

**Past as Prologue: Isolationism and Antisemitism in 20th Century America, and Their Modern Consequences**

**INTRODUCTION**

This list of resources explores the issues of isolationism and antisemitism in the US from the early to mid 20th Century, and their relationship to the current rise in antisemitism.

**REPORTS**

**Shapiro, Edward S. 'The Approach of War: Congressional Isolationism and Anti-Semitism 1939 - 1941.'** American Jewish History, Vol. 74 No. 1, pp 45-65, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Sept 1984

Published as Chapter 11 in 'A Unique People in a Unique Land,' Shapiro highlights the speeches and political actions of several members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to illustrate his view that various motivations (including varying levels of antisemitism) contributed to isolationist views during this period.

**Strong, Donald S. Organized Anti-Semitism: The Rise of Group Prejudice During the Decade 1930-1940.** American Council on Public Affairs, 1941; reissued by Greenwood Press 1979.

Strong examines over 100 organized antisemitic organizations in the United States from the years 1930-1940. Strong's report covers organizations such as the German-American Bund, Silver Shirts, and the Christian Front as well as The Paul Reveres and the American Christian Defenders.

**BOOKS**

**Baddiel, David. *Jews Don't Count*.** HarperCollins Publishers, 2021.

Baddiel comments on how issues of antisemitism are treated with less urgency and care in public discourse, recounting instances in culture and his own experiences. Baddiel speaks specifically to progressives about a failure to recognize and defend Jewish people against antisemitism with the same intensity and conviction as other marginalized groups.

*DFPL Collection. DFPL hosted a public discussion of the book April 17, 2023.*

**Belth, Nathan C. *A Promise to Keep: A Narrative of the American Encounter with Anti-Semitism*.** TimesBooks, 1979.

Belth tracks the history of Jewish struggle and antisemitic attitudes in America from the colonial era to the Skokie confrontation of the late 1970s. He observes that antisemitic sentiment and stereotypes of Jewish people began in the 1870s, then touches on the adoption of antisemitism by the Ku Klux Klan as a foundation of their ideology in the early post-WWI and the restrictions placed on Jewish life and immigration in the years between WWI & WWII. Belth also examines how national attitudes changed in the wake of the Holocaust and post-war events.

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**Breitman, Richard and Allan J. Lichtman. *FDR and the Jews*.** Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013.

Authors describe four different phases of FDR's position on Jewish issues. This scholarly work examines FDR's evolution from putting priority on domestic issues to becoming increasingly concerned with world events and the fate of Jewish populations in Europe. Issues discussed include possible Jewish resettlement areas in Latin America and Africa and the refusal to admit Jews in 1939.

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**Churchwell, Sarah. *Behold, America: The Entangled History or "America First" and "The American Dream."*** Basic Books, Hachette Book Group, 2018.

Churchwell uses stories and historical records to explore the origins of the phrases “America First” and “The American Dream” as competing visions of America. She tracks “America First” through its origins as a motto in WWI era Republican politics, its adoption by white supremacists in the 1920s, its use as the America First Committee’s motto in the 1930s, to its reappearance in the present day. She links the popularization of the phrase “the American Dream” from its use in the 1920s as a descriptor of the pursuit of material success and upward social mobility to its use in politics to promote social and economic equality.

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**Dinnerstein, Leonard. *Anti-Semitism in America*. Oxford University Press, 1995.**  
*excerpt from the Oxford University Press description:*

Dinnerstein provides a comprehensive history of prejudice against Jews in the United States, tracing American antisemitism from its roots in the dawn of the Christian era and the arrival of the first European Settlers, to its peak during WWII, and its permutations in the 1990s

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**Erbelding, Rebecca. *Rescue Board: The Untold Story of America’s Effort to Save the Jews of Europe*. Doubleday, 2018.**

The first known historical account of Henry Morgenthau Jr.’s War Refugee Board (WRB), the 1944 agency that represented the official U.S. response to the victims of Third Reich persecution. Erbelding presents primary source material (including archival material thought to be lost or destroyed) that was collected and digitized over a nearly five year period to piece together the story of the WRB’s 20 month effort to assist Jewish refugees escaping Nazi occupied areas. The material cites bribery of foreign officials, coordination with French Resistance and struggles with the US State Department.

**Gerber, David A., ed. *Anti-Semitism in American History*. Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press. 1986.**

This collection of academic essays explores the history of American views of and treatment of Jews, and offers a definition of antisemitism. Two articles relevant to the 1930s: First, "Anti-Semitism Mississippi Style" by Edward S. Shapiro describes the virulent anti-Jewish attitudes and policies of Senator Theodore G. Bilbo and Congressman John E. Rankin, both Democrats from Mississippi. Second, "Anti-Semitism in the State Department, 1933-44: Four Case Studies" by Richard D. Breitman and Alan M. Kraut profiles the actions of four State Department officials vis a vis Jewish immigration in the 1930s and 1940s; offers examples of obstructionism.

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**Greenblatt, Jonathan. *It Could Happen Here: Why America is Tipping from Hate to the Unthinkable - and How We Can Stop It*.** Mariner Books (an Imprint of HarperCollins), 2019.

Greenblatt, head of the Anti-Defamation League, examines the rise of antisemitism in America, and offers strategies individuals can take to eliminate hate-based rhetoric and action in all parts of society.

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**Greene, Daniel & Phillips, Edward. *Americans and the Holocaust: A Reader*.** Rutgers University Press, 2022.

*excerpt from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:*

Greene and Phillips collected more than 100 primary sources from newspapers, magazines, popular culture materials and government records to provide readers with an overview of how Americans viewed and debated their responsibility to respond to Nazism. The authors attempt to provide context on how American responses were shaped by economic crisis, fear of communism, antisemitism, racism, and isolationism during the 1920s - 1940s

**Gurock, Jeffrey, ed. *America, American Jews, and the Holocaust*.** Part of a series entitled ***American Jewish History***. Taylor & Francis, 2013.

Describes the first voice in Congress condemning Hitler's treatment of the Jews on May 24, 1933 as coming from Congressman Hamilton Fish. (p. 216).  
*Available for purchase online.*

**Hart, Bradley W. *Hitler's American Friends: The Third Reich's Supporters in the United States.*** MacMillan Publishers, 2018.

Hart reports on American citizens and groups seeking to defend and support Germany's Third Reich from Hitler's rise to power in the early 1930s until late 1941. Hart begins with a history of the German-American Bund and Silver Shirts, and examines efforts to support the Third Reich from grassroot organizations, universities, corporations, spy rings, political action groups, and members of the US government.

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**Jaher, Fredric Cople. *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America.*** Harvard University Press, 1996.

*excerpt from Harvard University Press description:*

Jaher attempts to create a comprehensive history from antisemitism's origins in the ancient world, to the first widespread outbreak in America during the Civil War. He combines psychological, sociological, economic, cultural, anthropological, and historical interpretations to reveal the rise and nature of antisemitism in the United States.

**Kohen, Ari & Steinacher, Gerald J. (editors). *Anti-Semitism on the Rise: The 1930's and Today.*** University of Nebraska Press, 2021.

*excerpt from publisher's description:*

A collection of essays regarding two key moments in antisemitic history. Part 1 focuses on antisemitic beliefs and ideas that were dominant in 1930-1940. Part 2 draws comparisons between that period and antisemitic beliefs and ideas in the present day.

**Lipstadt, Deborah. *Beyond Belief : The American Press and The Coming of the Holocaust.*** Simon & Schuster, 1986.

*excerpt from a Penn State University book review by Leonard Dinnerstein:*

Lipstadt constructs an account of how American newspapers treated information related to the Hitler's policies toward the Jewish people to the American public between 1933 - 1945. The assertion is that the atrocities committed during this period were underreported by the US media and that a full reporting of events could have changed national opinion.

**Medoff, Raphael. *The Jews Should Keep Quiet: Franklin D. Roosevelt Rabbi Stephen S. Wise and the Holocaust.*** University of Nebraska Press, The Jewish Publication Society, 2019.

*excerpt from University of Nebraska description:*

Based on recently discovered documents, Medoff attempts to reassess the motivations behind the FDR administration's policies regarding the Holocaust. Medoff highlights policies like the administration setting limits on European immigration, refusal to admit Jewish refugees in the Virgin Islands, dismissal of proposals to use empty Liberty ships to transport refugees, and rejecting of proposals to bomb the railways leading to Auschwitz, and compares them to some of FDR's private sentiments towards Jewish people. Medoff also examines how the relationship between FDR and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise influenced the American response to the Holocaust.

**Olmstead, Kathryn S. *The Newspaper Axis: The Six Press Barons Who Enabled Hitler.*** Yale University Press, 2022.

*excerpt from the Yale University Press description:*

Olmsted presents research that shows how several news publishers- Robert McCormick, Joseph & Eleanor Patterson, William Randolph Hearst in America and Lord Rothemere & Lord Beaverbrook in England - applied pressure to their governments directly and through their publications to ignore the threat of Nazism. Olmstead contends that by sharing editorial pieces and coordinating responses to events, they attempted to steer their countries responses in a populist direction, echoed antisemitic rhetoric, and attempted to weaken and delay the US and British response to Nazi aggression.

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**Olsen, Lynne. *Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America's Fight Over World War II, 1939-1941.*** Random House New York, 2013

Olsen examines the conflict over American involvement in WWII between the years of 1939 - 1941 through the contentious, often acrimonious, conflict between FDR and Charles Lindbergh. Olson highlights stories of diplomats and military officials working to sabotage FDR's efforts to turn national opinion towards joining the war, FDR's use of the FBI to monitor isolationists' activities, and his approval of covert British operations to discredit anti-war groups and plant propaganda in the U.S. media.

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**Ross, Steven J. *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America*. Bloomsbury Publishing 2017.**

Tells the story of the vast spy operation Germany had in California (because of the location of aircraft and destroyer factories) and two Jewish Americans, Leon Lewis and Joseph Roos, who developed a counter-spy network, with agent, Sylvia Comfort.

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## **DOCUMENTARIES (Features & Docuseries)**

*Available through online links*

***“Anti-Semitism in America.” The Jewish Americans: A Series by David Grubin***

Written, Produced, and Directed by David Grubin, JTA Productions, WETA Washington D.C., David Grubin Productions, Inc, in association with Thirteen/WNET New York, 2008

This episode of Grubin's five-part series features an in-depth look at the 20th Century resurgence of antisemitism in the U.S. by examining the lynching of Atlanta businessman Leo Frank in 1915, the role antisemitism played in the resurgence of the KKK in the early decades of the 1900s, the reaction to the nomination of Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court in 1916, Henry Ford's publishing of the popular Dearborn Independent during the 1920s, and how the end of WWII seemed to bring a full acceptance of Jewish assimilation into American culture.

**Burns, Ken, Novak, Lynn, & Botstein, Sarah, Producers *The U.S. and the Holocaust*. Florentine Films, 2022**

Collecting personal family accounts, historical events, archival footage, and survey data, Burns, Novak, and Botstein recount the rise and aggression of the Third Reich, the persecution of European Jewish people, along with the political and social climate of anti-immigrant and anti-Jewish sentiment in the U.S. between the early 1930's to the country's entry into WWII.

**Ophuls, Marcel, Director, Fish V, Hamilton, Producer. *Hotel Terminus*** The Memory Pictures Company, 1988.

*Summary from Icarus Films*

Ophuls' examination of the Nazi SS officer Klaus Barbie, the infamous "Butcher of Lyon," ***Hotel Terminus*** weaves together forty years of footage and interviews culled from over 120 hours of discussion with former Nazis, American intelligence officers, South American government officials, victims of Nazi atrocities and witnesses.

**Ophuls, Marcel, Director, Fish V, Hamilton, Producer. *The Memory of Justice***. Paramount Pictures, 1976.

Ophuls combines archival footage and interviews into an over 4 hour examination of the atrocities of war and guilt at the national and individual levels. By focusing on the similarities and differences between German atrocities in WWII and American missions in Vietnam, Ophuls attempts to point to the human tragedy in war.

## **ONLINE VIDEOS - YouTube**

***A Divided America Responds to Nazi Persecution***, presented by United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Sept 21, 2022

***'Anti-Semitism in the U.S. in the 1920s & 1930s'***, presented by Mendelsohn, Adam D., Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, May 14, 2020

***Jewish Life before World War II, Holocaust Education***, presented by United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Dec 29, 2014

## **ARTICLES and MISC.**



**Beauchamp, Zack. 'The Deep Roots of Anti-Semitism's Resurgence in America.'** Vox, Vox.com, Dec 1, 2022

Following former President Trump's dinner with Kanye West and Nick Fuentes becoming public, Beauchamp examines the current resurgence of US antisemitic sentiment through the lens of similar moments in American history.

**Erbelding, Rebecca. 'The Dark Political History of American Anti-Semitism.'** The Hill, TheHill.com, Aug 21, 2017.

The article provides a brief summary of the origins of antisemitism in far-right groups. Erbelding begins with the anti-immigration laws that coincided with Southern & Eastern European surge at the beginning of the 20th Century, draws a line between anti-Communist and disillusionment in the aftermath of WWI to stereotypes of Jewish immigrants, and describes how antisemitic views quickly became one of the foundational elements in American White Supremacy groups by 1925.

**Gad, Ben Zion. 'Newly Discovered Letter from Einstein Reveals U.S. Anti-Semitism in the 1930s'.** The Jerusalem Post, JerusalemPost.com, Nov 22, 2021.

After an unearthed letter from Einstein to a pianist Bruno Eisner was offered at auction in 2021, Ben Zion Gad highlights Einstein's description of the inconspicuous antisemitism that he encountered as he searched for work in the U.S. Gad focuses on Einstein's quote "It is, so to speak, an omnipresent enemy, one that is impossible to see, (whose presence) you only perceive,"

**Hart, Bradley W. 'America's Dark History of Anti-Semitism Re-emerges in Today's Far-Right Groups.'** The Conversation, TheConversation.com, Nov 29, 2018.

Hart uses the Tree of Life Synagogue mass shooting as a backdrop to challenge the concept of the “Lone Wolf” profile that is attached to many acts of rhetoric and violence rooted in antisemitism. Hart asserts that antisemitism in America found its roots in the post WWI era, the growing fears surrounding Communism’s spread, and in anti-immigrant sentiment in the early 20th century.

**Meir, Andrew ‘The God-Damndest Thing: The Anti-Semitic Plot to Thwart U.S. Aid to Europe’s Jews, and the Man Who Exposed it.’** Politico Magazine, Politico.com, Sept 23,2022.

Meir’s article is an excerpt from his biography of Henry Morgenthau Jr. **MORGENTHAU: Power, Privilege, and the Rise of an American Dynasty.** He recounts Morgenthau’s rapid shift of opinion toward favoring the US government helping to protect and rescue Jewish people from Nazi violence, his efforts to convert FDR to the cause, and Morgenthau’s work as head of the Treasury Department providing resources and aid to the network of activists, smugglers, and officials. Meir’s reporting includes the story of Morgenthau, the group of lawyers in his department who attempted to execute the plan, and the members of the US State Department and British Government who were actively involved in halting any effort to assist European Jewish people seeking to escape Nazi occupied territories.

**Sarna, Jonathan, Golden, Jonathan ‘The American Jewish Experience in the Twentieth Century: Anti-Semitism and Assimilation’.** National Humanities Center, October 2000.

Sarna and Golden present a summary of the Jewish community's surge in immigration in the early 1900s, how that surge transformed and galvanized the community efforts during the WWI era, and how their organized action led to increased political influence in the 1920s - 1940s. They also trace the resurgence of antisemitism during this time due to multiple factors, and the decline of antisemitism followed by increased assimilation of Jewish people in the post-WWII era.

**'Facing History, Facing Ourselves, *Anti-Semitism and its Impacts*', April 8, 2022**  
Online portal with questions and additional resources

**'Anti-Semitism in American History', ADL History, ADL.org**  
Online portal with questions and additional resources