportations of European Jews. Nowhere was the challenge posed to the Roosevelt administration by *We Will Never Die* clearer than in the charged political speech at the pageant's conclusion, especially in the version Hecht wrote specially for the performance at Constitution Hall in Washington, DC. Unlike the other stops on the tour, the Washington performance was for a mostly "invited only" audience of politicians and statesmen. Knowing he had the ear of so many influential people in one room, Hecht extended the narrator's closing remarks—delivered, once again, by Muni and Robinson:

In this city, not far away, are the halls from which Justice has sounded her loudest battle cries, the chambers from which have issued man's noblest promises to tomorrow. Stranger than the mass murder of the civilians of Europe is the silence of these halls today. Stranger than the brutality of the massacre is the quiet of its onlookers in these chambers. (38-39)

In even more damning terms, they add: "The silence of our history makers has made them honorary members of the German posse" (38). And in introducing the evening's closing *Kaddish* prayer (the Hebrew prayer for the dead) they contrast the comforting gesture of prayer with the much more needed action of politics and force:

The Jews have only one voice left to raise among the governments. It is an ancient voice. It is the voice of prayer. Here in the great historical city of Washington they raise it tonight. Perhaps the dead will hear it and find comfort. Perhaps the dying will hear it and find hope. Perhaps the Four Freedoms will hear it and find their tongue. (40)

The reference to the "Four Freedoms"—Roosevelt's own coinage summarizing the ideals of freedom of speech and worship, as well as "freedom from want" and "from fear"—would have been the most cutting of all to Roosevelt partisans. The president's articulation of these human rights was made in a prewar 1941 speech that powerfully resonated in the antifascist and

interventionist campaigns. Now Hecht was turning Roosevelt's own rhetoric against him, implying hypocrisy in these lofty goals when the "freedoms" of the Jews were at stake.

In dramatic form, however, this compelling and confrontational peroration was clearly in the spirit of 1930s political theatre—which advocated drama as a "weapon."¹³⁴ Hecht reaffirms that the intention of the performance was not just to enlighten and perhaps elicit sympathy, but to provoke this audience in the seat of American power to real-world action:

We, the actors who have performed for you tonight are nearly done. But there is another cast of actors involved in this tale whose performance is not done. This cast is our audience. Our audience tonight is a notable cast playing vital roles on the stage of history. It is to this audience more than to any group of human beings in the world that the dead and dying innocents of Europe raise their cry, "Remember Us." And tonight it is not as actors playing parts on a stage soon to be dismantled, but as the spokesmen of a people that is being exterminated, that we stand before you—the official, the accredited, the elected makers of history. Two million Jews have been mercilessly destroyed in Europe. Four million surviving Jews are to be destroyed by Christmas according to the pronouncements of the German government. To utter these miserable words anywhere else in the world would be to cry for pity. To speak them here tonight is a summons to action. (37-38)

The reminder of the artificiality of the stage scenery and the reference to actors virtually taking off their masks to speak as themselves—in many cases, as Jews—were also gestures of authenticity, to remind audiences that what they just witnessed was no mere play, but a tragedy occurring to real human beings at that very moment.

Ultimately, of course, *We Will Never Die* did not inspire all of Washington to immediately save the Jews of Europe and stop the Holocaust. Many attested to being emotionally affected by the pageant. "One of the most impressive and moving pageants I have ever seen," wrote Eleanor Roosevelt in her daily column. "No one," she said, "will ever forget those

¹³⁴ Morgan Y. Himmelstein, *Drama was a Weapon: The Left-Wing Theatre in New York, 1929-1941* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963).

haunting words: ‘Remember us.’”¹³⁵ But when Washington, as time went on, did indeed appear to “forget,” it seemed Kurt Weill may have been right when he sardonically confided to Hecht afterwards, “All we have done is make a lot of Jews cry, which is not a unique accomplishment.”¹³⁶

Some historians believe the pageant did make at least a small difference by advancing the Bergson campaign so effectively that the Roosevelt administration did finally establish, in January 1944, a War Refugee Board that resettled a small number of European Jews in American safe havens.¹³⁷ But the most significant achievement of *We Will Never Die* was not what it may have accomplished overseas, but how it addressed Jewish identity at home in the United States. The event that so many of Hecht’s Jewish colleagues feared would fan the flames of anti-Semitism or ruin their careers did neither of these things. While it did not sufficiently spur the American public to action, this then-unusual statement of unassimilated Muscular Judaism received a fair and even sympathetic hearing. By doing so, it paved the way for an era soon to come when such statements of Jewish-American pride *and* patriotism were no longer so unusual.

¹³⁵ “‘My Day’ by Eleanor Roosevelt: A Comprehensive Electronic Edition of Eleanor Roosevelt’s ‘My Day’ Newspaper Columns,” The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, The George Washington University, <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday> (accessed 9 July 2012).

¹³⁶ Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 576.

¹³⁷ Wyman and Medoff, *A Race Against Death*, 49-50.

Chapter 4

“1776 in Palestine”:

A Flag is Born and the Americanization of Zionism

On 6 September 1946, Zionist guerilla fighters stormed the stage of New York’s Alvin Theatre. “The past is dead,” one pronounced, “the whole black past of the Jews.” “We speak,” declared another, “in a new Jewish language. The language of guns.” “Come,” they said to the play’s wayward young hero, a Holocaust survivor, “help us give birth to a flag.”¹ Marching to the Zionist anthem, the “Hatikvah,” they exited waving a banner resembling what would become the flag of the State of Israel two years before such a country existed. Broadway audiences had never seen Jews such as these.

This was the conclusion of Ben Hecht’s play, *A Flag is Born*. Not only was it the first Zionist play on Broadway but, predating the dramatization of *The Diary of Anne Frank* by nine years, it was also the first American Holocaust drama, addressing as it did the aftermath of World War II from the perspective of Jewish survivors. Also unusual for Broadway was its overt propagandizing, on stage and off, for a controversial political cause: the immediate recognition of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and the ouster of British rule there. While Zionism per se was rapidly gaining support after the war, Hecht and his colleagues (including such theatre luminaries as Kurt Weill, Paul Muni, and the Adler family) were championing its most strident and, some even said, “terrorist” faction. Moreover, they were waging a war against England, the United States’ popular wartime ally, whom they accused of imperialism and even Nazi-level racism.

¹ Ben Hecht, *A Flag is Born* (New York: American League for a Free Palestine, 1946), 46-48. Further citations of this edition are given in the text.

While such confrontational stances are not the usual makings of a “hit,” the play found a sizable audience and ran four months on Broadway before touring several cities.

At a time when popular culture had not yet absorbed the shock of the Holocaust and when the entertainment industry was still cautious in approaching Jewish subject matter of any kind, the mounting of *A Flag is Born* on Broadway constituted an important first step in postwar developments that we now take for granted—such as the embrace of Holocaust drama, the showcasing of heroic Jewish characters, and popular support for Zionism. But as new as the play was in many ways, it also was continuous with the political theatre of the prewar Popular Front, which championed the cause of many marginalized and oppressed peoples, but seldom Jews. When Zionist and Popular Front liberation agendas converged on the issue of Palestine in 1946, *A Flag is Born* was there to intervene at a pivotal moment in the cultural, political, and military history of that conflict.

Moreover, by 1946, the revelations of the war opened up an opportunity in the American public sphere to finally address on stage issues not just of Jewish persecution, but of cultural identity—which was about to change drastically for the wartime generation of American Jews compared to that of their immigrant parents and grandparents. As an almost classically styled tragedy of death and rebirth, *A Flag is Born* not only addressed those crises of identity from the stage in searing rhetoric, but also through a variety of dramaturgical forms, each a theatrical analog to a different aspect of the Jewish experience. The vanishing of the Jewish diaspora was communicated through the dying art of the Yiddish Theatre, the ideals of Zionism through the spectacle of Biblical pageantry, and the case for Jewish armed resistance via the agitprop staging that once rallied support for labor and antifascist “partisans” of the prewar and wartime eras.

Undergirding all this multilayered stagecraft was the symbolic narrative of a confrontation between two competing Jewish identities—the old “wandering Jew” of the diaspora and the young “Tough Jew” of the new Zion. (Or as Warren Rosenberg formulates the contrast: the Gimpel and the Golem.)² These figures would soon emerge as the heroes of two landmark dramas of postwar American popular culture: *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Exodus*. More than a decade before either work, though, *A Flag is Born* brought those two archetypes together on stage in a dialectical confrontation. And the fact that they were played by the aging Paul Muni and the emerging Marlon Brando added yet more theatrical resonance to the cultural and generational shift the play was depicting.

Another Fight for Freedom

The fate of Palestine had been a hotly contested issue ever since England first took possession of the land during World War I. In the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the British government pledged eventually to cede it to Zionists as a Jewish homeland, and a 1920 League of Nations ruling officially authorized them to govern there by “mandate” until such a time. But after an influx of European refugees seeking safe haven from fascism during the thirties, England changed course by severely restricting all Jewish immigration in the infamous “White Paper” of 1939. By the end of the war in the summer of 1945, the issue of immigration had become even more volatile due to the millions of stranded and homeless European Jewish survivors—called “Displaced Persons” in the political and diplomatic discourse of the time. Zionist organizations had resumed and intensified their efforts to smuggle Jews into Palestine in defiance of British blockades. Therefore, at issue after the war was not only the larger question of an independent

² See Warren Rosenberg, *Legacies of Rage: Jewish Masculinity, Violence, and Culture* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

Jewish state, but the more immediate problem of what was to become of the Displaced Persons. It was this crisis that *A Flag is Born*—with its narrative of a trio of Holocaust survivors unable to get to the Holy Land—was most directly intervening in.

With the foundation of the State of Israel still two years off, the summer and fall of 1946 marked a sharp escalation in the conflict between Zionists, the British government, and Palestinian Arabs. So besieged were Mandate authorities by increasingly violent Jewish resistance that, according to historian Martin Gilbert, “Britain’s will-to-rule had reached its end” by February 1947, when it delegated any decision about the future of the territory to the United Nations.³ Of the three organized Jewish militias fighting the British, the one known as the most violent and most often accused of “Jewish terrorism” was the *Irgun Zvai Leumi*—the Revisionist Zionists’ “National Military Organization,” represented in America by Ben Hecht’s political partner, Peter Bergson, with whom he had produced *We Will Never Die*.

Having already been involved in Zionist activism since 1941 through Bergson’s wartime Jewish rescue campaigns, Hecht became a charter member of his American League for a Free Palestine in April 1944. At a time when Zionism in general was still considered a fringe movement among American Jews, Bergson’s faction represented the even smaller minority interests of the *Irgun* army—disavowed even by other Jews as, at best, outliers and, at worst, “terrorists” (or even “fascists”) for their ruthless, ends-justify-the-means tactics. Far from distancing himself from the *Irgun*’s violence, Hecht embraced it; after the shocking November 1944 assassination of Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s Middle East minister, Lord Moyne, Hecht penned a one-act satire (for a Bergson-sponsored benefit) in which the Prime Minister admonished an assemblage of Jews (all dead Holocaust victims) to atone for their people’s

³ Martin Gilbert, *Israel: A History* (New York: Morrow, 1998), 142.

murder of his friend.⁴ Just six weeks before the Broadway opening of *A Flag is Born*, the *Irgun* bombed Jerusalem's King David Hotel, site of the British Mandate's administrative offices, in response to which Hecht told a reporter that he only regretted that "there were four other hotels housing the illegal British occupation troops that they didn't blow up."⁵ For Hecht such violence was justified by the same motives that drove other "resistance" fighters in World War II and populist revolutionaries throughout history. The *Irgun*, he claimed, was "making history in the same way as the *Maquis* [i.e. French resistance], the Partisans, the Irish rebels and the American revolutionists."⁶

Hecht stepped into a prominent role for Bergson in April 1946 by co-chairing a "repatriation" committee to aid the (still illegal) resettlement of Jews in Palestine, writing many newspaper advertisements drawing on the imagery of the American Civil War by calling for an "underground railway."⁷ But when the fundraising effort fell short of goals, Bergson knew that newspaper advertisements alone would not bring in enough contributions to purchase the ships necessary to transport the hundreds of thousands of refugees that he was promising. Hecht therefore proposed repeating their success with *We Will Never Die* with another staged protest. As in his previous propaganda pageants, he was counting on the unique potential of performance as a powerful platform for the disenfranchised and voiceless. "There is no Parliament or Congress or World Court from which the Hebrews can speak," he wrote in a statement printed in

⁴ The play, *A Jewish Fairy Tale*, is described in Citron, "Pageantry and Theatre," 346-348. The piece was performed only twice: in New York on 4 December 1944 and in Philadelphia on 31 January 1945. The cast featured future *Flag is Born* director Luther Adler and was narrated by Stella Adler.

⁵ Earl Wilson, "It Happened At Night," *New York Post*, 5 September 1946, 36. This article appeared on the eve of *A Flag is Born*'s opening.

⁶ "Gillette Denies Aid to Terrorists: Says Funds From 'A Flag Is Born' Are Not Used," *New York Times*, 5 December, 1946.

⁷ "Give Us the Money...We'll Get Them There!" (Advertisement), *New York Post*, 19 April 1946. Hecht co-chaired this committee with author Louis Bromfield and Congressman Will Rogers, Jr., who had also been an active Bergson supporter during the war.

the *A Flag is Born* program. “Here, then, on the Stage in front of you is the Hebrew and his only Parliament.”⁸

“A World that has Disappeared”

A Flag is Born is set in a “battered graveyard” (one review described the scenic background as “Goya-like”)⁹ into which an old couple recently “liberated” from Treblinka, Tevya and Zelda, wander as they seek refuge in Palestine. There they find another “Displaced Person,” David, an embittered eighteen-year-old survivor who reminds them that the journey will be difficult because of British blockades against refugees. Tevya is then possessed by a series of allegorical biblical visions; King Saul instructs him that Jews historically have not always been passive victims, and Solomon charges him to claim his birthright to “*Eretz Israel*” and demand justice from the rest of the world. He finds himself magically transported to the United Nations, where he shames the pompous and anti-Semitic British ambassador and rouses the other diplomats with his passionate plea. But when his dream fades, Tevya is still back in the graveyard, and both he and his wife soon expire from their ordeals. David’s pessimism almost leads him to suicide before Zionist soldiers suddenly appear and beckon him to Palestine. Constructing a makeshift banner out of Tevya’s *talis* and a Star of David, David marches off triumphantly with the army brandishing the eponymous “flag” and, with it, the promise of nationhood it represented.

A Flag is Born is not only a Zionist work, but a Holocaust drama—arguably the very first

⁸ *A Flag is Born* souvenir program, Kurt Weill Foundation, New York.

⁹ Robert Garland, “‘A Flag is Born’ Premieres at Alvin Theatre,” *New York Journal-American*, 7 September 1946.

on that subject produced in the American commercial theatre.¹⁰ As the spoken prologue by an onstage narrator makes clear in the play's very first line: "This is a tale of a world that has disappeared" (1). He reminds the audience that amid postwar jubilation, allies and enemies alike have still not reckoned with, or even properly acknowledged, how close Hitler's "Final Solution" came to achieving its genocidal goals:

History will say, "of all the things that happened in that time—our time—the slaughter of the Jews of Europe was the only thing that counted forever in the annals of man. The proud orations of heroes and conquerors will be a footnote in history beside the great silence that watched this slaughter." Yes, in the history books it will not be victories—it will be this silence that identifies and condemns our era. (2)

Long before the significance of the Holocaust was clearly marked in mainstream American culture, *A Flag is Born* was prescient in identifying it as one of the war's primary legacies. Such a call to conscience ran counter to the prevailing optimism of postwar American discourse, in which good had decisively vanquished evil and war was over. Regarding the rush to restore and rebuild Western Europe, for instance (soon to be codified in the Marshall Plan of 1947), the Speaker maintains that nothing can erase the stain of murder from that land:

The continent of Europe echoes with the tumult and wail of rebirth. New businesses are being launched, new dreams are hatching in the debris of cities. But these are not for the two Jews [Tevya and Zelda] wandering the dark night with the spark of Eretz Israel in their lame bodies. Does one open a shop under the gallows where one's father was hanged? Does one return to picnic near the lime pit where one's children were slain? Europe is a gallows and a lime pit to these two who wander southward in the dark. (3-4)

With the onset of the Cold War in the early postwar years, the United States appeared increasingly willing—in the name of fighting communism—to forgive and forget the complicity of many Europeans (in both Axis and Allied nations) in Nazi crimes. Hecht's play offered a dissenting voice, demanding justice for Jews ahead of anticommunist realpolitik.

¹⁰ Atay Citron goes as far as to call it "probably. . . the first postwar Holocaust drama to be staged anywhere." Atay Citron, "Ben Hecht's Pageant-Drama: *A Flag is Born*," *Staging the Holocaust*. Claude Schumacher, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 70.

While the play never visually represents or enacts the horrors of the concentration camps, the constant referencing of them from the stage constitutes a kind of bearing witness at a time when such stories—especially as told by survivors themselves—were still shockingly new to the public. Hecht consistently describes the tragedy with unprecedented specificity for American drama, if not American culture generally. The Speaker tells of the “six millions [who] were murdered in the furnaces”(2); David curses the world for making “a garbage pile of my people” (45); and Tevya calls the entire European Jewish heritage “a dream that died in a gas chamber” (38). When Tevya and Zelda mourn their children who perished in Treblinka, David says: “Maybe I saw them. I saw a million Jews die. I used to hide in a tree at night and count them—when they were walking naked—two by two—to the furnaces” (7).

To appreciate the potential impact of such testimony upon a 1946 audience, one must take into account what Jeffrey Shandler calls the “inchoate status of the Holocaust as a historical concept during the first postwar years.”¹¹ Newsreels about the liberation of the concentration camps—exhibited in movie theatres in April and May of 1945—clearly moved those who saw them, but these images only publicly screened for a few weeks and were not as ubiquitous as they would later become via television and other media. Also, while Hitler’s persecution of Jews was common knowledge, much of the early postwar coverage of the camps framed the tragedy as one among many of the war’s gruesome horrors, without foregrounding the predominantly Jewish identity of the victims and survivors.¹² As Shandler argues:

What would later be distinguished as a separate “war against the Jews” was not yet codified as a discrete unit of human experience with its own authoritative sources, narrative boundaries, vocabulary, historiography, and scholarly apparatus. Jews were not singled out as the quintessential victims of Nazi persecution, *nor were Jewish responses*

¹¹ Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 23.

¹² In Shandler’s words, the early newsreels “present[ed] the victims of Nazism as confirmation of the Axis powers’ maleficence” in the broadest sense. *Ibid.*, 24.

*regarded as central to the postwar understanding of this chapter of history. Moreover, the Holocaust had not yet been distinguished as an event of ultimate or paradigmatic stature, against which other moral issues might be measured.*¹³

One of *Flag*'s most notable interventions, then, is how forcefully it not only claimed the unfolding story of the Holocaust as a Jewish story and framed it as a "discrete" and exceptional event, but also that it told that story from an expressly Jewish point of view (a rare "Jewish response"), as opposed to the initial perspectives from the dominant Christian culture.

Yet while insisting on its uniqueness, the play does not treat the Holocaust as an isolated problem. The motif of a "disappearing" world echoed the foundational Zionist premise that Jewish life in the diaspora had always been precarious and was destined to fail. "Believing that diasporic life was inevitably doomed," writes Steven Rosenthal,

Zionists maintained that the only solution was for all Jews to immigrate to Palestine and form a state of their own where they could fully and safely live out authentic, Jewish lives. As Zionism competed with the Diaspora-based doctrines of socialism, bundism, and assimilation, it began to emphasize that life for Jews in exile was degrading and humiliating.¹⁴

In light of this ideology, the Holocaust only confirmed such "inevitability" and failure not just of the diaspora, but, implicitly, of the entire Western assimilationist project. Hecht echoes this belief throughout the play, such as when David recites the succession of migrations and expulsions from one host country to another that constitute the history of Jewish "wandering":

Jewish prayers can't get to God, Tevya, without an English visa. This is the new law. Yesterday our prayers needed a German visa. And the day before yesterday they required a Spanish visa. You see, our trouble is, Tevya, we have been praying in the wrong countries. . . . My father taught me that I belonged in the land where I was born. Then, one day, all the Jews in that land were gathered together like a pile of garbage and burned up. From this I learned that the teachings of my father were wrong. (9)

¹³ Ibid, 23. Emphasis added.

¹⁴ Steven T. Rosenthal, "Long-Distance Nationalism: American Jews, Zionism, and Israel," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, ed. Dana Evan Kaplan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 209.

Even Tevya (the epitome of the “wandering Jew”) becomes disenchanted by the end, telling the United Nations:

In the old days the Jews did not need Palestine because they had many fine homelands in Europe. . . . And in the old days when somebody said to me, “Tevya, go to Palestine and live in the Holy Land like a good Jew,” I answered them back, “Why do I have to go anywhere? I am through going. Name me a place in the world, and I have gone in, gone out. Now I have a home. Europe”. . . . Then it turns out this was only a dream about a home. A dream that died in a gas chamber. (38)

The play shows that that “dream”—the utopian promise of a “melting pot,” as extolled in Israel Zangwill’s landmark 1908 play of that name—has now gone up in flames.

The End of the (Eternal) Road

Another signifier in the play of exilic suffering is Kurt Weill’s musical score. Aside from his collaboration with Hecht and the Bergson committee on *We Will Never Die*, Weill had already become increasingly involved in Zionism throughout the war era. In 1938 he contributed arrangements to a collection of “Folks Songs for the New Palestine.” In May 1946, four months before *A Flag is Born*, he wrote a setting of the *Kiddush* prayer (a Sabbath blessing) for the Park Avenue Synagogue; he dedicated the piece to his father, a former cantor, who had immigrated to Palestine in the late 1930s along with Weill’s mother and sister after fleeing Europe. Weill himself traveled to Palestine in 1947 to visit his parents, seeing them for the first time since leaving Europe; and that fall, after the U.N. paved the way for Israel’s founding, he was commissioned, by soon-to-be President Chaim Weizman, to write a new arrangement of the Zionist anthem, “Hatikvah,” for the anticipated new nation.¹⁵ Weill may have mocked Hecht’s

¹⁵ The commission was facilitated by Meyer Weisgal (producer of *The Eternal Road*) and the piece was premiered by Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra at a 25 November 1947 dinner honoring Weizmann.

Zionist fervency (privately expressing amusement at his colleague's "silly one-man campaign against the English empire"), but he clearly felt deeply invested in the cause himself by 1946.¹⁶

Weill's score for *A Flag is Born* borrows often from his 1937 opera *The Eternal Road*, itself (as indicated by its title) a dramatic meditation on the legacy of diaspora.¹⁷ But far from merely duplicating musical material, *A Flag is Born* engages with the earlier work as an intertext, both musically and dramaturgically.¹⁸ In the opera's expressionistic, time-traveling structure, modern Jews of an unnamed European land take shelter on the eve of a pogrom in a synagogue, where they recount (and the opera enacts) the history of their people from the Patriarchs and early Israelites up through the destruction of Solomon's Temple—a traditional origin point of the historical Jewish Diaspora. (Librettist Franz Werfel frames the narrative as taking place in the "timeless community of Israel" during "timeless night of Israel's persecution.")¹⁹ In the opera's finale, past and present converge in a double-expulsion, when the Babylonian sacking of the temple coincides with the arrival of the dreaded pogrom for the modern synagogue inhabitants. As originally staged by Max Reinhardt on multiple stage platforms, the scene "culminat[ed] in the procession of the biblical characters along the 'eternal

¹⁶ Weill to Maxwell and Mab Anderson, 22 June 1947, Kurt Weill Foundation.

¹⁷ Only disconnected fragments of Weill's *A Flag is Born* score survive. (And unlike *Fun to be Free* and *We Will Never Die*, it was never recorded or broadcast on radio.) Piano arrangements for four of the nearly thirty music cues are collected at the Library of Congress Music Division. In 1999, fragments of orchestral parts for twenty-one of the cues were discovered at the Jabotinsky Institute in Tel Aviv. See Christian Kuhnt, "Approaching the Music for *A Flag Is Born*." *Kurt Weill Newsletter*, 20, no.1 (Spring 2002): 10. Further clues are provided in Luther Adler's production script at the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, in which all music cues are marked. For musical analysis of the extant texts see Kuhnt, "Approaching the Music," as well as Kuhnt, *Kurt Weill*, 156-172; and Drew, *Kurt Weill*, 356.

¹⁸ Because Weill was in the midst of composing his large-scale musical *Street Scene* during *A Flag is Born*, many (like Drew) assume he devoted only minimal attention to the latter and hence the extensive copying from *Eternal Road*. But while Weill delegated many re-arrangements of the pre-existing music to Isaac Van Grove (who had conducted *Eternal Road*), he personally supervised orchestral rehearsals on 2 and 3 September 1946 (according to his diary) and, at the 5 September final dress rehearsal, sat "in the front row, listening and advising as musicians rehearsed in the pit." "Previewers Praise Hecht's 'Flag is Born,'" unidentified newspaper clipping, 6 September 1946, Kurt Weill Foundation. Also see Kurt Weill's 1946 journal at Kurt Weill Foundation.

¹⁹ Werfel, *The Eternal Road*, ix.

road' that connected the five stages, joined by the procession of the expelled European Jews up the 'heavenly staircase' atop the fifth stage."²⁰

Weill begins *A Flag is Born* literally where *The Eternal Road* left off, with the music that that underscored the Temple's destruction.²¹ The overture then segues into two more excerpts from the opera: Rachel's lament for the destruction of the Temple and King David's *Kol Nidre* prayer.²² When Tevya and Zelda enter at the opening of *A Flag is Born*, seeking Palestine amidst the rubble, the music suggests they are at the end of that same "eternal road," but arriving by way of Treblinka. "The Road of Promise" (*Der Weg der Verheissung*) was Werfel's original title for the opera, and while the "heaven" to which the opera's characters ascend may have been imagined by its Zionist producers as a Jewish homeland, by 1946 that "promise" seemed at risk of evaporating. By taking up this journey once again, Hecht and Weill offer *A Flag is Born* as a kind of sequel to *The Eternal Road*, updating it to take into account tragic events the opera did not foresee.

The Death of Tevya

The burdens of diaspora are borne on stage in *A Flag is Born* by camp survivors Tevya and Zelda, Polish Jews who speak a markedly Yiddish-inflected dialogue.²³ Hecht's stage directions even say that Zelda's "fifty-five years have the look of fifty-five centuries," close to the approximately 5700 years of the Jewish calendar; not only do these characters embody the recent European experience, but the whole history of the Jewish people up to this point. It is no

²⁰ Neil W. Levin, "Program Notes," *Kurt Weill: The Eternal Road (Highlights)*, Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, Naxos CD, 2003, 12.

²¹ Kuhnt, "Approaching the Music," 8.

²² Weill also featured these selections in his *We Will Never Die* overture (see chapter 3), establishing that work as yet another intertext in its use of these *Eternal Road* motifs to mourn the victims of the Holocaust.

²³ Tevya refers to being from the Polish town of Dubinky (7).

coincidence, then, that they find themselves in a cemetery, for even though they still aspire to get to Palestine, the graveyard is their own. As Hecht stated outright in a draft of the play, “Here lie the dead Jews of Europe.”²⁴

The name Tevya itself refers back to an emblematic figure of diaspora culture and one of the most beloved characters in modern Jewish literature: Sholem Aleichem’s Tevya the Dairyman.²⁵ The seven stories Aleichem published about this country milkman between 1895 and 1914 were enormously popular throughout the Yiddish-speaking world, if not yet in English. Before the character became popularized in America as the jovial father figure of the 1964 Aleichem-inspired musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, wartime Jewish audiences would have recognized in him not just the nostalgic but also the tragic connotations of the “wandering Jew.”²⁶ A popular 1943 English-language study, Maurice Samuel’s *The World of Sholem Aleichem*, anticipates *A Flag is Born*’s use of that geography, characterizing it as “a world that is no more” now that “the fiery harrow of two world wars have passed closely across its soil.”²⁷ (Samuel adds that writing about Tevya and his compatriots in 1943 is like “an exercise in necromancy, or calling up of the dead.”) Nor was Tevya perceived as being oblivious to his own demise. According to Seth Wolitz, the character in Aleichem’s stories “attempts to defend a

²⁴ “A Flag is Born” typescript, 65, Ben Hecht Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago. Hecht initially wanted these words to appear over the stage as a giant epitaph at the very end of the play, alongside the finale’s triumphal singing and military display, writing in the stage directions: “The tombstone is growing. It grows higher and wider until it stands looming like a tower. Across its face are written the words: ‘Here Lie the Dead Jews of Europe.’”

²⁵ The spelling “Tevye” was popularized by *Fiddler on the Roof*, the 1964 Broadway musical adaptation of Aleichem’s stories. However, “Tevya” and “Tevyeh” were both equally common transliterations from Yiddish in U.S. publications of the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Most pertinent to Hecht, perhaps, was Maurice Schwartz’s use of “Tevya” in advertising both his stage and screen adaptations of Aleichem’s play. For the sake of continuity with Hecht’s text, I have chosen to retain his spelling even when discussing the character in other contexts.

²⁶ “[F]or Sholem Aleichem, Tevye represents a tragic figure clinging to Jewish tradition in a changing Russia, while in *Fiddler* Tevye is a transitional figure, foreshadowing the ‘Americanization’ of the Jews in the post-World War II United States.” Bial, *Acting Jewish*, 72-73.

²⁷ Maurice Samuel, *The World of Sholem Aleichem* (New York: Schocken Books, 1943), 3. “Tevye emerged from Maurice Samuel’s analysis as a folk icon, the last embodiment of the rural, intrepid Eastern European Jew.” Seth Wolitz, “The Americanization of Tevye or Boarding the Jewish Mayflower,” *American Quarterly* 40, no.4 (December 1988): 523.

world he believes in but cannot protect, leaving him bitter and isolated”; and in the series’ final story (called “Get Thee Out”), “anti-Semitism and the order of expulsion force the worn-out Tevye to relinquish his homestead and become one more Jewish wanderer of the age.”²⁸ While the “Tevye” of *Fiddler on the Roof* is last seen bound for Ellis Island, in Aleichem he remains a Zionist at heart, too pious to assimilate to American ways.

While *A Flag is Born* offers no explicit allusion to Aleichem’s stories, Hecht clearly knew them and was a great admirer of the author. According to Bergson associate Yitshaq Ben-Ami, “no one could have been happier than Hecht when he discovered the stories of Sholem Aleichem,” and in a 1941 tribute written for *PM*, he singled out “the immortal Tevya” as a favorite character.²⁹ The playwright may have been directly inspired to borrow the character for *A Flag is Born* after reading a new translation of Aleichem stories (*The Old Country*) that he reviewed for the *New York Times* on 7 July 1946, precisely the time that the play was germinating.³⁰ The beginning of his review reads like a rough draft of the Speaker’s opening narration to his play:

“The Old Country,” a collection of Sholem Aleichem’s tales, is more than a book. It is the epitaph of a vanished people. The salty and hilarious folk of whom it tells—the Jews of Europe—are dead. All the Tevyas whose souls and sayings, whose bizarre and tender antics Sholem Aleichem immortalized in the richest Yiddish prose ever written—were massacred, six million strong, by the Germans. And all the quaint and heart-warming villages in which the Jews of Europe lived are no longer on the map.³¹

So essential is Aleichem’s veritable folk hero to the allegory of *A Flag is Born* that Hecht may as well have called his play, “The Death of Tevya.”

²⁸ Wolitz, “The Americanization of Tevye,” 516, 519.

²⁹ Ben-Ami, *Years of Wrath*, 284; Hecht, *1001 Afternoons in New York*, 49-52. Hecht’s article on Aleichem (“How Do You Do?”) originally appeared in *PM* on 12 May 1941.

³⁰ Kuhnt surmises (based on Weill’s diary) that Hecht and Weill’s first meeting to discuss the *Flag is Born* score was on July 13, one week later after this review was published. Kuhnt, *Kurt Weill*, 159.

³¹ Ben Hecht, “Tales of Capering, Rueful Laughter,” *New York Times*, 7 July 1946.

Hecht's use of Tevya conjures up ghosts of another "disappearing world," as well—the culture of the Yiddish Theatre. Ever since Aleichem himself adapted the stories into a play that premiered in New York in 1919, the character was just as pervasive on stage as he was in literature.³² It was revived regularly over the next two decades and, in 1939, famed actor-manager Maurice Schwartz (who had performed the stage premiere) produced and starred in a widely released Yiddish-language film version.³³ But by the late forties, Yiddish Theatre was going the way of Tevya himself.³⁴ When Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theatre closed in 1950, it was one of the last surviving companies on New York's Second Avenue, what was once "the Yiddish Broadway." Not only was the Eastern European Jewish culture from which the artform came now extinguished, but the Yiddish language even in New York was disappearing as the original immigrant generation passed on and their children (and grandchildren) increasingly took to English as their new *mamaloshen*.

In *A Flag is Born* Hecht uses the form and conventions of the Yiddish Theatre as a theatrical analog to the dying culture of the Jewish diaspora at large.³⁵ This was signaled in part by the casting of many famous Second Avenue performers in the lead roles. Tevya, for instance, was played by none other than Paul Muni, the American Yiddish stage's most famous alumnus. As the play's program reminded audiences: "Long before Broadway began to cheer Paul Muni,

³² Aleichem had barely completed his dramatization, *Tevye the Dairyman: A Family Portrait in Five Scenes*, at the time of his death in 1916. His son-in-law, Y.D. Berkovitch, adapted the manuscript for Maurice Schwartz's 1919 stage premiere. Paul Muni, when he acted with Schwartz's company in the 1920s, appeared in at least one revival of the play. For a detailed history of that and subsequent Tevya stage adaptations see Jacob Weitzner, *Sholem Aleichem in the Theater* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), 74-111.

³³ For a reading of Schwartz's film, *Tevya*, against the political backdrop of the coming war in 1939, see J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), 307-309.

³⁴ "The year 1945 might be considered the symbolic end of large-scale Yiddish theater in America. For decades New York's Yiddish theatrical world centered on the Cafe Royale on Second Avenue and Twelfth Street, next door to the Yiddish Art Theater. . . .But in 1945 it served its last cup of tea." Hasia R. Diner, *Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 282.

³⁵ Hecht's familiarity with the Yiddish Theatre stemmed from his childhood. Born in New York City in 1894, he writes in his memoir that he routinely, as a young child, "met the great Yiddish actors of the day" at an aunt's house. Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, 100.

the name of Muni Weisenfreund was a familiar one to Second Avenue audiences. For eighteen years his world was the Yiddish-language theatre of New York.”³⁶ Similarly, on the next page, director Luther Adler is identified as “the son of the late Jacob P. Adler, founder of the Yiddish stage in America.” Playing Zelda was Celia Adler (daughter of Jacob by a different marriage), who is hailed as not only “the reigning member of the Royal Family of the Yiddish Theatre,” but also its “First Lady.” (Before *Flag* she had appeared in only two English-speaking stage roles in her entire career.) Many reviewers made note of these lineages, as well: from the complementary (“Paul Muni gave an ardent downtown performance,” said the *New York Journal American*) to the critical (Celia Adler acted in “a broader style of the older Yiddish persuasion,” according to the *Chicago Tribune*).³⁷ These connections were further reinforced when, after Muni’s four-week contract expired, Luther Adler himself stepped into the role of Tevya.³⁸ For the national tour, Adler turned the part over to yet another Second Avenue icon, Jacob Ben-Ami—thereby offering the audience two lead actors whose careers had almost entirely been in Yiddish Theatre.³⁹ So obvious were the Yiddish Theatre connections to one critic that he felt it imperative to point out to readers that the play “is, of course, in English.”⁴⁰

The character of Tevya’s wife Zelda provided another direct link to the Yiddish Theatre tradition. (Hecht even initially named her Goldie, after the Aleichem character.)⁴¹ Celia Adler’s performance was, by many accounts, as “downtown” in style as Muni’s, especially when she

³⁶ *A Flag is Born* Souvenir Program, 3. Kurt Weill Foundation, New York.

³⁷ Robert Garland, “‘A Flag is Born’ Premieres at Alvin Theatre,” *New York Journal-American*, 7 September 1946; Claudia Cassidy, “‘Lute Song’ Returning to Studebaker on Jan. 22,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 January 1947.

³⁸ Fittingly, Luther Adler also played Tevye later on Broadway in *Fiddler on the Roof*, replacing Zero Mostel in 1965.

³⁹ Jacob Ben-Ami also acted for Hecht as the Rabbi in *We Will Never Die*. After his American tour of *A Flag is Born*, Ben-Ami then performed the play (in Yiddish) in Buenos Aires, where he acted regularly for one of the world’s last sizeable Yiddish-speaking audiences.

⁴⁰ Sidney J. Harris, “‘A Flag is Born’ Aims at a Nation’s Heart,” *Chicago Daily News*, 27 December 1946.

⁴¹ The name change appears to have been a very late revision. “Goldie” persists through all three typescript drafts of the play in Hecht’s Newberry Library papers, as well as in Luther Adler’s production typescript at the Billy Rose Theater Collection. In Adler’s script, each instance of the name is corrected by hand.

channeled the form's sentimental strain in a scene that interpolated the famous lullaby "Rozhinkes mit Mandlen" ("Raisins and Almonds"), a perennial favorite of the Second Avenue stage ever since Abraham Goldfaden wrote it for his operetta *Shulamith* in 1881.⁴² Nibbling whatever scraps of stale bread she and Tevya have left, Zelda has a flashback to Friday *shabbos* dinners with her now-dead children. "Glowing with memories," Hecht tells us, she envisions her five children before her and begins talking to them (19). When she hears her youngest crying, she is completely lost in her memories, amid the stark reality of the graveyard, and "for several moments the stage is motionless as Zelda sits singing and rocking and looking into the lighted place in front of her" (20).⁴³ Zelda's singing of this beloved melody to her (now dead) baby exploits the great sentimental appeal of the Yiddish Theatre to American Jewish audiences—an appeal that could only have been heightened by the presence in the role of Celia Adler, whose most famous Yiddish film (*Where is my Child?*) cemented her persona in the genre as a forlorn mother.

"Homesickness," writes Nahma Sandrow, "was a recurrent theme" in the Yiddish Theatre, especially via music.⁴⁴ The lilting minor-key melody of "Raisins and Almonds" must have made for a moment of great pathos and nostalgia in its longing for happier times. But the play had already worked to disenchant any notion of an idealized "old country" by framing its story with the harsh diaspora-negation of its opening. By framing Zelda's reminiscence not as a

⁴² "Goldfaden's 'Rozhinkes mit Mandlen' (Raisins and Almonds) quickly usurped 'Unter dem Kind's Vigele' as a favorite lullaby and achieved the ultimate (backhanded) compliment of being widely regarded as a folk song." Marsha Bryan Edelman, *Discovering Jewish Music* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 105.

⁴³ Luther Adler's production script reveals how music was used to maximize emotional effect in this moment. Originally a "Music Cue 13" was planned, presumably accompanying Zelda's singing of "Raisins and Almonds." But it is crossed out and "Goldie's unaccompanied song" written in its place—indicating Celia Adler sang it a cappella. (Luther Adler papers, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.) Hecht's earlier draft had already stipulated in stage directions that after she is done, "She rocks gently back and forth as the old song trails from her memory. The orchestra takes up the lullaby." "A Flag is Born" typescript, Ben Hecht Papers.

⁴⁴ Nahma Sandrow, "Yiddish Theater and American Theater," in *From Hester Street to Hollywood: The Jewish-American Stage and Screen*, ed. Sarah Blacher Cohen (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), 22.

fond flashback, but as a desperate delusion (the stage directions say that “her mind has grown vague” and her suddenly “strong voice...belongs to another long ago”), Hecht never lets the audience forget that they can’t go “home” again (19). As he does repeatedly throughout the play, Hecht resurrects the Yiddish Theatre form only to undo it.

Past as Present

Tevya’s “flashbacks” to scenes from the Hebrew Bible reference the Yiddish Theatre as well, since “reenactments of events out of Jewish history served to preserve and reinforce communal identity in the face of isolation and assimilation.”⁴⁵ They also recall *The Eternal Road* and other 1930s Zionist pageants produced by Meyer Weisgal.⁴⁶ In fact, both of the biblical episodes Hecht represents in the play (the battles of King Saul and the temple of King Solomon) also appear in *The Eternal Road*, indicating that Weill may have had a hand in suggesting such scenes, having already set similar ones to music. While Weisgal’s spectacles (beginning with 1932’s *Israel Reborn* and 1933’s *Romance of a People*) mounted grand tableaux of ancient glories as a “road of promise” for Zionist aspirations, Hecht’s less pious and more bellicose postwar pageantry in *A Flag is Born* reflects the catastrophic events of the years in between; more liberties are taken with scripture to emphasize modern parallels, and past and present interact more dynamically, allowing the beleaguered modern Jew to traverse time and space and learn directly from his forbearers—as if the past in Weisgal’s stagings was still too remote to

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ This similarity between *A Flag is Born* and *The Eternal Road* was noted by at least one major critic, George Jean Nathan, who, while disliking both works, recognized that, in *Flag*, Hecht “seeks to tell in terms of strident political propaganda much the same basic story which Franz Werfel told in the ill-fated *The Eternal Road* and which many writers have told before him, to wit, the story of the Wandering Jew. As in Werfel, he presents a people presently persecuted, disfranchised, and threatened with extinction and in their terror and bewilderment encouraged and given strength by the reassurances of the Old Testament, acted out on fancy platforms high above the stage.” George Jean Nathan, *The Theatre Book of the Year 1946-1947: A Record and Interpretation* (New York: Knopf, 1947), 55.

achieve the goal of efficacy. If in *The Eternal Road* past is prologue, in *A Flag is Born* it is the immediate present.

Thus while Saul is shown in *The Eternal Road* as cowardly and weak, as he is in the Bible, Hecht portrays him as a proto-Maccabee. The Philistines (whom he fights in the opera) are replaced by the Amonites, from whom Saul saves the villagers of Jabesh-Gilead; the narrative of aiding an endangered population against a tyrant not only parallels Hecht's view of the Palestine struggle, but also serves as an allegory for the appeasement debates of the 1930s. In the scene, three citizens of Jabesh-Gilead approach Saul and argue over whether or not to surrender to the enemy's demands: an "Old One" represents the most vulnerable of the Jewish inhabitants; a "Young One" in armor takes the militant stance of fighting and resisting; and, in between, stands a "Middle Aged One," "richly dressed" and full of excuses for why not to go to war (13). Echoing those in America and Europe who sought peace or neutrality with Hitler, this interpolated non-scriptural character of Hecht's argues that he and his brethren are "powerless against the enemy" who is a "great and powerful king," and that it is Saul "who will destroy Israel, not Nahash," if he does not capitulate. When the Young One reminds him the Amonites mean to enslave them, the Middle Aged One—"his voice unctuous and appeasing"—shrugs off the possibility:

Perhaps not slavery. Who knows? Perhaps we can make friends with the Amonite...do nothing to anger him...show how learned and law abiding we are...woo him by turning a kindly face to him. . . .Nahash the Amonite will take what he wants. But he is only a man. He cannot devour us. The quicker we surrender the less he will take away from us. (14)

In so closely echoing the early reassurances of prewar politicians and intellectuals—including some Jewish leaders—about a supposed gap between Hitler's rhetoric and intentions, Hecht disrupts the conventionally reverent nature of pageantry, reframing the biblical reenactment with

a disturbing contemporary parallel that suggests Jewish weakness and capitulation bore some responsibility for the Holocaust.⁴⁷

Another contrast between the staging of history in *The Eternal Road* and *A Flag is Born* is the degree of interaction between past and present. In the opera—as Reinhardt’s separate stage platforms indicated—the congregation of modern, besieged Jews could only look upon their great ancestors from afar. But in *Flag* the temporal boundaries are porous, with Tevya suddenly finding himself part of the biblical scene. (“Is that Tevya from Dubinky who speaks?” interjects King Saul himself, somewhat comically, when he overhears Tevya’s wondrous reaction to his speech.) King David appears as the youthful singer at Saul’s court (as he does in *The Eternal Road*), but he now sings a different text, Psalm 105, which recounts God’s bequeathing the Land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants. As sung to Tevya—not to Saul, as in the opera—these words (“And He gave them the fruits of their labor and the land of Israel in which to keep His laws”) take on the quality of a divine command to both the character and the audience to fulfill the Psalm’s prophecy (18).

In Tevya’s next vision, King Solomon offers even more direct instructions. Beholding the marvels of Solomon’s Temple (also celebrated in *The Eternal Road*), Tevya finds himself recognized and hailed by yet another king, who asks him about his grievance. When he tells the king he and his people have been “scattered . . . from our house” and left to build new houses in lands that did not want them, Solomon decrees: “My judgment is that you return to your own house” (28). Asked whom his complaint is against, Tevya can only say, “the WORLD,” to which Solomon answers: “This is my judgment, Tevya—go to the world, speak to it, be not afraid of its

⁴⁷ Hecht was particularly incensed to learn of the efforts of certain Jewish Councils during the war that attempted to negotiate with Nazi occupiers, but to no avail. He returned to this subject in a controversial 1961 book, *Perfidy*, a polemic against the Israeli government’s role in the 1950s Kastner trial, which he denounced as a whitewashing of what he considered collaboration with the enemy.

mighty councils. For in you is my own wisdom” (27, 29). This command sends Tevya, via the play’s fantastic and freeform dramaturgy, directly to the “Council of the Mighty,” Hecht’s stand-in for the United Nations.

Solomon also functions in the play as a physically revitalizing force for the old and frail Tevya. Entering with an ensemble of “sandled women, garlanded and lovely,” who “dance slowly,” he sings lines from the erotic scriptural poem, the Song of Solomon (24). While on the surface the scene may seem a show-business digression (a “production number” replete with “chorus girls”), it recalls how this text has been interpreted throughout Jewish history as a paean to the love between God and Israel, as well as that between man and woman.⁴⁸ In the play King Saul has already announced this theme in his call to battle: “Out of the whole world we have married only this land—and it is our bride. . . .[A] stranger has come for our bride—the fair Hebrew bride of Israel. . . .who wishes to despoil her and use her basely” (16). And in describing Tevya’s reaction to Solomon’s Temple, the Speaker frames the character’s journey as one in search of a “manhood” that models itself on the ancient Kings of Israel:

The inner eyes of the ghetto Jew of Europe were not for seeing God only but for looking on his own manhood. This is Tevya’s last secret in the graveyard—that he dreams of the glory of being a man. His soul has not accepted the lower levels designed for it by the hate and villainy of a world. It will not bow to contempt or murder. Condemned to survive as human rubbish, it will lift itself up out of the dust and move bewilderedly toward its destiny—manhood. Such is the reason of Tevya’s journey to Palestine. There his manhood lies. (23)

The modern-day “terrorist” soldiers who take the stage at the end of the play put the sentiment even more directly: “Saul and the Maccabees live again in Palestine. Their strong arms are bared again. . . . The manhood the world took from us roars again in Palestine” (47).

⁴⁸ “The motif of the Jew as bridegroom and the Land of Israel as bride is common in ancient writings, as well as in modern literature and Zionist slogans.” Amos Oz, *The Silence of Heaven: Agnon’s Fear of God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 104.

“The Council of the Mighty”

As if possessed by the spirit of Solomon himself (“In you, Tevya, is the tongue of greatness, the tongue that fashioned the eternal words of justice” [29]), Tevya is transported to a more contemporary seat of power, the far less splendid “Council of the Mighty.”⁴⁹ While the U.N. had been founded (just barely a year before the play) with a lofty mission of peace-keeping and human rights, Hecht’s portrayal of its diplomats as petty, elitist bureaucrats moves *A Flag Is Born* into yet another theatrical mode: political satire.

In its ruthless ridiculing of the U.N. Security Council, the scene hearkens back to earlier Popular Front satires of the warmongering, imperialist “Great Powers,” such as the “Four Little Angels of Peace” song from *Pins and Needles*.⁵⁰ Indeed the tone here is set musically, with the stage directions calling for “a medley of satyrically [sic] patriotic themes—‘The Punishment To Fit the Crime,’ ‘Give My Regards to Broadway,’ ‘The Marseillaise,’ the ‘Russian March,’ etc.” (29). (The Mikado reference resonated with one critic, who praised the scene’s “bitter Gilbert and Sullivan irony.”)⁵¹ In his lead-in to the scene, Weill’s sardonic musical *gestus* (which made for a deliberately abrupt transition out of ancient Israel) hearkens back not to *The Eternal Road* but his first American work, the 1936 antiwar satire *Johnny Johnson*, a score that also travestied the pomp of national anthems.⁵² So jarring was the tonal shift into the scene that one critic lamented that after the “profoundly moving” Saul and Solomon scenes, “suddenly Mr. Hecht

⁴⁹ By the time of the play, the real United Nations had not yet become as involved with Palestine’s future as they would the following year, 1947, when Great Britain delegated the problem to them, leading to an investigating commission and, finally, the “partition” vote of November 1947, which called for separate Jewish and Arab states—a plan abandoned by the time of England’s departure from Palestine and the proclamation of Israeli independence in May 1948.

⁵⁰ Hecht’s “Council” is comprised of representatives from Britain, the United States, France, and Russia, mirroring the first U.N. Security Council, except in its omission of China.

⁵¹ Claudia Cassidy, “On the Aisle,” 27 December 1946. Cassidy also tellingly compares the U.N. scene to two contemporary modern dance works of antiwar satire: Kurt Joos’ “The Green Table” (1932) and Michel Fokine’s “The Russian Soldier” (1942).

⁵² See Weill’s scoring in *Johnny Johnson* of the numbers “The Allied High Command” and “The Laughing Generals” at the beginning of act 2.

descends to sarcastic invective, and ‘A Flag is Born’ turns into hysterical anti-British propaganda with a cynical court of diplomats.”⁵³ The music anticipates the scene’s almost “flippant” and “burlesque” characterization of world leaders (those who hold the fate of the Jews in their hands) as grotesque buffoons.⁵⁴

The scene situates *A Flag is Born* as an anti-imperialist as well as Zionist project—at a moment when those two agendas converged. The “politics of antifascist and anti-imperialist solidarity” had always been one of the pillars of the Popular Front.⁵⁵ Opposition to the British Empire on the left, however, had long been complicated by England’s wartime alliance with antifascists against Nazi Germany. Now, with the war over, Hecht revives popular stereotypes of British Imperial haughtiness; the English delegates dismiss Tevya as an “illegal interloper” (32) guilty of a “breach of international courtesy” (31). Their unvarnished racism and anti-Semitism are also on display when they accuse this “bold and mocking Semite” (35) of “oriental evasion” and Jews in general of “always push[ing] themselves to the head of the line” (31). For Hecht the British are not only the new enemy, but the new Germany; when Tevya tries to engage the Council in debate about Palestine, the “English Statesman” refuses even to recognize him because “we’re at war with the Jews.” Tevya fires back with jarringly impolitic sarcasm:

TEVYA. Excuse me—but I would like to ask what you are doing here, sitting in a front seat! You Germans were already defeated. So what is Germany doing in a front seat again?

ENGLISH STATESMAN. I am not Germany. I am England.

TEVYA. England! England is having a war with the Jews! Who can believe such a thing!
(34)

When the Englishman accuses Jews in Palestine of “tak[ing] up arms against British law and order,” Tevya retorts: “Is it the law and order left over by Buchenwald and Dachau, maybe?”

⁵³ Cyrus Durgan, “The Stage,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 19 February 1947.

⁵⁴ William Hawkins, “Hecht’s ‘A Flag is Born’ Moving Plea for Jews,” *New York World-Telegram*, 7 September 1946

⁵⁵ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 9.

(35).⁵⁶ Such conflation of wartime Germany and postwar England—in the name of an occupied people—merge the antifascist and anti-imperialist discourses of prewar progressive politics.

In contrast to the imperial or, at best, amoral bureaucrats upstage of him (the American Statesman comes off as the most well intentioned), Tevya emerges as the only noble “statesman” in the room. The eloquent three-page oration that he finally convinces the men to let him deliver provides Hecht with an unfiltered platform for his polemic through direct address to the audience. But in the persona of Paul Muni, the moment also recalled the numerous “closing arguments” the actor had given in many Warner Brothers social conscience films of the thirties, most notably his final courtroom summation in defense of Alfred Dreyfus in *The Life of Emil Zola*.⁵⁷ While some critics complained of the patently propagandistic technique of having Muni effectively step outside the frame of the play, to exploit the stage as “the Hebrew’s only parliament” was Hecht’s expressed intention.

The delegates’ initial favorable response to Tevya’s speech suggests that he has won the day, but satire brings the proceedings back to “reality” when they then bicker over protocol and only agree to postpone the Palestine question to next meeting’s “agenda”—a word that mocks Tevya with its dismissiveness. It was, after all, a long series of well-intentioned “agendas” and diplomatic conferences that failed to save the Jews during the war and now continued to impede action in Palestine. “Each Statesman in turn repeats ‘agenda’ to the next and begins to chuckle,” leaving Tevya alone on stage crying “No, No! An agenda again!” as the scene dissolves back into the graveyard (42). Having abandoned the Jews before to an “agenda” at countless

⁵⁶ The subsequent lines target imperialism even more directly: “ENGLISH STATESMAN: It is the law and order of the British Empire that prohibits the entrance into Palestine of refugee Jews from Europe. The Jews of Palestine have broken that law.” “TEVYA: If somebody makes a law against humanity—who is the law breaker?” (35).

⁵⁷ Appropriately, Muni’s final stage role would be as the Clarence Darrow-modeled attorney in Lawrence and Lee’s 1955 courtroom drama *Inherit the Wind*, in which he gave another climactic peroration, this time an anti-McCarthyist defense of freedom of speech.

conferences during the tragedy of the Holocaust, history has now repeated itself, as Marx would have it, as farce.⁵⁸

The Zionist as Proletarian Hero

Tevya's "day in court" ultimately fails, we learn, because Jews cannot rely on others to address their problems and must take their future into their own hands. Tevya will not live long enough to heed that lesson, but it will be taken up by the other survivor he has met along the way, the nihilistic youth, David—a character unlike any Jewish persona American audiences (or at least non-Yiddish speaking audiences) had yet seen in 1946. Unlike the "sheenie," he was robust and fearless; unlike a Shylock or Svengali, he was strong, but without guile or evil; and unlike a kindly old *shtetl* sage (like Tevya), he was righteous, merciless and rebellious.⁵⁹ "Muscular Judaism," the half-century old Zionist project to transform the perception of Jewish identity, had finally come to Broadway—and in the person, no less, of a young unknown actor who was about to redefine masculinity in American popular culture at large, Marlon Brando.

If Tevya and Zelda embody the decline of life in the diaspora, then David exudes the physical renewal promised by Zionism. He is first seen rising, Golem-like, from the dirt of the graveyard, and while he has only been resting, the sight is enough to frighten Tevya and Zelda into asking if he is a ghost (6-7). While the older couple have been depleted by Treblinka, David

⁵⁸ The "Council of the Mighty" scene is also the only time the play addresses the Jewish-Arab relationship that would become the next violent struggle for Palestine. It only comes up because of the British claim that they were staying in Palestine in order to protect the Arab population. Tevya's rebuttal is to accuse England of only feigning concern and to assert solidarity with the Arabs against their common imperialist enemy: "[Y]ou don't want to do wrong by the Arabs? Since when does England worry about doing wrong to people whose land it steals? And who would treat the Arabs better, Jews who are their brothers, or Englishmen who are their masters?" (39). This conciliatory tone echoed the Bergson group's call for a "secular" democratic state for both peoples. As the future *Likud* party, however, the Revisionist Zionists would soon become the most bellicose Israeli party concerning Palestinian Arabs.

⁵⁹ For a history of anti-Semitic "stage Jew" types, see Harley Erdman, *Staging the Jew: The Performance of an American Ethnicity, 1860-1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

is radicalized. Exemplifying Peter Bergson’s motto, “action, not pity,” he casts a ruthlessly unsentimental eye on his own trauma. Recalling those he watched die in the camps, he mocks their desperate prayers and holds God responsible for their suffering:

YOUTH [i.e., David]. . . I heard you praying before. I don’t like to hear a man praying. I heard prayers in Treblinka.

ZELDA. (*wailing*) Treblinka! Treblinka...Ai—my sons and daughters—

YOUTH. (*coldly*) Did they die in Treblinka, mama? (Zelda and Tevya cover their faces with their hands) Maybe I saw them. I saw a million Jews die. I used to hide in a tree at night and count them—when they were walking naked—two by two—to the furnaces. And praying. (*His voice grows mocking as he chants the prayer.*) Shmai Yisrael, Adonai Elahanu—(*Tevya picks up the prayer and continues it, mumbling the words. Zelda holds her hands over her face. The youth listens to Tevya for a moment and then continues coldly.*) My father’s God suffered a great misfortune. The earth was His face—but vermin overran it and ate out its eyes, so He couldn’t see. One doesn’t pray to such a God. One pities Him. And tries to forget Him—like a poor relation. (7-8)

In contrast to Tevya and Zelda’s “wailing” piety, David’s cynical outlook sounds blasphemous.

But it is not his lack of faith that marks him as a radical as much as his refusal to accept suffering as a given for the Jewish people.

The tension between David and his elders in the play is not only religious and generational but also dramaturgical. While Tevya and Zelda appear to have come straight from a Sholem Aleichem play on Second Avenue, David—a “gaunt and grim” eighteen-year-old in “dungarees, a black turtle-necked sweater, a torn cap and shoes”—recalls the proletarian hero of thirties agitprop (6).⁶⁰ “Agitating” is indeed his main function in the play, whether it is goading Tevya and Zelda out of their pious submission or provoking the audience to ponder its own culpability in the characters’ predicament. No subject could have been more sensitive (or even taboo) in postwar Jewish-American culture than the question of whether American Jews could

⁶⁰ Tellingly, Weill’s leitmotif underscoring the character’s key moments is labeled “Partisan Theme”—the word “partisan” appearing nowhere in the play, but linking the character to antifascist resistance fighters of the thirties and forties.

have done more to stop the Holocaust—and yet, halfway through the play, David stops the action, marches downstage and accuses his audience of exactly that.

The force of its confrontational staging made this speech one of the most controversial—and effective—moments in the play. The element of disruption was heightened in performance by directly following Zelda’s sentimental Yiddish Theatre-styled singing of “Raisins and Almonds” with a sudden change in modes from melancholic empathy to stark alienation.⁶¹ As Zelda’s singing fades, David suddenly “rises and turns away from them,” Hecht writes, and “raises his face and remains looking wildly into the night that is over the audience” (20). The framing of the monologue being delivered “into the night” notwithstanding, the very first words reveal a very clear and specific use of second-person address:⁶²

Where were you—Jews? Where were you when the killing was going on? When the six million were being burned and buried alive in the lime pits, where were you? Where was your voice crying out against the slaughter? We didn’t hear any voice. There was no voice. You Jews of America! You Jews of England! Strong Jews, rich Jews, high-up Jews; Jews of power and genius! Where was your cry of rage that could have filled the world and stopped the fires? Nowhere! Because you were ashamed to cry out as Jews. (20-21)

The moment was apparently so charged that some nights, according to Brando, “Jewish girls got out of their seats and screamed and cried from the aisles out of sadness.”⁶³ One spectator recalled, “The whole audience sort of rose up en masse. You could feel them reacting.”⁶⁴ Not all reactions were affirmative, however; at one performance, after Brando asked, “Where were you, Jews?” an older woman in the audience yelled back, “Where were *you*?” On such occasions, the “agitation” aspect of this agitprop gesture became evident—opposition did not refute the actor’s

⁶¹ Citron reads this moment as a Brechtian alienation effect: “The shift from the sentimental, melancholy flashback to the direct, angry accusation was abrupt and violent.... It was important, however, that the spectators who had wept during Zelda’s vision were softened, disarmed and absolutely vulnerable. David’s furious speech, coming out of nowhere, exploited that vulnerability.” Citron, “Ben Hecht’s Pageant-Drama,” 87.

⁶² Since Hecht’s mention of David addressing “the night” is only in the stage directions, an audience in the theatre might not have been aware of any naturalistic context for the speech.

⁶³ Marlon Brando and Robert Lindsey, *Songs My Mother Taught Me* (New York: Random House, 1994), 108.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Peter Manso, *Brando: The Biography* (New York: Hyperion, 1994), 185.

speech but actually reinforced its political potency through the breaking down of the fourth wall. Such a direct address, call-and-response interaction between an actor and a “rising en masse” audience might have recalled, for some, another famous Broadway agitprop moment a generation earlier—the final call of “Strike!” from Odets’s 1935 *Waiting for Lefty*, a play Luther Adler had acted in and which was a watershed production in the history of the Group Theatre.

Considering that the play was to solicit donations from these same spectators after the curtain came down, David’s speech certainly risked destabilizing the actor-audience dynamic. Most potentially incendiary was its challenging of the ethics of assimilation, getting to the heart of the postwar debate over Jewish-American identity. Throughout the war years, Hecht repeatedly clashed with Jewish colleagues over how outspoken to be in their activism about their own Jewishness; he considered any reluctance to speak out “as Jews” a cowardly stance that would only weaken the cause. By war’s end he felt vindicated (by the failure of such caution to save the Jews) and continued this controversial line of attack. By 1946, more American Jews may have been ready for such challenging questions, and the resulting moral crisis ended up helping Zionism gain ground in the U.S. As Steven Rosenthal writes, “The war and the horror of the Holocaust transformed American Jews’ relationship to Zionism. A Jewish state could provide a haven for survivors, help assuage American Jews’ guilt at their failure to save European Jewry, and provide a powerful counterweight to the image of Jewish passivity.”⁶⁵ The fact that many did still donate in large numbers after the performance indicated that at least some Jewish audiences were not driven away by David’s challenge, but, if anything, spurred to action by it, perhaps out of a desire to right past wrongs.

⁶⁵Rosenthal, “Long-Distance Nationalism,” 211. He adds: “American Jews now embraced the idea of a Jewish state en masse and acted with an unprecedented communal self-assertiveness.”

The play's final scene combines a multitude of agitprop techniques with a more mystical evocation of Jewish ritual and symbolism. When Tevya wakes up from his United Nations dream, he finds himself back in the graveyard and realizes that Zelda has died. Tevya says the Kaddish prayer for her—an action that doubly serves on stage as a speech act memorializing all the Jewish dead of the war.⁶⁶ But in addition to a lament, it is also a catalyst for action; Kaddish must be said for that world that has disappeared before it can finally be abandoned, and before anyone in the play can complete the journey to Palestine. A moment of historical transformation is at hand.

Tevya himself will not make it to Palestine, however.⁶⁷ Beckoned by David to continue with their journey, he is summoned by an “Angel of Death.” His death initially has a deadening effect upon David, who now finds himself alone. “You—World,” he inveighs, “who made a garbage pile of my people, you didn’t kill me. An oversight—to be corrected” (45). He takes out a knife, but before he can plunge it into his heart, he is stopped by three “Palestinian soldiers” beckoning him: “We’re waiting for you, David.”⁶⁸ The summoning of the angry but directionless David resembles the kind of “conversion” narrative that dominated much 1930s proletarian fiction, where an adrift protagonist is corralled by dire circumstances—and by his “comrades”—into an epiphany of new consciousness leading to direct action. The comrades in this case are not

⁶⁶ The Kaddish had also been intoned at the end of Hecht and Weill’s “mass memorial” *We Will Never Die*.

⁶⁷ Tevya (and Hecht) calls the angel by its Hebrew (and Yiddish) name, “*malchumuvis*.” An “Angel of Death” also appears in Weill’s *Eternal Road* calling Jacob and Moses to their deaths (suggesting another part of that score used in the play). In *A Flag is Born*, then, the angel effectively elevates “Tevya from Dubinky” to the status of Patriarch.

⁶⁸ At the soldier’s entrance, the script mentions a music cue of “martial music threaded with the Hatikva theme” (45). Two years after the play, in the fall of 1947, Weill wrote a setting of the “Hatikvah” anthem at the bequest of soon-to-be Israeli President Chaim Weitzmann. Given that Weill’s 1947 *Hatikvah* does in fact “thread” the traditional melody contrapuntally with original themes (including “martial” percussion and fanfares) perhaps Neil Levin is correct in speculating that the later piece may be “a recycled, if minimally tweaked or expanded, instrumental piece from *A Flag is Born*.” Neil Levin, liner notes, *In Celebration of Israel*, Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, Naxos CD, 2006.

just the three uniformed actors on stage, but countless others represented via the Epic Theatre practice of projected film, in this case documentary footage of actual Irgun troops.⁶⁹

David's full conversion to the cause at last is signified by his brandishing of the flag that gives the play its title. In constructing the symbol of the new Jewish state out of Tevya's worn *talis*, David merges old and new in a Hegelian synthesis that creates a new chapter in history. The gesture by which he does so bids farewell to that "disappeared world" while simultaneously carrying its legacy onto a new "road of promise." Hecht's closing stage directions read:

David turns to the dead Tevya. He takes the talis from him. He takes a blue star from his own pocket. He puts the star on the talis, cutting away the talis hinges with his knife. From beyond the lighted bridge comes a chorus of soldiers singing the Hatikvah—in the distance beyond the bridge.... David tacks his talis-flag to a branch. He pauses and through the singing he hears the sound of guns, distant guns growing louder. He looks at Tevya. David turns toward the shining bridge. Holding his flag high, he walks toward the light, the singing and the sound of guns. (48)

David's climactic awakening recalls thirties proletarian fiction, where so often, as Malcolm Cowley noted, "The older man dies for the cause, like John the Baptist, but the young hero takes over his faith and mission."⁷⁰ Perhaps this evocation is what Brooks Atkinson had in mind when he faulted the conclusion as "an episode of flag waving that, from the point of view of stage craftsmanship, comes straight out of the rummage basket."⁷¹

From Second Avenue to Actors Studio

Just as the meeting between Tevya and David in *A Flag is Born* is one of opposites, so was the one on stage between the two actors playing them: Paul Muni and Marlon Brando. Muni

⁶⁹ According to Atay Citron, during the scene, "Rows of soldiers [were] seen on a slide which is projected on the backdrop." Citron, "Pageantry and Theatre," 394. A *New York Post* reporter, visiting rehearsal, describes "phantom soldiers I saw projected from a 2,000-watt motor-driven machine to the back wall of the theatre." Harriet Johnson, "Heckled and Hectic Hecht: Elusive Noted Dramatist Difficult to Locate on 'Flag is Born' Set," *New York Post*, 29 August 1946.

⁷⁰ Malcolm Cowley, "While They Waited for Lefty," *Saturday Review*, 6 June 1964, 18.

⁷¹ Brooks Atkinson, "Drama: Craftsmanship," *The New York Times*, 15 September 1946.

was nearing the end of his career at the time, his film stardom having peaked by the late 1930s. (He would only appear in two more feature films after *Flag* before his death in 1967.) Brando, then twenty-two, had made his Broadway debut one year earlier, but was still one year away from his catapulting success in the 1947 premiere of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Even so, he had already made his mark with forceful performances in small roles; just six months before *Flag*, he received wide acclaim in Maxwell Anderson's *Truckline Cafe* for playing a disgruntled veteran who kills his wife out of traumatic rage.

Brando may not have been Jewish himself (although, given how unknown he was at the time, the audience had no reason to assume otherwise), but his casting in *Flag* was a direct result of his close relationship with his teacher, Stella Adler, and the Adler family, who, Brando felt, “virtually adopted me.”⁷² He would later write that despite being an outsider to the religion, he quickly took on the Zionist cause as his own:

I wanted to act in the play because of what we were beginning to learn about the true nature of the killing of the Jews and because of the empathy I felt for the Adlers. . . . In hindsight, I think it was also because I was starting what would become a journey to try to understand the human impulse that makes it not only possible but easy for one group of people to single out another and try to destroy it. . . . I was beginning to hear a voice in my head that said I had a responsibility to do something about it and that acting was not an important vocation in life when the world was still facing so many problems.⁷³

Considering how much he went on to publicly campaign throughout his career for the rights of African Americans and Native Americans, *Flag* effectively launched Brando as a late Popular Front actor-activist, very much in the mold of artists of the Depression-era “cultural front” such as the Adlers.

⁷² Brando and Lindsey, *Songs*, 98. Director Luther Adler considered Brando a natural choice for the role of David, given that the play was already becoming a family affair with Celia Adler playing Zelda and Stella working on the board for Bergson's committee. (Stella Adler would appear as the Speaker in the play's opening night performance in Philadelphia.) The Adlers were also responsible for Brando's *Truckline Cafe* role, since Stella's then-husband, Harold Clurman, directed.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 107, 100.

Brando's suitability for the role of David was due, however, less to his credibility as a Jewish hero than as a Popular Front proletarian hero in the mold of John Garfield. Just as Garfield, in the late thirties, had been hailed as the new Muni, now Brando was poised to become the next Garfield. (Likewise, Garfield would later, in retrospect, be described as the "first Brando.")⁷⁴ So natural was the comparison early in Brando's career that the two actors sometimes even seemed interchangeable. The role of working-class Polish-American Stanley Kowalski, for instance, was actually offered first to Garfield, whom the Broadway producer of *A Streetcar Named Desire* avidly pursued.⁷⁵ Around the same time, *Streetcar*'s director, Elia Kazan also wanted Garfield for his next film, *Gentleman's Agreement*, to play a Jewish-American veteran named (coincidentally) "Dave." Garfield did end up playing the role—his first ever onscreen performance as an expressly Jewish character—but when negotiations over his contract for the film stalled, Kazan asked Luther Adler to recommend other actors. He recommended Brando. Had Garfield not done the movie, Brando's film debut would have been in 1947 as a fighting Jew in uniform.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ "[Garfield] is generally considered to be the first "rebel" actor in film history; the one who opened the door for all the other cinematic anti-heroes to step through. Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, Steve McQueen, Paul Newman, Robert DeNiro and many others walked through that door." Robert Nott, *He Ran All the Way: The Life of John Garfield* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2003), xi. In a documentary about Garfield, actress Lee Grant calls him "the precursor to Brando and [James] Dean." *The John Garfield Story*, VHS, Turner Entertainment, 2003.

⁷⁵ See Sam Stagg, *When Blanche Met Brando: The Scandalous Story of A Streetcar Named Desire* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2006), 28-29. Garfield declined the role of Stanley Kowalski, reportedly due to disputes over contract terms.

⁷⁶ The Garfield comparison even extended to Brando's replacement in *A Flag is Born*, Sidney Lumet, whom reviewers described as "straight from the Group Theater school of acting" (by which was meant "tense, quick thrusting, sharply alert") and even as "a younger John Garfield." Claudia Cassidy, "'Lute Song Returning to Studebaker on Jan. 22,'" *Chicago Tribune*, 5 January 1947; Philip R. Davis, "A Lawyer on the Aisle," *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin*, undated clipping, Kurt Weill Foundation. Like Brando, Lumet had also grown up straddling the worlds of the Yiddish and Group Theatres; his father, Baruch Lumet, was a Second Avenue veteran, and Sidney himself appeared as a child actor in Group productions and in Weill's *The Eternal Road*. Beginning in the 1950s, directing first for television and then for film, Lumet would carry the legacy of both the Group's politics and its acting "method" into the second half of the twentieth century in a body of work that Michael Denning characterizes as "embodiments of Popular Front structure of feeling." Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 26.

Also linking Brando to the Jewish-American “cultural front” was the quality he would become most famous for: his acting technique. “Method acting from its inception,” argues Henry Bial in his study *Acting Jewish*, “has been a cultural process for which Jewish American artists can claim a birthright, much as African Americans can claim jazz music. Its arrival and subsequent level of acceptance in the United States coincides with their own.”⁷⁷ What came to be popularized after the war as “The Method” began with Group Theatre co-founder Lee Strasberg’s training of the company’s actors (including Luther and Stella Adler, as well as John Garfield) in his Stanislavsky-derived “system,” as he then called it.⁷⁸ Russian realism was not the Group’s only influence, though. While it was far from an all-Jewish company (and never self-identified as such), many of its leading figures had either firsthand experience performing with Yiddish companies (Strasberg, the Adlers, Morris Carnovsky) or grew up avidly attending them (Harold Clurman). Thus, as Bial argues, “the American Method differs from ‘pure Stanislavsky,’ because (at least in part) the ‘system’ arrived in the United States filtered through the emotionally and politically charged Yiddish Theatre.”⁷⁹

This cultural cross-breeding of Stanislavsky and Second Avenue resulted in a uniquely internalized yet passionate naturalism that was immediately recognized by 1930s critics as

⁷⁷ Bial, *Acting Jewish*, 52. For more exploration of links between the Method and Jewish and Yiddish Theatre traditions see David Krasner, “I Hate Strasberg: Method Bashing in the Academy,” in *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*, David Krasner, ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 30-34.

⁷⁸ Strasberg first experimented with Stanislavsky-inspired techniques teaching amateur actors at New York’s Chrystie Street Settlement House, a hub of the Lower East Side Jewish immigrant community. After acting under Strasberg for the first few Group seasons, Stella Adler challenged him with her own interpretation of Stanislavsky and later went on to become a rival teacher. After the Group Theatre dissolved in 1941, she practiced her own brand of socially conscious theatre-making alongside Erwin Piscator at the New School for Social Research, where Brando first studied with her. Brando forever maintained that Adler was his primary teacher and disavowed any influence from Strasberg.

⁷⁹ Bial, *Acting Jewish*, 53. He adds that Group members “found the deeply felt emotion and working-class consciousness of the Yiddish Theatre more appealing than either the bourgeois vapidness of the commercial stage or the aloof and self-consciously artistic style favored by . . . art theaters.” Sandrow argues that the American Yiddish theatre also became a conduit for the Stanislavsky “system” itself, especially given the influx of immigrant Jewish artists from Eastern Europe. Younger Second Avenue actor-managers like Jacob Ben-Ami and Maurice Schwartz pioneered their own brand of naturalism in the twenties and thirties in productions well known to the Group. Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars*, 205, 268.

something new in the American theatre. But the style took on a wholly new life when, after the war, a new generation of actors (all trained by Group alumni) brought it to their film work in Hollywood, often in films directed by former Group actor Elia Kazan. The Actors Studio itself—the technique’s mecca—was founded in 1947 by ex-Group members as essentially an extension of the earlier company’s mission to promote a popular progressive American theatrical ethos.⁸⁰ Like the Group, it extolled a pluralist vision of America where ethnic markers need not be erased in the name of good acting.⁸¹ And, as popular stereotypes of Method actors would emphasize, the school soon became associated with intense and indecorous emotional display. “Critiques of the Method as unrefined, vulgar, neurotic, or overly emotional,” have tellingly echoed, Bial maintains, “the charges leveled by anti-Semites against Jews themselves.”⁸²

In early Warner Brothers “ethnic” film roles (like the Capone figure in *Scarface* and the Polish coal miner in *Black Fury*) Muni excelled in the kinds of emotionally extreme performances Brando would later become known for. But Muni was, by many accounts, always an “external” actor, learning dialogue and gesture by rote, leaving little room for spontaneity, and relying heavily on physical appearance and makeup to create a character—as opposed to the

⁸⁰ The Actors Studio was founded by Group Theatre producer Cheryl Crawford along with Group actor-directors Robert Lewis and Elia Kazan. Strasberg did not join until its second year. While Brando claimed never to have formally studied with Strasberg and disavowed any influence from him, his tutorship under Kazan did begin with visits to the Studio, of which Brando was a member.

⁸¹ “Strasberg’s emphasis on the specificity of the actor’s emotions is based not on self-aggrandizement but on a liberal assumption of universal humanism. The Method actors believe that their own emotions can be appropriate to the character because people of all races, religions, and nations experience similar emotions in similar ways; otherwise they are limited to playing characters substantially like themselves. Indeed, it was the Group’s resistance to typecasting that initially distinguished its repertoire from those of its contemporaries.” Bial, *Acting Jewish*, 53. Bial also cites an early controversy for the company when outside producers questioned the Group actors’ ability to “pass” as Southern aristocrats in Paul Green’s play, *The House of Connelly*, their first production. Ibid.

⁸² Bial, *Acting Jewish*, 166n. Bial contextualizes this observation in terms of Jos Esteban Munoz’s “formulation of ethnic otherness as affective excess” where “to the degree that an audience perceives a character’s behavior as emotionally excessive that character is seen as Other—different from the nonethnic norm.” Method actors—especially those of already “nonethnic norm” origins—risk such reception, since it, by definition, “demands emotional affect that the actor provides in excess of the written play text. And to the degree that the actor’s emotion exceeds the written text, the performance challenges the emotionally impoverished ‘national affect’ theorized by Munoz.” Ibid, 56-57.

Method's shunning of such surface details in favor of an "inside out" approach. (While Method actors have always been accused of self-indulgent emotional exposure, Muni "had so effaced himself that he would answer the door in makeup.")⁸³ While Muni Weisenfreund changed his name to Paul Muni and kept relatively private his Jewish identity and Yiddish theatre past—playing a series of other ethnicities and "great men" of Europe like Pasteur and Zola—many of the new Method actors, especially by the 1960s and 1970s, would proudly retain their ethnically marked names and bring their own personal histories into their roles.⁸⁴

No wonder, then, when Brando, as David, was called upon at the end of the play to "bury" Muni as Tevya by covering him with a *talis* shawl, the older actor sometimes seemed reluctant to cede his place:

[I] covered him completely, face and all. I began my big speech, and when I looked down I saw the flag crawl down his forehead, slip away from his eyes along the bridge of his nose, slowly exposing his face inch by inch. It was like magic. I saw Muni's upstage hand, the one hidden from the audience, pulling down the flag by gathering folds in his fist. The old hambone couldn't stand not having his face in the final scene. . . . Imagine! He was supposed to be dead, but he was still acting.⁸⁵

Both the Zionist text and American-theatrical subtext play out in this moment as Oedipal drama: for the Jews and a Jewish state to survive, the young Muscle Jew must honor yet bury the weaker, victimized diasporic father figure—just as the young Method Actor sought to both honor his craft's Yiddish Theatre heritage, while leaving beyond its reliance on masks and disguise.

"The murder of six million people is not an entertaining subject."

For a propaganda pageant exploring foreign affairs and genocidal horrors (and running nearly two hours without intermission), *A Flag is Born* was a great success by many measures.

⁸³ Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 302.

⁸⁴ Muni never played a Jewish-identified character on screen until his final performance in *The Last Angry Man* in 1959.

⁸⁵ Fred Fehl, William Stott, Jane Stott, *On Broadway* (New York: Da Capo, 1980), 96. Quoted in Manso, 184.

Its Broadway run was initially scheduled only for four weeks, but was extended repeatedly for a total of 120 performances. It then toured other major American cities (Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore) for an additional two months. Revenues from ticket sales and additional audience donations grossed close to \$1 million.⁸⁶

Critical reaction was mixed, however. As the first of Hecht's pageants to perform on Broadway, *Flag* was also the first to be reviewed in the theatre pages, and many critics were openly ambivalent (if not hostile) about how to judge such a "curiously uneven combination of drama, pageant and oratory."⁸⁷ The *New York Times*' Brooks Atkinson, for one, outright dismissed all "pageantry" as "at best, untalented theatre."⁸⁸ Others were unreceptive to propaganda in any form; the *Boston Herald* complained that "the theatre is elbowed out by the lecture platform," thus posing "some pretty problems for the reviewer, whose task it is not to take sides but to tell you what went on and what sort of entertainment this is."⁸⁹ The *Philadelphia Record* offered a dismissive comparison to recent memories of Office of War Information films: "The movie shorts distributed by the O.W.I. were simpler, more direct fare."⁹⁰ Irked by the play's "clarion quality of a soapbox harangue," the *Herald Tribune*'s Howard Barnes insisted politics was not dramatic criticism's concern: "[The play's] value as an instrument to open the doors of Palestine to Jewish refugees is not the business of this reviewer. As a show it is distinctly dubious."⁹¹

Critics who accepted the performance on its own formal terms, however, tended to be more favorable. "Naturally, a play of this type cannot be judged by the ordinary standards of

⁸⁶ Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 160.

⁸⁷ Elinor Hughes, "The Theater," *Boston Herald*, 19 February 1947.

⁸⁸ Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," *New York Times*, 7 September 1946.

⁸⁹ Hughes.

⁹⁰ "Ben Hecht's 'A Flag is Born' Opens at Erlanger Theatre," *Philadelphia Record*, 29 January 1947.

⁹¹ Howard Barnes, "The Theaters," *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 September 1946.

stagecraft,” wrote the *Chicago Daily News*, bluntly instructing readers not to expect “amusement and escapism” since “the murder of six million people is not an entertaining subject.”⁹² Harriet Johnson in the *New York Post* echoed this acceptance, arguing that “Hecht obviously didn’t set out to write a play” and that “to dismiss his pageant as propaganda, which it admittedly is, doesn’t suffice.”⁹³ Elliot Norton in the *Boston Post*, while wary of some of the play’s more “hysterical” polemics, admitted to ultimately succumbing to its rhetorical and performative power:

Though it lapses into doubtful conversation at times, there is anguish and heartbreak as well as passionate pleading in this pageant play. Parts of it, as when the old man shouts his challenge to the World Court to give justice to the Jews, are electrifying. None of it is less than fascinating. That Mr. Hecht is justified in some of his statements is dubious. He oversimplifies. He brushes reason aside. But he believes and he fights like a tiger for what he believes. His uncompromising courage, which breathes in every scene of the show, is exhilarating in itself.⁹⁴

John Chapman in the *New York Daily News* likewise welcomed something more challenging than the usual Broadway fare: “Mr. Hecht and all those who have worked with him have reminded a rather sleepy commercial theatre that the stage still can be a forum, a pulpit and a platform.”⁹⁵ Robert Garland in the *New York Journal American* sounded a similar note in writing, “If the Broadway stage is the proper place for propaganda, then ‘A Flag is Born’ is undoubtedly the proper propaganda for the Broadway stage.”⁹⁶

Ultimately, the most important reviews were those that did not shy from engaging with the play’s politics and, as a result, helped further its mission to raise consciousness of the international Jewish plight of recent years. “*A Flag is Born* Has Message for Jews, non-Jews

⁹² Sydney J. Harris, “‘A Flag is Born’ Aims at a Nation’s Heart,” *Chicago Daily News*, 27 December 1946.

⁹³ Harriett Johnson, “‘A Flag is Born’ Is a Court Where Jews Plead Cause,” *New York Post*, 14 September 1946.

⁹⁴ Elliot Norton, “Thrilling Pageant in Debut,” *Boston Post*, 19 February 1947.

⁹⁵ John Chapman, “‘A Flag is Born’ an Impassioned Drama Urging a Free Palestine,” *New York Daily News*, 7 September 1946.

⁹⁶ Garland.

Alike, Which Must Be Heard,” proclaimed the headline of the *New York Morning Telegram*’s review.⁹⁷ The *Detroit Free Press* critic opined that David’s speech “vehemently chiding the silence of American and British Jews whilst the Jews of Europe went to death in the Nazi gas chambers will not soon be forgotten by those who heard it in silence.”⁹⁸ Others echoed Hecht’s own comparisons of the embattled Jewish resistance fighters to other popular insurrectionists. Claudia Cassidy in the *Chicago Tribune*, after claiming “no desire to talk of things I know little about, such as. . . this passionate conviction that the Jews must drive the British out of Palestine,” then quipped, “who are the Irish to say you must not fight for freedom?”⁹⁹ *Variety*’s Nat Kahn was more strident:

[*A Flag is Born*] depicts with vivid imagination, backed by documentary evidence, that here is a story that must be told not only to Jews but those of other creeds as well. It is a lesson in a fight for freedom, in very much the same manner of Parnell’s Irish fight against the British, Lenin’s against the Czarists, the Hebrews against the Pharaohs.¹⁰⁰

As the Lenin reference suggests (in spite of the coming chill of the Cold War), such reception indicated the potential appeal of *A Flag is Born* to the old Popular Front coalition.

“Not Just Great Theatre—A Call to Action!”

A Flag is Born also stood out from the rest of Broadway by doing its political work in a number of ways outside of the narrative of the play itself. A fundraising pitch, scripted by Hecht, was given from the stage after every performance. (Hecht himself delivered the speech at the Broadway opening night, followed by Luther Adler for the rest of the New York run and by actor Sidney Lumet on tour.) “You—out front—are not in a theater tonight,” the statement read.

⁹⁷ George Freedley, “The Stage Today: ‘A Flag is Born’ Has Message for Jews, Non-Jews Alike, Which Must Be Heard,” *New York Morning Telegram*, 9 September 1946.

⁹⁸ Helen Bower, “‘A Flag is Born’ Outright Propaganda,” *Detroit Free Press*, 21 January 1947.

⁹⁹ Claudia Cassidy, “On the Aisle,” *Chicago Tribune*, 27 December 1946.

¹⁰⁰ Nat Kahn, “Hecht-Weill’s ‘Flag is Born’ Socks Hard as Palestine Propaganda,” *Variety*, 11 September 1946.

“You’re on a battlefield. We blow bugles at you. And of your applause of our bugle blowings, well and good. Applause can put a show over—but it’s not enough to win a war. You have better weapons than applause. We need those weapons.”¹⁰¹ Patrons were then referred to inserts in their programs which included mock-checks made out to the American League for a Free Palestine in envelopes pre-addressed to “Ben Hecht, Co-Chairman.” An enclosed note declared, “‘A FLAG IS BORN’ is not just great theatre—it is a call to action!” and added: “It costs \$250 to save a life under current conditions. . . . Don’t delay. Write your check at this performance and please turn it in at the theatre tonight. Join, work, and organize.”¹⁰² The tactic was apparently so effective, that, according to one reporter, “members of the audience are contributing from five to thirty thousand dollars above the ticket expenditures via the blank checks enclosed in every program.”¹⁰³

The post-show speech also worked to Americanize the Palestine struggle as not just a Jewish cause, or a foreign policy issue, but yet another Popular Front “fight for freedom” like the war that had just ended. Echoing the rhetoric he employed in *Fun to be Free* advocating for an earlier human-rights intervention, Hecht employed the language of progressive internationalism:

[W]ho calls it a Palestinian front or a Jewish front? It’s a bigger front than that. It’s a front where the rights of man are battling for survival again. Always again. That is, and always has been, an American front. When the rights of man were imperiled in Europe—that was an American front, for America has large and sacred boundaries. Wherever oppression strikes at the soul of man, there the U.S.A. raises its flag.¹⁰⁴

Hecht even appealed to the cherished memory of Franklin Roosevelt: “He—the president who led us in the war days—pronounced us the arsenal of democracy. We were—and still are—and

¹⁰¹ Manuscript of fundraising appeal for *A Flag is Born*. Ben Hecht Papers.

¹⁰² *A Flag is Born* clippings folder, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library.

¹⁰³ Unsigned, undated clipping from *PM* in *A Flag is Born* clippings folder, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

¹⁰⁴ The text here directly recalls Hecht and MacArthur’s “What is America?” speech at the beginning of *Fun to be Free*: “No foreign nation has ever held our land—and yet we have fought. . . . We have fought because our frontiers have been those of the spirit. . . . History proves that our battle front has never been the line of conquest but always. . . the frontiers of Freedom.” Hecht and MacArthur, *Fun to be Free*, 10.

we always will be.” Even though Hecht had personally turned against Roosevelt by the end of the war (over his inaction regarding European Jewry), that did not stop him from invoking his name here in order to rekindle the solidarity of the prewar Popular Front.¹⁰⁵

Such proselytizing extended beyond the theatre, as well, in a series of outreach events and demonstrations. During the Broadway run and national tour of the play, many actors—including Brando and Lumet—were trained by the League in agitprop and rhetorical techniques to engage Jewish audiences in synagogues, community centers, and even on the streets. According to Atay Citron, “The idea was to take advantage of the actors’ oratory skills and of their eagerness to perform, in order to attract the attention of passers-by. Once a crowd was gathered and the speech came to an end, a member of the League would step up to answer questions and to debate the issue.”¹⁰⁶ After three weeks of training, the actors were sent out in pairs, often showing a pro-*Irgun* documentary film as part of their presentation.¹⁰⁷

The ultimate measure of *Flag*’s efficacy from the League’s point of view was the impact it made in Palestine. “The first of a fleet of *A Flag is Born* ships sailed from an American port,” the League proudly announced to supporters in December 1946, referring to a refurbished yacht bought from U.S. government surplus with proceeds from the play.¹⁰⁸ That month, the former *SS Abril* left New York with a mostly American crew, bound for France, where 600 Holocaust survivors awaited transport to Palestine.¹⁰⁹ Once they boarded, the crew decided to honor the play’s role in the operation by officially re-christening the ship the *SS Ben Hecht*. Through his

¹⁰⁵ Roosevelt gave his “Arsenal of Democracy” speech on 29 December 1940, arguing for increased aid to Great Britain despite prevailing isolationism in the United States.

¹⁰⁶ Citron, “Pageantry and Theatre,” 364.

¹⁰⁷ See Brando and Lindsey, *Songs*, 109-111; Manso, *Brando*, 186; Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 154.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Citron, “Ben Hecht’s Pageant-Drama,” 92.

¹⁰⁹ Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 160.

play and his namesake vessel, Hecht had now stepped clearly off the stage, outside of the theatre, and into international politics.¹¹⁰

“Throughout the summer of and autumn of 1946,” writes Rafael Medoff, “British-American tensions over Palestine were approaching the boiling point, and *Flag* contributed its share to the charged atmosphere.”¹¹¹ During the run of *Flag* and beyond, the British government and press increasingly singled out Hecht personally as a dangerously subversive writer. The *London Evening Standard* warned its readers that *A Flag is Born* was “the most virulently anti-British play ever staged in the United States,” and copies of the script (published in a limited edition by the American League for a Free Palestine) were banned in all U.K. territories, including Canada, where shipments were seized at the border.¹¹² The voyage of the *SS Ben Hecht* only increased English suspicions of the writer. In March 1947, before it could reach its destination in Palestine, the ship was stopped and seized by British border guards, who put the passengers in a Displaced Persons camp and the crew in jail. The playwright and his play had found themselves at the center of, literally, an international incident. Hecht remained undeterred by the confrontation; “Britain may be able to patrol the Mediterranean,” he quipped, “but she cannot patrol Broadway.”¹¹³

In May, Hecht escalated tensions even further with a major newspaper advertisement entitled, “Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine.” It was his most hostile anti-British polemic to date in its express endorsement of—even jubilation in—the *Irgun*’s violent means:

¹¹⁰ In another tributary gesture, in April 1947 Jewish detainees in a British-run Cyprus DP camp reportedly staged their own production of *A Flag is Born* (translated into Hebrew). The script was most likely provided to them by the League, which had published a limited edition of the text in New York. Citron, “Ben Hecht’s Pageant-Drama,” 93.

¹¹¹ Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 156.

¹¹² Quoted in Medoff, 158; *Newsweek*, 10 November 47. Canadian customs said the script was “declared inadmissible to the dominion under a Tariff Act clause banning ‘treasonable and seditious material.’”

¹¹³ “‘A Flag is Born,’” *The Answer*, September 1946, 20. *The Answer* was the in-house newsletter for Bergson’s American League for a Free Palestine.

Every time you blow up a British arsenal, or wreck a British jail, or send a British railroad train sky high, or rob a British bank or let go with your guns and bombs at the British betrayers and invaders of your homeland, the Jews of America make a little holiday in their hearts.¹¹⁴

So incensed was His Majesty's Government by this "incitement to murder British officials and soldiers" that it lodged a formal complaint with the U.S. State Department challenging the validity of the American League for a Free Palestine's tax-free status, which, they argued, implied Washington's approval of charitable donations (such as those from *A Flag is Born* audiences) that they suspected were funding *Irgun* attacks.¹¹⁵ The incident got the attention of President Harry Truman, who was so concerned about not damaging U.S.-British relations that he publicly called upon all Americans to stay neutral and avoid "inflam[ing] the passions" of the Palestinian resistance fighters with any support.¹¹⁶ "Although he named no individuals," speculated Broadway columnist Leonard Lyons, "the President's target is Ben Hecht."¹¹⁷ Hecht paid a hefty price for taking on the British Foreign Office when, in 1948 the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association of Great Britain and Ireland barred the U.K. release of any Hollywood movies bearing a screenplay credit by him.¹¹⁸ Not until 1952, with the intervention of friends in Washington, was this boycott rescinded.

¹¹⁴ Ben Hecht, "Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 15 May 1947, 17.

¹¹⁵ James Reston, "Britain Prods U.S. to Stop Funds to Defy Palestine Law," *New York Times*, 20 May 1947. With this story, the controversy stirred by Hecht's editorial literally made front page news.

¹¹⁶ "Halt in Palestine Agitation Here Requested by Truman," *New York Times*, 6 June 1947. During 1946 and most of 1947, the United States remained neutral regarding Palestine. Truman showed little interest in supporting Zionism until 1948, when he did support and immediately recognize the new state of Israel that May.

¹¹⁷ Leonard Lyons, "Lyons Den," *New York Post*, 7 June 1947. Hecht's reply, as reported by Lyons, was: "Despite the fact that he is President. . . Truman is entitled to his opinion."

¹¹⁸ "[D]uring the entire period from late 1947 until well after 1952 because of the threat of the boycott, Hecht found it difficult to obtain work and then only at drastically reduced wages and often with no credit." Jeffrey Brown Martin, *Ben Hecht: Hollywood Screenwriter* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 159.

The War for Jewish-American Identity

British politicians were not the only constituency to rise up against Hecht. *A Flag is Born* also stoked protest from other American Jewish and even Zionist organizations. Tensions between Bergson's followers and those of larger organizations, like Rabbi Stephen Wise's American Jewish Congress, had been brewing ever since the wartime campaigns to rescue the European Jews—and, before that, stretching back to the schism between Vladimir Jabotinsky's Revisionist Zionists and the World Zionist Congress in 1925. During the play's Broadway run, American rabbi Judah Magnes, then president of Hebrew University in Jerusalem, issued an open letter addressed to Eleanor Roosevelt calling upon her to disassociate from the American League for a Free Palestine and to withdraw as an official "sponsor" of *A Flag is Born* due to its "appeal to terror." Magnes specifically protested the play's bellicose ending: "The climax of the play is the appearance of young Palestinians with rifles who declare: 'The new Jewish voice speaks from out of these guns' [sic]. . . . This is indeed a new Jewish voice, a voice which is opposed to the whole tradition of the Jewish religion."¹¹⁹ Other objections came from advocates of rival factions amongst the Palestine guerilla forces. The *Haganah*—the paramilitary force of the David Ben-Gurion's interim Jewish Agency—had already been smuggling refugees past British blockades and did not trust the more radical *Irgun* with the task. When *A Flag is Born* came to Philadelphia in January 1947, the Zionist Organization of America—the largest and oldest such organization in the United States—organized a picketing of the show's opening, calling the ALFP an untrustworthy fringe group and discouraging audiences from donating money.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ "Play Mrs. FDR Backs Branded Pro-Terrorist," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 December 1946.

¹²⁰ Citron, "Pageantry and Theatre," 417-419.

Hovering over all these disputes was a deeper ideological war within the American Jewish community about the place of violence in Jewish culture after the Holocaust—a debate rife with disturbing questions, such as whether European Jews went too peacefully to their deaths or whether American Jews were not aggressive enough in saving them. Many, like Magnes, still maintained that Judaism was essentially peaceful. And while even the dominant Labor Zionists resorted to armed resistance against the British (with their own army, the *Haganah*), they insisted they acted so only out of self-defense and strategic necessity—unlike the alleged “terrorism” of the *Irgun*. The Bergson Zionists, meanwhile, defended their brand of Judaism as consistent with, as Hecht called it in *We Will Never Die*, “the spirit of Bar Kochba.”¹²¹

While the Bergson/*Irgun* brand of militarism may have repelled other Jews, its outward celebration of brute force and “the language of guns” bore a special potential appeal in the militarized, conquest-celebrating postwar culture of America at large. Whenever embroiled in conflicts with other Jewish organizations, Bergson always aimed his message at the broader non-Jewish American populace, appealing to public sentiments of fairness and tolerance, but also to military heroism and righteous vengeance. Moreover, Bergson made a point of not emphasizing *religion* at all; his postwar campaigns even favored the nationalist designation “Hebrew” over “Jewish” in order to, first, avoid implications that all Jewish people everywhere (such as American Jews) should emigrate to Palestine, and, second, to sidestep theological debates he saw as crippling other organizations’ ability to act. What Alan Wald has called “the intersection of radical secular Jewish identity and masculinity during the era of the Popular Front in arms,” therefore, suited Bergson’s purposes perfectly—especially after the war, when he could draw parallels between Jews taking up arms in Palestine and the average GI.¹²²

¹²¹ Hecht, *We Will Never Die*, 25.

¹²² Wald, *Trinity of Passion*, 22.

An even deeper connection to American mythology was made by stressing comparisons between the *Irgun*'s fight against Great Britain and that of the original American colonists. The slogan, "It's 1776 in Palestine," was used extensively in promoting all Bergson publicity campaigns, including that for *A Flag is Born*. The parallel was reinforced with a charcoal drawing that appeared in both print advertisements and on the cover of the play's program. In the foreground were three muscular young men carrying a rifle, a shovel, and a Star of David flag; behind them were their mirror images, dressed as the "fife and drums" trio of American Revolution iconography.

Such patriotic, double "flag waving" also appears in the text of the play itself. In his oration before the U.N. Tevya reminds Great Britain, "you have never won a war against a people that wanted to be free," adding, "how nice it would have been if you had acted a little different toward America long ago" (39). (The British ambassador agrees with "that point about the American Colonies," but further antagonizes the play's American audience by adding, "We should never have lost those, you know.") The soldiers at the end promise David that together they will "wrest our homeland out of British claws—as the Americans once did" (47). Even Zelda's very first line to Tevya is "*Nu*, Columbus, you're satisfied? *Eretz Yisrael* he's going to find!"—as if it is not only 1776 in Palestine, but 1492 (4).

When reviving and adapting *Flag* for a 1948 rally, Hecht made the parallel between the two rebellions even more explicit. For a Bergson event at Madison Square Garden called "Colors of Hebrew Freedom"—saluting a brigade of American veterans planning to fight in Palestine under the banner of the "George Washington Legion"¹²³—Hecht adapted the final two scenes of his play into a thirteen-page piece he called "An End to Silence." The ending was essentially the same, but with an expanded musical cue accompanying the hoisting of the flag: "The music

¹²³ See Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 179.

breaks into the strains of the *Hatikvah*, with strains of ‘Yankee Doodle’ and ‘Over There’ running through it.”¹²⁴ And instead of screen-projected fighters, David and his cohorts were now joined on stage by the real-life honorees themselves: “David raises the flag. Men are marching toward the stage. It is the George Washington Legion.” A *New York Times* report the next day notes that “a newly designed standard was presented to the legion,” suggesting the actors, in the course of playing the scene, may have handed their prop “flag” to the legionnaires, seamlessly fusing the play’s climactic moment with the brigade’s real life crusade.¹²⁵

Conclusion: Bridging Jewish Identities

One of the central images in *A Flag is Born* is that of a bridge. David tells Tevya and Zelda early on that he has had a vision of a bridge that will lead them to Palestine (8-9). When Tevya asks King Saul to point the way to “Eretz Yisrael,” he also says, “There is a bridge to cross” (17). (“Again a bridge,” Tevya mutters in a moment of *Yiddishkeit*.) The anticipation builds to the play’s climax, when the suicidal David is saved by the *deus ex machina* of a descending bridge from the flies (in a “brightening glare”) from which the three soldiers emerge (45). Tevya turns out to have been looking in the wrong places for the bridge, which is not on land, but in Jews’ souls.

The play, too, enacts a bridging of old and new Jewish identities in this liminal postwar cultural moment. And it was a bridge, perhaps, only possible in America. One of the initial misgivings many Jews had about Zionism was over its implied devaluing of the diasporic life

¹²⁴ “An End to Silence” (appended to *A Flag is Born* script), Luther Adler Papers, Billy Rose Theatre Collection. A newspaper advertisement lists “Music by Isaac Van Grove,” indicating that Weill delegated the writing of the new arrangement to the play’s music director. Van Grove had been Weill’s music director for *The Eternal Road* and *We Will Never Die*, as well as for the early Meyer Weisgal pageants.

¹²⁵ “A highlight of the evening was the presence of several hundred members of the newly organized George Washington Legion, sponsored by the league.” “Chavez Denounces U.S. On Palestine,” *New York Times*, 14 May 1948. Unbeknownst to the participants, Israeli independence would be declared just two days after the event.

that they themselves chose to lead. But this turned out to be less of an obstacle in the United States. As two parallel “Promised Lands,” the imagined Zionist state and “the American dream” shared a somewhat similar utopian vision for an end to perpetual exile. Since “diaspora negation” focused on the inherent intolerance of European culture, those Jews who immigrated to America could sympathize most with a yearning for “new beginnings” and a clean break with the “old country.” As Beth Wenger argues,

in both settings, the rhetoric focused on building a culture in contradistinction to European Jewish experience. Zionist ideology demanded a repudiation of exile, rejected the perceived shackles and degradation of Jewish wandering in Europe and called for a physical and spiritual rebirth in the Land of Israel. The new Jew envisioned by Zionists was strong and confident, no longer subdued by the weight of exile and reinvigorated by life in the national Jewish homeland. . . . In the United States, the repudiation of European experience was less ideologically potent, but nonetheless present. Jews believed that America offered them an opportunity to overcome the hardships of Europe and begin new lives in a free society. . . . [T]he idea that life in America would rejuvenate Jews both spiritually and physically suffused the narratives produced by American Jews.¹²⁶

The rebirth (spiritual and bodily) promised in both ideologies would increasingly overlap in the postwar era, when America and Palestine (and later Israel) were similarly seen as fertile soil for nurturing the “New Jew,” the Zionist ideal of a remasculinized Jewish subject who embraced the more physical tasks shunned by his forbearers. As Arthur Goren has written, the Jewish settlers in Palestine, with their dedication to farming and working the land, were even looked upon as “Americans in spirit.”¹²⁷ It was in its rejection of the old prejudices of Europe and insistence on physical rejuvenation that this brand of militant Zionism could find common cause with many American Jews.

The dual heroes of *A Flag is Born*—situated at opposite ends of that bridge—embody dueling archetypes that were emerging in postwar American Jewish popular culture. In 1964,

¹²⁶ Wenger, *History Lessons*, 30.

¹²⁷ Arthur Goren, *The Politics and Culture of the American Jews* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 176. Quoted in Wenger, *History Lessons*, 212.

with the arrival of *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevya became “the personification of the Jewish immigrant and the universal grandfather.”¹²⁸ In 1958, the Zionist warrior was lionized in the character of *Haganah* fighter Ari Ben Canaan in Leon Uris’s bestselling novel *Exodus*.¹²⁹ In *Flag* we see these competing Jewish masculinities already taking the stage more than a decade earlier, playing out the postwar, post-Holocaust Jewish American identity crisis. And it may be no coincidence that, when casting the role of Ari Ben Canaan for the film version of *Exodus*, émigré director Otto Preminger chose yet another leading Method actor of the Actors Studio, Paul Newman.¹³⁰ The Method—transmitted by way of Second Avenue and the Group Theatre—became the theatrical language of choice through which to communicate “Muscular Judaism” in postwar American popular culture. Such convergence in the popular imaginary between the Method actor and the “New Jew” suggests that the embodiment of the Zionist ideal in young stars such as Brando and Newman was yet another way by which Jewish nationalism was Americanized.

While *A Flag is Born* may have been expressly concerned with Palestine, it was still a cultural product of American Jews performed in the United States. When David crosses the long awaited bridge in the play’s finale, his destination is not just literally the geographic land of Palestine, but a place where Jews can finally live freely and have agency *as* Jews. That bridge would lead, for many, not just to Palestine but to postwar America.

¹²⁸ Wolitz, “The Americanization of Tevye,” 530.

¹²⁹ In his recent study of Uris’ novel, Matthew Silver acknowledges that “the production of *A Flag Is Born* presaged techniques utilized by Uris and *Exodus*.” M. M. Silver, *Our Exodus: Leon Uris and the Americanization of Israel’s Founding Story* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 21.

¹³⁰ Despite Silver’s complaint that “Paul Newman’s blue eyes belie everything Uris wanted to say in his book,” Newman was actually born to a Jewish father. *Ibid.*, 134.

Conclusion

On 20 March 1948, the film *Gentleman's Agreement*—touted as Hollywood's first major statement against anti-Semitism—was named Best Picture at the twentieth annual Academy Awards in Los Angeles. Seven weeks later, on May 14, just hours after David Ben-Gurion's Jewish Agency in Tel Aviv declared an independent Jewish nation, the United States became the first government to formally recognize the State of Israel. While the film may not have had any direct geopolitical impact, it did reveal a shift in American popular opinion towards Jews that paved the way for the United States' embrace of Israel—a political development that would inform the Jewish-American experience so profoundly in the coming decades. Along with such other postwar popular-culture markers as the crowning of a Jewish “Miss America” (Bess Myerson) in September 1945, *Gentleman's Agreement* signaled for many American Jews a new social “affirmation,” to which President Harry Truman's pro-Israel policy added political legitimation.¹ The cultural capital of the film's Oscar-certified prestige also indicated, as Neal Gabler writes, that “anti-anti-Semitism was now not only acceptable, it was highly respectable.”²

As a product of the postwar, late-period Popular Front, *Gentleman's Agreement* marked a culmination of sorts for the Jewish-American artists within that movement who had worked toward such a moment for over a decade. (Critic John Mason Brown praised the filmmakers' courage for “speak[ing] publicly for the first time on a subject on which movie goers have long

¹ “In different ways, [many cultural works] condemned antisemitism as un-American, presented Jews in a new and more sympathetic light, and promoted intergroup understanding and tolerance. *Gentleman's Agreement*, a courageous exposure of pervasive antisemitic discrimination in the United States, carried these objectives onto the silver screen. This 1947 film, based on [Laura Z.] Hobson's bestselling novel of the same title, won the Academy Award for best picture and, according to a contemporary sociological study, created among its viewers a ‘significantly more favorable attitude towards Jews.’ A year later, in 1948, the state of Israel came into being... Jews understood all of these developments as signs of ‘affirmation’ following the greatest tragedy in their history.” Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 273-274. See also Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 152-153.

² Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 350.

spoken privately.”³ The screenwriter who adapted Laura Z. Hobson’s novel was none other than Moss Hart, who directed *We Will Never Die*. It co-starred John Garfield in his first Jewish-identified role on screen. And it was directed by Elia Kazan (like Garfield, a Group Theatre alumnus), who, though not Jewish, had been an ardent antifascist since his 1934 play *Dimitroff*.⁴ But *Gentleman’s Agreement* was just one of a group of films that emanated from the postwar, late-period Popular Front addressing anti-Semitism, Zionism, and Jewish identity. *Crossfire* (which opened four months before *Gentleman’s Agreement*) was a violent film noir about the killing of an American Jew by a disgruntled, racist G.I. Its director, Edward Dmytryk, and producer, Adrian Scott, had been so active in the Popular Front that they were among the first victims of the film industry’s Blacklist (as members of the “Hollywood Ten”) in 1947.⁵ Screenwriter Albert Maltz (also of the Hollywood Ten) wrote the script for Frank Sinatra’s 1945 short film *The House I Live In*, which showed a gang of boys taunting and beating another because of his “religion.” After Sinatra breaks up the fight, he sings the title song (music by Earl Robinson, lyrics by Lewis Allen) preaching racial tolerance: “The children in the playground, the faces that I see/ All races and religions, that’s America to me.”⁶ As Michael Denning shows, the continuity between this moment and the thirties is clear: “From Paul Robeson’s 1939 version of Earl Robinson’s ‘Ballad for Americans’ to Frank Sinatra’s 1945 version of Earl Robinson’s ‘The House I Live In,’ the anthems of the Popular Front were pleas for racial and ethnic tolerance.”⁷

³ John Mason Brown, “If You Prick Us,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, 6 December 1947, 69, quoted in Dinnerstein, 153.

⁴ Five years after *Gentleman’s Agreement* Kazan broke with many of his former Popular Front colleagues in cooperating with the House Un-American Activities Committee, leading to accusations of betrayal.

⁵ The “Hollywood Ten” were “unfriendly witnesses” who were cited and imprisoned for contempt of Congress by HUAC in the fall of 1947. Dmytryk soon recanted and cooperated with the committee.

⁶ Quoted in Kathleen E. R. Smith, *God Bless America: Tin Pan Alley Goes to War* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 48.

⁷ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 35.

The antifascist thriller lived on in postwar Hollywood, as well, with a series of movies about fugitive Nazis in hiding. Ben Hecht wrote the screenplay for Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious*, about Third Reich exiles in South America determined to rise again; the film opened on the very same day (6 September 1946) as *A Flag is Born*. (Hecht's references in the script to I.G. Farben, the German chemical corporation that supplied Nazi gas chambers, were censored by the Production Code office.)⁸ Four months earlier, Orson Welles returned to Hollywood with *The Stranger*, in which Edward G. Robinson effectively revived his "G-Man" role from *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, tracking down a war criminal (Welles) posing as a Connecticut schoolteacher. Its most striking scene features actual newsreel footage from liberated concentration camps that Welles interpolated into the story, one of the very first uses of such imagery in a Hollywood feature film.

After the birth of Israel, Zionist films also started to appear. Hollywood Ten director Edward Dmytryk made *The Juggler* (1953) with a screenplay by Michael Blankfort about a traumatized concentration camp survivor (Kirk Douglas) trying to start a new life in Israel. For the film of Leon Uris' *Exodus* (1960), émigré director Otto Preminger hired Hollywood Ten screenwriter Dalton Trumbo;⁹ in the hands of Trumbo (not Jewish, but a former communist) Uris's story became a political "resistance" narrative—replete with underground "cells" and factional infighting—reminiscent of older proletarian literature.

The Broadway theatre also turned increasingly to Jewish issues in this period, beginning with *A Flag is Born*, which opened over a year earlier than *Gentleman's Agreement*. Earlier still (in December 1945) was Arthur Laurents's first play *Home of the Brave*, which addressed anti-

⁸ Bill Krohn, *Hitchcock at Work* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 102.

⁹ Together with Trumbo's near-simultaneous credit for Kirk Douglas's *Spartacus* (1960), these two films have gone down in history as, together, "breaking the Blacklist," since they marked the first instances of screen credit openly given to Blacklisted writers.

Semitism in the U.S. Army, something he had just experienced firsthand during the war.¹⁰ (The play is not often recognized as a groundbreaking Jewish drama, since its better known 1949 film version altered the identity of the Jewish character to black.)¹¹ In January 1948, John Garfield returned to the stage in *Skipper Next to God*, Jan de Hartog's thinly veiled allegory of the condemned Jews aboard the *SS St. Louis* to whom America would not give shelter in 1939.¹² But one play that might have been a milestone in late Popular Front Jewish-American theatre never materialized the way it was intended. In 1949, Laurents began working with director/choreographer Jerome Robbins and composer Leonard Bernstein on a musical drama about anti-Semitism in the form of a tragically thwarted romance between a Jewish girl and a Catholic boy on the Lower East Side. (Bernstein saw it as "an out and out plea for racial tolerance.")¹³ Eight years later, after repeated delays, their "East Side Story" was renamed *West Side Story* and the Jewish characters were reconceived as Puerto Ricans.

These works contributed a great deal to what Arthur Goren has called the "Golden Decade" for American Jews of 1945-1955—a period of increased social acceptance, fewer professional barriers, and a share in the middle-class prosperity of the postwar economic boom.¹⁴

¹⁰ Laurents was one of several young Jewish veterans who returned from the war with stories to tell of anti-Semitism in the military. The first novels of Irwin Shaw (*The Young Lions*, 1948), Norman Mailer (*The Naked and the Dead*, 1948), and Leon Uris (*Battle Cry*, 1953), featured storylines about the Jewish G.I. experience. Herman Wouk's 1951 novel *The Caine Mutiny* (quickly adapted for both Broadway and Hollywood) featured a Jewish Navy lieutenant who ultimately extols the very court-martialed officer he is prosecuting because of his valor fighting Nazis.

¹¹ Such interchanging of marginalized "others" also occurred in *Crossfire*, whose source novel (*The Brick Foxhole* by Richard Brooks, another Jewish veteran) actually centered on the murder of a homosexual. Producer Adrian Scott convinced the RKO studio to take on the project only by recasting the gay male victim as Jewish. Ironically, when time came to film *Home of the Brave* two years later, producer Stanley Kramer reportedly explained to Laurents the reason for changing the play was, "Jews have been done," referring to *Gentleman's Agreement* and *Crossfire*. Arthur Laurents, *Original Story By: A Memoir of Broadway and Hollywood* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 51.

¹² *Skipper Close to God* (directed by former Group Theatre leader Lee Strasberg) was presented by The Experimental Theatre, Inc., an early Off Broadway progressive company that had also presented the New York premiere of Brecht's *Galileo* with Charles Laughton in 1947.

¹³ Misha Berson, *Something's Coming, Something Good: West Side Story and the American Imagination* (Milwaukee, WI: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2011), 22.

¹⁴ Arthur A. Goren, "A 'Golden Decade' for American Jews: 1945-1955," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 8 (1992): 3-20.

But lurking in the background—even amid this flourishing of late-period Popular Front cultural production on Jewish themes—was the postwar anti-communist resurgence that soon overtook Hollywood and silenced many of its most progressive Jewish-American voices. Six of the Hollywood Ten were Jewish, most of them familiar names from the 1930s “cultural front”: Albert Maltz, John Howard Lawson, Samuel Ornitz, Herbert Biberman, Alvah Bessie, and Lester Cole. Other Jewish artists entangled in Congressional investigations who had been prominent in the antifascist movement were John Garfield, Edward G. Robinson, Luther Adler, Robert Rossen, Lillian Hellman, Clifford Odets, John Wexley, and William Dieterle.¹⁵ Indeed, the prevalence of so many Jewish names on the “Blacklist” appeared less than coincidental when their Jewishness was openly cited by crusading politicians as grounds for suspicion.¹⁶

It was the Blacklist, not the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact or even the end of the war in 1945, that truly ruptured the coalition of the Popular Front, at least in the performing arts.¹⁷ Its effect on American Jews was especially divisive. According to Goren, “The Red Scare...weakened Jewish radicalism [and instead] fortified the liberalism of ‘the vital center.’”¹⁸ With the more unrepentant radicals of the thirties peeled off from the liberal-left alliance, the Popular Front was no more, leaving those progressive American Jews who did not want to be stigmatized as “disloyal” with fewer options for political participation.

One of those options, as a political outlet for Jewish ethnic pride, became militant Zionism. The 1967 Arab-Israeli war is often cited as a catalyst for intense pro-Israeli sentiment

¹⁵ Rossen, Odets, and Robinson ultimately cooperated with investigators in order to “clear their names” and be allowed to continue working in Hollywood.

¹⁶ For the anti-Semitic overtones of the Blacklist, see Navasky, *Naming Names*, 109-121 and Gabler, *An Empire of their Own*, 351-385.

¹⁷ See Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 21-27 for his analysis of attempts to historically demarcate the Popular Front. He prefers to read it as “a moment of transition between the Fordist modernism that reigned before the crash [of 1929] and the postmodernism of the American Century that emerged from the ruins of Hiroshima [in 1945].” *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁸ Goren, “A ‘Golden Decade,’” 15. He also refers to the “bitter fight [that] ensued within the Jewish community over aiding Jewish victims of the anti-Communist crusade.”

among American Jews, but such support was periodically evident in the immediate postwar period as well—*A Flag is Born* being a prime example, even if “Israel” did not yet officially exist in 1946. Hecht suffered his own “blacklist” for his political agitation, but at the hands of British, not American censors, when his name was banned from U.K. film releases, thus affecting his employment in Hollywood between 1947 and 1952 (coincidentally concurrent with the anticommunist Blacklist). But before long, his brand of American “Muscular Judaism” became increasingly mainstream—especially with the rise of the Jewish anticommunist intellectuals in cultural outlets like *Commentary* magazine.¹⁹ And as Israel emerged as an important bulwark against Soviet expansionism in the Middle East, its value as an ally to America became even greater than its religious and ethnic appeal.²⁰ In the geopolitics of the Cold War, the “tough Jews” who “spoke the language of guns” (as Hecht’s soldiers do in *A Flag is Born*) were more valuable than the “gentle Jews” of old. Ironically, Zionism (once feared by Jews as implying “dual loyalty”) became a more viable path to “Americanism” for postwar Jews than the more outwardly patriotic Americana of the “prematurely antifascist” Popular Front.

Hecht’s embrace of *Irgun* “terrorism,” though, alienated not only the British, but many old antifascist colleagues and allies, as well. Edward G. Robinson, who declined the role of Tevya in *A Flag is Born*, apparently broke with Hecht over the play’s message; “I admired him,” he later recalled of the playwright, “worked with him in innumerable meetings, rallies and dinners, but fell out with him over his support of the *Irgun*, a radical Israeli [sic] group. His comments about his delight at the death of every English soldier sickened me.... I never

¹⁹ See Benjamin Balint, *Running Commentary: The Contentious Magazine That Transformed the Jewish Left Into the Neoconservative Right* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010).

²⁰ Among Hecht’s papers is a 13 February 1956 essay by Louis Bromfield (a colleague from *A Flag is Born* and other campaigns) promoting a “Committee to Save the Middle East from Communism.” Ben Hecht Papers, Newberry Library.

acknowledged him again.”²¹ Such fallings out anticipated the greater split in decades to come among self-identifying “liberal” American Jews for whom Israel has increasingly served as more divisive than uniting.²² In this way, too, Hecht anticipated the future “neoconservatives,” who evolved from thirties radicals to right-wing ideologues and became equally pro-Israel, pro-American, and anticommunist (and, by extension, anti-progressive).

That American Jews could have such open disagreements, without their national loyalty being questioned, marks how far public discourse in the United States had come regarding Jewish matters by the 1940s and 1950s. But as the memory of the Popular Front recedes further into the past, the important role played by the cultural work of Jewish progressives—and even radicals—in bringing about that “Golden Decade” risks being forgotten. Far from remaining silent until the Israeli military triumph of 1967 awakened their ethnicity (as several accounts of Jewish-American history still maintain), many American Jews—like the theatre and film artists I have spotlighted—were long active in public campaigns to raise consciousness of anti-Jewish persecution, promote Jewish pride, and campaign for international causes such as a Jewish homeland. Were it not for the postwar shifts of party politics and internecine splintering among the activists themselves, the Popular Front might receive more credit today for helping Jews (as per Hecht’s formulation) “become American by becoming more Jewish.”

²¹ Robinson and Spiegelgass, *All My Yesterdays*, 156.

²² Diner, *Jews of the United States*, 329. Ironically, the subject of future relations between Jews and Arabs did not dominate pre-1948 discussions of Palestine in the U.S., which focused more on the Jewish-British conflict.

Bibliography

- Abzug, Robert H. *America Views the Holocaust: 1933-1945: A Brief Documentary History*. Boston: Bedford, 1999.
- Adamic, Louis. "Ellis Island and Plymouth Rock" in *My America*, 185-259. 1938; repr. New York: Da Capo Press, 1976.
- Ahrendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report upon the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin, 1987.
- Anderson, Maxwell. *Knickerbocker Holiday: A Musical Comedy in Two Acts*. Washington, DC: Anderson House, 1938.
- Avishai, Bernard. *The Tragedy of Zionism: Revolution and Democracy in the Land of Israel*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985.
- Balint, Benjamin. *Running Commentary: The Contentious Magazine That Transformed the Jewish Left Into the Neoconservative Right* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010).
- Barton, John. *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Baumel, Judith Tydor. *The "Bergson Boys" and the Origins of Contemporary Zionist Militancy*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005.
- Bell, Daniel. *Marxian Socialism in the United States*. 1952. Reprint, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Ben-Ami, Yitshaq. *Years of Wrath, Days of Glory: Memoirs from the Irgun*. New York: Sheingold, 1983.
- Bendersky, Joseph W. *The "Jewish Threat": Anti-Semitic Politics of the US Army*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.
- Berkowitz, Michael. *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry Before the First World War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- Berlin, Adele et al. *The Jewish Study Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Berman, Aaron. *Nazism, the Jews, and American Zionism, 1933-1948*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990.
- Bernstein, Matthew. *Walter Wanger: Hollywood Independent*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

- Berson, Misha. *Something's Coming, Something Good: West Side Story and the American Imagination*. Milwaukee, WI: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2011.
- Bial, Henry. *Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage and Screen*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Birdwell, Michael. *Celluloid Soldiers: Warner Brothers' Campaign Against Nazism*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- Black, Gregory. *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Brando, Marlon and Robert Lindsey. *Songs My Mother Taught Me*. New York: Random House, 1994.
- Braudy, Leo. "Entertainment or Propaganda?" In Kaplan and Blakely, 27-37.
- Breines, Paul. *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry*. New York: Basic Books, 1990.
- Brenman-Gibson, Margaret. *Clifford Odets: American Playwright, The Years from 1906 to 1940*. Atheneum: New York, 1981.
- Brenner, Michael. *Prophets of the Past: Interpreters of Jewish History*. trans. Steven Rendall. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Buhle, Mary Jo, Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, eds. *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Buhle, Paul. *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture*. London: Verso, 2004.
- Buhle, Paul and David Wagner. *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America's Favorite Movies*. New York: The New Press, 1982.
- Butters, Gerald. *Banned in Kansas: Motion Picture Censorship, 1915-1966*. Columbia: University of Missouri, 2007.
- Callow, Simon. *Orson Welles: The Road to Xanadu*. New York: Viking 1995.
- . *Orson Welles, Volume Two: Hello Americans*. New York: Viking, 2006.
- Carr, Steven Alan. *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Century, Douglas. *Barney Ross*. New York: Schocken Books, 2006.

- Ceplair, Larry. *Under the Shadow of War: Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and Marxists, 1918-1939*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.
- Ceplair, Larry and Steven Englund. *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Citron, Atay. "Ben Hecht's Pageant-Drama: *A Flag is Born*." In *Staging the Holocaust*, edited by Claude Schumacher, 70-93. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- . "Pageantry and Theatre in the Service of Jewish Nationalism in the United States, 1933-1946." Thesis (Ph.D.). New York University, 1989.
- Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London: Verso, 1998.
- Dick, Bernard F. *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film*. Rev. ed. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996.
- Dickstein, Morris. *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.
- Dimitrov, Georgi. "Unity of the Working Class against Fascism." Marxists Internet Archive. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/unity.htm> (accessed July 21, 2010).
- Diner, Hasia R. *A New Promised Land: A History of Jews in America*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- . *Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004.
- . *We Remember With Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- Dinnerstein, Leonard. *Anti-Semitism in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet*. DVD. Directed by William Dieterle. Warner Archive Collection, 2009.
- Drew, David. *Kurt Weill: A Handbook*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
- Edelman, Marsha Bryan. *Discovering Jewish Music*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003.
- Eisenberg, Ronald L. *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2005.

- Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, eds. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007.
- Epstein, Marc Michael. *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997.
- Erdman, Harley. *Staging the Jew: The Performance of an American Ethnicity, 1860-1920*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997.
- Everett, William. *Sigmund Romberg*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Farneth, David, Elmar Juchem and Dave Stein. *Kurt Weill: A Life in Pictures and Documents*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2004.
- Fehl, Fred, William Stott, and Jane Stott. *On Broadway*. New York: Da Capo, 1980.
- Feingold, Henry L. *Bearing Witness: How America and its Jews Responded to the Holocaust*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995.
- Fetherling, Doug. *The Five Lives of Ben Hecht*. Toronto: Lester and Orpen, 1977.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Freedman, Jonathan. *The Temple of Culture: Assimilation and Anti-Semitism in Literary Anglo-America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Fussell, Paul. *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*. New York: Oxford, 1989.
- Gabler, Neal. *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.
- Gilbert, Martin. *Israel: A History*. New York: Morrow, 1998.
- Gilman, Sander. *The Jew's Body*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Glassberg, David. *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.
- Goldstein, Richard. *Helluva Town: The Story of New York City During World War II*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010.

- Goren, Arthur A. "A 'Golden Decade' for American Jews: 1945-1955." *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 8 (1992): 3-20.
- . *The Politics and Culture of the American Jews*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Green, Paul. *Johnny Johnson: The Biography of a Common Man*. New York: Samuel French, 1937.
- Green, Stanley. *Broadway Musicals of the 30s*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1971.
- Harmetz, Aljean. *Round Up the Usual Suspects: The Making of Casablanca*. New York: Hyperion, 1992.
- Hecht, Ben, *A Child of the Century*. 1954. Reprint, New York: Primus, 1985.
- . *A Flag is Born*. New York: American League for a Free Palestine, 1946.
- . *Let Freedom Ring*. Directed by Jack Conway. VHS. MGM/UA Home Video, 1994.
- . *To Quito and Back*. New York: Covici, Friede, 1937.
- . *A Thousand and One Afternoons in New York*. New York: Viking, 1941.
- . *We Will Never Die: A Memorial Dedicated to the 2,000,000 Jewish Dead of Europe*. New York: Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews, 1943.
- Hecht, Ben and Charles MacArthur, *Fun to be Free: Patriotic Pageant*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1941.
- . "It's Fun to be Free." In *Best One-Act Plays of 1941*, ed. Margaret Mayorga, 237-254. New York: Dodd Mead, 1942.
- Hellman, Lillian. *Six Plays by Lillian Hellman*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- Herman, Felicia. "Hollywood, Nazism, and the Jews, 1933-1941." *American Jewish History* 89, no.1 (2001): 61-89.
- Hirsch, Foster. *Kurt Weill on Stage: From Berlin to Broadway*. New York: Limelight Editions, 2003.
- . *Otto Preminger: The Man Who Would Be King*. New York: Knopf, 2007.
- Hoberman, J. *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2010.

- Hoberman, J. and Jeffrey Shandler, eds. *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies, and Broadcasting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Hollywood: An Empire of Their Own*. DVD. Directed by Simcha Jacobovici. A & E Home Video, 2005.
- Isser, Edward. *Stages of Annihilation: Theatrical Representations of the Holocaust*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997.
- Juchem, Elmar. "Musical Alchemists: Weill and Anderson as Collaborators." *Kurt Weill Newsletter* 28, no.2 (Fall 2010): 4-10.
- Kanfer, Stefan. *Stardust Lost: The Triumph, Tragedy, and Mishugas of the Yiddish Theater in America*. New York: Knopf, 2006.
- Kaplan, Martin and Johanna Blakely, eds. *Warners' War: Politics, Pop Culture and Propaganda in Wartime Hollywood*. Los Angeles: Norman Lear Center Press, 2004.
- Kennedy, David M. *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Kowalke, Kim et al. "The Eternal Road and Kurt Weill's German, Jewish, and American Identity." *Theater* 30, No. 3 (2000): 83-95.
- Krasner, David, ed. *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
- Kuhnt, Christian. *Kurt Weill und das Judentum*. Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2001.
- . "Approaching the Music for *A Flag Is Born*." *Kurt Weill Newsletter*, 20, no.1 (Spring 2002): 8-10.
- Kushner, Tony and Alisa Solomon. *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. New York: Grove Press, 2003.
- Laurents, Arthur. *Original Story By: A Memoir of Broadway and Hollywood*. New York: Knopf, 2000.
- Lawrence, Jerome. *Actor: The Life and Times of Paul Muni*. New York: Samuel French, 1974.
- Levine, Ira. *Left-Wing Dramatic Theory in the American Theatre*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985.
- The Life of Emile Zola*. DVD. Directed by William Dieterle. Warner Home Video, 2005.
- MacAdams, William. *Ben Hecht: A Biography*. New York: Barricade Books, 1999.

- Makoul, Rudy. *Hollywood, Sight Unseeing*. Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford Publishing, 2006.
- Manso, Peter. *Brando: The Biography*. New York: Hyperion, 1994.
- Martin, Jeffrey Brown. *Ben Hecht: Hollywood Screenwriter*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985.
- Martins, Olga J. *Hollywood's Commandments: A Handbook for Motion Picture Writers and Reviewers*. New York: H.W. Wilson, 1937.
- McCarthy, Mary. *Sights and Spectacles*. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956.
- McGilligan, Patrick and Paul Buhle. *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997.
- Medoff, Rafael. *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926-1948*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002.
- Meredith, Burgess. *So Far, So Good*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994.
- Moore, Deborah Dash. *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- . "When Jews Were GIs: How World War II Changed a Generation and Remade American Jewry." In *American Jewish Identity Politics*, edited by Deborah Dash Moore, 23-44. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009.
- Most, Andrea. *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Nahshon, Edna. "From Geopathology to Redemption: A Flag Is Born on the Broadway Stage." *Kurt Weill Newsletter*, 20, no.1 (Spring 2002): 5-8.
- Nannes, Caspar. *Politics in the American Drama*. Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1960.
- Navasky, Victor S. *A Matter of Opinion*. New York: Picador, 2006.
- . *Naming Names*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2003.
- Nelson, Steve. "Only a Paper Moon": *The Theatre of Billy Rose*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987.
- Norwood, Stephen. "American Jewish Muscle: Forging a New Masculinity in the Streets and in the Ring, 1890-1940." *Modern Judaism* 29, no. 2 (May 2009): 167-193.

- Nott, Robert. *He Ran All the Way: The Life of John Garfield*. New York: Limelight, 2003.
- Novick, Julius. *Beyond the Golden Door: Jewish American Drama and Jewish American Experience*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Odets, Clifford. "Waiting for Lefty." *New Theatre*. February 1935.
- . *Waiting for Lefty and Other Plays*. New York: Grove Press, 1979.
- Pollard, Tanya. "Tragedy and Revenge." In *A Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, edited by Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., 58-72. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Presner, Todd. *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Rabkin, Gerald. *Drama and Commitment: Politics in the American Theatre of the Thirties*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964.
- Rice, Elmer. *Minority Report: An Autobiography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.
- Robinson, Edward G. and Leonard Spiegelgass. *All My Yesterdays: An Autobiography*. London: W.H. Allen, 1974.
- Rogin, Michael. *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*. Berkeley: University of California, 1998.
- Rosenberg, Warren. *Legacies of Rage: Jewish Masculinity, Violence, and Culture*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001.
- Rosenthal, Steven T. "Long-Distance Nationalism: American Jews, Zionism, and Israel." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, edited by Dana Evan Kaplan, 209-224. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Ross, Steven J. "Confessions of a Nazi Spy: Warner Bros., Anti-Fascism and the Politicization of Hollywood." In Kaplan and Blakely, 49-59.
- Roth, Cecil. *The Jewish Contribution to Civilization*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940.
- Roth, Walter. *Looking Backward: True Stories from Chicago's Jewish Past*. Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2002.
- Salvi, Delia Nora "The History of the Actors' Laboratory, Inc. 1941-1950." Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1970.
- Samuel, Maurice. *The World of Sholem Aleichem*. New York: Schocken Books, 1943.

- Sandrow, Nahma. *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995.
- . "Yiddish Theater and American Theater." In *From Hester Street to Hollywood: The Jewish-American Stage and Screen*, edited by Sarah Blacher Cohen, 18-27. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983.
- Sarna, Jonathan D. *American Judaism: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Schebera, Jürgen. *Kurt Weill: An Illustrated Life*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Schiff, Ellen. Introduction to *Awake and Singing: 7 Classic Plays from the American Jewish Repertoire*, xv-xxxvi. Edited by Ellen Schiff. New York: Mentor, 1995.
- . *From Stereotype to Metaphor: The Jew in Contemporary Drama*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1982.
- Schindler, Colin. *Hollywood in Crisis: Cinema and American Society, 1929-1939*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Shandler, Jeffrey . *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Silver, M. M. *Our Exodus: Leon Uris and the Americanization of Israel's Founding Story*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010.
- Skloot, Robert. "We Will Never Die: The Success and Failure of a Holocaust Pageant." *Theatre Journal* 37, no. 2 (May 1985): 167-180.
- Smith, Kathleen E. R. *God Bless America: Tin Pan Alley Goes to War*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002.
- Smith, Wendy. *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-1940*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990.
- Sollors, Werner. *The Invention of Ethnicity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Stagg, Sam. *When Blanche Met Brando: The Scandalous Story of A Streetcar Named Desire*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2006.
- Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*. 1939. New York: Penguin, 1992.
- Stember, Charles Herbert et al. *Jews in the Mind of America*. New York: Basic Books, 1966.
- Symonette, Lys and Kim H. Kowalke, eds. *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

- Troy, Gil. "From Literary Gadfly to Jewish Activist: the Political Transformation of Ben Hecht." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 40, no.4 (Fall 2003):431-439.
- Urofsky, Melvin. *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1995.
- Wald, Alan. *Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left and the Antifascist Crusade*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Waldau, Roy S. *Vintage Years of the Theatre Guild, 1928-1939*. Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1972.
- Wenger, Beth S. *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010
- . "Constructing Manhood in American Jewish Culture." In *Gender and Jewish History*, edited by Marion A. Kaplan and Deborah Dash Moore, 350-366. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.
- Werfel, Franz. *The Eternal Road: A Drama in Four Parts*. Translated by Ludwig Lewisohn. New York: Viking, 1936.
- Wertheim, Albert. *Staging the War: American Drama and World War II*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Whitfield, Stephen J. *In Search of American Jewish Culture*. Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999.
- Wolitz, Seth. "The Americanization of Tevye or Boarding the Jewish Mayflower." *American Quarterly* 40, no.4 (December 1988): 514-536.
- Wyman, David S. *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*. New York: Pantheon, 1984.
- Wyman, David S. and Rafael Medoff. *A Race Against Death: Peter Bergson, America and the Holocaust*. New York: New Press, 2002.
- Zalampas, Michael. *Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich in American Magazines, 1923-1939*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989.