

A Court Jew?

Rabbi Stephen Wise's Relationship
with President Franklin Roosevelt



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The philosopher George Santayana wrote, “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it” – Is that true? Perhaps those who do remember are just as doomed to repeat it, and that seems to be our current situation.

A Court Jew?

Rabbi Stephen Wise's Relationship with President Franklin Roosevelt

Stephen S. Wise and Franklin Delano Roosevelt lived highly consequential lives and the relationship between them was no less consequential. What the two men said to each other, or perhaps more important, what they “didn’t” say, as they sipped tea in the White House, influenced the fate of millions.

Roosevelt needs no introduction, but Wise does. Roosevelt’s reputation, like that of most famous men, has gone up and down, but nobody needs to be told who he was. Not so for Wise. Prominent Rabbis, like best-selling authors, may have their 15 minutes (in Wise’s case, 50 years) of fame, and then fade from public view, and that is true of Wise. During his lifetime, he was so well known that the US Post Office would deliver mail addressed simply to “Rabbi USA” to him. Now unless you happen to live in Manhattan’s Upper West Side and walk past the Stephen S. Wise Free Synagogue that he founded, you probably know little to nothing about Wise. After his death the present structure was erected and named in his honor.

Before that, it was a congregation without a permanent home. During the 30 years the Free Synagogue didn't have a home, Wise conducted Sunday morning services in Carnegie Hall. He always "sold out."

As unlikely as it seems, Franklin Roosevelt and Stephen Wise, although coming from radically different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences had a great deal in common.

Both were aristocrats; Roosevelt, who was fond of pointing out that some of his ancestors were pirates in the South China Seas (something of an exaggeration), although part of the family fortune had had its origins in the opium trade. He could trace his antecedents back to the Dutch who sailed up the Hudson River long before there was a United States; settling there and over the generations acquiring great wealth. Franklin grew up in a world of privilege, went to the best schools, graduated from Harvard and attended Columbia Law School. His family had status as well as wealth and if it was not quite one of the 400, who were said to be the only people that mattered in New York society, they weren't far from it.

Wise, born in Hungary and coming here as a very young child, was a very different sort of aristocrat – the sixth generation of distinguished Rabbis who had secular clout as well as religious authority. His maternal grandfather, one of his few male ancestors who did not become Rabbis, made a fortune manufacturing top quality porcelain dishes – one of which was purchased by Queen Victoria. He was knighted and later made a Baron by Emperor Franz Joseph. So quite literally, Wise came from a noble family. At the time and place his Rabbinical lineage was more highly regarded than his baronship. Wise’s family didn’t have the vast wealth that the Roosevelts had, yet they didn’t need to worry where their next Schnitzel would come from. Stephen was particularly proud of his ancestors who participated in the unsuccessful Hungarian struggle for independence from Austria during the Revolution of 1848. He believed that his own anti-authoritarian streak owed something to his rebel ancestors.

Both Franklin and Stephen were extraordinarily ambitious; both were brilliant; both masters of the English language; both great orators; both master politicians; both handsome; both charming; and both had charisma. Both had major health crisis at young ages that affected them the rest of their lives. Wise’s health problems were

psychological. On route to a pulpit in Oregon he suffered a debilitating panic attack and a few years later, after he had become a successful Rabbi and something of a public figure, he suffered a full-scale breakdown necessitating months of withdrawal and recuperation in an Atlantic City hotel. Wise was so debilitated that he couldn't even walk on Atlantic City's famous boardwalk. Although Wise never suffered anything as severe in his later life, he did have episodes that necessitated withdrawal and rest.

Roosevelt had been superbly physical, a first-rate golfer, a highly accomplished sailor, and if not quite an exemplar of the "strenuous life" recommended by his wife's uncle President Teddy Roosevelt; he approximated it, until stricken down by Polio in an attack that left him permanently disabled.

Uncle Ted had lost his wife and his mother the very same day. Apparently, he never grieved. Instead, he handled his twin losses by aggressing – hunting, killing animals, boxing, and ranching. Franklin handled his grievous loss somewhat similarly, but with less frank aggression, rather with denial and undiminished optimism – even cheerfulness – in the face of great pain – physical and

emotional. Whatever one thinks about Roosevelt's political career; it is impossible not to admire how he dealt with adversity.

Both Wise and Roosevelt had outstanding public personas; both were greatly loved and just as deeply hated. Both were unfaithful to their wives. Roosevelt with Lucy Rutherford and later with his private secretary Missy LeHand. Wise with Helen Lawrenson, the editor of Vanity Fair. Both were believers in a "higher power." Neither was conventionally religious. Although Wise was the most reformed of Rabbis, not wearing a Yarmulke or keeping kosher, and was hardly a believer in an anthropomorphic God, he was nevertheless a man of deep faith. While Roosevelt rarely went to church, he too had a faith in a benevolent God. And their faith was unquestionably one source of their strength.

Both men were less than forthcoming about their serious health problems in their old age. Wise's minimalization had less public import than Roosevelt's, whose uncontrolled blood pressure and heart disease played a large role in his misjudging Stalin at Yalta.

The most important difference between Wise and Roosevelt was a power differential. Wise had a strong influence over many men

(and women) and over many institutions, but Roosevelt was the most powerful man in the world.

Wise met twice with Sigmund Freud. It is not clear whether he was interviewing Freud, there to recruit Freud to the Zionist movement (Freud was ambivalent about Zionism), or there for personal consultations with Freud.

Wise added to his aristocratic credentials by marrying Louise Waterman, an uptown German Jewish heiress, descended from central European emigres of two generations earlier who had done very well indeed in New York. Emily Lazarus, whose immortal words (sometimes honored more in the breach than in the observance) are engraved in the base of the statue of liberty, was a member of Louise's extended family. Louise was no longer Jewish, rather attending meetings of the Ethical Culture Society; returning to Judaism after marrying Rabbi Wise.

Both Franklin Roosevelt and Stephen Wise liked to live well. Roosevelt had his Hyde Park Estate, a house in Manhattan, a summer home on Campbell Island in Canada, and membership in the most exclusive of New York Clubs (years later Wise declined a

speaking engagement in one of them because it discriminated against Jews).

Both men had outstanding political skills; and both had the ability to persuade others to follow in their footsteps. Wise was considered one of the most powerful speakers of his era; Roosevelt uttered words that would go down in history. Both could be devious in pursuit of their political goals, Roosevelt more so.

Wise hardly had Roosevelt's wealth, but he did have a succession of luxury apartments, a summer home in the Adirondacks, a cook, a housekeeper, and a governess. He sent his children to expensive schools - Princeton, Bryn Mawr and Yale Law School.

Both men were American Patriots believing in what has been called our "civic religion," the belief that our democracy, however flawed, is sacred. Although the power differential between the men was real enough, it is also true that Wise had his own sources of power. He was the most prominent Rabbi of his generation, the founder and longtime leader of a synagogue, the most well-known American Zionist, the founder and long-time head of a seminary. And he put an indelible stamp on all of these institutions. Like Roosevelt, Wise was driven and had enormous energy.

Both Roosevelt and Wise shared a not so happy experience, the traumatic early deaths of their fathers. Roosevelt's father, James, was in late middle age and had a history of serious health problems, so his death was not altogether surprising. Nevertheless, it had profound consequences leaving Franklin a lonely child with a dominating, overindulgent, possessive mother. What role the loss of his father and envelopment by his mother played in the formation of his character, I'll leave to his many biographers.

Both men knew how to relax. Before polio, Roosevelt indulged in sailing, horseback riding and playing golf; after polio working on his stamp collection. Wise each spring eagerly anticipated the arrival of his clerical complimentary season tickets to the New York Yankee games and loved roaming the woods surrounding his summer home.

Neither was conventionally religious. Wise's "Liberal Judaism," a designation he preferred to Reform Judaism, had little regard for Jewish law or custom and Wise's relationship with ritual was quite flexible. He didn't wear a Yarmulke, a Taliss or Payess, conducted services on Sunday so working people could attend, and didn't keep Kosher. But he was deeply admiring of the Jewish prophetic tradition and related much more to the prophets than to the 613

commandments of traditional Judaism. He did retain enough of Jewish ritual to distinguish his Liberal Judaism from the Ethical Culture movement his wife had been a part of. And he was undoubtedly a man of deep faith in his very own individualistic way.

Roosevelt rarely went to church, except on ceremonial occasions, but nevertheless on the night before his inauguration, his son James found him uncharacteristically disturbed. Saying, “I don’t know if I can do this job. I’m going to pray. I would like you to pray for me too.” Not interested in theology or philosophy, Franklin described himself as simply a Christian and a Democrat. Franklin always remembered being moved during a “divine service” onboard an American destroyer off the coast of Newfoundland during his first meeting with Churchill as the lookouts scanned the sea looking for German submarines.

Wise’s father, Aaron, had left his father-in-law’s porcelain business, returned to the Rabbinate, and then immigrated to America (after scouting New York while working as a laborer and serving as a part-time Rabbi). He was liberal in both religion and politics (he had backed his father-in-law’s employees during a labor dispute back in Hungary). Now in New York with his family, he soon had a

full-time position as pulpit Rabbi, where he was both an iconoclast and a traditionalist. Stephen, who was to play on a much larger stage, emulated many of his father's stances and shared many of his values, but perhaps his father's most powerful influence was his early death making his own son Stephen all too aware of his own mortality.

It was said of Franklin's wife, Eleanor's uncle Teddy Roosevelt, that "He was the groom at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral." Although their narcissism and need to always be in the spotlight was muted and better packaged, the same was true of Franklin and of Stephen.

And finally, for both men, the most problematic aspects of their lives and careers came at the end.

Wise's family quickly acculturated as his father made a secure and comfortable place for himself in uptown German-Jewish society. As a son of the Rabbi of Congregation Rodeph Shalom, Stephen had every material and cultural advantage, including learning Hebrew from his father. Stephen had an older brother who grew up to become a distinguished lawyer after moving to California. His death in middle age was a severe blow to Wise. He

also had two half-sisters from his mother's first marriage (some biographers say from affairs).

“Stevie,” as President Roosevelt was fond of calling him (in private), in public the President always referred to him as “Dr. Wise,” went to the public school down the block, later to a public high school. He then enrolled in City College quickly transferring to the more prestigious Columbia University, where he distinguished himself as a student of Latin and Greek. He went on to Columbia grad school, eventually writing a dissertation on the “Ethics” of the 11th century Spanish-Jewish philosopher Ibn Gabirola. Gabirola wrote in Arabic, so Wise had yet another language to master. Wise was required to study the original manuscript that is in an Oxford University library, and he did.

There is controversy over Wise's dissertation. Some biographers think that it was ghostwritten, essentially plagiarized. More recent scholarship doesn't support this and credits Wise with authorship.

This brings up another issue. Stephen's father, unusually for a European Rabbi of his generation, had a doctorate from a German University and Aaron wanted his son to be a scholar. It never happened. Although he became a master of English prose, Stephen

Wise never wrote a philosophical or theological work. Stephen Wise himself had scholarly aspirations, but his talents lay elsewhere. I wonder if his later driven-ness was a displaced attempt to fulfill his father's hopes.

During Wise's European trip to examine the Arabic manuscript in the Oxford Library, two transformative events took place. He met Theodore Herzl. Like so many others, he was dazzled by Herzl, an encounter that moved him from having a mild interest in Zionism to a passionate commitment to Zionism that lasted the rest of his life. Herzl made him a kind of American Lieutenant of the Zionist movement. The two men met three more times before Herzl's untimely death in 1904.

The second event was Wise's ordination after private study with Rabbi Adolf Jellinek in Vienna. Jellinek was very well known as a liberal Jewish thinker and the two developed a friendship walking the streets of Vienna. The fact that Wise didn't attend a yeshiva – the usual way to prepare for the Rabbinate - may have contributed to his fierce independence.

Now ordained, Stephen returned to New York, became a pulpit Rabbi and found a bride, Louise Waterman. Louise was highly

cultured, very well educated, a secure member of the upper-class uptown German Jewish aristocracy. She was also a follower and friend of Felix Adler, founder of the Ethical Culture Society. Ethical Culture was a serious competitor of Judaism around the turn of the twentieth century. It retained and embellished the ethical and prophetic teachings of Judaism, leaving behind Jewish rituals, customs, and belief in a divine being. That wasn't too far from most of Stephen's belief system. Where Wise could not follow Adler was Wise's retaining a belief in a transcendent God, who was a force in human affairs, and to whom prayer was appropriately addressed. As well as in the practice of some vestiges of Jewish ritual. Stephen's Rabbinical grandfather had stood between strict Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism. The grandson recapitulated this stance – his Liberal Judaism – stood between Orthodoxy and Ethical Culture.

Louise continued to admire and correspond with Felix Adler the rest of her life. If Stephen was jealous, there is no evidence of it. After a few years leading a Manhattan Synagogue, Wise decided to follow in his brother west and accepted a job as Rabbi of Portland, Oregon's congregation Beth Israel. Before following him there, I would like to mention two powerful influences on his entire career: "progressivism" and "the social gospel."

The Progressive movement of the late 19th and early 20th century was different from classical liberalism in one critical aspect – its emphasis on social action. Classic liberalism had defended individual rights, freedom of speech and strongly supported a laissez-faire approach to economic issues giving the government little role in the marketplace. In Jefferson’s words it advocated a “career open to talents,” a meritocracy, rather than a society structured around inherited position and wealth.

The progressives on the other hand favored government regulation of the marketplace, supported “muckraking,” as exemplified by Upton Sinclair’s best-selling “The Jungle,” a book that exposed the horrors of the meatpacking industry and led to the Federal Food and Drug Act; exposure of corruption; and the breaking up of monopolies. Other progressive goals included child labor laws, support for the rights of labor; environmental protection; and conservation. Wise was involved in trying to achieve all of these goals. His progressivism was very much concerned with economic justice and the elimination of social ills. Stephen Wiess supported progressive causes his entire adult life.

The Christian movement known as the “Social Gospel” taught that true piety was not so much about doctrine as it was about alleviating human misery through social action. It’s Jewish equivalent is Tikkun Olam – repairing the world – and was a natural fit for and found support in Wise’s hierarchy of values. His lifelong Christian friend John Holmes, the minister of a church in Brooklyn, who spoke at Wise’s funeral, was an enthusiastic follower of the Social Gospel and a major influence on Wise. Wise for all of his commitment in Judaism and Jewish affairs never lived in an exclusively Jewish world. From the beginning of his career as a pulpit Rabbi he invited a wide range of speakers, including Christian clergymen, to give sermons that sometimes espoused positions he did not hold. He was a pioneer in what we would call inter-faith relations.

Another Social Gospel-ist who strongly influenced Wise was the eccentric Scotsman, Thomas Davidson. Davidson started, among other things, “Breadwinners College,” that was housed in the Educational Alliance – one of the “settlement houses” on the lower east side. Both Louise Watterman and Eleanor Roosevelt volunteered their services in settlement houses, which provided instruction for working people, largely Jewish immigrants living on

the lower east side, in the evening. Davidson then purchased land in Keene Valley in the Adirondacks at the base of Hurricane Mountain (a mountain I have climbed) and had a summer camp, Lynmore, a sort of distant relative of the American Utopian experiments of the early nineteenth century, where young people participated in intense intellectual discussions, sang, read poetry, farmed, and wandered in the woods. Wise spent the summer of 1882 there and heard Davidson teach “knowledge and wisdom are not idols or fetishes to be worshiped, but rather instruments to be used for the welfare of others,” and told Wise “Judaism like all living things changes as it goes...you will dream a twentieth century Judaism fitted to meet the needs of the present day.” Stephen never forgot that summer.

After returning from Europe to lead a Manhattan Synagogue, while still pursuing a Columbia doctorate, and becoming engaged to Louise, Wise left for Oregon. The congregation he took over in Portland was sparsely attended, on the verge of bankruptcy, and without clear direction. Wise reversed all of that. His years in Portland were spectacularly successful. He and Louise always regarded them as the happiest years of their lives.

Portland was still something of a frontier town, wide open, corrupt, and surging with energy. A port with thousands of saloons, brothels, and gambling halls, as well as a thriving salmon cannery industry where the working conditions were appalling and the sanitation minimal. The fishing industry was vital to Portland's prosperity and support for cleaning it up minimal or non-existent.

The surest way to become a millionaire in Portland was to become a precinct captain in the police force, raking in money to assure that there would be no interference with the saloons, brothels, or gambling halls. Wise denounced all of it from his pulpit; he accrued enemies even as his reputation grew.

When a reform mayor came in, Wise became a major figure in the attempt to clean Portland up. It was even suggested that he run for Mayor. But Wise rejected all suggestions that he become overtly political, always insisting that the clergy should have an independent role without affiliation with any political party. Wise also insisted that there was no such thing as a Jewish voting bloc, rather advocating that the Jews should play an independent role in the public sphere by voting for the best candidate – Jewish, Christian, Republican, Democratic, or whatever. Nevertheless, his

sermons provided material for and support of the reformers. Originally a Republican, by his Portland years, Wise had become a Democrat. He consistently filled the pews at his Synagogue and started speaking all over the West, even venturing as far as Alaska. He always filled the lecture halls he spoke in and, by the time he left Portland, he had a national reputation.

When Teddy Roosevelt came to town, Wise was invited to lunch with him. It was Wise's first contact with an American President, and a Republican at that. Although he admired Teddy Roosevelt for his achievements, Wise was uncomfortable with Teddy's style. Too impulsive, too much the loose cannon. Wise would have agreed with the Republican leader, Mark Hanna, who lamented after Teddy became President following McKinley's assassination, "Now we're stuck with that damn cowboy." But Stephen did like getting close to power, and he himself, much like Teddy Roosevelt, consistently sought adoration and applause. Although Teddy and Stephen were both progressives, they did have a significant political disagreement. Wise favored the breaking up of monopolies; Roosevelt favored regulating them. It was a split that ran through the progressive movement for many years.

More central to Wise's career, and closer to his core beliefs, was the issue of the proper role of the Rabbi. Was a Rabbi to reflect the beliefs and values of his congregation and its trustees, or should the Rabbi (or other clergy) lead rather than follow; challenging the congregation to think boldly, questioning its complacency with the status quo. Wise was adamant that the Rabbi have complete freedom to express his beliefs from the pulpit. The leaders of his congregation were also leaders of Portland's civic society and were not comfortable with Wise's often dramatic confrontations with the corrupt elements of the Portland elite. Stephen won that one, and he succeeded in breaking free of control by the trustees.

That wasn't true when after several years, Wise returned to New York and was a candidate for spiritual leader of Emanu-El, "the cathedral" of Reform Judaism. Lewis Marshall, the chief Macher of Emanu-El, who had status, not only as one on top of the wealthy society of uptown German Jews, but throughout the Jewish world, refused to grant Wise carte blanche to say whatever he wanted from its pulpit, and Stephen withdrew his candidacy.

Wise was later accused of grandstanding to get attention and the leader of Emanu-El insisted that Wise had no serious interest in the

position and furthermore that its trustees had never actually censored any of their Rabbis. Be that as it may, Wise was both lauded for his stance and condemned for it; a pattern that would reoccur throughout his career.

Whatever Stephen's motives, there is a serious issue here. Although, unlike ministers and rabbis, he was not a spiritual leader of a congregation with a board of trustees to please, but rather a Catholic priest, Father Coughlin, had a huge radio audience for his vicious antisemitism. And for years the Catholic hierarchy did nothing to silence him. Was this a case of the absolute right of a clergyman to speak his hateful hate speech? By Wise's criteria, the answer would be yes, and that would be problematic to say the least.

His struggle with Marshall, a bitter battle that he lost, drove Wise to establish the "Free Synagogue." The Free Synagogue was free in two regards: its spiritual leader had absolute freedom of conscience and speech, and its pews were open to whoever sat in them first, rather than being purchased, the best seats going to the wealthy. Wise found that repugnant and he ended the practice. In an effort to bridge the downtown-uptown Russian-German split in the New York Jewish world, Wise, from the very beginning of the Free

Synagogue, also held services in the Lower East Side. He also hired a full-time Rabbi to pursue the Synagogue's social agenda.

Some years later, Wise was one of the founders of the NAACP. Shortly thereafter, he went to Massena, a small town in upper New York State, where, after a young girl had gone missing, Jews were accused of ritual murder – the only instance of the “blood libel” in American history. The blood libel is the belief that Jews murder Christian children to get blood to make Matzah at Passover. A dangerous fantasy that started in Damascus and spread throughout Europe, and continues to this very day in the middle east. When she walked out of the woods a few days later, Wise demanded and got an apology from the mayor, and demanded discipline of the police chief who had started the whole thing. Herbert Lehman, the Jewish governor of New York, also demanded that the blood libel charge be repudiated, and it was.

Sacco and Vanzetti were Italian immigrants, who were almost certainly innocent of a murder they were accused of committing. Wise became a leader of the movement in their defense. Supposed anarchists and unwelcome intruders in America, they were convicted, and despite world-wide protest, were executed.

Despite being engaged in so many fronts, Wise managed to found a seminary and to become a leader of American Zionism, even as he continued to support the progressive agenda. When Princeton University President Woodrow Wilson decided to run for Governor in New Jersey, Wise not only supported his candidacy, but developed a friendship with Wilson and predicted that Wilson would become President. When Wilson did become President, Wise was a frequent and welcome visitor at the White House and when Wilson announced his support of the “Balfour Declaration,” in which England proclaimed that it favored the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine; Wise’s admiration of Wilson turned to love. Wise became a member of the Zionist contingent at the Versailles Peace Conference after the war. Unhappily England was to renege, with dire consequences for the Jews, on its promise in the Balfour Declaration to support a Jewish settlement in Palestine.

Prefiguring his being blinded by worship of Franklin Roosevelt, Wise was incapable of criticizing Wilson. During the first World War, freedom of speech was severely curtailed. The Sedition Act of 1918 prohibited speech in support of resistance to American fighting in WWI. Jacob Abrams, along with another seven suspected communists were arrested for printing a bulletin denouncing

America's war activities. He was convicted and his case eventually went to the Supreme Court, that upheld the conviction. Justice Oliver Wendel Holmes Jr., dissented writing in his dissent, "When men realize that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundation of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas...the best test of truth is the power of thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that *truth* is the only ground upon which their wishes can safely be carried out."

One would have thought that Wise would strongly support this statement of his own credo, and Abram's right to express his feelings about the war. But he didn't. He was silent. To do so would have been implicit criticism of Wilson and Wise was incapable of doing that.

A few years after the war and after the Russian Revolution many immigrants suspected of supporting communism were deported. As were those who were suspected of being anarchists. They were mostly Russian Jews. Michael Palmer, Wilson's Attorney General, spearheaded the arrests, and carried out a more general oppression. Then bombs went off at Palmer's home and elsewhere, that were

attributed to “anarchists” and communists. The wave of arrests and deportations that followed were known as “the Palmer Raids.” Those raids gravely violated the Constitution’s guarantee of freedom of speech. It also added fuel for the anti-immigrant movement that swept the country and led to the horrendous restrictions of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Laws of 1924.

As far as I know, Stephen Wise didn’t say a word about any of this. He was even silent when Eugene Debs, the perennial socialist candidate for President, who had received more than a million votes in the previous election, was jailed for opposing the draft. Debs was ultimately pardoned, not by Wilson who could be rigidly self-righteous and vindictive, but by, of all people, Warren Harding.

In fairness to Wise, he agreed with Wilson that World War I was a righteous war against autocracy and a war that would end all wars. And perhaps even more significantly, Wilson was pro-Zionist, supportive of the Balfour Declaration. Wilson’s Zionism was partially the result of his religious beliefs that included the belief that the Jews must return to their ancestral homeland before the Messiah could arrive. (Sound familiar? Very similar sentiments are expressed by the current Christian right.)

Wise's passion for Woodrow Wilson glowed even brighter after the President nominated Louis Brandeis, a Jew, to the Supreme Court. The nomination lay bare the intensity of antisemitism in America. The confirmation hearings dragged on for months. The public opposition to Brandeis was led by Lawrence Lowell, president of Harvard. And this in spite of Brandeis being a Harvard alumnus. Lowell rationalized his opposition as driven by Brandeis' judicial philosophy (he was known as the "peoples' advocate"), but the real source of the opposition to his confirmation was his Jewishness.

When Brandeis was finally confirmed and took his seat on the Court, Justice James Clark Reynolds refused to speak to him because he was a Jew. When Brandeis retired years later, Reynolds wouldn't sit for the customary photograph of the justices. He was also one of the "four horsemen" who found most of the New Deal unconstitutional, leading Roosevelt to try to add members to the court's nine. He was accused of trying to "pack" the court, and Roosevelt withdrew his proposal to expand its membership.

Reynolds' antisemitism didn't hurt Reynolds socially with the Washington elite. Invitations to his parties were prized. Brandeis

went on to be one of the few Justices to be considered “great.” When Herbert Hoover nominated Benjamin Cardozo, another Jew and close friend of Stephen Wise to the court, there was no fuss, and he was easily confirmed.

Brandeis had an enormous influence on Wise, especially in reinforcing his already strong Zionism. Brandeis refuted the accusation of Jewish “dual loyalty” by stating that, “My Zionism makes me a better American and my Americanism makes me a better Zionist.” Stephen Wise agreed.

Perhaps surprisingly, Wise was a “dry,” a proponent of prohibition; a position he arrived at during his crusading days in Oregon. We usually attribute prohibition to reactionary zealots, while the truth is that Wise was far from being alone among Progressives in supporting prohibition.

Back in New York, Wise gained absolute control over his “Free Synagogue,” headed and similarly controlled the seminary he had founded and became a leader of American Zionism.

Most Reform Rabbis, as well as the Reform Seminary, were passionately anti-Zionist, seeing Zionism as a threat to their

assimilation into American society. That was one reason Wise founded a seminary not dictated by the Reform establishment.

If Wise had any doubt's about the strength of anti-immigration sentiment in the United State during the reactionary 1920s, they were soon gone. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 placed highly restrictive quotas on immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe, condemning millions of Jews to death during the Holocaust. The Johnson-Reed law was overtly racist. Johnson was a crude eugenicist who used a pseudo-scientific theory to justify his quota system. Unhappily, the law had wide-spread support. Even the Jewish Samuel Gompers, head of the AFL, supported it out of fear cheap labor would hurt his members.

Although Wise opposed the Johnson-Reed Act, it wasn't one of his passions. The Leo Frank case was. Frank was a Jewish factory manager in Georgia who was accused and convicted of murdering a young female employee. Wise was in the thick of the fight for a new trial. Frank was almost certainly innocent, and his conviction an act of pure antisemitism. The governor commuted Frank's death sentence, but a mob that included "upstanding" members of the community broke into the jail and lynched Frank.

One reaction to the Frank lynching was the founding of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to defend minority rights — explicitly, but not exclusively, Jewish ones. As far as I know, Wise is the only person instrumental in founding both the NAACP and the ADL.

After the Frank tragedy, Wise’s passion became exposing and toppling Tammany Hall, the political machine that ran New York city. By then, Roosevelt was governor of New York. Wise assumed Roosevelt was on his side; he wasn’t. Wise utterly failed to enlist Roosevelt in his anti-Tammany crusade. Though the governor espoused and successfully enacted the progressive program Wise favored, there was no way he was going to offend Tammany, who he hoped would support him when he became a candidate for President (and it did).

Wise wanted Roosevelt to aid in his attempt to bring down the flamboyant, openly corrupt, and popular mayor Jimmy Walker. Not only did liquor flow openly – in spite of prohibition – so did all sorts of other “sin.” Manhattan’s leading madam, Polly Adler, “entertained” the city’s political and financial elite. Turning to the arts in her retirement, Adler wrote a well-selling, quite literate memoir titled, “A House is Not a Home,” and naturally was close to

Mayor Walker. You may not be surprised to find out that Adler was Jewish.

When Wise and his fellow reformers finally forced Walker out of office –with minimal help from Roosevelt – he fled to Europe leaving the wags to say, “when Wise goes after politicians, there is a run on steamship tickets.”

As much as he liked Roosevelt’s policies, Wise was repelled by FDR’s clearly opportunistic refusal to move against Tammany Hall and Jimmy Walker. Wise’s conclusion was that the Governor was a man without principals: shallow, self-serving, and not to be relied upon or trusted. So ironically, the first interaction between Wise and Roosevelt was adversarial.

When Roosevelt ran for President in 1932, Wise did not vote for him. Nor did he vote for Herbert Hoover. He cast his vote for the Socialist candidate, Norman Thomas. And that in spite of the fact that, in 1928, Wise gave a speech at a rally in Madison Square Garden in support of Roosevelt’s candidacy for Governor. His support of Roosevelt in the 1928 election gave Wise entry into the Governor’s mansion in Albany. Roosevelt never forgot that Wise didn’t support his 1932 run for President. Wise had supported FDR

for governor of New York although Roosevelt's opponent was Jewish. Wise once more insisted that Jews, like everyone else, should vote for the best candidate and not as a member of a Jewish Voting Block. Wise was fond of pointing out that he had voted for a Catholic (Alfred Smith) for President, a Protestant (FDR) for Governor, and a Jew (Herbert Lehman) for Lieutenant Governor.

When her husband retained many Jews from Smith's New York State Administration (he had been governor), Eleanor Roosevelt objected saying, "the race has nerves of iron, tentacles of steel." Given the prevalence of antisemitism in the culture that the Roosevelts grew up in, FDR was surprisingly friendly – at least in his professional life – with Jews. Eleanor was not. Returning from a party that had included many Jews, she said, reflecting the stereotype, "if I never see a mink or a diamond again, it will be too soon." And when FDR brought the brilliant Felix Frankfurter, who was a part of his "brain trust" home, her comment was, "Oh, he's so Jewish."

Eleanor eventually became a Zionist and later a passionate supporter of the State of Israel. After Franklin's death, she fell in love with her Jewish physician, David Gurewitsch, who had had

many affairs, among others, with Hemingway's third wife, Martha Gellhorn, also Jewish. Although Eleanor had erotic feelings for David, he a decade younger, did not reciprocate them. After David married an old flame, and fellow Jew, the three of them moved in together and the once antisemitic Eleanor Roosevelt ended her life with a mezuzah on her door.

Eleanor later wrote of a night when their plane was stranded in Newfoundland they (meaning she and David), shared sleeping quarters. She went on to tell that lacking a nightgown she slept in her panties. Given David's lack of physical interest, although he did care deeply for her, it is unlikely that the panties came off however much Eleanor wanted to give the impression that they did. Eleanor's other great passion was for Lorena "Hick" Hickok, an AP reporter, who lived in the White House during WWII. If Franklin Roosevelt had objected to his wife having a sexual relationship with a woman, there is no record of it.

Returning to Wise's 1932 vote for Norman Thomas, the socialist candidate, I might note that I interviewed Thomas when he was old, at the end of his career. I found him impressive both as a human being and as a political thinker. By then, he thought that Roosevelt's

New Deal had accomplished much of what he had fought for his entire life. When I spoke to him, his political agenda was almost exclusively on stopping the Vietnam War.

To turn back to FDR, since he is so well known, I won't go into much detail about his life before his presidency. As already noted, he was born into great wealth, doted on, especially after his father's death, by his mother Sarah, educated by private tutors until he went off to Groton, an ultra-exclusive boarding school, its headmaster the Reverend Endicott Peabody remaining influential throughout Franklin's life, officiating at his wedding, and giving the invocation at his inauguration.

Roosevelt proposed to three *débutantes*, all of whom refused him. The refusals didn't seem to much to affect him. His great disappointment was not making the Porcellian Club, the most exclusive club at Harvard, to which both Uncle Ted and his father had belonged.

Romantically, he tried again, proposing to his distant cousin Eleanor, who was considered something of an ugly duckling – perhaps unfairly – and the attraction of the handsome Franklin to her remains something of a mystery. I imagine that he was drawn to

her still undeveloped depth of spirit and intellect. In spite of his mother's opposition, he married her. From Harvard, FDR went to Columbia Law School. Passing the New York Bar after two years, he dropped out. Eleanor had made a snide comment about the "Jewish gentleman" at Columbia that may have had some influence on his decision to leave the school.

Franklin practiced Law without much interest for several years, and then ran for the New York State Senate and won. He had found his vocation – politics. In Albany, Franklin pursued the progressive agenda, easily winning reelection. In 1912, he supported Woodrow Wilson for President in a four-way race – cousin Theodore having split the Republican Party to run as a "Bull Moose," with the socialist Eugene Debs having a significant following. The main line Republican candidate was William Taft, who had succeeded Teddy Roosevelt in the Presidency.

Wilson, when he was president of Princeton, appointed the first Jewish faculty member and later, when President, nominated Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court. Roosevelt thought that Wilson, whose family had been on the wrong side of the Civil War and therefore members of a minority, identified with the Jews.

Farfetched, but not impossible. Franklin's feelings about Wilson's support of the Balfour Declaration, if any, are not known. Roosevelt had previously supported the Roman Catholic Smith, who he famously characterized as the "happy warrior" when he nominated him for President at the 1920 Democratic Convention. Roosevelt's antisemitism was cultural and seemed to apply to the "race" and not to individual Jews. Franklin Roosevelt had many close relationships – professional and to some degree personal – with Jews. He was particularly close to his Hyde Park neighbor Henry Morgenthau, Jr. who he appointed to his cabinet when he became President. Morgenthau's father had been Wilson's ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. And young Henry had been an assistant to his father as the Turks turned on the Armenians, so he had direct knowledge of genocide. The Turkish attack on the Armenians being overtly genocidal.

Henry's identification as a Jew was initially weak. His beliefs grew stronger as Hitler's horror became known. Eventually, Roosevelt's long-term secretary of the treasury advocated within the administration for more overt and stronger support of the European Jews. To some extent, Morgenthau succeeded.

One of his sons became a renowned long-term Manhattan district attorney. I treated one of D.A. Morgenthau's Chief of Detectives, a working class Catholic who had the highest regard for Morgenthau.

Roosevelt had no trouble working with his Lieutenant Governor, Herbert Lehman, and that was true of his dealings with other Jewish politicians. He appointed Jews to his "brain trust" and nominated Felix Frankfurter to the Supreme Court.

On the other hand, when Roosevelt was on the Harvard board of overseers, he voted for a "Jewish quota." Apparently embarrassed, he told Morgenthau that he had only voted for the quota because he didn't believe any one group should dominate any organization. That was absurd. Harvard President, Lawrence Lowell, had led the opposition to Brandeis' confirmation to the Supreme Court, an opposition rationalized as objection to Brandeis' judicial philosophy, while the real reason was Brandeis' Jewishness.

For all of his ambivalence towards Jews and Judaism, Franklin Roosevelt seemed to have bought into the stereotype. He had a lifelong fear of Jewish dominance. As late as 1941, well into the Holocaust, he remarked during a visit to the west coast that there were too many Jews in the Oregon (Federal) Civil Service and once

said that the German resentment of Jewish domination of certain professions (law and medicine) was understandable.

Roosevelt, who had been successful as assistant secretary of the Navy during the WWI was nominated for Vice President in 1920. The secretary, Josephus Daniels, a southerner and overt racist, had given Roosevelt a free hand to run the Navy. If Roosevelt had any feelings about his boss' racism, there is no record of it. Roosevelt ran with James Cox, who no one expected to win. Cox had been nominated after Smith's failed bid to get the nomination for himself. The ticket failed abysmally. Warren Harding, proposing a return to "normalcy," easily won, only to be brought down by multiple scandals, especially Teapot Dome, an oil lease fiasco. He died on a trip to Alaska, some saying it was a suicide, others that his wife poisoned him. He was succeeded by "silent" Calvin Coolidge. Then by Herbert Hoover who had received many votes from Jews who admired his efforts to aide European recovery after World War I. Unfortunately, Hoover was passive in the face of the economic disaster of the depression – trapped by his party's laissez-faire economic philosophy.

In 1928, FDR, after years of struggle at his retreat at Warm Springs, Georgia had recovered sufficiently to reenter politics, ran for governor of New York, and won. Roosevelt previewed, so to speak, the New Deal, as governor of New York. He was the exact opposite of Hoover. His approach was to do something – try anything – if it didn't work, then try something else.

In 1932 the country was in danger of becoming a fascist or at least authoritarian country. There is no doubt in my mind that Roosevelt saved the country from such demagogues as Louisiana governor Huey Long and Charles Lindberg. The depression was, of course, blamed by Henry Ford and the violently antisemitic priest Father Conklin on the Jews. Jew hatred was already widespread in the country. Roosevelt was far from perfect in his attitude on Jews. Sharing the belief in suspicion of the “Jewish race,” as close as he was to Morgenthau, he never included him in social events at his Hyde Park home. Such social antisemitism was par for the course in Franklin's class and generation. And it was widespread in other classes. In his pre-presidential years, Harry Truman's partner in his haberdashery store, Eddie Jacobson, was not welcome in his home. His wife, Bess, refused to entertain a Jew. When Truman visited New York during World War I, when he was a captain in the Army,

he wrote Bess, “now I’m in Jew town.” Nevertheless, with some pushing from Jacobson, Truman granted Israel recognition within hours of the Israeli Declaration of Independence.

For all of his flaws, Franklin Roosevelt was so much better than the alternatives, including Charles Lindbergh, who would have been calamitous for American Jews. FDR appointed many Jews to high positions in government and gave them leading roles in his brain trust. His Jewish brain trusters included Benjamin Cohen, Robert Moses, Felix Frankfurter, Alfred Berle and David Lilienthal (who was to lead the Tennessee valley authority, whose task was to provide cheap electricity to rural America). And, perhaps most importantly, his speech writer Sam Rosenman. Rosenman was even more of a court Jew than Wise, consistently advising FDR to say nothing about the Jews.

With the advent of The New Deal, Wise did a 180, a complete turnaround, forgot about Roosevelt’s role in supporting Tammany and his protection of Mayor Walker. And Roosevelt forgot (almost) that Wise hadn’t voted for him for President in 1932. And the two men, so to speak, kissed and made up. Wise never had the free access to Roosevelt that he had to Wilson; nevertheless, he was

invited to the White House thirteen times as well as having an extensive correspondence with “The Boss.” There was little policy disagreement between them and Roosevelt was grateful for Wise’s support in the form of speeches, articles, and use of his influence to promote “New Deal” policies.

A word about their sex lives. During World War I, Roosevelt had an affair with Lucy Mercer. Eleanor discovered their love letters and there would have been a divorce if Roosevelt’s mother hadn’t negotiated an arrangement whose terms included Franklin’s agreement that he would never see Lucy again and that their marriage would be sexless and, in fact, a political partnership.

During WWII FDR’s daughter Anna arranged a series of meetings between Lucy Mercer Rutherford, now widowed, and FDR. When Roosevelt’s private railroad car, the Magellan, pulled up on Lucy’s siding, the press core played poker until Franklin re-boarded and never reported a word about the relationship. Roosevelt also had a long affair (some biographers disagree) with his private Secretary, Missy LeHand. After Missy suffered a stroke, Roosevelt supported her financially, but seldom visited saying he “didn’t like to be around sick people.”

Such a reaction suggests a certain callousness in Roosevelt that may have had ominous consequences. Averell Harriman who was a Braintruster, an intimate advisor, and later – after Roosevelt recognized the Soviet Union – FDR’s ambassador to Moscow said, “Roosevelt was the coldest man I ever met.” Harriman, who was known as “the Crocodile,” may not have been the best judge of character. And he had presidential aspirations of his own. The “coldest” man in the world has also been attributed to Harry Truman, perhaps both men thought that of FDR.

Stephen Wise certainly loved his wife, but that doesn’t preclude him having had other amorous encounters. Helen Lawrenson, a journalist who became editor of *Vanity Fair*, wrote in her autobiography that when she visited Wise in his office, he pulled her down on a couch and “made love to me with my gloves on, then asked me to get on my knees in a position of prayer, presumably to perform fellatio but, “I refused on that occasion,” implying that there were other occasions when she didn’t refuse. According to Helen, Stephen told her, “virile men should act accordingly.” Lawrenson wrote that there was a repeat performance several years later. In her autobiography, she gave a long list of famous men she slept with, making her account of her interaction with Wise

questionable. Wise's rabbinical salary didn't nearly cover the cost of his lavish lifestyle, so he employed a booking agency to arrange his speaking tours. I can't help but wonder what Wise did on his lonely nights on the lecture circuit.

In 1936 the British (in direct repudiation of the Balfour Declaration) were about to publish a White Paper radically restricting Jewish immigration into Palestine. Roosevelt almost certainly urged on by Wise and other Jewish leaders, talked the British out of issuing it. Britain, with Hitler's armies an ever-present threat, needed American (meaning Roosevelt's) support. So we had leverage. We, meaning the Americans. Yet, three years later, the British did publish a substantially identical White Paper. This time, Roosevelt remained silent. No one knows if Wise tried to persuade Franklin to repeat his stance of 1936 and 1937. If so, he didn't succeed.

As noted in his public utterances, Roosevelt always referred to the Rabbi as Dr. Wise. In private, he was "Stevie." Was Stevie an attempt at friendly intimacy or was it patronizing; or perhaps both. During the prelude to the war, especially after Krystal Nacht, American Jews, with the exception of a good part of the German-

Jewish elite, were not as they are often portrayed, passive. On the contrary, they organized all sorts of protests, including a mass meeting at Madison Square Garden organized by Wise. And this in spite of the widespread antisemitism and isolationism, most prominently manifest in Lindbergh's America First Movement.

Given the circumstances, explicitly the strength of the isolationist movement, Franklin Roosevelt fought Hitler and fascism to the best of his ability. This was not directly supportive of the Jews, although he did denounce what was happening in Germany. Often accused of formatting a "Jewish War," in some ways, Roosevelt did have his hands tied.

The Jews within his administration were split. Roosevelt's speechwriter, Sam Rosenman, fearful of an antisemitic backlash, urged silence in the "Jewish quarter." Felix Frankfurter took the opposite approach. Frankfurter, in his later years on the Supreme Court, became critical of "juridical activism" and his reputation suffered because of it. But now, living with an "active" reactionary court, Frankfurter's fears of the consequences of juridical activism seems all too apt. Roosevelt himself was also split – retaining some

of the antisemitism of his background, yet was often ahead of virtually everyone else in his policies towards the Jews.

Roosevelt deserves enormous credit for bringing this country back from the brink of totalitarianism and leading a turnabout in the American attitude towards the war against fascism. And he had much to fight. Father Conklin, Hughey Long, Lindbergh, the KKK and the traditional isolationism and the long standing policy of no government interference with the economy. At this distance, the degree to which various New Deal programs succeeded in getting the country out of depression seems indeterminable and almost irrelevant. What counted was Roosevelt's ability to take the country from despair and rage into hope and the recommitment to our "civic religion." Unfortunately, there was another side to Roosevelt: calculating, devious, and vacillating. Notoriously, everyone that spoke to Roosevelt came away thinking that Roosevelt agreed with them - that included Wise - while none knew what Roosevelt actually believed.

Then, there is the sad story of the St. Louis, a ship filled with German-Jewish refugees that came within sight of the lights of Miami, yet wasn't allowed to land, not even land in the Virgin

Islands whose Governor said he would welcome them. The ship returned to Europe, the passengers landing in countries not yet dominated by Hitler. About a third of them eventually died in the Holocaust. Roosevelt could have changed that, but he didn't. Wise doesn't seem to have been involved in the fate of the St. Louis.

Roosevelt's most egregious failure was his inability or unwillingness to do much of anything to help European Jews enter America. America's failure to even fill the already highly restrictive immigration quotas is simply appalling.

It is congruent with our long history of sentiment against immigration into the United States. Lincoln feared the anti-immigrant Know Nothing Party, that had a huge following; then there was the Chinese Exclusion Act of the 1880s, and the KKK hatred of immigrants (read Catholic and Jewish immigrants), culminating in the exclusionary immigration acts of the 1920s that created the quota system and the requirement that the consuls approve the admission of "foreigners" to the US. The already very small quotas of Eastern Europe, where most Jews lived, were never filled – not even close to being filled - with deadly consequences for the Jews.

The blame for this is usually put on the antisemitic Department of State, in particular Roosevelt's friend Breckinridge Long the most viscous, most visible, and most powerful antisemite in the State Department. The unfulfilled quotas were acts of murder. Roosevelt, the "Boss," could have restrained or fired Long. He didn't. Roosevelt was perhaps influenced by Isaiah Bowman, a pseudo-scientific eugenicist and demographer, who advocated dispersing of the Jews, an idea that appealed to Roosevelt with his long-standing fear of Jewish dominance. Bowman wound up as President of John Hopkins University, an outrage upon which I won't comment.

The Talmud teaches that "to save one life is to save the whole world; and to destroy one life is to destroy the whole world." By that standard, Roosevelt's unwillingness to fire Long, or at least order him to fill the quotas, was a failure to save many worlds. If Wise challenged Roosevelt's inertness in regard to immigration, he made no mention of it in his autobiography.

Roosevelt did do more in response to Krystal Nacht than any other Western leader. He withdrew his ambassador; but did not break diplomatic relations with Hitler's Germany. Even after Krystal Nacht, we continued normal commercial intercourse with Germany

and allowed German Warships to refuel in California. This continued until Pearl Harbor and our entry into the war.

In 1942, after the successful invasion of North Africa, Roosevelt met with Churchill and French (mostly Vichy) officials in Casablanca. The Vichy government, allied with the German Nazis, passed anti-Jewish legislation, and even put Jews in concentration camps. The French Vichy leader Admiral Darlan was an outright Nazi supporter. Indeed, a fascist himself, who was viciously antisemitic. Yet the allies thought they had to deal with him. They didn't want to fight Frenchmen and they wanted to take possession of the French fleet, being extremely fearful that it would fall into German hands. Fortunately, Darlan was assassinated, by a French Monarchist who was a supporter of restoring the monarchy, to be succeeded by Henri Giraud, who was anti-Vichy but was little or no better for the Jews than Darlan.

Churchill and Roosevelt were told that most Jews had been released from the French concentration camps and they seemed to be satisfied with that. When Roosevelt was asked if the rights, including full citizenship, of Jews should be restored by a French official he, in one version, went along with the Vichy claim that they

couldn't do that because the Algerian Muslims did not have French citizenship; and in another version Roosevelt told a French official that Jews take over everything so it would be best to restore Jewish rights, but restrict North African Jews to their proportion in the population in the various professions. That is when he made his remark that German resentment of Jewish dominance of the professions in Germany was understandable. And this in 1942, when the Holocaust was going full throttle.

Echoes of Franklin's support of Harvard's quota system and his rationalization of it to Morgenthau. The only possible reaction to Roosevelt's behavior at Casablanca is disgust. It is beyond outrage. The following year (1943) all North African Jews were restored to full French citizenship and equal status without occupational quotas. Wise almost certainly didn't know about Roosevelt's antisemitic statements at Casablanca. In the unlikely event that he did, he said nothing.

In fairness to Roosevelt, his Lend Lease Program, that he sold to a reluctant Congress and public in one of his "fireside chats" – "If my neighbors house is on fire and I have a hose..." - provided the tanks that enabled the British General Montgomery to defeat the

Germans under Rommel and preventing the German armies from taking Cairo and seizing the Suez Canal with God knows what consequences. And certain annihilation of the Egyptian Jewish community.

Back in the US, Roosevelt refused to see a contingent of Orthodox Rabbis. Wise had advised Roosevelt not to see them. They were an embarrassment with their wide brim hats, long beards and payees. It wasn't one of Wise's better moments.

In 1942, Wise received a telegram from Gerhard Rieger of the World Jewish Congress, posted in Switzerland, detailing the Nazi plans already in motion to eliminate the entire Jewish population. The plan was originally conceived at a conference in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee. Over half of the participants at the Wannsee conference had doctorates. So much for elite educational institutions, at least German ones.

Wise eventually took the Rieger telegram to Sumner Wells, one of the few high-ranking state department officials sympathetic to the Jews – perhaps because of his alcoholism and his identification with a despised minority as a closeted homosexual. Sumner was supposed to forward a copy to Wise thereby making the telegram

public, but he didn't. Wise received a copy from other sources and confronted Wells who got Wise to agree not to release it to the press until it had been confirmed by officials at the overtly antisemitic US Department of State. Wise agreed, for God knows what reason, not to release the German plan for a Final Solution of the "Jewish Problem" to the press. No one knows how many lives may have been lost by Wise's delay.

After Roosevelt learned the horrible truth from another Jew, Jankowski, representing the Polish government in exile, Rieger's telegram was passed on to him. It was three months after Wise received it, when that finally happened. Did the delay make a difference? Like any counterfactual statement, there is no way to know. But at the very least the Jews that died in those three months should have had at least a chance to live, through possible allied intervention, had the telegram been made public earlier.

By then, Wise had a rival as a Jewish leader, Peter Bergman. Bergman, a former resident of Palestine, was a follower of the radical Zionist Vladimir Jabatinsky, who supported violence against the British to pave a way for Jewish immigration to Palestine – indeed urged the creation of a Jewish army. Wise, for reasons both

personal and ideological, fought Bergman tooth and nail. Wise believed that Bergman's militancy was counterproductive, fueling antisemitism. Bergman, with his militant approach, was also a threat to Wise as a dominant force in American Judaism. Today, it is painful to read of the bitter battles between the two men as Jews were being led to the slaughter by the millions. The earlier clashes between Wise and Reform Rabbis who opposed Zionism also appear futile, indeed pathetic.

Wise was justly lauded for his compassion when he was acting as a pastor, but he was a gutter fighter in his many quarrels with public figures, including Chaim Weizmann, later President of Israel. The manifest content of these fights was always ideological; the latent content bruised egos and competition.

Finally, after the Reiger telegram reached him, something was done by Roosevelt and his administration. This action was pushed by Morgenthau who was now willing to confront Roosevelt directly on aid to the European Jews. Morgenthau having reclaimed his identity as a Jew, threatened to resign as secretary of treasury and to make the breach public, if the President didn't take action. Wise also encouraged Roosevelt to take action. And he did. He created the

War Refugee Board, which is credited with saving a quarter of a million, mostly Hungarian, Jews.

The fact that allied armies were on the verge of victory unlike when they were in danger of defeat, certainly played a role in Roosevelt taking measures to save whatever Jews were still left in Europe. His goal and his focus had always been on the absolute defeat of Adolf Hitler and his entire odious reign. The allied armies now getting closer to success gave FDR more freedom of action, and he did use it.

Another issue which is still controversial is the bombing on the rail lines into Auschwitz. The American Chief of Staff, General George Marshall, opposed it and Roosevelt backed his Chief of Staff. Whether the bombing of those rail lines would have saved any Jewish lives is questionable but, at the very least, it would have been an important symbolic gesture. Unfortunately, it was never made.

Roosevelt's relationship to Zionism is murky. He espoused support for Zionist goals yet equivocated not wanting to offend the Arabs – or England. Returning from the last meeting of the Big Three at Yalta, he met with the Saudi King who expressed adamant opposition to Jewish settlement in the Holy Land, in fact opposition

of any Jewish immigration whatsoever. FDR told Stephen Wise that Yalta had been a huge success with the exception of his failure to move King Ibn Saud, even one inch. In Roosevelt's account, he took a pro-Zionist stance in his meeting with the Saudi King. Other accounts are not so clear; after all the West did need Saudi oil.

That was the last meeting of Stephen Wise and FDR. Not long after, both men were dead.

Epilogue

Writing this piece brought out many feelings in me; predominantly sorrow. For all of their brilliance, all attempts of the Jewish leaders to do something to diminish the casualties of the Holocaust proved futile. Rage and fear were my equally strong emotional responses, even as I had some admiration for the flawed human beings, Franklin Roosevelt and Steve Wise, who in the end failed to save many, or even effectively protest. I wonder what feelings surfaced in your minds this afternoon?

Let me make some suggestions for discussion.

1. What is the role of a Rabbi or any other spiritual leader – in dealing with social and political issues?
2. How should Jews speak truth to power or should they not speak truth to power? This implies a question as to how to deal with antisemitism. Silence? Protest? Education? Or forthright condemnation and active struggle with antisemites?
3. How vocal (or silent) should Jews be in the face of attacks on Jews and Judaism? (This one is related, but I think distinct from item 2.)
4. How much culpability does Roosevelt (and America) have for not helping the doomed Jews of Europe more?

5. Was Wise, a “Hof Jude,” a Court Jew – in Yiddish a “Stadtlanut” – more interested in keeping his privileged position than in helping his fellow Jews? And, if so, was Wise’s life tragic in spite of all that he accomplished?
6. Leo Pisker, a 19th century Russian Jewish Physician from Odessa that suffered pogroms in the 1880s and in 1905 said, “Antisemitism is an incurable psychosis.” Was he right?