



Richard Gottheil
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

Richard Gottheil's Role in the Great War: The Polemical Dogfights of a "Professor of Dead Languages"

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The outbreak of World War I was as much of a shock to European Jewish leaders and intellectuals as it was to anyone else, but it did not leave them in a quandary. With a small number of notable exceptions, they lined up in support of their respective lands and participated in their war efforts, usually without reservation. This was true even of most Zionists, whose worldwide organization proclaimed its neutrality even as its members, scattered across the continent, donned different uniforms and suited up to fight one another.

In the United States, the situation was different—until April 1917, when the country belatedly entered the war. Before that its people stood outside the fray, generally heeding the admonition of its president to remain neutral in “thought as well as action.” By and large, American Jewry’s most notable figures did so for years, even though most of them tended to support the Central Powers, sometimes out of genuine sympathy but more often out of hatred of their enemy to the east, Tsarist Russia.

America’s Zionists for the most part shared these feelings, but not unanimously. Some of the thoroughly acculturated academics among them were, in the words of Ben Halpern, “inclined to share Anglophile, pro-Allied leanings” that prevailed among the East Coast elites. Among these people, however, Halpern identified a significant outlier. “Professor Richard Gottheil,” he wrote, “was particularly outspoken in supporting the Allied cause.”¹ During the war years, he often created something

1 Ben Halpern, *A Clash of Heroes: Brandeis, Weizmann and American Zionism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987), 154.

of a stir by issuing public statements pertaining to the Jewish and the American stakes in the fighting from a pro-Entente and anti-German point of view. He did not usually do so in his capacity as a high-ranking Zionist, but his identification with the Zionist movement strongly influenced others' perceptions of his words and their reaction to them. Many Zionists complained about what he was doing, but they could not stop him. At times, however, they may have succeeded in inducing him to act with a greater measure of caution. And after the United States entered the war, Gottheil was no longer out of step with anyone of consequence in the American Zionist movement or, for that matter, in the American Jewish community as a whole.

During the war, Gottheil was not a mover and a shaker. But he was a provocative and contentious figure who served as something of a lightning rod. An examination of his altercations with Zionist leaders like Judah Magnes and Harry Friedenwald, his critique of the great magnate Jacob Schiff, his attack on the Harvard professor Hugo Muensterberg, his letters to the *New York Times*, his denunciation of the Turkish government, his long-running battle with the pro-Zionist *American Jewish Chronicle*, and other episodes of his unique wartime career as a polemicist can shed a great deal of light, from an unusual perspective, on the evolution of American Jewry's attitudes toward World War I. And it can contribute to the biography of a half-forgotten but far from insignificant figure in American Jewish history, an outspoken man of principle, if not an adroit politician.

In and Out of Leadership

Richard Gottheil was an erudite and accomplished scholar, a professor of Semitics at Columbia University for half a century, from the 1880s to the 1930s, and a political leader as well, for a much shorter period, around the turn of the twentieth century. The range of his academic work was astonishingly broad, extending from antiquity to modern times, from ancient Persian to rabbinic to Muslim literature; like the authority of the book of Esther's King Ahasuerus, it stretched from India to Ethiopia and even a little bit further. His impressive bibliography is admittedly devoid of any work pertaining directly to the culture of India, but it does include studies relating to lands located

beyond it, including Tibet, as well as virtually all of the territory to the west, up to Ethiopia.² In fact, as his most thorough biographer notes, “when Ethiopia became the cynosure of the world’s interest in 1933–36, Professor Gottheil offered a course in the language and culture of Ethiopia at Columbia.”³

Gottheil’s political career was much narrower than his academic one. In 1898 he was the founding president of the Federation of American Zionists, a position he retained until 1904. As the head of America’s Zionists, he was not particularly effective. He did, however, earn Theodor Herzl’s trust and undertook a few remarkable initiatives. Perhaps the most colorful of them involved a collaboration with Herzl in 1901 and 1902 to obtain from the Remington company a magnificently appointed Arabic typewriter—apparently the first of its kind—and to dispatch it as a gift from the World Zionist Organization to Sultan Abdul Hamid in Constantinople.⁴ After his departure from office, however, it does not seem that Gottheil was greatly missed.

One of the fullest summaries of his political career comes from one of his successors as a leader of American Zionists, Louis Lipsky. It is not a positive one. “That Professor Richard Gottheil,” Lipsky writes, “should have been the first leader of an American Zionist organization is one of the curious incidents of early Zionist history. It was disconcerting that a student of dead languages should be called to lead the Zionist renaissance.” After he was induced to accept the presidency of the new federation, Lipsky reports,

he took the office with reluctance and did not alter his interests or his way of life because of it. He remained the student of books, the teacher of languages, leading a cloistered life from which he emerged from time to time to intervene indifferently in the practical aspects of Zionism.

2 Joshua Bloch and Ida A. Pratt, “Richard James Horatio Gottheil 1862–1936,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56, no. 4 (December 1936): 472–489.

3 Louis I. Newman, “Richard J. H. Gottheil: A Biographical Sketch,” *American Jewish Year Book* 39 (1937–1938): 36.

4 Evyatar Friesel, *HaTnua HaTziyonit BeArtzot HaBrit Be-Shanim, 1897–1914* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1970), 69.

Gottheil, Lipsky goes on to say, “hated to preside at meetings,” and “was careless in procedural matters and embarrassed by ceremonies in which he had to take part.” In addition, he

felt that his status as a professor was being sullied by his being President of a propaganda organization. He ran away from official duties. He usually limited his official addresses at Zionist meetings to the necessary items, speaking briefly. He became more and more nerve-provoked by his status, especially as the practical affairs of the Zionist Federation made no visible progress.

When his term of office ended in 1904, he “left at once for Europe and disappeared from the Zionist scene for good.”⁵

This was too harsh an assessment, one that ignored Gottheil’s significant contributions to American Zionism. As the Israeli scholar Zohar Segev recently wrote, when one closely examines his early Zionist writings, “it is hard to ignore the resemblance between Gottheil in 1900 and Louis Brandeis’s famous definition: “To be good Americans, we must be better Jews, and to be better Jews we must become Zionist.” What Gottheil wrote about how Zionism made its adherents better men years before Brandeis said much the same “adds another dimension to Brandeis’s view, showing that the roots of the special American view of Zionism go back to its earliest days. Already then, its founders felt that given the American reality, they had to adapt Herzl’s ideology to the needs of the Jewish community in the United States.”⁶ Even if Lipsky was correct in his assessment of Gottheil’s limitations, he went too far when he suggested that Gottheil disappeared from the Zionist scene for good. He may never again have attended a Zionist convention in the United States after 1904, as Lipsky says, but he did publish a pioneering history of Zionism in 1914.⁷ And he remained to some degree in the fray, as a result of his membership during

5 Louis Lipsky, *Memoirs in Profile* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1975), 211–214.

6 Zohar Segev, “European Zionism in the United States: The Americanization of Herzl’s Doctrine by American Zionist Leaders: Case Studies,” *Modern Judaism* 26, no. 3 (October 2006): 279.

7 Richard J. H. Gottheil, *Zionism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1914).

World War I in the Provisional Executive Committee of the Federation of American Zionists, and as a result of the various interventions in public discourse that we are now about to examine.

Taking on the Turks and Jacob Schiff

Turkey did not enter World War I until the end of October 1914, but within a month Gottheil had condemned it for joining the Central Powers. In an interview that appeared on the front page of the seventh section of the 29 November (Sunday) edition of the *New York Sun*, Gottheil first provided a capsule history of the Zionist movement, about which he had written at much greater length in his recently published book, and then outlined his position on the war, including his assessment of the Turks. He regretted most of all that they had been lured or duped into participating on “the wrong side”: “I say this not only as an American but also, and especially, as a Jew. For we Jews owe a great debt of gratitude to the two great democratic Powers of Western Europe which must render us eternally grateful to the liberal statesmanship with which they have been informed?”⁸

Gottheil proceeded to provide the *Sun*'s readers with a brief explanation of France's historical benevolence toward the Jews, one that begins, somewhat surprisingly, not with the French Revolution, which granted the country's Jews equal rights in 1791, but with the Sanhedrin that Napoleon convened sixteen years later. Historians today tend to highlight Napoleon's suspicions of the Jews and his coercive efforts to reform them.⁹ Gottheil, for his part, took no note of such things. For him, as a Jewish nationalist, they were apparently outweighed by the fact that Napoleon was “the first to recognize us as a body and by the calling of the Sanhedrin in 1807, to give us the dignity that such recognition demanded.”¹⁰ He saw this as a gesture that was more deserving of appreciation than the French National Assembly's earlier acknowledgment of Jews' equal rights as individuals. At the same time, however, he chose

8 *New York Sun*, 29 November 1914, section 7, p. 1.

9 See, e.g., Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews, and the Sanhedrin* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul), 1979.

10 *New York Sun*, 29 November 1914, section 7, p. 1.

to highlight the fact that in France “no Jew has been denied the position that his ability and his merits have demanded as of right.” Knowing that such an assertion would call to his readers’ minds the Dreyfus affair, he hastened to dismiss the antisemitism it revealed as an importation from Germany.

Gottheil was briefer in his expression of enthusiastic appreciation of England, the land of his birth (to German-born parents, who would ultimately migrate to the United States). “Is it even needful to refer to England,” he asked,

where at the present day several of the highest posts in the gift of Government are held by men of my race and, I may add, without the slightest suspicion that in order to gain these posts they must show themselves recreant to their religious convictions or to their racial connections?¹¹

It is hard to see why Gottheil would have expected the Turks to throw in their lot with the Allies for these particular reasons. He argued, however, rather loosely, that, in view of these countries’ generous treatment of the Jews, the Turks ought to see that France and England “would have an understanding for the peculiar questions that confront the Government at the Golden Horn, for the multiplicity of the national and religious entities that demand recognition and the free play of their national consciences within the wide reach of Turkish dominion.”

Unfortunately, the Turks failed to realize what would be in their own best interests and placed themselves “unreservedly under the heel of the Prussian boot.” They did so no doubt because they anticipated a German victory, but if they only looked at the inhabitants of Alsace and Lorraine and considered the fate of the Poles, they would understand what negative consequences these aspects might very well imply for them. And, as far as the Jews were concerned, matters were even clearer:

What are we Jews to expect from a Prussianization of Turkey and a Junkerization of Palestine? Is the anti-Semitism born this side of the Russian border to be part and parcel of the new order of things

11 *New York Sun*, 29 November 1914, section 7, p. 1.

hoped for? Are Jews in order to take part and share in the new Turkey to be forced to the baptismal font or perhaps to a repetition of the Mohammedan Shehadah, or confession of faith?¹²

Gottheil was not wrong to fear an Ottoman crackdown on Jewish Palestine. One was already underway as he wrote, although it was focused on the removal of the Zionists from the country, not their conversion to Islam. What he could not see at the moment, however, was how effectively the German government would soon intervene with its Ottoman ally in defense of Zionist interests and bring the crackdown to a halt.¹³

Since the Germans have nothing to offer, Gottheil wrote, “we Jews can profit only by the spread of the spirit that has informed the liberal statesmanship of France and England. This is true both in the lands of the Dispersion and in our home country Palestine.” But Gottheil did not stop there. He bent over backwards to rope the most dubious of the Allies into the circle of respectability: Russia. Gottheil expressed the pious hope that the beneficial influence of France and England would extend eastward “to the land of the Czar in order that the suspicion that has been attached to his Jewish subjects, largely under the influence of the Prussian Junkerdom that has crossed the border into Russia” shall weaken.¹⁴ Too optimistically, he viewed the enlistment of a quarter of a million Jewish soldiers in the Russian Army as a sign that this was beginning to happen.¹⁵ After this excursus on the war, Gottheil returned, at the end of the interview, to the subject of Zionism.

Among the people displeased by Gottheil’s interview in the *Sun* was Harry Friedenwald, one of the leading figures in the Federation of American Zionists and a fellow member of its Provisional Executive Committee. “I felt badly,” he wrote to Gottheil on 1 December 1914, “at your giving expression to your very decidedly pro-Ally views and

12 *New York Sun*, 29 November 1914, Section 7, p. 1.

13 Isaiah Friedman, *Germany, Turkey and Zionism, 1897–1918* (New York: Transaction, 1997), 191–227.

14 *New York Sun*, 29 November 1914, Section 7, p. 1.

15 He was far from the only person to do so; see Marc Saperstein, “Western Perceptions of Russian Jews at the Beginning of the First World War,” *European Judaism* 43, no. 1 (2010): 116–127.

anti-German sentiments. It appears to me essential that the small group of persons who are guiding the provisional Zionist work should maintain the strictest neutrality in their public utterances, especially when they are dealing with Zionist questions!" Friedenwald concluded his note with a friendly warning that he was going to call this matter to the attention of other members of the committee.¹⁶ Magnes, who also belonged to the committee and was one of the leading figures in the New York Jewish community, was similarly upset with Gottheil.¹⁷ The new leader of American Zionism, Louis Brandeis, consequently "had to find a way to restrain his partisanship, at least when shown in a Zionist context, and yet soothe his ruffled feelings when other Zionists (such as the emphatically anti-war Magnes) tried to administer an official rebuke."¹⁸ But no such rebuke was delivered.

It seems as if Gottheil may have taken these criticisms and manifestations of disapproval to heart.¹⁹ His next public statement on the war

16 Letter from Harry Friedenwald to Richard Gottheil, 1 December 1914, Friedenwald MSS, A 182/89, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

17 Melvin I. Urofsky, *American Zionism From Herzl to the Holocaust* (New York: Anchor, 1975), 198. "I think that it is absolutely necessary," Magnes wrote to Brandeis on 7 December 1914, "for our committee or any Committee in America that expects to make its voice heard in peace negotiations to act as an absolutely neutral committee. It is not enough for us to be able to say when the time comes that as a Committee we have committed no breach of neutrality. We must be able to say that the individual members of our Committee have not given public expression to their individual views. Dr. Gottheil, while appreciating these sentiments, was not inclined to be in agreement with them." Richard Gottheil Papers, MS-127, box 1, folder 5, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter AJA).

18 Halpern, *Clash*, 154. Later, in June 1915, the Turkish consul-general in New York complained to the U.S. ambassador to Turkey, Oscar Strauss, about Gottheil and others who had been making pro-Entente statements. See Friedman, *Germany, Turkey and Zionism*, 245.

19 But Magnes did not give up easily. Six months later he was still prepared to urge Brandeis to remove Gottheil from the Provisional Executive Committee. On 24 May 1915, he sent Brandeis a clipping from that day's *New York Times*. The newspaper reported that Gottheil had denounced the German government's conduct in Palestine at a meeting of the American branch of the Alliance Israelite Universelle. He "attacked the doings of a German Jewish society which, he said, established a 'Technicum' in

retained anti-German overtones, but it studiously avoided any overt partisanship. It was, however, notably critical of one American Jew of German origin, who only a week before Gottheil's interview in the *Sun* had himself given an interview to the *New York Times* in which he had expressed his sympathy with Germany: Jacob Schiff.

Born in Germany but long established in the United States, Schiff had a better claim than anyone else to be considered the leading Jew in his adopted land. An enormously wealthy banker at Kuhn, Loeb & Co., he was a zealous activist and philanthropist, the guiding spirit behind a host of different initiatives and organizations.²⁰ In the *New York Times* on 22 November 1914, Schiff made it clear from the outset that, even though he was an American "in every fibre" of his being, he nevertheless did not share what seemed to be the prevailing opinion of his fellow citizens that Germany was responsible for the war taking place in Europe. He was admittedly biased. "For many reasons," he said, "my personal sympathies are with Germany." She was not the real aggressor; war had been forced on her, he maintained. But even if this had not been the case, it seems, he could not have done anything other than stand up for his native land. "Although I left Germany half a century ago, I would think as little of arraying myself against her, the country

Jaffa, Palestine, to compete with and undermine the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, whose headquarters are in Paris, though it is not French in nature or in purpose. The German society, Dr. Gottheil said, inspired by the Imperial Government, first collected funds from Jews all over the world to establish the Technicum, with the Hebrew language as the vernacular, then, when it was built, endeavored to substitute German. "The storm of protest that this aroused not only exceeded any preceding wave of emotion sweeping our people throughout the world," he said, "but it did much to unite them." Gottheil's words, according to Magnes, constituted a "breach of the understanding that we had in the Provisional Committee that the Committee should preserve strict neutrality in their public utterances as to the European war, particularly when related to Jewish affairs." Magnes advised Brandeis that Gottheil should be asked to resign from the Committee and threatened to withdraw from it himself if he was not. Richard Gottheil Papers, MS-127, box 1, folder 5, AJA. Magnes did resign from the Committee the following month, but for weightier reasons, see Daniel P. Kotzkin, *Judah L. Magnes: An American Jewish Nonconformist* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 133–137.

20 Naomi W. Cohen, *Jacob H. Schiff: A Study in American Jewish Leadership* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1999).

of my birth, in this moment of her struggle for existence, as of arraying myself against my parents.”

Schiff did not expect the readers of the *New York Times* to share his feelings or to come to Germany’s aid. He proceeded with a dispassionate analysis of the world situation, in which he endeavored not simply to justify Germany’s actions but to outline what Americans, whether they shared his sentiments or not, ought to recognize as their own country’s interest in preventing Germany from being utterly defeated by the Entente. If that were to happen, it would lead, Schiff warned, to England’s domination of Europe. Then “every nation in the world would have to do the British bidding, for, should anyone refuse, she could completely destroy its commerce and shut off its overseas supplies.”

But it was not only Britain that should be barred from attaining world domination. If things were to go the other way, and its main adversary were to come out on top, “in the role of a world conqueror Germany would become a world dictator—would indulge in a domination which would be almost unbearable in every other nation. Particularly would this be the case in respect to her relations with the United States,” since it would be only a matter of time before Germany began meddling in the Western Hemisphere. What is the answer, then? Stop the fighting now! The American press and the American people should do whatever was within their power to bring about an end to the conflagration and restore a world in which all of the pitfalls that Schiff foresaw would be avoided and “peaceful competition” would prevail.

In this entire long interview Schiff alluded only once to his Jewishness. “I am anti-Russian,” he noted in passing, “for reasons that are obvious.” They were, of course, to people who knew of his Jewish commitments, which probably included all readers of the *New York Times* in the fall of 1914.²¹ A few months later, however, in a Jewish periodical, the newly created *Menorah Journal*, Schiff was more explicit and outlined what the current world situation looked like from a Jewish perspective. In an

21 Edward Marshall, “Jacob H. Schiff Points a Way to European Peace,” *New York Times* (22 November 1914): 4.

article entitled “The Jewish Problem Today,” he explained at the very outset just why he was anti-Russian. He admitted, once again, that he was a German sympathizer but rejected the idea that he was therefore biased. Regardless of his feelings, “the fact is” that the Jewish people in the eastern war zone “have been outraged in the most terrible manner” by the Russians and the Poles, who have treated them inhumanely.²²

Schiff did not go into the gory details as he could have, if he thought that readers of the *Menorah Journal* needed to hear them. By the time he was writing, however, the *New York Times* and other papers had already revealed all that needed to be known of what was taking place in the areas under the control of the Russian Army.²³ Nor did he call upon the Jewish press and the Jewish people to campaign actively for immediate action to remedy the situation faced by their brethren in Eastern Europe. In the long run, he said, “the only way to solve the Jewish problem in Russia...is nothing less than the entire removal of the Pale.” In the short run, little improvement could be expected. Speaking from experience (but only alluding to it indirectly), Schiff discounted the possibility that the Russian government could be moved to take positive action.²⁴ What America and America’s Jews should do is therefore “hard to say.” But Schiff did have a positive proposal. “I do not think that there is anything to do now for the Jews and Jewish bodies except to work harmoniously together in the raising of relief funds.”²⁵

For a German sympathizer, Schiff remained reserved in his expressions of approbation for his native land until he reached the middle of his essay, where he compared England unfavorably with it. England, he wrote,

has been contaminated by her alliance with Russia, because England doesn’t want to do anything that is displeasing to her ally, more through fear to offend her than through respect for her. So far, at least, it has not

22 Jacob H. Schiff, “The Jewish Problem Today,” *Menorah Journal* 1, no. 2 (1915): 75.

23 Sarah Panter, “Neutral Spectators from a Distance? American Jews and the Outbreak of the First World War,” *Religions* 9, no. 7 (2018): 6.

24 Cohen, *Jacob H. Schiff*, 124–152.

25 Schiff, “Jewish Problem,” 76.

come true, as it was hoped in certain quarters, that England might apply pressure upon Russia to obtain an improvement in the condition of the Jews. And unfortunately the conditions in England itself affecting the Jews are certainly not as good now as they have been formerly. England has always been our great friend. In England there existed no such thing as anti-Semitism. But now there are, I fear, signs of a change.

That there was no trace of antisemitism in England prior to the outbreak of World War I is a less than accurate assertion. And Schiff's insinuation that antisemitism was seeping into the country from its Russian ally lacked any foundation.²⁶ But what he went on to say about Germany was even more dubious.

In Germany the Jews do not suffer. They have a high standing and occupy many positions. There has, it is true, always been a certain anti-Semitic tendency in Germany. But I think this war will crush out most of that, in fact all classes of difference. I am quite convinced that anti-Semitism in Germany is a thing of the past.²⁷

Needless to say, Schiff's statements ring hollow today. But they were already unfounded when they were still fresh, in 1915, and they got under Gottheil's skin even then. They may very well have been what provoked him to publish his article, "The War from a Jewish Standpoint," in the very next issue of the *Menorah Journal*, even though he reserved his response to Schiff for a footnote.²⁸

In this footnote, Gottheil disputed the very idea that antisemitism was on the rise in England, although he did acknowledge that some

26 If antisemitism did indeed increase in England in the course of the war, it was mostly due to the widely known reluctance of young Russian Jews residing in the country to service in the war; see Julia Bush, "East London Jews and the First World War," *London Journal* 6, no. 2 (1980): 147–161.

27 Schiff, "Jewish Problem," 77.

28 This footnote represents a briefer and somewhat less pugnacious recapitulation of a letter that Gottheil addressed to the *Times* after it published, on 1 May 1915, some excerpts from Schiff's *Menorah Journal* article. A copy of the letter, which may or may not have been sent but was certainly not published, is in the Richard Gottheil Papers, MS-127, box 1, folder 2, AJA.

bankers of German-Jewish origin “and their following” had recently aroused public mistrust there. But whatever ill will was being directed against them, he insisted, had nothing to do with their Jewish origin. “Most of them have never taken the least interest in Jewish affairs, some even have ostentatiously kept themselves quite apart from any connection with them. And what is more, the feeling against them is shared by Jews as well as by non-Jews in England.”²⁹

The aspersions Schiff cast on England seem to disturb Gottheil less than the excuses he made for Germany. Gottheil scoffs at his sugar-coating of the scene there, insisting that antisemitism is far more than a mere tendency. “Anti-Semitism in Germany,” he objects, “and especially in Prussia, has kept the Jews far from any positions of importance in university life, on the bench, and in all state and military affairs.” Schiff’s idea that the war will “crush out” most of the remaining antisemitism is a fantasy that flies in the face of the known facts.

Nor can Mr. Schiff forget that forced conversion away from the Jewish faith and communion has nowhere taken on the dangerous proportions it has in the Fatherland. Russia, it is true, has martyred many Jewish bodies; German “Kultur” has quenched too many Jewish souls. History will have to decide which has done greater hurt to the Jewish cause.³⁰

29 Richard Gottheil, “The War from a Jewish Standpoint,” *Menorah Journal* 1, no. 3 (June 1915): 153.

30 Gottheil did not have access to a personal letter from Schiff to Arthur Zimmerman, undersecretary in the German Foreign Office (and, after his promotion and in time, the author of the famous telegram) in which Schiff was more candid about German antisemitism: “The sympathies of a majority of American Jews,” he wrote, “who are in the main of Russian origin, decidedly are on the side of Germany, but I cannot but state that a great number of Jews, especially born in this country, whose parents came here from Germany many years ago, do not completely share this sympathy, because the members of this young generation, very much convinced of their human dignity, cannot forget that Germany has been the breeding ground of anti-Semitism and that this irresponsible movement has spread out further from Germany.” The letter is quoted in Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908–1917*, trans. Christa D. Shannon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 65.

There is no need to emphasize how ironic these words sound today, long after the Germans succeeded in outdoing the Russians in the destruction of Jewish bodies, and after seven decades in which Russia concentrated on quenching Jewish souls. Let us take note, instead, of their tone. It is so sharp in its rebuke of the leading figure in American Jewry at the time that one cannot help but wonder whether there is a personal backstory to uncover here. Of such a thing I have found no direct evidence. It is hard to believe that Gottheil and Schiff never crossed paths, but the existing (and rather brief) biographical studies of the former make no mention of the latter. Nor does Gottheil show up in any of the biographies of Schiff, including the sizeable and relatively recent one by Naomi Cohen.

But elsewhere, in her *Encounter with Emancipation*, Cohen provides a biographical sketch of Gottheil that may shed some light on this question. Exploring the basis for his early commitment to Zionism, she considers the impact of his family background. She notes, to begin with, the fact that his German-born father, Rabbi Gustav Gottheil, was himself an early convert to Zionism and one of the few Reform rabbis of his day who fell into this category. Rabbi Gottheil had served for some years at a congregation in Manchester, England (where Richard was born), before coming to New York City, where he became the rabbi of Temple Emanu-el in New York City. Cohen suspects that as a youngster Richard may have observed and deeply resented the crass treatment meted out to rabbis by the “vulgar rich of whom Temple Emanu-el doubtless had its share.” Indeed, later in life, he “seized numerous occasions to retaliate against the ‘well-fed dwellers in our golden ghettos’ who supported synagogues, choirs, and ‘staid church deportment.’ Lulled by their material comfort (whose level he and his father never approximated) into a mood of false security, they were insensitive to ‘kicks and hurts.’ He saw them as harbingers of the destruction of Judaism.”

Cohen conjectures that “Zionist affiliation was Richard’s way of declaring his independence of those circles and yet remaining loyal to his

father.”³¹ If this was indeed what the younger Gottheil was doing, these feelings may have colored his relationship with Schiff, who was one of the pillars of Temple Emanu-el. No one could dismiss this august patrician as a vulgarian, but who knows what distorted recollections from his childhood might have become lodged in Gottheil’s imagination and inspired him to lash out at him?

In the latter part of his essay, Gottheil, like Schiff before him, focused on the situation in Eastern Europe. There, he noted, “in Poland, in Galicia, and in parts of Russia, at least two or three millions of Jews have suffered from the ravages of a war waged with a bitterness that exceeds all bounds.” Unlike Schiff, however, Gottheil did not express outrage against the Russians, nor did he reinforce Schiff’s urgent call for the extension of assistance to their victims. He despaired, like Schiff, of any possibility for immediate, structural change and focused on the aftermath of the war, but he did so with considerably more optimism. Encouraged by some recent expressions on the part of members of “the most intelligent portion of the Russian population” for “the disappearance of all kinds of persecution of the Jews and their complete emancipation,” he predicted a better future, particularly since he differed with Schiff with respect to the direction in which cross-border influence was flowing.

And we are the more persuaded that these [pro-Jewish] views will prevail when we remember that [during the war] Russia has been brought into closer contact with just those nations of Europe where Jewish emancipation has been most perfect and has brought forth the best fruits. It is unthinkable that these nations should fail to put their influence on the side of Jewish freedom in Russia when European accounts are finally balanced.

Gottheil went into more detail than Schiff about the situation in Romania and, of course, in his capacity as a lifelong Zionist, the future of Palestine. The most significant difference between his essay and

31 Naomi W. Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States 1830–1914* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984), 287.

Schiff's, however, had to do not with Jewish issues in particular but with matters of great global import. "Our concern," he wrote, "in the present world conflict goes further than our own immediate affairs and meets those interests which we have in common with the rest of humankind." Schiff, too, as we have seen, expressed such concerns in his *Times* interview when he shared his geopolitical worries about one side or the other obtaining global dominion. Gottheil's reflections were, in contrast, purely moralistic and more opposed to war itself than they were supportive of any belligerent power.

Gottheil's words bear the imprint, to be sure, of an essentially anti-German outlook. There is, to begin with, his reference on the second page to the sufferings of the Belgian people (although without any explicit mention of the fact that Germany was responsible for them). His later lament over the collapse during wartime of the structure of international law seems, in context, to point principally to Germany's violation of Belgium's neutrality and its initiation of the use of poison gas in combat. But where he seems most clearly to be thinking anti-German thoughts is in his outline of the intellectual genealogy of the outlook currently prevailing in the world. The first thinker he blames for this lamentable state of affairs is Martin Luther, who described war as a "divine business." The other villains include Heinrich von Treitschke, Hans Delbrueck, and above all, Friedrich Nietzsche, whose consecration of the "will to power" had led to "a glorification of war as the supreme test of strength, obtaining its justification in success."³²

This all has a very familiar ring to it. As Nicholas Martin has observed, the "opening salvos of the British propaganda offensive" in World War I

included numerous books and articles which sought to establish how Nietzsche had fueled, if not created, the Germans' supposed love of killing and conquest. In works with improbable titles such as *Fighting a Philosophy* or *Nietzsche and Treitschke: The Power in Modern Germany* or *Nietzsche and the Ideals of Modern Germany*, British propagandists accused Nietzsche, who had died in 1900, of leading a posthumous

32 Gottheil, "War," 156–157.

conspiracy with his “followers,” the historian Heinrich von Treitschke (dead since 1896) and the ageing military strategist General Friedrich von Bernhardi (1849–1930), to foster a mood of aggressive imperialism in Germany.³³

Gottheil, for his part, had nothing at all to say against Bernhardi, but, much more significantly, he did not, in the end, stigmatize the Germans in particular. Whatever the origins of the new bellicosity, it was now manifest in England as well. In proof of this, he cited a September 1914 article from the British periodical *Nineteenth Century* in which the unnamed but religious-minded author spoke of the test of war as “the test which God has given for the trial of people.” No one should think, this man said, that “Christianity is incompatible with the military spirit.” For only “a spurious and bastard humanitarianism masquerading as religion declares war to be an anachronism and a barbaric sin.”

Gottheil might at this point have scoured England or even the rest of the world for signs of a more salubrious mentality, but he identified, in the end, only one countervailing force: Judaism. On the basis of some brief citations from the Torah, the prophets, and the rabbis, he arrived at the conclusion that the “ideal of peace has been the guiding star of Israel for which the Jew has prayed morning, noon and night.” His readers, he hoped, “the young men of the Menorah,” would do their part in “upholding the reign of law, the reign of love, and the reign of peace.” Gottheil seems, for the moment, to have been tamed.³⁴ Unlike his ardently pro-Allies remarks the year before, Gottheil’s “The War from a Jewish Standpoint” should have been unobjectionable to Friedenwald and probably would have found favor even in the eyes of Magnes, the pacifist who took umbrage at what he had then said. But Gottheil was not denouncing the very idea of participating in the Great War. He was just keeping his distance from it.

33 Nicholas Martin, “Fighting a Philosophy: The Figure of Nietzsche in British Propaganda of the First World War,” *Modern Language Review* 98, no. 2 (April 2003): 368.

34 Perhaps the editors of the *Menorah Journal*, who during these years generally kept their pages closed to ruminations about the war, had a part in this.

Professor versus Professor

No sequel to Gottheil's essay appeared in the *Menorah Journal*, and neither Schiff nor anyone else replied to it elsewhere, as far as I have been able to determine. It was not until the following year that Gottheil himself made another public statement pertaining to the war. In this case it was not a short essay but a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* directed against a piece that had been published in the *Times Magazine* on 30 July 1916. Its author, Professor Hugo Muensterberg of Harvard University, was a longtime German resident of the United States and a figure of considerable prominence who had long made it his goal to facilitate mutual understanding among Germans and Americans, a project beset with ever greater difficulties after World War I began. Gottheil sought to make it even harder for him.

Muensterberg and Gottheil had a lot in common, and even more that divided them. Both were born in the early 1860s, less than a year apart, and both became professors at Ivy League universities in their thirties. Muensterberg was, to be sure, far closer to the pinnacle of contemporary American academy, as a close associate of William James, who brought him to Harvard "and had his own title changed from 'Professor of Psychology' to 'professor of philosophy' to enable his German colleague to become the exponent of the new (experimental) psychology" there.³⁵ But Gottheil's reputation was still a formidable one.

35 Jutta Spillman and Lothar Spillman, "The Rise and Fall of Hugo Muensterberg," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 29 (October 1993): 325. Muensterberg had an extraordinary career. After succeeding William James as professor of psychology at Harvard, he "had a long-lasting influence on the development of psychology in the United States." In 1898, "he was elected President of the American Psychological Association and ten years later, President of the American Philosophical Association" (326). His book *On the Witness Stand* "marked the beginning of forensic psychology in the United States, showing that there could be great differences between eyewitness testimony and objective truth" (329–30). Among many other things, he played a pioneering role in the application of psychology to industrial life. The onset of war changed everything, however. As Muensterberg acquired the reputation of being an apologist for Germany, he became a virtual outcast at Harvard. See Phyllis Keller, *States of Belonging: German-American Intellectuals and the First World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 68–115.

Both Muensterberg and Gottheil became involved in political pursuits beyond the boundaries of their universities, and while doing so each of them stressed the possibility of combining one's original ethnic identity with full-fledged American citizenship. Gottheil did this, as we have seen, from a Zionist standpoint; Muensterberg did something similar for German-Americans. "No German-American lives up to his responsibilities," he wrote, "if he does not try to bring the very best traits of the land of his ancestors as his peculiar contribution to the young nation of the new world. But this is possible only if he never forgets that he is of German descent."³⁶

What Muensterberg himself did wish to forget, utterly unlike Gottheil, was that he was of Jewish descent, too. While his father, Moritz Minsterberg, was a leader of one of the Jewish congregations in Danzig, he himself had become estranged from the religion in which he had been raised, which at a number of points seems to have stood in the way of his career advancement.³⁷ After his parents died, he converted to Lutheranism, without any apparent regrets and without maintaining any residual loyalty to the Jewish people. Much as he might have wished to bury any traces of his Jewish origin, it remained well enough known, even at Harvard. This is reflected in one of the denunciations heaped upon him at the university on account of his vocal support for Germany during the early days of World War I. While most of his local critics were content to accuse Muensterberg of wrong-headedness and immorality, William Roscoe Thayer, a member of Harvard's Board of Overseers, railed against the publicity-seeking of "the Prussianized renegade Jew."³⁸

Muensterberg had already been busy making enemies at Harvard for two years when his article "The Allies of the Future: A Meditation on the Second Anniversary of the Beginning of the Great War in Europe" appeared in the *Times*. It was a piece slightly reminiscent of Schiff's 1914 *Times* interview insofar as it expressed concern about what the postwar world might look like. The basic contours of world politics, Muensterberg foresaw, would in the future be determined by the rivalry

36 Hugo Münsterberg, *The War and America* (New York: D. Appleton, 1915), 51.

37 Keller, *States*, 16.

38 Keller, *States*, 78.

between Great Britain and Russia. Which of these powers would prevail would depend on Germany. If it joined with Russia, as well as Austria, Turkey, and Japan, a "tremendous alliance" capable of "incalculable harm" would be ranged against England. The result would be a "superwar" in which "Europe would be devastated, for the first time Asia would tremble, and America would be drenched with blood." The only way to avoid this frightening prospect would be for Germany "to join not Russia, but England." And America could not remain isolated. Facing the threat of Japan, it would have to join the British-German alliance and thereby render it "invincible." The time to start building this tripartite force, according to Muensterberg, was now, in the midst of the current war. The president of the United States must do his best to serve as a mediator between the warring parties, with the aim of creating an alliance that would bind together "the three Teutonic master nations" and "bring to the war-ridden world the glories of peace for ages and ages hereafter."

Muensterberg knew that two years of bitter fighting had produced a great deal of ill will that would have to be overcome before such an alliance could be constituted. To help make this possible, he urged everyone to realize that the current war was the fault of no nation in particular, and he minimized the actual damage that had been done, both to the international order and to humanity. In Belgium and elsewhere, he acknowledged, treaties had been ignored, but there were usually good reasons for that. Many mistakes were made in the course of the fighting. "No one can wonder," therefore, "that in the heat of the struggle those blunders, when they did harm, were denounced as moral wrongs, that every unintentional homicide was branded as murder." These misconceptions were understandable, but, if things were seen in the proper perspective, the old hatreds could become "the nightmare of yesterday."³⁹

In a letter to the editor of the *Times* datelined Woods Hole, Massachusetts, 22 August 1916, and presumably written from somewhere near the beach, Gottheil first disputed some of what Muensterberg

39 Hugo Münsterberg, "The Allies of the Future," *New York Times Magazine* (30 July 1916): 1.

said concerning the circumstances leading up to the current war. He proceeded to accuse him of trying “to sow the seeds of disunion between Great Britain and Russia.” Then he got to what was, for him, the heart of the matter. Germany, he insisted, did bear responsibility for the war and for its worst excesses. “It is quite evident,” therefore, that before it “can be readmitted into the comity of nations some reparation—spiritual and other—must be made for the violent rending of the moral conscience of the world by those who have been and are leading her policies of war and destruction.” Gottheil ridiculed Muensterberg’s reference to “unintentional homicides” as nothing more than an effort “to cover many events with the mantle of silence.” The world, he said, “cannot forget the savagery of German ‘Kultur’ in Belgium” or a host of other German offenses and crimes. There can be no talk, Gottheil insisted, of a “Teutonic alliance” of the kind Muensterberg had in mind “until the manifest faults of Germany are admitted.”⁴⁰

Gottheil’s derogatory recourse to the word *Kultur* in this context is reminiscent of his use of the same word in his response to Schiff in the footnote to his *Menorah Journal* essay, where he lamented the fact that German “Kultur” had “quenched” too many Jewish souls. He must have known that Muensterberg was one of these souls, even though he made no reference to this fact (understandably enough) in his letter to the editor of the *Times*. His hostility to Muensterberg surely does not stem from the fact that he was a “renegade Jew,” but it could only have been enhanced by it.

Muensterberg, for his part, does not seem to have responded to Gottheil in any way. But he did not have much time to do so. After its

40 Gottheil refrained from spelling out in his letter to the *Times*, or in any other publication, all of his fears with regard to Germany. He did so, however, in an 29 April 1916 letter to Stephen S. Wise: “I am afraid you have no conception as yet of what is going on in Germany and Austria,” he told Wise, and then went on to outline the vast range of Germany’s ambitions. It aimed, he maintained, at nothing less than “world dominion.” He concluded his letter with a rather severe admonition. “It is for you ‘peace at any price’ men to look these facts straight in the face.... We, in America, stand in between Prussian oppression over-dominion in the whole world and the rights of the separate nations to live their own political and economic lives.” Stephen S. Wise Papers, MS-49, box 3, folder 3, AJA.

publication, he had only four months to live. From another quarter, however, Gottheil was subjected to lacerating criticism on account of his rebuke of Muensterberg, as well as other things he had said that were at variance with the interests of the Central Powers.

“The Case against Richard Gottheil”

On 1 September 1916 the Zionist-oriented *American Jewish Chronicle*, angered by Gottheil’s letter to the *Times*, criticized him for writing “an inciting article against the Central Powers who now shelter 5,000,000 Jews” that was inconsistent with Zionist neutrality.

Richard Gottheil may have a perfect right to bring his unneutral opinion before the American public and to take pleasure in his work for Russia, but he should be made to leave the Zionist organization as soon as possible.

We suggest that the leaders of American Zionism take steps without delay to have Professor Gottheil resign from the Provisional Committee of General Zionist Affairs. This should be done before the Professor has a chance to do more harm. In doing this they will re-establish the complete neutrality which marks the acts of the Zionist organization.⁴¹

The *Chronicle* was concerned, however, with much more than keeping the Zionist organization out of the fray. The weekly paper had been founded in 1916 by Isaac Straus and was edited by the Russian-born S. M. Melamed, who were both affiliated with the German-Jewish Committee for the East, an ad hoc body led by prominent German Zionists that actively promoted the German cause in occupied Russian territory. Straus had been sent to the United States in September 1914 to direct propaganda work among Jews for the German Information Bureau in New York, and “to win over public opinion of American Jews for the Central Powers.”⁴² The German government apparently supplied

41 “The Case Against Richard Gottheil,” *American Jewish Chronicle* 1, no. 17 (1 September 1916): 516.

42 Joseph Rappaport, “The American Yiddish Press and the European Conflict in 1914,” *Jewish Social Studies*, 19, nos 3–4 (July–October 1957): 118. See also Doerries, *Imperial Challenge*, 59–60, 271n117.

him with very substantial funding.⁴³

The *Chronicle's* critical response to Gottheil's attack on Muensterberg appeared in the midst of its longer and more sustained campaign against Gottheil on account of some other things that he had reportedly said, not in the course of the summer of 1916 in a letter to an American newspaper but months earlier in a conversation with a Russian conservative writer that had only recently been published in a paper based in Moscow.

Sergei Nikolaievich Syromiatnikov was a journalist and political thinker who at times maintained very close relations with the Czarist government. He

always remained a supporter of the autocracy, but he considered himself to be a “progressive nationalist,” the champion of “true, state conservatism” aimed at “the preservation of all that is alive and viable in our people,” “the development of what is historically necessary,” and “the defense of our time-proven ways against the untested alien ways through the education of thoughts and sentiments.”

The outbreak of World War I turned Syromiatnikov into “a champion of Russia's rapprochement with England and the United States to counterbalance the German Empire.”⁴⁴

In early 1915, the Russian Interior Ministry sent Syromiatnikov to the United States (on the one of the last voyages of the *Lusitania*, as it turns out) to promote a better understanding of Russia among the American public. The hope was that he would soften hostility toward the country's autocratic regime and thereby remove an obstacle to American

43 Zosa Szejakowski, *The Attitude of American Jews to World War I, the Russian Revolutions of 1917, and Communism (1914–1945)*, vol. 1 of *Jews, Wars, and Communism* (New York: Ktav, 1972), 39.

44 Victoria I. Zhuravleva, “Rethinking Russia in the United States during the First World War: Mr. Sigma's American Voyage,” in *New Perspectives on Russian-American Relations*, ed. William Benton Whisenhunt and Norman E. Saul (New York: Routledge, 1915), 145.

support for the Entente.⁴⁵ Interestingly enough, but in a way that goes beyond the scope of this article, Syromiatnikov helped to lay the ground for Russian studies in the United States during his year in this country, particularly at Columbia University. Whether he encountered Gottheil in connection with this enterprise is unclear. But he definitely did what he could to counteract ubiquitous reports of the Russian military's abuses of Jews in the eastern war zone. He "insisted that they were limited to the Jewish spies that collaborated with Germany and that they bore no comparison to the violence that Germany had unleashed toward both Jews and Christians."⁴⁶

In contentious debate on this subject with American Jewish adversaries, Syromiatnikov eventually slipped from slander into rank anti-semitism. In a piece in the *New York Tribune* he uttered the following complaint:

But the Jewish agitation in the United States press and society endangers not only the fate of the Jews in Russia, but imperils the possibility of a better understanding between the great republic and the great empire, because it suggests to the Russian statesmen the wrong idea that the United States has no policy of its own, no government of its own, and that it is preferable and more efficient to treat with the Alliance Israelite than with the government at Washington regarding American affairs.

The Russian ambassador to the United States understood that this was counterproductive and, partly on account of this statement, arranged for Syromiatnikov to be recalled.⁴⁷

Months after he had returned to his own country, Syromiatnikov published in an antisemitic Russian newspaper an interview he had held with Gottheil back in the United States. In its 28 July 1916 issue, the *American Jewish Chronicle* quoted this article beneath the headline: "Professor Gottheil Against Russian Jews: American 'Zionist leader' Reported By Anti-Semitic Editor To Approve Anti-Jewish Tactics." Gottheil is said to have told "the anti-Semitic Russian journalist that

45 Zhuravleva, "Rethinking," 146.

46 Zhuravleva, "Rethinking," 149.

47 Zhuravleva, "Rethinking," 153.

Russia could not ameliorate the condition of her Jews during the war. He prefers a gradual and fundamental solution to a radical one.” But that was not the worst of it. “*Gottheil advised me, Mr. Syromiatnikoff asserts, that the anti-Russian attitude in America was held by the Jewish revolutionists and socialists, and he told me not to pay any attention to them since influential Jewish circles pay no attention to them either*” (italic in the original).⁴⁸

In the eyes of the *Chronicle's* Russian correspondent, it was incredible that a Zionist, much less a Jew, could have had said such things. But if he indeed had done so, he wrote, as seemed to be the case, “we have before us a clear case of high treason against the Jewish nation. These words are a betrayal of all the efforts made by American Jewry to better the lot of the suffering and persecuted Russian Jews by characterizing them as revolutionaries and socialists.” The *Chronicle's* editors amplified these criticisms, berating Gottheil in similar language and going so far as to assert that his dismissal of American Jews as subversives was tantamount to encouragement of the Russian government's policy of pogroms. Unfortunately, they wrote, “Richard Gottheil is spoken of as an American Jewish leader.” He should not be. “American Jewry will have to see to it that such leaders are dethroned as quickly as possible.”⁴⁹

A month later, on 25 August, the *Chronicle* published another editorial prosecuting “The Case Against Richard Gottheil.” It seems to have been triggered by the newspaper's receipt of a letter from an unnamed friend of Gottheil requesting that it notify its readers that Gottheil himself denied the accuracy of Syromiatnikov's reports. “We thereupon suggested,” reported the *Chronicle*, “that Professor Gottheil should publish what he actually said in the several interviews” he had with the Russian. His refusal to do so, however, was perhaps the least of the sins the *Chronicle* now listed.

Soon after the war broke out, it claimed, Gottheil visited the Russian ambassador in Paris. What was that unusual meeting with the

48 *American Jewish Chronicle* 1, no. 12 (28 July 1916): 356.

49 *American Jewish Chronicle* 1, no. 12 (28 July 1916): 354.

representative of “the Pogrom Government” about? It was suspicious enough that not long after it Gottheil “began his propaganda work for the Allies, and a large share of this work was for Russia.” Among other things, he tried “to keep Abe Cahan, the well-known editor of the *Forward*, from addressing Columbia University students” out of fear that he would denounce Russia’s pogrom policy.

After the Ottoman Empire entered the war, the *Chronicle* continued, Gottheil, despite his prominence as a Zionist, “came out as a propagandist against Turkey,” protesting “loudly against the Armenian atrocities, about which very little authentic news had then reached this country.”⁵⁰ But he kept quiet about the pogroms in Russia. Gottheil’s imprudent propagandizing ran a real risk of antagonizing the Central Powers against “the Jewish masses” over which they ruled. For, even though he is not as important a leader as the Russian press (a reference, presumably, to Syromiatnikov) makes him out to be, the Central Powers and Turkey nevertheless “attach importance to his words and acts and hold the Jews responsible for them.”

In view of all these egregious actions, the *Chronicle* believed what Syromiatnikov said. Gottheil was guilty.

Far be it from us to say that Richard Gottheil is a Mosser [traitor], but we say that the distant roar of cannon on the battlefields has had a peculiar effect on the Professor. He seems to have forgotten his Jewish interests in his active devotions to one group of powers in this war. And, unfortunately, Russia has made the best of his devotion.⁵¹

In its 13 October 1916 issue, the *Chronicle* went after Gottheil yet again. It reprinted a full and literal translation of the interview with

50 Decades later, one of Gottheil’s leading colleagues in the Zionist movement, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, reminisced about this period. “Whatever our attitude toward Turkey might otherwise have been, some of us, notably Professor Gottheil and myself, were moved by the Armenian atrocities to take our stand against the hideously criminal government of Turkey.” Wise expressed no regrets about this decision. See Stephen S. Wise, *Challenging Years: The Autobiography of Stephen Wise* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1949), 182.

51 *American Jewish Chronicle* 1, no. 16 (25 August 1916): 484–486.

Syromiatnikov, one that essentially substantiated the earlier account but also offered new information, including a report of the two men's discussion of the recent opening up of areas outside the Pale of Settlement for Jewish refugees.

"This is a good beginning," said Gottheil to me, "and as a result of this, much can be done for improving the relations of the Russian Jews in the country to Russia. But in Russia everything is so changing that it is really not altogether clear to me whether we can depend on this decision."

This unimpeachable hesitancy was accompanied, however, by an unpalatable expression of willingness to wait. Gottheil, according to Syromiatnikov, recognized that "*an alleviation of the Jewish conditions in Russia would be premature before the war ended.*"⁵²

The *Chronicle's* editors dismissed Gottheil's disavowal of Syromiatnikov's account of their meeting once again. Syromiatnikov, they maintained, was entirely credible for a variety of reasons. In particular, what he is reported to have said "is so typical of Gottheil that even his friends must recognize him in the interview." And it is so self-evidently unworthy of a Zionist leader that it is imperative, they once again insisted, that he "be kept from further participation in Jewish affairs and that the Provisional Committee for General Zionist Affairs drop him from all its councils."⁵³

Whether or not his friends would have been able to recognize Gottheil in the interview, readers a century later can at least see the basic consistency between the position he marked out in the *Menorah Journal* essay and the one outlined in the interview. Whether it was the interviewee or the interviewer on whose account we rely who soft-pedalled Russia's offenses against the Jews, it is at any rate clear that Gottheil was prepared to grant the Russians a great deal of leeway as long as their participation in the struggle against the Central Powers was needed. On the other hand, the *Chronicle* certainly went overboard in its hostile construal of Gottheil's remarks as virtual treachery against the Jewish

52 *American Jewish Chronicle* 1, no. 22 (13 October 1916): 594.

53 *American Jewish Chronicle* 1, no. 22 (13 October 1916): 690–691.

people. They were no different in substance from the expressed views of many other Jewish leaders in France and Great Britain who believed in the moral superiority of the Allied cause and who were willing to make allowances for the Russians for the same reason that he was. Nor did they differ from the private views of other American Zionist leaders, such as Brandeis, Jacob de Haas, Stephen S. Wise, and Felix Frankfurter, who do not seem to have made any attempt to remove Gottheil from his not very influential position on the Provisional Executive Committee on this account.⁵⁴

Taking on the Turks Again

On 1 January 1917 the Turkish government took a step that is little remembered today. It went beyond its earlier repudiation of the long-standing “Capitulation treaties” with the Great Powers and shook free of restrictions on its power that had been imposed by the Treaty of Paris of 1856 and the Treaty of Berlin of 1858. There is no need here to explain the precise significance of these assertions of independence of foreign control. We do not need to understand them in order to grasp the significance of the essay that Gottheil published on 7 January in the *New York Times Magazine* under the title: “Turkey’s Latest Move ‘Intolerably Unintelligible.’” In the most salient paragraph of this piece, Gottheil states:

how the Ottoman Government can “declare that it will not fail to appeal to the principles of international law in order to have its rights respected” is intolerably unintelligible, when we know that before that can take place it will have to appear before the bar of international morality and answer for the hideous massacres perpetrated upon the Armenians—massacres and evil deeds that pass the understanding of everyone except of those whose Government stands before the world as the guarantors of the present rulers in the Turkish Empire and as sponsors for the Belgian deportations and robberies.⁵⁵

54 Leon Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), 197.

55 Richard Gottheil, “Turkey’s Latest Move Intolerably Unintelligible,” *New York Times Magazine* (7 January 1917): 15.

This simultaneous swipe at Germany and Turkey made it virtually inevitable that the *American Jewish Chronicle* would quickly take Gottheil to task once again. In its 17 January issue, it mocked “the learned member” of the American Zionist Executive for failing to remember that “Palestine is still under Turkish rule and that the Jews living there have to deal with the Turks.” A true Zionist would understand that one should not rile the current rulers of the Holy Land as Gottheil had already done in the past. The *Chronicle* may have known of the negative impact of his earlier pro-Entente statement on the Turkish consul-general in New York back in 1915.⁵⁶ It is obvious, however, from the language with which it chastised him, that it certainly knew that Gottheil had already been, in 1917, as Leonard Stein reports, “severely criticized at a meeting of the Provisional Executive Committee for having attacked the Turkish Government in *The New York Times*, thus violating the rule of neutrality, which was still, it was insisted, as binding as it had always been.”⁵⁷

The *Chronicle* did not merely rebuke Gottheil; it tried to understand him. “The Zionist Gottheil,” it reasoned, “is first an Armenian, a Serb, a Roumanian, a Russian and then a Jew and a Zionist. The interests of Armenia, Serbia, Roumania, and probably Russia lie nearer to his heart than the actual political interests of his people.” For whom was Gottheil really working? asked the editors of the Germany-subsidized newspaper. These other nations, apparently. What he was engaged in was “treason pure and simple,” and, once again, the *Chronicle* called for his expulsion from the Provisional Committee for General Zionist Affairs. This was, however, the last time that the newspaper pressed for such action, and it did so without success. The entrance of the United States into the war soon made attacks on a pro-Entente American Zionist superfluous.⁵⁸

56 Friedman, *Germany, Turkey and Zionism*, 245.

57 Stein, *Balfour Declaration*, 199.

58 Rappaport, “American Yiddish Press,” 182n13. The *Chronicle*’s publisher, Isaac Straus, was interned in March 1918 on the basis of evidence by the Department of Justice that he had received \$85,000 from Dr. Heinrich Albert, Germany Privy Councilor in the United States in 1915, in addition to \$30,000 from an unnamed source.

“What the War Means to America”

Gottheil made the headlines only one more time in the course of World War I. In March 1918 he stepped in, together with Wise, to oppose the inclusion of the Jewish Theological Seminary scholar Israel Friedlaender on a Red Cross Commission to British-occupied Palestine. Gottheil set out his grounds for doing so in the *New York Sun*.

In regard to Prof. Friedlander, while I value him highly as a scholar, I cannot refrain from deploring that influences, of whose pro-Germanism there is no doubt, were brought to bear to force him into the commission as the representative of the Jews of America. Having been outspokenly pro-German prior to our entry in the war, and ominously silent since that time, it must be admitted that he is hardly suited from the American point of view to be on a United States commission going to a land held by the British, whose armies are now fighting for its liberation.⁵⁹

Friedlander, for his part, vociferously and convincingly defended himself. Louis Marshall, who had himself always been anti-German and who had nominated Friedlaender for the commission in the first place, strongly defended him in the *New York Times*, testifying to his patriotism and loyalty and denying that he had ever been pro-German. The Joint Distribution Committee backed him up, too, but Friedlaender nevertheless chose to withdraw from the commission rather than place any kind of a cloud over its operations.

Unfair as Gottheil seems to have been in this case, it is important not to mistake his motives.⁶⁰ In her biography of Friedlaender, Baila Shargel places this episode in the context of other occasions during the war in

59 Quoted in *American Jewish Chronicle* 4, no. 19 (15 March 1918): 510.

60 He spelled them out fully in a 23 March letter to Brandeis: “I do not for a moment suggest that Dr. Friedlander would have acted as a German spy, but I do hold that he would have been open to all sorts of German influences, which are rampant in Palestine as they are in this and other countries. In a recent number of the *Nineteenth Century* Mr. Walter Sishel in an article combating Zionist work in Palestine draws attention to the fact that the congregation of large numbers of Jews there ‘might afford’ a new center for those Teutonic machinations which even now are busy in setting the crescent against the Cross.” Stephen S. Wise Papers, MS-49, Box 3, folder 4, AJA.

which Gottheil had sought to expunge pro-German individuals from the Zionist organization. She also notes that even after the United States entered the war, Friedlaender “took pains to distinguish between the kaiser’s aggressive militarism, which he abhorred, and German *Kultur*, which he admired.” This leads her to conclude, rather critically, that “for the chauvinistic Professor Gottheil, this civilized and balanced attitude must have offered proof of Friedlaender’s unsuitability for a sensitive position in British-occupied territory.⁶¹ In the light of everything we know about Gottheil’s attitude toward German *Kultur*, however, it seems more likely that, in his eyes, Friedlaender’s distinction simply did not hold water. German *Kultur* was itself the culprit. And it was his hatred of it that dominated his outlook. What Shargel says about Gottheil’s chauvinism is likewise misguided. Gottheil was not a jingoist. He was no more an American chauvinist than he was, as the *Chronicle* had argued, an Armenian or a Serb. What was ultimately of the greatest importance for him was not the glorification of America or the rescue of one or another beleaguered people but the victory of right over wrong.

Nowhere did Gottheil make this clearer than in his contribution to a symposium of the Columbia faculty on the subject of “What the War Means to America,” organized by the *Columbia Alumni News* on 17 May 1918. It deserves to be cited in full:

What the War means to America—it means, everything that we have been taught to regard as holy and precious. It is a war of contending ideals—the ones embodied in the theory “La force prime le droit”—force is superior to right; the other constituting the hope that there are such things as right and righteousness. We hold that such right and such righteousness can be worked out for the mass only in a democratic form of government. For these things—inexpressibly more precious than all that this word can offer us of its beauties and its pleasures—we must be willing to stake our possessions and our lives. The great democracies of

61 Baila Shargel, *Practical Dreamer: Israel Friedlaender and the Shaping of American Judaism* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1985), 28. Friedlaender, it should be noted, was murdered in 1920 by Red Army soldiers while serving on a relief mission in Ukraine.

France and of England have nobly and heroically pointed the way. For nearly three years we Americans refused to see that way. We allowed ourselves to be led by inefficient theorists and by enemy propaganda masquerading under philosophical and ethical gas-masks. The revelations of Count Lichnowsky, which—to those who wished to see were nothing more than confirmations of what they knew and felt to be the truth, must have opened the eyes of the few remaining in our country who were captivated by fancies and must have revealed to them the malicious and malign purposes which animated reactionary Germany to bring on the war at all hazards.⁶² That reactionary Germany must be brought down—no matter what the cost, no matter what the pain. To do this is a demand of honor. America and her sons will surely give what they have and what they are for this purpose.⁶³

The reactionary government did fall, of course, within half a year. And Gottheil had other grounds for optimism. The previous year, when the reactionary Russian regime collapsed, he had been “filled with joy on hearing the news.” In an interview with the Columbia newspaper, he “declared it is now evident that a beginning has come to the end of the exceptional laws and regimes under which not only the Jewish people lived in that country, but also other subject peoples.” He did not hesitate to say with regard to Russia that “I have every faith in the future.” For it seemed to him “that Russia is better prepared for a more democratic control of its government than have been many of the other states of Europe.”⁶⁴ Gottheil could not have retained much of that optimism even a year later, following the Bolshevik takeover. But at least he no longer had to counsel patience regarding a backward ally’s misdeeds.

Gottheil’s support for the Allies was not bound up with any project for obtaining Zionist control of Palestine under their auspices. But he could only have been overjoyed when their victory resulted in the creation of

62 The former German Ambassador to England, Prince Karl Max Linchowsky, testified posthumously against his own government in Linchowsky, *My Mission to London 1912–1914* (New York: George H. Doran, 1918).

63 *Columbia Alumni News* 9, no. 32 (17 May 1918): 1006–1007.

64 *Columbia Spectator* 40, no. 124 (19 March 1917): 4.

vast new opportunities for the Zionist movement. It is interesting to note, however, the degree to which his pleasure was mixed with urgent concern that Zionism, too, would in the future live up to his ideals. Whatever political shape the Zionist entity in Palestine assumed, he wrote:

It must stand in cordial relations with the new Arab Kingdom of the Hejaz to the south and the coming state of Syria to the north. It must have the good will of the leading countries that are to be responsible for the international order that is in process of creation. It will not rely upon its physical strength, for, at best, it will be small in extent. It will depend upon the sense of right and of justice on the part of those to whom world-leadership will be given.⁶⁵

Here, Gottheil hoped for the best. But with regard to the already existing internal arrangements of the Jewish community in Palestine he is far more confident. The settlers, he rejoiced, have already “laid the foundations for a democratic governance that is perhaps unique of its kind: it seeks to combine the utmost freedom of individual expression with a proper regard for the good conduct of the whole community.” It was, Gottheil wrote, “democracy in excelcis.”⁶⁶

But it had to be even better. To achieve Zionism’s goals in Palestine fully, Gottheil explained,

measures must be laid down to insure other and non-Jewish interests in the country, not only their full value and their complete liberty of action, but their concurrent action with what we hope will be the dominating Jewish forces there. To work out the problems, the protecting hand of some great power is urgently needed, and all indications point to Great Britain as the one that, through special circumstances and unusual equipment, is called upon to give this pioneer aid in helping the form of Judea, that has laid prostrate for so long a time, to rise once more and take its fitting place among the powers of the world.⁶⁷

65 Richard Gottheil, “Palestine,” *International Conciliation* (Greenwich, CT) 6 (1919): 734.

66 Gottheil, “Palestine,” 736.

67 Gottheil, “Palestine,” 737.

Conclusion

Throughout World War I, Gottheil was an idealistic and zealous—if sometimes circumspect—supporter of the Allied cause. This was probably due to some degree to his British birth, but it clearly stemmed mostly from his philosophical principles. Above all, he hated Germany and what he took it to stand for. His detestation of oppression made it impossible for him to forbear, for one thing, from criticizing the Germans' Turkish ally for its treatment of the Armenians, even if that risked placing the Jews of Palestine in jeopardy, along with the future of the Zionist movement to which he so strongly adhered. Yet he was not uncompromising. Because the alliance with Russia seemed to be absolutely necessary to defeat Germany, he could resign himself to the Tsarist regime's abuses of its Jews for the duration of the war. But he never abandoned the hope that World War I would culminate in a decisive improvement in the position of Russian Jewry.

Gottheil was part of the team of pro-British American Zionists led by Brandeis who sought a diplomatic entente with Great Britain during the war, but he did not exercise significant influence over Zionist policy at this time.⁶⁸ He was mostly busy doing his job as, in Lipsky's words, a "professor of dead languages." Periodically, however, in the course of the war, he interrupted his professional activity to play a forceful and revealing, if not particularly efficacious, role in American public discourse at a pivotal moment in Jewish history. As a courageous and outspoken intellectual who successfully blended his American patriotism and his Zionism, he helped to set an important precedent for American Jewry in the twentieth century.

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68 Eli Lederhendler, *American Jewry: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 223.