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CLEVELAND ZIONISTS: RAISING HOLOCAUST AWARENESS

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ABSTRACT

Through a critical reading of newspapers, official government documents, and secondary sources Megan Moledor sheds light on the Jewish groups in Cleveland, Ohio that tried to raise awareness to the United States government about the Holocaust. Moledor argues that the efforts of these specifically Jewish groups in Cleveland were largely successful in raising Holocaust awareness, and turns to the widely debated question of why it took the United States so long to aid Europe during the Holocaust.

Keywords: Zionism, Jewish Studies, Cleveland, Holocaust, United States, Jewish Studies

The question of why it took the United States so long to aid Europe during the Holocaust has been widely debated in history, due to confusion over what groups knew about the atrocity taking place and just how much information was available. When did the United States government understand the destruction that was being done to the Jewish populations overseas? Did specific organizations try to help to raise awareness? As early as the mid-1800s, Cleveland, Ohio became home to its own active Jewish society. Acknowledging what the government was not, these Cleveland Jewish groups tried to bring the American population up to speed by exposing Hitler's destruction to their people. However, within the Jewish population opposing ideologies about how to bring awareness to the issue existed, thus hindering their full ability to prompt the need of the United States to give aid. This paper examines the Zionist Cleveland groups who tried to raise awareness to the United States government about the Holocaust.

For the purpose of this research paper, the Holocaust is to be defined as “the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators.”¹ During the Holocaust, it is estimated that between the years of 1938 and 1945 there were approximately six million Jews murdered.² Before the Holocaust there was a population of around 9,500,000 Jews living in Europe, during the catastrophe, about sixty-three percent were killed.³ This significant loss of life is what the Cleveland Jewish groups tried to prevent, by trying to raise awareness for the national government to step in.

This paper will argue that through the activism of specific Jewish groups in Cleveland, as well as others, the United States was well aware of the monstrous acts being administered by Adolf Hitler. Many authors have written about these Jewish groups, how awareness was brought about, and the gap between acknowledging the awareness and acting to aid the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. In *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, Peter Hayes and John K. Roth compiled multiple works to bridge the gap between various disciplinary approaches to the study of the Holocaust. Together, these two assemble works that study anti-Semitism and just how these beliefs started. Additionally, they focus on the introduction to the Holocaust by linking the anti-Semitic views to how Hitler and Himmler created the Final Solution.

¹ Hillel Silver, “Holocaust Awareness at Ohio State University,” *The Holocaust Awareness Council Blog*. The Wexner Jewish Student Center <http://holocaustawarenessohiostate.weebly.com/the-holocaust.html>. 2013.

² Ibid.

³ “Statistics of the Holocaust.” *The History Place* <http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/h-statistics.htm>. 2015.

Hayes and Roth include sections on the specific types of Jewish groups, including the Zionists, who were present in Cleveland and responsible for trying to raise awareness of the atrocity overseas. One of the strongest segments of the text touches on the lack of awareness of the United States. The final aspect of *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies* deals with liberation of the victims and information of when and how the United States intervened.⁴

David S. Wyman is another important contributor to the study of the Holocaust through his work, *Abandonment of the Jews*. Focusing on the period 1938 to 1945, he provides a vast array of information to answer the question victims in Europe had of, "When are the American's coming?" Wyman points out that there was a gap of information and a struggle to get larger groups informed of the atrocities. He follows up with research on committees that formed because of this gap. Other contributions that should be given credit are his in-depth descriptions of Zionist Jews, many of whom lived in Cleveland and were activists for wanting to aid Europe, as well as rescue resolutions created and helped spurred by the specific Jewish groups.⁵

Sarah E. Peck's article, titled "The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust, 1943-1945", is another crucial source contributing to the topic of Jewish groups in America trying to raise awareness of the Holocaust and what information the government knew. Peck sets the stage by introducing the opposing Jewish groups in America that hindered their cause by not working together. Additionally, she explains the views of the American people towards Jewish populations and reasons of why the Jews had to be more careful with their ways of informing the public of the Holocaust as to not anger the government. If the government was angered, Zionist groups believed it would lead to limiting the already scare information to the general public. She discusses the types of movements, conferences, pamphlets, and protests that were created by American Jewish groups to raise awareness. Her work shows that the Jewish groups continued to pull for their cause regardless of public and government opposition until the need for aid was finally recognized.⁶

Alex Grobman's "What Did They Know? The American Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1 September 1939-17 December 1942," is an important source. Through the use of newspaper articles, Grobman includes specifics such as dates, statistics, and the flow of information to prove there was

⁴ Hayes & Roth, *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵ David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984).

⁶ Sarah E. Peck, "The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust, 1943-1945." *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 2 (1980): 367-400.

information on Hitler's actions circulating among the Jewish populations in the United States prior to sending aid. Additionally, he acknowledges that the Jewish groups in America were not very successful in getting aid due to the common theme of disunity.⁷ Grobman's article examines reports within the United States, as well as in Europe to prove that the Americans were aware of what was happening as early as 1939. Through highlighting key headlines and statistics, he describes the attempts to bring attention to the dire situation as well as the disconnect by the United States government.

The majority of this paper is based on the primary sources *The Jewish Independent* and sermons by Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver. *The Jewish Independent* was a weekly Jewish newspaper published in Cleveland between 1906 and 1964. Maurice Weidenthal was the editor until 1917 and was succeeded by his brother Leo for the remainder of the publication.⁸ Both brothers were Zionist Jews and their views were often depicted within the paper.⁹ Rabbi Silver began at The Temple in 1917, in Cleveland, Ohio.¹⁰ Topics of his sermons in the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s were a mix between what was happening to the Jewish population in Cleveland and the Jewish population in Europe. Many sermons acknowledge that aid need to be given to those in concentration camps and that there was a problem overseas.¹¹

Cleveland's expanding Jewish population was the first influx of Jews in the State of Ohio. In 1832, Simon Thorman came to Cleveland after leaving Unsleben, Bavaria. Following his lead, a group of fifteen left in 1839 for Cleveland to escape oppression and persecution by the government back home.¹² The first wave of this integrated community from Jewish immigration ended around 1880, with a population around 3,500. The second wave of immigration started in the 1900s and focused on fleeing from economic deprivation and persecution; mainly from Poland and Russia. In the early 1900s the Jewish groups were not united. The main division was between German Jewish followers of Reform Judaism and Eastern Europeans.¹³ Living closely together and typically settling for the same reasons, these groups still could not find common grounds.

7. Alex Grobman, "What Did They Know? The American Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1 September 1939- 17 December 1942," *American Jewish History* 68, no. 3 (1979), 327-352.

8. "Search the Jewish Independent Obituary Database." The Jewish Genealogy Society of Cleveland, <http://clevelandjgs.org/db/>. 2011.

9. "Weidenthal." Cleveland Jewish History, <http://www.clevelandjewishhistory.net/people/weidenthal-notes.htm>. 2015.

10. Jewish Virtual Library, "Virtual Jewish World: Cleveland, Ohio."

11. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver (Cleveland, Ohio, 1933-43), Western Reserve Historical Society.

12. Gries Family Foundation, "They've Arrived," *Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage*, visited October 18, 2015, Beachwood, OH.

13. "Virtual Jewish World: Cleveland, Ohio," Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Cleveland.html>. 2015.

The theme of persecution and hatred towards the Jews has gone on for centuries after emerging in Europe. It is defined as hostility against both individuals and groups of Jews, ranging from mild distaste to violence, as well as verbal or mannerisms. Early 1900 is when the major dislike of the Jews began in Europe, which is credited to their climb in the economic world.¹⁴ In the U.S., anti-Semitism peaked in the 1930s and 1940s, specific agitators being the Great Depression and the attack on Pearl Harbor; creating a generalization that all foreigners were a threat to the States. There were demonstrations as well as organizations with propaganda show in big cities, where violence against Jews would occur at synagogues and cemeteries¹⁵. High-ranking figures also displayed anti-Semitic views. They belonged to elite positions within the U.S. Red Cross volunteers, legislatures, and even Congressmen.¹⁶ The government was aware of the anti-Semitic mantic views since Congress members fit into this category, yet they took no initiative to look at what was happening in Europe.

The Final Solution was a plan to ultimately extinguish the Jewish population in Europe. Hitler encouraged the United States to adopt this policy. As early as 1919, he started to introduce his anti-Semitic attitude towards the public; his long-term goal being an ethnic cleansing of Europe. Although his plan did not begin when he took power in 1933, Hitler did begin to lay the foundation of persecution.¹⁷ In Adolf Hitler's six-year commemorating speech he made a declaration of a goal for the "annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!"¹⁸ On July 31, 1941, the high priority decision for systematic extermination was made to create "a complete solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe."¹⁹ The plan was immediately commenced. In Russia, Himmler ordered mass extermination of adult Jewish males, but this quickly began to include both women and children. The way of carrying this out was through deportation to Poland to the special facilities for gassing.²⁰ On January 20, 1942, the Wannsee Conference discussed the expulsion of the Jews in Germany, as well as Austria, and Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Sterilization was another aspect discussed during the Conferences and it was to impact an estimated 11,000,000 Jews.²¹ By preventing reproduction of this group, they would

¹⁴ Richard S. Levy, "Anti-Semitism," *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 23-26.

¹⁵ David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 9-10. 16. Ibid. 13-14.

¹⁷ Alan E. Steinweis, "Hitler and Himmler," *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 115-117.

¹⁸ "Hitler Threatens Jews," *The History Place*, last modified 2015, accessed September 8, 2015, <http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/h-threat.htm>.

¹⁹ David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 4.

²⁰ Alan E. Steinweis, "Hitler and Himmler," *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 121-123.

²¹ Berlin, "am Grossen Wannsee No. 56/58" Minutes from the Wannsee Conferences, <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/holoprelude/Wannsee/wannseeconference.html>. 1942.

never be able to undo the effects of Hitler's actions, which was the motivation for doing so.

With the plan in mind, news spread in Europe quicker than it did to the United States. Additionally, the news in the U.S. spread faster in local papers than in the national papers. Word broke to Cleveland fast through their large Jewish community. On May 16th, 1933, marchers paraded the streets to protest the Nazi persecution of German Jews.²² Following the parade, thousands gathered at an indoor arena at Public Hall in support of this action.²³ In addition to protesting through parades and gatherings, groups would boycott German goods. As early as the December 4th, 1936 issue of *The Jewish Independent* headlined "Reference to Jews Brings Protest" with the subheading quoting "Anti-Nazi Boycotts."²⁴ On January 15th, 1937, the front page included a column dedicated to the Anti-Nazi League Boycott Chairman Committees meeting. During the meeting the chairman of the committee of the League for Human Rights Against Nazism, Emil Brudno, spoke and was quote said to believe "that the method of economic boycott can be a powerful weapon to protest against the terror of Nazism."²⁵ An economic boycott would hurt their economy and was something that could be done within the States.

Furthermore, Rabbi Silver gave many sermons as a way to spread information to the Cleveland community. In his May 21st, 1933 sermon, titled Nazi Germany, he described three main events being created in Germany. The three events being a dictator rising, the German population trying to begin again following the reparations of World War I, and last but not least, "the drama of a community of 600,000 souls being strangled and destroyed in one of the cruelest programs know to history."²⁶ Not only did he include the term of persecution in his Sunday sermon but he also referred to the event taking place in Europe as "such a diabolically planned program of extermination as the Nazis have set on foot."²⁷ He also warned that the Jewish Cleveland community needed to rally quickly to help.²⁸ Speaking out again

²². National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, *Marchers Parade through the Streets of Cleveland to Protest Against the Nazi Persecution of German Jews*, United States National Memorial Museum (Photo Archives, Washington, D.C), <http://digitalassets.usnmm.org/photoarchives/detail.aspx?id=8328>. 1933.

²³. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, *Thousands Gather at an Indoor Arena in Cleveland to Protest Against the Nazi Persecution of German Jews*, United States National Memorial Museum: Photo Archives, Washington, D.C., <http://digitalassets.usnmm.org/photoarchives/detail.aspx?id=8327>. 1933.

²⁴. "Reference to Jews Brings Protest," *Jewish Independent* (Cleveland Ohio), Western Reserve Historical Society, December 4, 1936.

²⁵. Ibid.

²⁶. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, *Nazi Germany* (Cleveland Ohio), Western Reserve Historical Society, May 21, 1933.

²⁷. Ibid.

²⁸. Ibid.

at The Temple on November 26, 1933, he discussed the seriousness of what was going on in Europe. Rabbi Silver described the situation as “The meanest, cruelest and most degrading kind of persecution of the Jewish people...”²⁹ Furthermore, on February 11, 1934, in his sermon titled *What Abraham Lincoln Would Say to Adolf Hitler*, Rabbi Silver stated that “Race obsessions and race persecutions are again rife in the world.”³⁰ This is Rabbi Silver spelling out that the Jews are being persecuted over in Europe.

The language and terminology being used in Cleveland in the sermons in just 1933 was very significant. The national government had yet to confirm those beliefs, or even acknowledge that persecution was going on overseas.³¹ To inform the Cleveland population he discussed the fate of German Jewish families in March of 1933 and on February 9, 1936 he titled his sermon *The Fear of Persecution Versus The Danger of Persecution*.³² Most importantly, on March 26, 1939, he titled his sermon *The Nazi's Stand Revealed*, acknowledging that the threat of extermination had been created.³³ This only confirms and strengthens the evidence he had been delivering to the Jewish Cleveland population since 1933. Through the use of these sermons, Rabbi Silver was acknowledging what the government was not.

Another major proponent of helping raise awareness for the Holocaust victims was Stephen Wise. Wise was ordained as a reform Rabbi and became a Zionist Jew. In 1898 he was elected to the Zionist General Action Committee. After creating the American Jewish Congress in 1920, he became president of the group. His call to action for the American people begun a few years following 1933 when Adolf Hitler came to power. Wise was responsible for being very outspoken against Nazi Germany.³⁴ Like Rabbi Silver, he was a public figurehead of the cause.

Wise was very active in the public eye to raise awareness. This Zionist was responsible for organizing a mass protest against Nazism in Madison Square Garden, which had thousands in attendance. Additionally, he was a supporter of boycotting German goods. In 1936 he helped create the World Jewish Congress in Geneva to help fight against Nazi Germany. Wise was a big supporter of President Roosevelt, but this would eventually tarnish some

29. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, *The Jewish People- What Can It Look Forward to Today?* (Cleveland Ohio), Western Reserve Historical Society, November 26, 1933.

30. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, *What Abraham Lincoln Would Say to Adolf Hitler* (Cleveland Ohio), Western Reserve Historical Society, February 11, 1934.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, *The Fate of a Jewish Family* (Cleveland Ohio), Western Reserve Historical Society, March 25, 1934.

33. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, *The Nazi's Stand Revealed* (Cleveland Ohio), Western Reserve Historical Society, March 26, 1939.

34. “Stephen S. Wise (1874-1949),” Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States National Memorial Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007309>.

of his credibility.³⁵ This was due to the president and national government's refusal for acknowledgment of the treatment of the Jews for so long; however, he did eventually sway to begin not supporting President Roosevelt as time passed.

Cleveland's early acknowledgement was visible in the *Jewish Independent*, which had begun publishing stories prior to 1936. What was significant about this paper was that this was run by Zionist Jews, which each weekly edition included a section about Nazi Germany, and all of the front pages from November 29, 1936 headlined about the crisis in Europe. The headlines went past the report posted in the *New York Times* on September 13, 1939, which was the first national headline about the Jewish Holocaust.³⁶ On December 11, 1936, the front page of the *Jewish Independent* covered a story about what was taking place in Latvia, including the line, "a policy of deliberate anti-Jewish persecution" being established.³⁷ One week later, the editor, Leo Weidenthal, referred to the same threat as Rabbi Silver made by Hitler previously mentioned in 1933, as the Nazi formulas confirmed what the national government turned a blind eye to.

Unlike the national newspapers, the local *Jewish Independent* included a headlined call of action on January 1, 1937. Capital letters read "TO CONFER ON SITUATIONS OF POLISH JEWS," followed by the announcement of Jewish Organizations planning to meet in New York on January 31. The reason for this was to encourage Cleveland groups to attend and show their support for the victims of Hitler's extermination overseas.³⁸ In this weekly edition, the section on Germany discussed a fundraising effort to raise money for winter relief for overseas. The significance of this particular article was not only that the Cleveland groups were fundraising on their own. Hitler's actions were described as a "blood purge" and the words "concentration camps" were included.³⁹ Cleveland also joined the appeal for American intercession for the persecution of Polish Jews and sent seven delegates to Washington D.C., which was covered in the running headline.⁴⁰ The paper also covered the Jewish Community Council of Cleveland writing to President Franklin D. Roosevelt to investigate Nazi activities of persecution.⁴¹ If these ideas were being published in national papers then the government would be more pressured to respond.

35. Ibid.

36. *Jewish Independent* (Cleveland Ohio), Western Reserve Historical Society, November 26, 1936. 397.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 4.

40. Ibid., 1.

41. Ibid.

the *Jewish Independent* was not afraid to engage the Cleveland public and keep them up-to-date about the mass extermination. The paper headlined the proposal of the removal of 3,000,000 Jews because Poland only had space for 500,000.⁴² Additionally, the paper advertised the protest to take place on December 3, 1937, in Cleveland.⁴³ On May 6, 1938, the Jewish population in Cleveland set the goal to raise \$328,000 to help the Jews overseas for relief and resettlement. The Jewish population in Cleveland ended up going above their goal and raised \$338,458, their most successful community drive.⁴⁴ Their hope was that if other communities sponsored events such as these, or even the national government, then there would be a large amount of money to be used for aid; however, the national government was more concerned with raising money for war items for the United States soldiers, rather than the Jewish victims.

So as to not discredit the general public, protests took place across the U.S. around the same period. The biggest was in Madison Square Garden, where 20,000 gathered in 1942; however, the success was tarnished due to opposing viewpoints of various Jewish groups. Jewish groups reached out to the national government prior to this display and asked for the government to send a message of support, but the White House staff refused.⁴⁵ The pageant titled “We Will Never Die” also played in Washington D.C., Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles.⁴⁶ This pageant provoked the First Lady to make a statement in her column titled “My Day”; however, she did not write about the need for aid to the Jewish groups in Europe being attacked by Nazi Germany.⁴⁷ The President did not make a comment about this demonstration.

Another important demonstration took place on October 6, 1943 by a large group of Rabbis. Word had broken to the public about the Holocaust, and Jewish leaders marched in Washington D.C. to urge the government to create rescue units and allow Jewish refugees in. These Rabbis came from all over the United States, including Boston, Cleveland, and Chicago. Additionally, it was a mixture of over four hundred Jewish rabbis. The State Department offered sorrow and grief of the loss overseas, but made no promise and took no action to help the refugees.⁴⁸ By not choosing to send help, the United States government took a stance that winning the war was priority

⁴². Ibid.

⁴³. Ibid.

⁴⁴. Ibid.

⁴⁵. David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 87-88.

⁴⁶. Sarah E. Peck, “The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust, 1943-1945.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 2 (1980), 373.

⁴⁷. David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York: NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 91-92.

⁴⁸. Rafael Medoff, “The Day the Rabbis Marched,” The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, 2005, <http://www.wymaninstitute.org/special/rabbimarch/pg02.php>. 2005.

over fixing the Jewish problem overseas.

Additionally, these groups were relatively successful at getting other groups to join their cause. The Church Peace Union, made up of Christianity and liberalism, was joined along with the Free World Associate to help with this cause. Stepping away from religion, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) joined the fight for rescues. The two large American trade unions were in charge of co-sponsoring a mass meeting to demonstrate how aid was needed for the people suffering from the Holocaust.⁴⁹ The varieties of groups acknowledge the atrocity overseas helped strengthen the argument by Zionist Jews that the general public was showing more attention than the national government.

The Committee for a Jewish Army (CJA) was more radical and violent; the group was just a little removed from the Zionists.⁵⁰ The CJA's Madison Square Garden protest angered the Zionists as well as the Bergson Jews, who were even less radical than the Zionists.⁵¹ Another area for disconnect between the Jewish groups was what route of action to take. The national Zionist groups were focused on aiding and the post-war goal. Additionally, they were considered the most active and effective U.S. Jewish force.⁵² The Bergsonites were responsible for helping to create the War Refugee Board, which focused on sending aid to refugees. This furthered their passion and drive for the promotion of peace.⁵³ The Committee for a Jewish Army had nationalist ideals and wanted to strengthen post-war Israel.⁵⁴ The disunity of the Jewish groups worked against them in coming up with a common solution; the competing forces created a smaller sense of urgency.⁵⁵

In late 1942, some other Jewish groups tried to band together to strengthen their cause. These seven groups went by the name the Joint Emergency Committee of European Jewish Affairs, but it was often interchangeable with the Temporary Committee. Stephen Wise often called this group together to create plans of action.⁵⁶ These groups included the American

⁴⁹ Ibid., 88.

⁵⁰ The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, "Committee for a Jewish Army," *Encyclopedia of America's Response to the Holocaust*, accessed September 12, 2015, <http://enc.wymaninstitute.org/?p=154>.

⁵¹ Sarah E. Peck, "The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust, 1943-1945." *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 2 (1980), 370.

⁵² David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 78.

⁵³ "Rescue Resolution," *Encyclopedia of America's Response to the Holocaust*, The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, <http://enc.wymaninstitute.org/?p=474>.

⁵⁴ "Committee for a Jewish Army," <http://enc.wymaninstitute.org/?p=154>.

⁵⁵ Alex Grobman, "What Did They Know? The American Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1 September 1939 – 17 December 1942," *American Jewish History* 68, no. 3 (1979), 344.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 67.

Jewish Committee (AJC), the American Jewish Congress, the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC), the B'nai B'rith, the World Jewish Congress (WJC), the Synagogue Council of America (SCA), and Agudath Israel of America. The AJC was formed in 1906, made of wealthy non-Zionist Jews, and often refused to participate with Zionists. The American Jewish Congress was involved with many other Jewish groups, made up particularly of middle- and lower-class, and was Zionist in approach. The JLC focused on labor issues and was mostly non-Zionist. The B'nai B'rith focused on education and defending Jewish rights and focused on neutrality, but swung Zionist through WWII. The WJC was Zionist based and focused on worldwide political and economic rights. The SCA focused on the common religious aspects to help create unity between Jewish groups. Lastly, the AIA was anti-Zionist and focused on maintaining spiritual significance of their religion within the U.S.⁵⁷ Although different in primary beliefs, these Jewish groups all could agree that Hitler's destruction needed to be ended and those affected needed the help others.

In the eyes of the Jewish community in the United States, the Temporary Committee was fairly disappointing due to their varying views and agenda. After much disagreement, they were able to cooperate very briefly to agree on five plans of action. The first three points included releasing facts about the Holocaust to the press, dispatching multiple newspapers with the new information, and to telegraph to non-Jews and get them involved. The fourth point was a Day of Mourning and Prayer, which was held in the U.S. and 29 other countries December 2, 1943. The last action was a plan to have Jewish leaders and President Roosevelt meet.⁵⁸ Eventually the conference between President Roosevelt and Wise took place on December 8, 1942. Lasting only a half-hour, Wise presented information from the Temporary Committee. It warned of the war crimes against the Jews and even provided data about the mass killings. The only thing this meeting accomplished was President Roosevelt agreed to give a war crimes warning.⁵⁹ To the dismay of the Jewish groups, the warning would not help answer their cry to help the Holocaust victims or the refugees.

It would be a presumptuous to say that the national government was not informed on the mass murder going on over seas in the 1940s. In the spring of 1942, the government had received dispatches discussing the deportation of Jews to undisclosed locations of labor and concentration camps.⁶⁰ On August 11, 1942, the State Department received a telegram from Switzerland regarding the Nazi situation in Europe. This confidential message

⁵⁷. Ibid., 68.

⁵⁸. Ibid., 70-71.

⁵⁹. Ibid., 72.

⁶⁰. Ibid., 346.

mentioned Hitler's plan to kill 3,500,000-4,000,000 million Jews that coming fall. Also included was the Memorandum at the World Jewish Congress in Geneva. This once again reiterated the extermination plan as well as the deaths would be of the Jews from the mass deportations that had been going on overseas.⁶¹ The national government even sent S. Bertrand Jacobson, chief representative in East Europe for relief activities, specifically the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. He held a press conference based on his eyewitness accounts, which estimated over 240,000 Jews had been killed by Nazi Germany.⁶² On June 18, 1942, an American diplomat confirmed a report by the Dutch government made on April 5, 1942, about 10,000 Dutch Jews being killed in gas experiments 11 days earlier.⁶³ Yet, the government never said or acted on this information.

From the very beginning of his rise to power, Hitler was very vocal with his opinion on the Jewish population, and it was no secret to the national government. In 1933, he began blaming the Jewish population for being the main reason the Germans lost WWI. He made statements about the superior Aryan race as well as in 1935, the Nuremberg Laws were passed, which Jews were no longer considered German citizens. Additionally, the Jews were "removed from schools, banned them from professions, excluded them from military positions, and were even forbidden to share a park bench with a non-Jew."⁶⁴ Right before the start of WWII, Hitler made a formal declaration about being a prophet and promising to wipe out the Jewish race in Europe.⁶⁵ What was so significant about these acts was that these are all public and accessible to the national government.

The acknowledgment within newspapers and reports were occurring all over the world, except for national papers within the United States. On December 30, 1938, *The Jewish Independent* published a London headline on their front page, which was titled "ESTIMATE OF LIVES OF 5 MILLION JEWS ARE IMPERILED THROUGH ANTI-SEMITISM OF EUROPEAN DICTATOR STATES."⁶⁶ London acknowledged what the national government would not, and so did the Cleveland Jewish paper. Additionally, *The Jewish Independent* headlined another press topic from London June 28, 1939, "NAZI'S URGE FRANCE TO UNITE WITH GERMANY TO

⁶¹ U.S. State Department. *Strictly Confidential: Information from Switzerland Regarding the Nazi Plan to Murder the Jews of Europe* (Washington) by Howard Elting, Jr. Telegram. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/holocaust/filmmore/reference/primary/newsusdept.html>. 1942.

⁶² David S. *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 20.

⁶³ Alex Grobman, "What Did They Know? The American Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1 September 1939- 17 December 1942," *American Jewish History* 68, no. 3 (1979), 346.

⁶⁴ The History Place, "The Nazi Holocaust 1938-1945," <http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/holocaust.htm>. n.d.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Jewish Independent* (Cleveland Ohio), Western Reserve Historical Society, December 30, 1938.

ANNILATE FRENCH JEWS- Launch Drive.”⁶⁷ On November 23, 1942, the Palestine press published reports on extermination, accounts of gas chambers, and reports on trains that took the Jewish people to the crematoriums. London also received information from Poland and unlike the U.S. government, did not question its credibility. Nations such as Austria, Bohemia/Moravia, and Poland, among others, stated that Himmler called for the death of half of the 3,000,000 Jews in Poland by the end of 1942, which would be the first step towards success of the Final Solution. In Germany, they were publishing documents declaring the success of deporting those 1,500,000 Jews to die by the end of the year; these documents were seized in Poland and sent to the U.S., specifically Stephen Wise.⁶⁸ Lastly, the Nazi Germany paper even announced that they were solving the Jewish problem by killing off the Jewish population.⁶⁹ The national governments just took these accounts in stride, not promising or acting to aid the individuals overseas.

With all of this information available to the national government, the pressure of how to react was steadily increasing. The Evian Conference took place with leaders from over thirty-two different countries in the summer of 1938. The topic to be discussed was concerning Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. However, from the start, President Roosevelt did not place high importance on the conference, for he did not send any high government official to stand for the U.S., instead he sent a businessman, who happened to be his friend. Although support and sympathy was displayed, no effort or agreement to take in refugees was made because the government was afraid that allowing more refugees into the United States would harm the current economy even more.⁷⁰ Once again, this was the national government was less concerned about the harm being done to the helpless groups overseas, and more focused on the outcome of the war or issues back home.

Another important conference during this period was the Bermuda Conference, which took place in secrecy from April 19-29 in 1943. Prior to the meeting, U.S. government officials restricted what their delegates could promise.⁷¹ This time, the President thought it was important enough to send government officials, but once again did not think it was important enough to make a commitment. Bermuda focused on the call of Allied powers to answer the question of Jewish refugees. From the start, the U.S.

⁶⁷. Ibid.

⁶⁸. David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 52.

⁶⁹. Alex Grobman, “What Did They Know? The American Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1 September 1939- 17 December 1942,” *American Jewish History* 68, no. 3 (1979), 347.

⁷⁰. “The Evian Conference,” *The Holocaust: A Learning Site for Students*, n.d., <http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007698>.

⁷¹. “The Bermuda Conference, (April 19 - 29, 1943),” *The American Experience*, last modified 2009, accessed September 14, 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/holocaust/peoplevents/pandeA-MEX89.html>.

government refused to increase their intake of refugees, would not consider a trans-Atlantic ship to help with transportation of the Jews, or shipments of food to aid.⁷² The lack of effort to aid by the government was a major disappointment to the American Jews.

The delay for the American government to confirm their sources was a great frustration to Jewish groups. Specifically, a telegram that the State Department received in August from the report from Geneva, previously mentioned, which confirmed the mass extermination of the Jews in Europe.⁷³ The first decision the State Department made was to not pass along the telegram to the President of the World Jewish Congress, Stephen Wise. It was not until November 24, 1942, that Wise was allowed to publically announce the policy of mass murder of the European Jews by Nazi Germany through a press conference. However, after further delay, the U.S. government did not condemn the plan of Nazi Germany or hold them responsible for the crimes until December 17, 1942.⁷⁴ It took the national government weeks to hold Nazi Germany accountable.

While the Jewish Independent was responsible for including sections dedicated to the Holocaust, the national papers were not. Coverage about the Jews in Europe was sporadic and fragmented, which made it hard to understand what was happening.⁷⁵ Since State Department documents were available to so few, the average American, regardless of religious affiliation, had little information or knowledge on what was taking place overseas.⁷⁶ The Jewish papers published daily accounts of what was happening, and on the front pages, national papers did not even include information within. On January 23, 1940, the *New York Times* reported from the Vatican that what the public had questioned and believed as exaggerations was confirmed.⁷⁷ The national government had yet to agree. Finally, on December 17, 1942, the Allies finally acknowledged Nazi Germany for mass extermination of the Jewish population.⁷⁸ Additionally, even after though the national government was acknowledging the destruction, the government still refused to aid overseas.

Fear that the necessary attention to win the war would sway if the United

⁷² The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, "Bermuda Conference," *Encyclopedia of America's Response to the Holocaust*, accessed September 12, 2015, <http://enc.wymaninstitute.org/?p=69>.

⁷³ U.S. State Department. *Strictly Confidential: Information from Switzerland Regarding the Nazi Plan to Murder the Jews of Europe*.

⁷⁴ David S. Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984): 74.

⁷⁵ Alex Grobman, "What Did They Know? The American Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1 September 1939- 17 December 1942," *American Jewish History* 68, no. 3 (1979), 328.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 327.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 333.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 328.

States sent aid is what halted them from doing so. For example, the Temporary Committee put together by Stephen Wise agreed on the action to sponsor a Day of Mourning and Prayer. The committee first asked for a one-hour shut down of work where prayer could take place and pause productivity. The government only granted a ten-minute period of mourning, fearing that the Jews responsible for creating this delay would halt the war movement. Additionally, the ten-minute pause had to be made up the following day.⁷⁹ By forcing businesses to make up for the lost time it gave the impression that the government was more concerned about their place in war than humanity. President Roosevelt made it known that he “had no intention of demanding less than an unconditional surrender from Nazi Germany.”⁸⁰ Due to this stance, he feared that by trying to defend the Jews, that Hitler would force Roosevelt to make an agreement that would not completely destroy Nazi Germany or could even lengthen the time of war. Jewish groups spoke out about this refusal to aid and said “Jews within Europe should not be considered potential refugees but potential corpses.”⁸¹

This paper argues that specific Jewish Zionist groups in Cleveland helped raise awareness of the monstrous acts being administered by Adolf Hitler before the United States government acknowledged or intervened. The national government was aware of what was going on, but refused to speak out. Through the use of public outlets such as sermons given by Rabbi Silver and the weekly newspaper, *The Jewish Independent*, Cleveland Zionist groups kept the public informed. Through raising funds, protesting, and boycotting the Jewish community was able to create attention. If the disunity of Jewish groups in the United States did not exist, the United States government might have had less fragmented information, and could have possibly been forced to place more significance on the atrocity earlier.

⁷⁹ David S. Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 71.

⁸⁰ Hayes & Roth, *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 270.

⁸¹ Sarah E. Peck, “The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust, 1943-1945.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 2 (1980), 378.

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