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Jews, Lincoln, and the American Election of 1864: A Newly Discovered Broadside and Its Larger Significance

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According to most studies of Jews and American politics, the subject of this article—an 1864 political broadside urging Jews to vote for Abraham Lincoln—should simply not exist. Rev. Samuel Isaacs, a mid-nineteenth-century American Jewish Orthodox religious leader from Holland, regularly insisted that “Israelites, as Israelites, have no politics.”¹ The eminent Reform rabbi, Emil G. Hirsch of Chicago, writing in the authoritative *Encyclopedia Britannica*, agreed: “Politically the Jews are divided,” he wrote. “There is no solid Jewish vote. Most of the Jews have no political aspirations. They are loyal citizens.” The presumed link between loyalty and the absence of political aspirations is telling.²

In our time, the judicious American Jewish historian Naomi W. Cohen, in her descriptive scholarly work on nineteenth-century German Jews in America, concluded that from before the Civil War until the early twentieth century the basic rule was that “politics concerned the individual Jew but not the community. Jewish group interests, if indeed there were any,” she wrote, “had no place under that name in any political forum.” “More than other immigrant groups,” she boldly continued, “nineteenth-century American Jews shied *away* from injecting ethnic

1 *Jewish Messenger* (25 January 1861): 28; for similar statements by Isaacs, see Robert Swierenga, *The Forerunners: Dutch Jewry in the North American Diaspora* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 85.

2 Emil G. Hirsch, “Judaism and the Jews in the United States,” *New American Supplement to the Werner Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Akron: Werner, 1901 [1897]), 27:467.

interests into the political arena.” Indeed, two central principles of nineteenth-century American Jewish political life, according to Cohen’s influential account, were the following: first, “it was wrong for Jews to band together in separate political clubs” and, second, “rabbis or lay leaders had no right to advise the community on how to vote.”³

Plainly, the 1864 broadside violated all these rules. So far as I know, it is the earliest American Jewish political broadside in existence. The original is found in the collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia.⁴ Benjamin Shapell and I did not discuss or reproduce it in *Lincoln and the Jews: A History* (2015), because we did not then know it existed. But the broadside reinforces what we did know and discuss: that Jews were much more engaged in promoting Abraham Lincoln’s 1864 reelection than the extant literature, both prescriptive and descriptive, previously led us to believe.⁵ Historians have been misled by the abundant prescriptive literature warning Jews against the evils of group politics. When one looks at what Jews actually *did* rather than at what they reflexively *said*, one discovers that many leaders paid lip service to the rule of “Jews have no politics” in public but failed to obey that rule in private.⁶

That is what happened in 1864, amidst the Civil War, when Lincoln ran for re-election. By then, the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued freeing the slaves, but as the war dragged on Lincoln’s popularity plummeted. “It seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will

3 Naomi W. Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States 1830–1914* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984), 129–130; see generally 129–158.

4 “Head Quarters Jewish Union Republican Association, New York, Pennsylvania and Indiana, To Our Jewish Brethren (n.p., 1864), in “John A. McAllister’s Civil War: The American Home Front,” Library Company of Philadelphia, <https://www.librarycompany.org/mcallisterexhibition/section5.htm> (image #9).

5 Jonathan D. Sarna and Benjamin Shapell, *Lincoln and the Jews: A History* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books and St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 178–182.

6 David G. Dalin makes this point concerning Louis Marshall; see Dalin, “Louis Marshall, the Jewish Vote and the Republican Party,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 4 (Spring 1992), reprinted in Dalin, *Jews and American Public Life: Essays on American Jewish History and Politics* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2022), 97–127.

not be re-elected,” Lincoln wrote in a famous memorandum.⁷ Hoping to keep his job, he made a special effort to reach out to potential supporters. Outreach to Jews formed part of that political strategy.

Lincoln and the Jews revealed that, as early as December of 1858, “Israelites” were explicitly included as part of the coalition of outsiders whose votes Lincoln and the new Republican Party sought to attract. America’s Jewish population was by then approaching 150,000 and Lincoln himself had Jewish friends, including his influential advisor, Abraham Jonas. In 1860, the majority of Jews, fearing instability, war, and loss of business, nevertheless voted against Lincoln. Some German-Jewish radicals (notably veterans of the abortive 1848 revolutions) and others, supported him.⁸

In 1864, when the broadside reproduced here appeared, the Republicans—Lincoln’s party of Union—made a renewed effort to attract Jewish voters. Lincoln’s friend, the Jewish chiropodist (podiatrist) Issachar Zacharie, led this remarkable campaign. Zacharie spent a great deal of time during the Civil War helping Jews who had run afoul of the authorities and intervening with Lincoln to free (*pidyon shevuyim*) Jews who had been taken prisoner in the North for smuggling or related crimes.⁹

Partly out of gratitude for Lincoln’s benevolent pardons, Zacharie now took charge of an effort to win Jewish voters to the Republican side. He visited key states, knocked on doors, secured favors for selected Jewish voters, and exhorted the faithful to turn out at the ballot box. On 23 October 1864, probably at Zacharie’s behest, Lincoln met with “certain gentlemen of the Hebrew faith” to discuss the Jewish vote, likely the first time that any president had ever formally discussed that subject in the executive mansion. Rumors circulated that these “gentlemen of the Hebrew faith” had offered to deliver the New York Jewish vote to Lincoln in return for suitable contributions. That, of course, was

7 Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 7:514; Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 2:704–710.

8 Sarna and Shapell, *Lincoln and the Jews*, 43–64.

9 Sarna and Shapell, *Lincoln and the Jews*, 142–145.

quickly denied. Lincoln's young assistant, John Hay—many years later he became Secretary of State—insisted that “no pledge of the Jewish vote was made by these gentlemen and no inducements or promises were extended to them by the President.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, a private letter from a wealthy New York Jew named Samuel A. Lewis advised Lincoln to direct any “Jewish committees” seeking political funds straight to him: “I will furnish them such amounts as we see can be used to advantage...nothing shall be wanting on the part of your friends here toward carrying the Union [Republican] cause.”¹¹ Lewis was particularly grateful to Lincoln and Zacharie for freeing a relative of his from a Union prison. Whether Lincoln took Lewis up on this generous offer of funds is unknown, but his letter demonstrates that Jews in 1864 were much more deeply engaged, as Jews, in getting fellow Jews to vote for Lincoln than contemporaries were willing to admit or scholars subsequently to recognize.

The Jewish Union Republican Association broadside discussed here seems to have been another part of Lincoln's ethno-religious strategy. Its fourteen signers, almost all from New York and Pennsylvania, described America as their “adopted country,” an indication that they were, at least for the most part, immigrants. The bulk of those identified, like so many Jews of that time, were born in central Europe, a disproportionate number from Holland. By 1864, most were middle aged and had prospered. Pennsylvanians (all but one from Philadelphia) dominated the group. Several of them worked together on Jewish charitable and educational endeavors, even though religiously they spanned from Radical Reform to Orthodox. Seven of the eight Pennsylvanians identified themselves on the broadside with their full names, which may indicate that the document originated there. By contrast, three of the five New Yorkers (H. Alexander, S. Myers, and R. Davis) hid behind first initials. Curiously, the “Jewish Union Republican Association,” in the second line of the

10 Sarna and Shapell, *Lincoln and the Jews*, 180; *Jewish Messenger* (28 October 1864), 124; John Hay to Myer S. Isaacs, 1 November 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

11 Samuel A. Lewis to Abraham Lincoln, 26 October 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

broadside, listed Indiana as one of its headquarters, although no Indiana Jew signed this statement at all. In fact, Judith E. Endelman argues that it was only in the post-Civil War era that Indiana Jews “began to take an active part in...politics.”¹²

The following signers can be positively identified, and they are here listed in the order in which their names appeared at the bottom of the broadside.

Elijah Miers (1841–1907) was born in New York according to the 1900 census and served as a broker. The *New York Times* described him in 1883 as “a broker in a small way and a peddler of precious stones.” “Rev. E. Miers” of Illinois, also listed as a signatory, may have been his (immigrant?) father. He was likely the same “Rev. Edward Miers of the Fifth Street congregation,” whom Isaac Leeser met in St. Louis in 1858.¹³

H. Deboor, a misspelling of Henry de Boer (1816–1907), was a Dutch-born old clothes dealer and later dry goods jobber, active in Bnai Israel (“the Netherlands Synagogue in Philadelphia”), where he served as president and choir leader. He also engaged in Jewish charitable and educational work and fathered fourteen children. De Boer and two other Dutch-born signers of the broadside, Isaac Hyneman and Herman Van Beil, held positions as officers of the Hebrew Benevolent Society in Philadelphia.¹⁴

Isaac Hyneman (1804–1886), scion of a prominent Dutch-Jewish family, resided in Philadelphia in 1864 and was active at Mikveh Israel. He had lived for some time in Richmond and was married to the sister of the merchant and Jewish communal leader Jacob Ezekiel, who at one point was his business partner. While many of the Ezekiels (including the subsequently famous sculptor Moses Ezekiel) were Confederates

12 Judith E. Endelman, *The Jewish Community of Indianapolis 1849 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 27.

13 *New York Times* (22 February 1883), 8; *Occident* (1 April 1852), 55; “Elijah Miers,” Find a Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/130942393/elijah-miers>.

14 Swierenga, *Forerunners*, 130, 374 n 86, and index s.v. “de Boer, Henry”; Ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/82265618/person/102325385633/facts?_phsrc=IT128&_phstart=successSource]

and proud Virginians, Hyneman's son, Jacob Ezekiel Hyneman, fought for the Union. His father in this broadside publicly advocated for the election of Lincoln.¹⁵

Herman Von [should be Van] Beil (1799–1865), born in Amsterdam, arrived in Philadelphia in 1820 and was a secondhand clothes dealer and later a pawnbroker and prominent Freemason. He became a devoted follower of Rev. Leeser and followed him to Congregation Beth El Emeth when Leeser's supporters seceded from Mikveh Israel. Yet he clearly disagreed with Leeser concerning slavery and the Republican Party. While, as Lance Sussman has taught us, Leeser was sympathetic to the Confederacy and critical of Lincoln, Van Beil signed this Republican broadside and advocated for “Lincoln and Union!”¹⁶

Rev. Julius Salinger (1804–1865) of Germany was the reader (*chazan*) at Keneseth Israel (most recently, Sussman's congregation) where the Radical Reform rabbi and antislavery advocate David Einhorn then served as rabbi. Salinger's grandson and namesake, Dr. Julius L. Salinger (1866–1912) was given the middle name “Lincoln,” an indication of the family's esteem for the by-then assassinated president.¹⁷

Leon Hirsh (1826–1903) was born in Hesse-Darmstadt and lived in Philadelphia and New York. His brothers, Henry, Mason, and Leopold Hirsh, likewise immigrated to the United States and made their fortunes in the umbrella business. All were active in Jewish communal affairs.¹⁸

William Lonestatter (1822–1894), commonly known by his German

15 Swierenga, *Forerunners*, 54, 121; “Isaac Hyneman (1804–1886),” Mikveh Israel History, <https://mikvehisraelhistory.com/2013/01/18/isaac-hyneman-1804-1886/>.

16 Swierenga, *Forerunners*, 124 and index s.v. “Van Beil, Herman”; *Israelite* (4 September 1857), 69; for Leeser's views on Lincoln, see Lance J. Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 218–227.

17 Henry S. Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Levytype, 1894), 91; “Julius Salinger,” Ancestry.com, https://www.ancestry.com/search/?name=Julius_Salinger&birth=1866&death=1912; Julius Lincoln Salinger and Frederick J. Kaltever, *Modern Medicine* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1900).

18 “Leon Hirsh,” *Jewish Exponent* (22 May 1903): 3; *American Israelite* (17 March 1892): 2 (re Mason Hirsh); “Henry Hirsh,” *Jewish Exponent* (10 October 1919): 10.

last name, “Lonnerstadter,” was a Philadelphia merchant and, in 1865, secretary of Keneseth Israel, where Einhorn was rabbi and Rev. Salinger *chazan*. He subsequently served as secretary of the board of Philadelphia’s United Hebrew Charities.¹⁹

Charles D. Arnstahl (1809–1887), born in Mecklenberg-Schwerin, immigrated to the United States in 1838 and was a founder of Congregation Rodef Shalom in Pittsburgh. He worked in the tobacco and cigar business. He had a personal reason to support Lincoln in 1864: the president had appointed him as a revenue inspector in Pittsburgh.²⁰

Not one of these signers stood among the most prominent Jews of the time. None appeared in the circle of Lincoln’s friends, associates, supporters, acquaintances, and appointees that we listed in *Lincoln and the Jews*.²¹ That may have been no accident. The signers had less to lose by publicizing their support for Lincoln than more prominent Jews who quietly supported Lincoln in the 1864 election.

Those whose names publicly appeared on the Republican broadside admitted that their document was unusual. “In the political affairs of our adopted country,” they confessed, “very few members of our persuasion have hitherto been led to take an active part.” They boldly called upon Jews to support Lincoln—“the Champion of Freedom, the Emancipator of the Slave and preserver of his country”—and, fascinatingly, in violation of the commandments of proper Jewish political behavior, they proclaimed that “the votes of the immense number of Jewish citizens will go far to determine the re-election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency.”

In real life, the Jewish vote in 1864 could scarcely have exceeded fifty thousand nationwide, but that would certainly not be the last time that the power of the Jewish vote was exaggerated.²² The same bombastic

19 *Sinai* (3 February 1865): 127; *American Israelite* (29 March 1894): 2; *Jewish Exponent* (30 March 1894),: 3.

20 *Jewish Exponent* (22 July 1887): 8.

21 Sarna and Shapell, *Lincoln and the Jews*, xiv–xv.

22 For Jewish population figures, see Jacob R. Marcus, *To Count A People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585–1984* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 237–240; Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale

claim was made four years later by Jewish Democrats who, in a bid to prevent Ulysses S. Grant's election, warned the Republican standard-bearer that "we are numerous, we are influential, we are wealthy, we are diffused over the whole continent."²³ In the twentieth century, anti-Semites influenced by the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* turned these exaggerations around, infamously accusing Jews of controlling the destinies of nations.

If the Jewish Union Republican Association's broadside exaggerated Jewish power, it greatly underestimated the Jewish community's specific indebtedness to Lincoln. The text was silent concerning what today we would consider to have been the three major reasons why Jews might have supported him: his many appointments of Jews to governmental and military offices, his pivotal support for opening up the military chaplaincy to Jews, and his countmanding of Gen. Grant's infamous order (known as General Orders #11) expelling "Jews as a Class" from the Army of the Tennessee's war zone.²⁴ What the broadside emphasized instead were themes common to Lincoln's Jewish and non-Jewish supporters alike: the president's emancipation of the slaves, his defense of the Constitution and the Union, and his "determined administration" of the military. "Choose ye this day whom you will serve," the broadside concluded. Echoing Joshua 24:15, it subtly linked the Democrats ("McClellan and Disunion") to the false gods that the ancient Israelites pledged to reject. Lincoln's re-election, it promised, would realize "the high hopes of liberty" and result in "peace," "harmony," "prosperity," "greatness" and "grandeur."

Myer Isaacs, the editor of the *New York Jewish Messenger*, secretary

University Press, 2019), 391–392. Women, children and nonnaturalized immigrants, among others, could not vote at that time.

23 Ph. Von Bort, *General Grant and the Jews* (New York: National News Company, 1868), 16; Jonathan D. Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews* (New York: Schocken/Nextbook, 2012), 58–59.

24 Sarna and Shapell, *Lincoln and the Jews*, 77–118. The fact that Solomon Schechter overlooked these same themes in his 1909 lecture on the occasion of Lincoln's Hundredth Anniversary delivered at the Jewish Theological Seminary suggests that they were not generally known until later; see Solomon Schechter, *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1959), 145–168.

of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, and the son of Rev. Samuel Isaacs, one of the architects, as noted above, of the antipolitical stance of American Jews, was understandably aghast at the broadside's discussions of Jewish politics and the Jewish vote. "The Israelites are not as a body distinctively Union [meaning Republican] or Democratic in their politics," he insisted. "The Jews as a body have *no* politics!" Privately, however, he assured Lincoln that many Jews—himself included—warmly supported the Republican Party.²⁵

Jewish leaders like Myer Isaacs believed that politics needed to be conducted privately, not with public pronouncements and broadsides. Jewish politics to them was, like sexual relations, properly confined to the private sphere, behind closed doors. There it was permissible and natural, while in public they considered it shameful and dangerous.

Zacharie, the chiropodist and an ex-spy, had lots of experience working behind closed doors. In a confidential letter sent just five days prior to the election, he assured President Lincoln that the Jewish vote would swing his way. "As regards the Israelites," he wrote, "with but few Exceptions they will vote for you...I have secured good and trustworthy men to attend on them on Election Day. My men have been all the week seeing that their masses are properly Registered so that all will go right."²⁶

And right it went—although the Jewish vote hardly mattered in the end. Thanks to a string of last-minute Union military victories on the battlefield, as well as divisions within the Democratic Party and an effective Republican slogan ("Don't change horses in the middle of a stream"), Lincoln won reelection by 400,000 votes and carried all but three states.²⁷

Unrecognized at that time was the fact that the 1864 election witnessed unprecedented Jewish engagement in politics. Lincoln appreciated the potential voting power of Jews, political parties with the

25 Myer S. Isaacs to Abraham Lincoln, 26 October 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

26 Issachar Zacharie to Abraham Lincoln, 3 November 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

27 Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln* 2:681–730.

assistance of Jews reached out and specifically targeted Jewish voters, and members of the Jewish Union Republican Association actively participated in the political arena, as their 1864 broadside demonstrates. All of this set the stage for the explosive involvement of Jews four years later in the 1868 presidential election, and in practically every American presidential election thereafter.²⁸

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28 On Jewish involvement in the 1868 election, see Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews*, 50–79.