American Presidents and the Jews

ADVANCING JEWISH THOUGHT Mosaic

ADVANCING JEWISH THOUGHT Mosaic

American Presidents and the Jews

God's American Israel

DANIEL L. DREISBACH

As two new books show, the influence of the Hebrew Bible (and of biblical models) on the founding generations of Americans was as vast as the new country they were trying to create.

The Unusual Relationship Between Abraham Lincoln and the Jews

EDWARD ROTHSTEIN

As a powerful new exhibit shows, the 16th president felt a close connection to the Jewish people. Why?

"We Have Not Yet Appointed a Hebrew"

JONATHAN SARNA AND MEIR SOLOVEICHIK

A leading historian of American Judaism discusses Abraham Lincoln's fascination with the Jews—and Jews' fascination with Lincoln.

Ike vs. Obama in the Middle East

MICHAEL DORAN

One of them learned from his mistakes, re-examined his fundamental assumptions, and changed course as necessary.

Did FDR Really Abandon the Jews of Europe?

JARED SORHAINDO

He did. A recent book is a damning polemic against him and also against America's most politically connected Jewish leader. Yet it's hard to imagine things ending differently.

What the Right Still Has To Learn From Ronald Reagan

MEIR SOLOVEICHIK

A new history of the American right seeks from the first page to alert the reader to what it is not about: the 40th president. But in the end conservatives can't escape Reagan—nor should they.

A Letter to My Liberal Jewish Friends

MICHAEL DORAN

The president's address last week to Congregation Adas Israel as "an honorary member of the tribe" was something other than it seemed.

The Gematria of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump

PHILOLOGOS

Fun with Hebrew numbers.

Dear friends,

Launched in June 2013, *Mosaic* takes a lively, serious, and committed approach to Jewish issues and ideas.

What brought *Mosaic* into being? Even where not facing threats to their physical existence, Jews today confront severe challenges to their identity, their staying power, their very reason for being. In addressing these challenges head-on, and in depth, *Mosaic* conceives itself as a place of analysis, judgment, and intellectual provocation. On issues of politics, society, culture, religion, and the arts, it offers criticism and argument, takes positions and defends them, and joins hands with all those everywhere intent on preserving the traditions and promoting the interests of the Jewish people.

Mosaic's name, with its multiple associations, hints at the animating spirit behind these purposes. We express our trust in a permanent set of Jewish allegiances; in a model of heterogeneous elements coalescing into an ordered and integral whole; and in the mutually vitalizing interaction of the Jewish expressive genius with the highest achievements of other cultures and civilizations.

For more information about our work, and to read more essays like those selected here, visit us at mosaicmagazine.com.

With every good wish,

Jonathan Silver
Editor
Mosaic

From Hudson River Waterfront, N.Y.C. by Colin Campbell Cooper, ca. 1913-21. New-York Historical Society

DANIEL L. DREISBACH

OCTOBER 30, 2019

God's American Israel

As two new books show, the influence of the Hebrew Bible (and of biblical models) on the founding generations of Americans was as vast as the new country they were trying to create.

About the author

Daniel L. Dreisbach is a professor at American University in Washington, D.C. His research interests include the intersection of religion, politics, and law in the American founding era. His most recent book is *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers (Oxford, 2017).*

The American political experiment has been shaped by diverse intellectual traditions; among them are British constitutionalism, Enlightenment liberalism, and classical republicanism. Americans have also drawn deeply from Hebraic and Christian sources. The influence of the latter sources was especially evident in colonial New England, where Puritans sought to establish commonwealths in conformity with biblical laws and principles; but it can also be found, more generally, throughout American culture and political thought. Yet these Hebraic and Christian influences have often been discounted or ignored by leading scholars and standard histories alike, thereby undermining a faithful telling of the nation's story.

Two books published this year are welcome correctives. First, Wilfred M. McClay's *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story*, a grand, sweeping chronicle of five centuries of history, gives attention to the role of religion in shaping the American character. Second, *Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land: The Hebrew Bible in the United States* brings into sharp focus religion's contributions to the American political order. Compiled and edited by Meir Y. Soloveichik, Matthew Holbreich, Jonathan Silver, and Stuart W. Halpern, this rich sourcebook of primary documents, from the Mayflower Compact to Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, shows vividly how the Hebrew Bible in particular deserves to be known as "a foundational text" in the American political tradition.

Let's consider how each book enriches the understanding of America's story.

A distinguished professor of intellectual history at the University of Oklahoma and a master storyteller, Wilfred McClay recalls being inspired to undertake his monumental project upon realizing there was no single high-school or college-level textbook on American history that he could comfortably recommend to others. The result of his efforts is a learned, elegantly written, and wholly accessible history largely devoid of the partisan axe-grinding that has diminished or tainted so many others. It not only presents American readers with a credible and coherent narrative account of their own country but also succeeds brilliantly in its stated goal to "equip them for the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship."

No ordinary history book, *Land of Hope* is one of the best single-volume histories of the United States available anywhere. Few pages fail to offer a new insight or excite reflection on the country's people, places, and political and social developments, as well as, more generally, overarching ideas like the importance of stories to the human experience, the nature of national memory, the workings of the public imagination, the love of country, and other topics.

Several themes emerge from McClay's coverage of the major events in American political history along with his occasional excursions into less familiar territory. As the book's title suggests, this story brims with optimism. America was, indeed, a land of hope for countless immigrants drawn to its shores in pursuit of happiness and such fundamental ideals of the American experiment as liberty, equality, and self-government. The political and social forces that breathed life and content into these ideals feature prominently in McClay's narrative. The pursuit of religious liberty, for example, that attracted many settlers to the New World and the religious culture that flourished on American soil informed the nation's most basic values and nurtured the civic virtues that facilitated self-government.

To his credit, McClay also unflinchingly confronts the "dashed hopes" and sorrows of so many Americans, especially those brought to America's shores in chains. "A nation that professes high ideals," he writes, "makes itself vulnerable to searing criticism when it falls short of them—sometimes far short indeed, as America often has done."

The land itself—a place on the map, a piece of real estate—emerges as a distinct, vibrant "character" in McClay's narrative. It was the land, rich with resources, that drew settlers to the expansive American continent and then prodded them ever westward. It was the land that inspired them to embrace challenges and aspire to something greater than the past they had left behind. The forbidding terrain, the vast, uncharted territory, both tested and tempered the American character. Insulated by the wide-open ocean from many of the intrusions and depredations they had left behind in the Old World, the settlers had the space to develop habits of self-rule.

Religion, too, has been an essential "character" in America's story. From the time of the Pilgrims, to the founding fathers, and even to later generations, many Americans saw themselves as a chosen people—as God's new Israel—reliving the Exodus story. The precise contours of the comparison with ancient Israel differed depending on who invoked it and when, but the parallels were often quite elaborate (and sometimes more than a bit forced).

Thus, the political repression and religious persecution so many early settlers had endured in England, from which they fled, was their Egyptian bondage; the Stuart monarchs (and, later in the revolutionary era, George III) were their intransigent Pharaohs; the treacherous waters of the Atlantic Ocean, which they traversed in search of a promised land, were their Red Sea (or, in some versions, their Jordan River). In the new Canaan, they had to contend, like the ancient Israelites, with a forbidding terrain and hostile inhabitants.

Not a few Americans in the founding era came to regard George Washington as their Moses, who led them out of bondage and into freedom. For these Americans, the providential history of the Hebrew people and the biblical record of Moses' instructions for creating the political and legal infrastructure needed to govern that people held special meaning and played a key role in directing their own ambitious errand into the new promised land.

Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land picks up this part of the story, assembling compelling documentary evidence of the specifically Hebraic influences on the American political experiment, especially during the period of the founding and its aftermath.

Like *Land of Hope*, *Proclaim Liberty* makes indispensable reading for anyone interested in religion's contributions to American political thought and culture. Unlike *Land of Hope*, it's less a sweeping narrative than an introduction to selected episodes and texts that cast light on its subject. It is, in short, an anthology, serving up expertly chosen and edited primary sources from American history along with brief illuminating commentaries and notes, plus, for ease of reference, the original biblical texts. A book not only for students of history but also for students of the sacred works themselves, *Proclaim Liberty* invites meditation on the enduring political, legal, and spiritual impact of these texts that traveled from Sinai's deserts to America's shores.

As is amply illustrated in the state papers, political debates, pamphlets, sermons, and private correspondence gathered in this anthology, America's founding generation appealed frequently to the Hebrew experience for principles, precedents, normative standards, and cultural motifs with which to define a community-in-formation and to order its political experiments. The discourse of the age was replete with quotations from and allusions to the sacred text. Indeed, the Bible—and the Hebrew Bible in particular—was the single most cited work in the political literature of the founding era, with the book of Deuteronomy, which recapitulates Mosa-

ic law and recounts the providential progress of God's "chosen nation," taking special pride of place, referred to more frequently than the works of influential thinkers like John Locke or Baron de Montesquieu.

The notion that America was God's *new* Israel was embraced by both pious and skeptical citizens, woven into the national mythology, and manifested in diverse national expressions and symbols. In the summer of 1776, both Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, two sons of the Enlightenment who were otherwise skeptical of the miracles recorded in Hebrew Scripture, drew on the familiar biblical story of the Israelite people's miraculous liberation from Egyptian bondage for their proposed design of "a seal for the United States of America." Israel's providential deliverance through the parted waters of the Red Sea, they thought, was a fitting portrayal of the new nation's plight at its moment of greatest peril.

Americans continued to see comparisons between ancient Israel and America in the years that followed. In 1783, Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale College, delivered a sermon before Connecticut's highest public officials based on Deuteronomy 26:19: a passage describing God's promise to exalt the nation Israel on the condition that it remain a "holy people." This, Stiles declared, was "allusively prophetic of the future prosperity and splendor of the United States"—of "God's American Israel."

The ancient "Republic of the Israelites," declared Samuel Langdon, the Congregationalist minister and politically active president of Harvard College, in 1788, was "an Example to the American States." (To underscore the point in a way with which his audience could relate, he added: "instead of the twelve tribes of Israel, we may substitute the thirteen states of the American union.") Indeed, for Langdon, "the Israelites may be considered as a pattern to the world in all ages; and from them we may learn what will exalt our character, and what will depress and bring us to ruin."

Some Americans also saw in Hebrew Scripture certain political *models* that, having enjoyed divine favor, were worthy of emulation. Langdon opined in 1775: "The Jewish government, according to the original constitution which was divinely established, . . . was a perfect Republic" and "an excellent general model" for the nation now aborning.

In his wildly popular revolutionary pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), Thomas Paine also turned to the Hebraic republican tradition—in his case, in order to denounce monarchy and hereditary succession. Monarchy, he asserted, had been "first introduced into the world by the Heathens" and could not "be defended on the authority of Scripture; for the will of the Almighty, as declared by Gideon and the prophet Samuel, expressly disapproves of government by kings."

For "[n]ear three-thousand years," Paine continued, the Jewish form of civil government "was a kind of republic administered by a judge and the elders of the tribes. Kings they had none, and it was held sinful to acknowledge any being under that title but the Lord of Hosts." But, in their folly, the Israelites then rejected God's designs and insisted on having a king to reign over them—which, Paine concluded, is exactly why "[m]onarchy

is ranked in Scripture as one of the sins of the Jews, for which a curse in reserve is denounced against them."

Americans of the founding generation were well aware that ideas like republicanism found expression in traditions other than those recorded in the Bible, and they studied those traditions both ancient and modern. But in a way that classical models could not do, the republic described in the Hebrew Bible reassured all Americans that republicanism was a political system favored by God.

What, then, of the early American commoner? Ordinary citizens, like intellectual elites, looked to the Bible for insights into human nature, social order, public authority, the rights and duties of citizens, and other concepts essential to establishing a stable polity. The common man would have agreed, for example, that biblical morality, as expressed in the Ten Commandments, was vital for nurturing the civic virtues that gave citizens like himself the capacity for self-government.

Indeed, as the editors of *Proclaim Liberty* point out, the Hebrew Bible, far from being an influence limited to the American elite, was "a source for, and an element of, collective identity and self-identification." This was especially true of the 17th-century New England Puritans, but it has also been true of those Americans, across the broad sweep of the nation's history, who have "endowed the people of the United States with an identity set apart from that of the other nations."

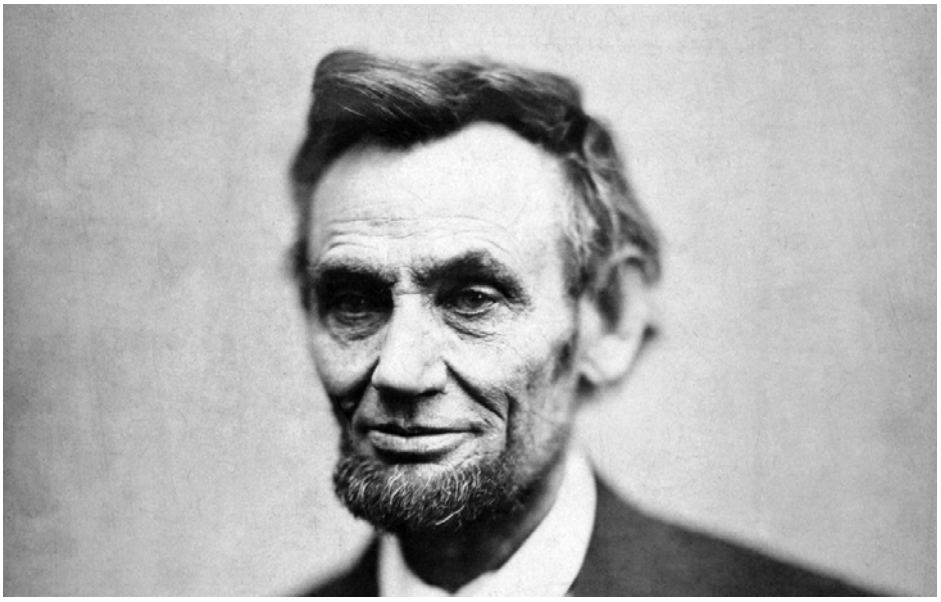
Early Americans also took from Scripture, and especially from the story of man's fall in the Garden of Eden, a view of humankind as radically sinful—a view that informed the country's governing design as developed in the national Constitution. The separation of powers and the system of checks and balances embodied in that document reflect an awareness of this fallen, inherently sinful nature and, consequently, the need to guard against the concentration of power vested in human actors.

Over the course of many generations, Americans also wove into their constitutional traditions specific principles and measures said to have been derived from the Hebrew Bible and transmitted to the colonies by way of English common law and customs. Among them eventually would be constitutional provisions ranging from the need for multiple witnesses of malfeasance for purposes of conviction and punishment, to the concepts of double jeopardy and cruel and unusual punishment, to national standards for weights and measures.

Indeed, according to James Madison's notes, the understanding of human nature contained in Hebrew Scripture contributed substantively to the debates in the Constitutional Convention of 1787. In the Convention's waning days, for example, during a debate on the qualifications for public office, the venerable Benjamin Franklin spoke in opposition to any proposal that, in his words, "tended to debase the spirit of the common people." "We should remember the character which the Scripture requires in rulers," Franklin said, invoking Jethro's advice to Moses regarding qualifications for prospective Israelite rulers, "that they should be men hating covetousness."

These episodes and many others serve to remind us of the extent to which Hebrew Scripture informed the American political imagination. In doing so, they challenge the popular narrative that the American founding, sandwiched between two great spiritual awakenings, was the product of an enlightened age when rationalism was in the ascendancy and the Bible was, if not rejected outright, relegated to the sidelines.

For that reminder, and relatedly for edifying us toward a more capacious understanding of the American experiment in general, we owe a special debt of gratitude to Wilfred McClay's *Land of Hope* and to the compilers, editors, and expositors of *Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land*.



The last posed photograph of Abraham Lincoln, taken ten weeks before his assassination. Alexander Gardner, Wikimedia.

EDWARD ROTHSTEIN

APRIL 1, 2015

About the author
Edward Rothstein is Critic at Large at the *Wall Street Journal*. His essays in *Mosaic* include "The Problem with Jewish Museums" and "Jerusalem Syndrome at the Met."

The Unusual Relationship Between Abraham Lincoln and the Jews

As a powerful new exhibit shows, the 16th president felt a close connection to the Jewish people. Why?

It was Good Friday—April 14, 1865—when John Wilkes Booth made his way into the presidential box at Ford's Theatre, forcibly propped the door shut behind him, and shot a bullet into the head of Abraham Lincoln. For many mourners, the timing had unusual significance. The Civil War, in which some 750,000 Americans had lost their lives, was coming to an end. Just weeks earlier, citing the nation's trauma in his Second Inaugural address, Lincoln had suggested that this "mighty scourge of war" was a form of divine retribution visited on "both North and South" for the offense of slavery. He ended with words of consolation and exhortation:

> With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds. . . .

Lincoln's own suffering, as evident as the nation's, was inscribed in his countenance. Of his two life-masks, one had been cast as he was beginning his campaign for the presidency in 1860, and the other in February 1865, some two months before the end of the war. In the intervening years, his face had become emaciated, his eyes were gouged into his skull, and his skin was creased by age and sadness. "This war is eating my life out," Lincoln once told a friend. "I have a strong impression that I shall not live to see the end."

Then came the assassination. You can see an account of the death and autopsy by Lincoln's family physician in *With Firmness in the Right: Lincoln and*

the Jews, a fine new exhibition at the New-York Historical Society. The handwritten pages are blotched with brown stains— likely Lincoln's blood. Since it was widely noted that the president had been shot on the day marking the crucifixion of Jesus, the spilling of his blood became imbued with religious resonance. In New York, Congressman James A. Garfield (to become, in 1881, the second U.S. president assassinated) stated: "It may be almost impious to say it, but it does seem that Lincoln's death parallels that of the son of God."

Unfortunately, the Christian parallel also prompted some to indulge in the world's most ancient slander. The *Chicago Tribune* characterized the assassination as "the most horrid crime ever committed on this globe since the wicked Jews crucified the savior." Also invoking venerable canards was Lincoln's successor, Vice President Andrew Johnson. Excoriating Judah P. Benjamin, who had served as attorney general, secretary of war, and secretary of state in the Confederacy, as "a sneaking, Jewish, unconscionable traitor," and citing the apostle John's account of the crucifixion, Johnson placed Benjamin in "that tribe that parted the garments of our savior and for his vesture cast lots."

So much for "malice toward none"—and, perhaps, for the sorry fate of Reconstruction under Johnson's presidency. But such comments, some of which are to be read at the exhibition or in its more detailed companion volume, provide context and contrast, not substance. For not only are any such sentiments absent from Lincoln's own writings, but the relationship between Lincoln and the Jews was something else entirely. (*With Firmness in the Right* is on view till June 7, after which it will travel to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum in Springfield, Illinois; it is a perfect companion to the current exhibition at the Morgan Library & Museum, *Lincoln Speaks: Words That Transformed a Nation*. Curated by Ann Meyerson and Dina Grossman, with Harold Holzer as historical adviser, the Historical Society exhibition is accompanied by the valuable, recently released *Lincoln and the Jews: A History*, co-authored by the distinguished historian Jonathan D. Sarna of Brandeis and by Benjamin Shapell, president of the manuscript foundation that owns many of the striking documents on display.)

For American Jews, Lincoln's death was associated not with Good Friday but with the simultaneous holiday of Passover and not with Jesus but with Moses, who had liberated his people from slavery but was unable to lead them into the promised land. Many learned of Lincoln's death on Saturday morning while on their way to Sabbath services. Adolphus S. Solomons, an Orthodox printer and bookseller in Washington DC who had managed Lincoln's inaugural ball in 1861, noted that "it was the Israelites' privilege here, as well as elsewhere, to be the first to offer in their places of worship, prayers for the repose of the soul of Mr. Lincoln." At Temple Emanu-El in New York the congregation rose as one at the news and recited in unison the kaddish memorial prayer. Rabbi Elkan Cohen of San Francisco's Emanu-El, hearing the news as he mounted the pulpit to deliver his sermon, "was so overcome," reads one report, "that, bursting in tears, he sank almost senseless."

The exhibition offers a sampling of synagogue eulogies. "We should regard Abraham Lincoln," said Rabbi Benjamin Szold of Baltimore, "as a son of

Israel." Another eulogist was Lewis Naphtali Dembitz of Louisville, uncle of the future Supreme Court justice Louis Dembitz Brandeis and a Republican leader so devoted to Lincoln's political creed that he named one son after Henry Clay, the young Lincoln's political idol, and another after Lincoln himself. Rabbi Isaac M. Wise, of Cincinnati, who had initially jeered at Lincoln's election ("one of the greatest blunders a nation can commit"), only to become an ardent admirer ("the greatest man that ever sprung from mortal loins"), claimed that Lincoln had once confided to him that he was "bone from our bone and flesh from our flesh" and supposed himself "a descendant of Hebrew parentage."

Since there is no other evidence supporting such a statement, Lincoln might have been speaking metaphorically. But his ancestors, as the exhibition points out, included New England Calvinists who bore names straight out of the Hebrew Bible. As the Puritans tended to emphasize Hebrew Scripture in general, alluded to their settling in the New World as a sign of the restoration of Israel (and in some cases even imagined Hebrew as the future American language), some aspect of their feelings of kinship may have passed down through the generations. Although Lincoln himself famously belonged to no church, he quoted the Hebrew Bible (the exhibition records) about three times as often as he did the New Testament, and the rhythms of the King James Version run throughout his speeches, his writings, and, it seems, his conversation.

In brief, his was no casual acquaintance. And if the living Jews of the time felt an unusual connection with Lincoln, it is no less clear from the letters, official papers, personal notes, and artifacts gathered here that he seemed to feel a similar connection—one that contrasts starkly with the regnant attitudes of his time. This association, not often examined, may also reveal something about Lincoln's vision of the world.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Some of the items on display may not seem to offer much, being rather of the kind intended to inspire ethnic and religious pride. Did you know that the designer of the 1909 Lincoln penny was a Jew? Or the nineteen-year-old telegraph operator at the White House who broadcast the Emancipation Proclamation? Or the bearded doctor who was among the attending physicians at Lincoln's deathbed and who appears directly above the president in Alonzo Chappel's famous 1867 painting, *The Last Hours of Abraham Lincoln*? Or the first man to take a photograph of Lincoln (in 1858) and loaned him his own velvet-trimmed coat for the occasion?

These examples reveal less about Lincoln's relationship with the Jews than about how, in the mid-19th century, Jewish immigrants were already making their way into the wider society. In 1809, the year Lincoln was born, there were perhaps 3,000 Jews in the United States. By 1840 the number had risen to about 15,000. But by 1860, thanks to extensive immigration from mostly Germanic lands, the figure had leaped upward to 150,000 (one part of a much larger wave that brought over three million immigrants to American shores). "Wherever there is a chance for profitable trade," the *New York Journal of Commerce* intoned, Jews "have insinuated themselves."

Lincoln's first contact with Jews, in the persons of store owners in Kentucky and Illinois, may have been due to such "insinuations." But his most important Jewish connection was with a fellow lawyer, Abraham Jonas, who was born in England and had come to the United States in 1819. Jonas's law practice in Quincy, Illinois was in the same building as Congregation B'nai Abraham, which his family had helped establish. The two lawyers became political allies, fellow admirers of Henry Clay. Both campaigned for the Whig party, were elected to the state legislature, and became active in the anti-slavery Republican party after its founding in 1854. Jonas, apparently no mean politician himself, championed Lincoln, helped organize his debates with Stephen A. Douglas, and worked to propel him into the presidency in 1860. Once in office, Lincoln, who called Jonas "one of my most valued friends," made him a postmaster—a patronage position—in Quincy, and after Jonas's death appointed his widow to the position lest the family be left without income.

The Historical Society exhibition gives considerable attention to this friendship, which even extended to Jonas's children, five of whom moved to the South and two of whom joined the rebel army. Yet Lincoln's interactions with them remained touching and compassionate throughout. One of them, a lawyer, contacted Lincoln in 1857 on behalf of a black man from Illinois imprisoned in New Orleans for lack of papers; Lincoln raised the money to rescue him. During the Civil War, as Abraham Jonas lay ill, President Lincoln arranged to give another son, a Confederate prisoner of war, a three-week parole to visit his dying father.

The Jonas example is not the only personal relationship that stands out in Lincoln's associations with Jews. Among his more colorful acquaintances was a chiropodist named Issachar Zacharie, who earned a testimonial letter for alleviating the pain in the presidential feet. Evidently a bit of an operator, Zacharie gained Lincoln's trust, becoming emissary to New Orleans to imbue his "countrymen" with loyalty to the Union. He also acted as a kind of spy, reporting on Confederate troop movements. His correspondence with the president extended over a period of two-and-a-half years, with multiple White House meetings.

But the close connection felt by many Jews to Lincoln was not, of course, based on personal acquaintance. As the exhibition notes, Lincoln's position on slavery, together with his ardent advocacy of American possibility, must have resonated deeply with the growing Jewish population. Why else would a Chicago merchant named Abraham Kohn have thought to send the newly elected president a painting of an American flag in whose white stripes was inscribed, in Hebrew, a passage from the book of Joshua: "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest"?

It was indeed a special moment in American Jewish history. Not only were Jewish immigrants becoming established themselves but they were raising children who were entering American society. And then there was the effect of the war. *Passages through the Fire: Jews and the Civil War*, a compelling exhibition two years ago at the Yeshiva University Museum (co-pre-

sented with the American Jewish Historical Society), suggested that the war served as a "crucible" for American Jewish life. Through its trials, on both sides of the conflict, Jews were inducted into the mainstream of America, a change reflected in politics as well as in commerce and everyday life.So at home in America were Jews beginning to feel that at least one Union soldier from Ohio could joyfully recount, in 1862, a Passover seder held by "twenty of my comrades and co-religionists belonging to the Regiment." (His account can be heard on the exhibition's audio tour.) After vividly describing the elaborate preparations, the menu, and the drinking—"we forgot the law authorizing us to drink only four cups, and the consequence was we drank up all the cider"—he concludes:

> There, in the wild woods of West Virginia, away from home and friends, we consecrated and offered up to the ever-loving G-d of Israel our prayers and sacrifice. I doubt whether the spirits of our forefathers, had they been looking down on us, standing there with our arms by our side ready for an attack, *faithful to our G-d and our cause* [emphasis added], would have imagined themselves amongst mortals. . . .

Jews entering American life—and confronting, no doubt, many obstacles along the way—must have felt a strong connection with a president who stood out for *not* erecting barriers, indeed for extending a welcome. During the war, the roster of Lincoln's Jewish appointments is astonishing. In addition to Jonas, Henry Rice, a dry-goods merchant whom Lincoln knew from Springfield, was endorsed by him to become a sutler or military storekeeper. C. M. Levy, an Orthodox Jew from New York who had applied for a quartermaster position—responsible for army housing, transport, clothing, and supplies—earned this 1862 approbation addressed by Lincoln to his secretary of war Edward M. Stanton: "We have not yet appointed a Hebrew," and Levy is "a capable and faithful man." About 50 other Jews would likewise serve as quartermasters for the Union. In addition, although Congress had ruled that chaplains in the army had to be "ordained" ministers of "a Christian denomination," Lincoln responded positively to the direct appeal of a Jewish candidate for such a position, and in July 1862 the chaplaincy was opened to non-Christians for the first time.

Lincoln also promoted Jewish officers in the Union Army, a fact hardly worth noting unless one knew that, as the exhibition points out, "In the military, anti-Semitism was casual, yet virulent and omnipresent." Union generals seemed to endorse it as policy. Maybe that is why we see Lincoln, on multiple occasions, overriding unjustified condemnations or convictions of Jews. In early 1865, he intervened on behalf of two Jewish clothiers, Philip and Meyer Wallach, who, we read, "were unjustly convicted of selling contraband goods to the Confederacy." But he also let stand a conviction if he found it just: a replica of a drawing here shows a procession of five deserters being led to their execution in Virginia in 1863. One of them is a Jew with a rabbi at his side.

The most notorious example of official anti-Semitism during the war was, of course, General Ulysses S. Grant's December 17, 1862 order expelling "Jews as a class" from the territory he controlled. Grant was attempting to

combat cotton smugglers and had decided that Jews were the villains. One Union soldier, in a letter here, testifies to having observed cotton smuggling, but not by Jews: "We soldiers can't understand why they were singled out." Others appealed directly to Lincoln, who had not been aware of the order. He said: "I do not like to hear a class or nationality condemned on account of a few sinners." The order was rescinded.

Lincoln's record in all of this is stunning, unlike that of any American president until the 20th century. While little of the information at the exhibition seems new, and the subject has even inspired previous books (including one as early as 1909 by Isaac Markens)—and while the exhibition would have benefited from greater narrative continuity—the overall effect is powerful: strong enough to place Lincoln in a new light. Abraham Lincoln was a philo-Semite.

But what was the source of this sentiment? There is, as we've said, his family history to consider—his religious heritage—which may have made him less likely to indulge in calumny. But, given his contacts and friendships, he also had to have developed a fairly sophisticated understanding of Jewish beliefs and even of Jewish history. The exhibition points out that his sympathies may have also been stirred by "Jewish-themed" plays that the Lincolns attended in 1864 and 1865, including Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Twice he attended *Gamea, or The Jewish Mother*, about the 1859 abduction and secret baptism of a Jewish child in Italy on order of the Pope; and he also saw *Leah, the Forsaken*, a play about 18th-century Austrian anti-Semitism that the editor of *Harper's Weekly* believed was relevant to the war then being waged over a similarly "outcast race." But these were late experiences, and could only have confirmed and deepened already mature views.

One important reason for the affinity, emphasized in both the exhibition and the book, was Lincoln's interpretation of the national project—his vision of equality. His treatment of Jews as fellow citizens seems in this reading to be a corollary to his convictions about slavery. Objecting to restrictions on immigration in 1855, for example, he wrote: "I have some little notoriety for commiserating with the oppressed condition of the negro; and I should be strangely inconsistent if I could favor curtailing the existing rights of white men, even though born in different lands, and speaking different languages from myself." This is the opening quotation in the Historical Society's exhibition, which throughout underlines Lincoln's striving for "tolerance and inclusivity."

This theme surely had something to do with the affinity, but it is too broad to yield insight into the case, specifically, of the Jews. Was it, perhaps, that Lincoln felt that Jews in particular shared his vision? There is certainly a tendency today to associate Jewish identity itself with a belief in "tolerance and inclusivity," but the behavior of Jews during the Civil War was more equivocal. Of the 10,000 Jews who fought, 3,000 served in the Confederate army. As Lincoln had to know, moreover, there were rabbis who opposed abolition (some to their later embarrassment). Rabbi Morris Raphall of New York's B'nai Jeshurun synagogue, for example, supported Douglas over Lin-

coln and adduced biblical justifications of slavery. In a discomfiting passage in their book, Sarna and Shappell mention that, according to some sources, the family of John Wilkes Booth was itself of Jewish extraction.

So are we making too much of this matter of a specific affinity? In a recent collection, *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives*, edited by Eric Foner, the historian Robert Carwardine writes that Lincoln strove to maintain good relations with all faiths, and met with a "full gamut of religious visitors." Carwardine also suggests (without mentioning Jews) that many religious groups claimed Lincoln for their own: Quakers pointed to his Virginia ancestors, Baptists to his parents' faith, Episcopalians to his wedding ceremony, Presbyterians to the ministers he heard, spiritualists to séances at the White House in which Mary Todd Lincoln tried to contact the spirit of her dead son. "Methodists, Unitarians, Universalists, and Catholics—not to mention Freemasons—have found, or invented, reasons to clasp him to their bosoms."

Is the Jewish case just another example, then, of Lincoln's wide embrace? I don't think so. What makes it so peculiar when compared with these other examples is that Lincoln's attitudes toward Jews were so dramatically at odds with mainstream American opinion at the time. This suggests an intellectual consanguinity, even an aspect of shared belief (recall Lincoln's intimate affection for the Hebrew Bible). Mary Todd Lincoln told friends that Lincoln said he wanted to see Jerusalem before he died. In the exhibition we are greeted in the final gallery by Frederick Edwin Church's luminous, immense *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives*, painted in 1870: the city "as Lincoln might have seen it had he lived."

If Lincoln did share with the Jews a particular religious temperament, in what did it consist? This is difficult to specify because his approach to religion tended to be solitary and ruminative, and it shifted over the years. Aside from his reading in the Bible, he regularly met at the White House, as Carwardine reports, with preachers and ministers of various sects—including one self-proclaimed prophet and Christian messianist to whom Lincoln announced: "I myself have a regard for the Jews." All seemed to agree that he was a deeply religious man. In fact, he established more holidays for national religious observance, including the first nationwide Thanksgiving, than any president before him. As the end of the Civil War approached, he evidently devoted much thought to the conflict's religious significance—the subject, in a sense, of the Second Inaugural, saturated as it is with allusions to both Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament.

Such generalities aside, some fundamental aspects of Lincoln's thought are notably consistent with a particularly Jewish orientation. When Lincoln speaks of God and the role God plays in the world, he devotes almost no attention to the idea of salvation or otherworldly reward. For him, our interactions with God are this-worldly. While he made varying endorsements of predestination, his emphasis was on the ways we choose to regulate our lives and on the principles we choose to affirm.

This had something to do with his stubborn attachment to the law, a salient element in his approach to slavery that was at odds with the position of

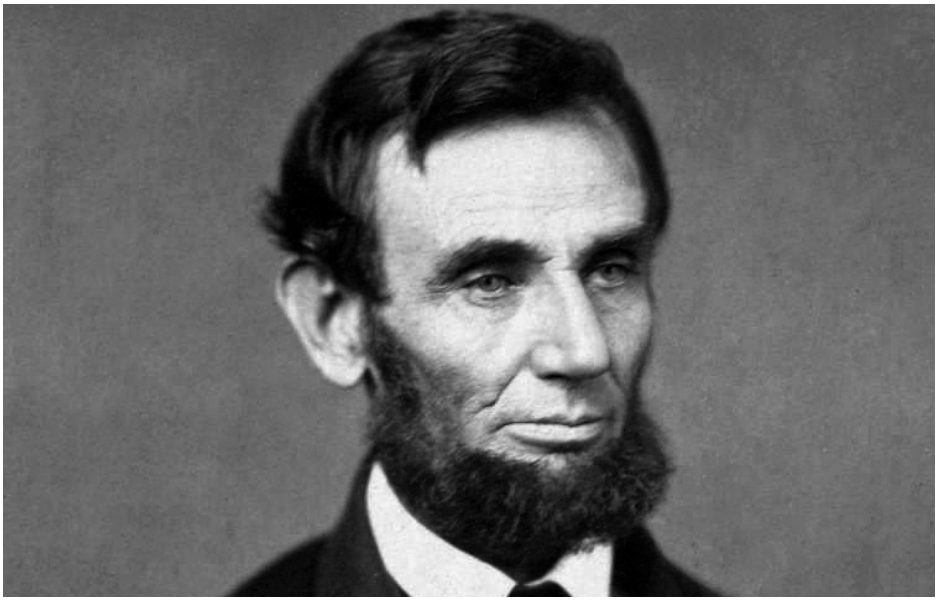
radical abolitionists. Agreeing with the latter's moral ideals, he nevertheless argued that any alteration to the system had to follow the law meticulously. There were political considerations behind this stance, needless to say, but it was his adherence to law that accounted for the limited scope of the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed only the slaves in the rebelling states. Lincoln's belief was that he could not, as president, simply eliminate slavery—that was left to Congress and the 13th Amendment—but as commander-in-chief in the midst of war, he did have some control over rebel property. He also had the authority to act to suppress rebellion. That's what freeing the slaves in the rebellious states would do, and why the proclamation was issued in the president's name "by virtue of the power vested in me as commander-in-chief." It calls itself a "fit and necessary war measure."

The point of this fastidiousness was to emphasize his main principle: fidelity to law was essential. In fact, it was the issue at stake in the Civil War itself: secession was an act of legal violation. As he suggested in the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln wished to demonstrate that it was possible, while clinging strictly to laws founded on the principles of equality and democratic governance, for a nation "so conceived and so dedicated" to "long endure"—and not just to endure but to usher in "a new birth of freedom."

In that same address, he speaks in high religious tones while insisting that the "unfinished work" and the "great task remaining" are the responsibility of "us the living." Fulfilling that responsibility, however, would not yield a perfect world. When, in its Dred Scott decision of 1857, the Supreme Court suggested that the Declaration of Independence had not extended equality to "negroes," Lincoln retorted that the Declaration was meant to be a "standard maxim for free society," regardless of society's failings at the time, and that it should serve as a guide "constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated." The world would always fall short, but it would be up to the people to labor for the ideal's achievement.

Some of the same spirit appears in the Second Inaugural, which speaks of "firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right." The conviction of being "right" is a human conviction, therefore necessarily incomplete. Lincoln is convinced, as he says, quoting Psalm 19, that "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." But he knows human efforts are unending.

I am using broad strokes here, but it strikes me that this set of emphases—on this-worldly activity, on law as the basis and necessary means of human action, on human incompleteness, and, in other contexts, on education as an instrument of freedom—are congruent with bedrock Jewish ideas and values, and in their own way help explain the close connections between Lincoln and the Jews. So, at any rate, it was believed at the time. Lewis Naphtali Dembitz, in his eulogy at the Adath Jeshurun Congregation in Louisville, Kentucky, had it partly right: "Of all the Israelites throughout the United States, there was none who more thoroughly filled the ideal of what a true descendant of Abraham ought to be than Abraham Lincoln."



Wikimedia.

JONATHAN SARNA AND MEIR SOLOVEICHIK

JULY 7, 2016

About the author

Jonathan Sarna is the Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun professsor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University and chief historian of the National Museum of American Jewish History. He has written, edited, or co-edited more than 30 books. The most recent, co-authored with Benjamin Shapell, is *Lincoln and the Jews: a History*.

Meir Soloveichik is the rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel and the director of the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University. His new website, containing all of his media appearances, podcasts, and writing, can be found at meirsoloveichik.com.

"We Have Not Yet Appointed a Hebrew"

A leading historian of American Judaism discusses Abraham Lincoln's fascination with the Jews—and Jews' fascination with Lincoln.

At a conference in New York last year, the historian Jonathan Sarna spoke on the subject of his book Lincoln and the Jews. *The full interview, conducted by Meir Soloveichik, is included in the just-released volume,* What America Owes the Jews, What Jews Owe America. *We present an edited excerpt of their conversation here:*

Meir Soloveichik: Let me start with the obvious question. More books are written every year on Abraham Lincoln than on almost any other figure in history. But is it so clear that Lincoln was the most important person in American history—more important than say, George Washington? Widening the lens, was he more important for the course of world history than such figures as Napoleon, or Alexander the Great, or Winston Churchill? Why the almost unique fascination with Lincoln in general, and why from a Jewish perspective in particular?

Jonathan Sarna: It's a fine question. Take the case of Washington and Napoleon. We're familiar with this story: the story of the great general who becomes a great political leader. It goes back to Joshua. But Lincoln's story is different: he's a figure who came out of nowhere, who was probably illiterate in his young life, who later went on to lose several elections—and who only then became what he became. That story is deeply inspiring—in a wholly different way.

But as for who most changed the world, one would be hard-pressed to name anyone who changed the American world, and not just the American world, more than did Lincoln. And here I can cite the testimony of a Eu-

ropean Jew. In an essay reflecting on his own childhood, the great scholar Solomon Schechter recalls hearing about Lincoln in Romania as a child—and what a wondrous thing it was to him that a person who came from nothing and nowhere could climb so high and achieve so much.

Nor, for Schechter, did all this have anything to do with the Jews or with the story of Lincoln and the Jews. His essay shows no knowledge of that side of things. But it does touchingly bear on why people all over the world were and remain so impressed with Lincoln, the simple person from a simple background who emerges as president of his country and radically transforms it for the better.

Meir Soloveichik: I wonder whether there isn't something Jewish about precisely that point. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks points to the story of Moses in the Bible as a kind of literary antitype. Many ancient tales of heroes feature the child of a god or a king who is raised by a peasant and in time discovers his true identity and true destiny. By contrast, Moses is the child of slaves, is raised in the king's palace, rebels, and becomes a great leader. Could this quality be what attracts Jews in particular to the Lincoln story?

Jonathan Sarna: Yes, in a way. More specifically, I think that many Jews also saw in Lincoln a fellow outsider: one who became, as they aspired to become, a kind of ultimate insider. That, too, is a Jewish story. And Jews saw in Lincoln something else as well: aspects of the archetypal righteous prophet.

Meir Soloveichik: That brings us to the matter of Lincoln's relations with actual Jews. Born in Kentucky, Abraham Lincoln moves to Illinois, works as a lawyer, gets involved in politics—and meets Jews. Eventually, as you say in your book, he will become the first president actually to have Jewish friends.

Jonathan Sarna: By far the most important of his early Jewish connections was Abraham Jonas: another Abraham, this one from an upstanding Orthodox family. After the loss of his wife, Jonas moved from Cincinnati first to Kentucky and then to Illinois, became a lawyer, and through this shared profession met Abraham Lincoln. It's clear that theirs was a significant friendship; many letters were exchanged between them, and they traveled together. One of the things I was happy to discover was that Jonas's son, who lived in New Orleans, worked with Lincoln to free an African-American from Illinois who had come south, been imprisoned, and was going to be sold into slavery until freed by their joint effort and enabled to return to Illinois.

Biographers have tended to scant this friendship, but it was no minor thing. The larger point is Abraham Lincoln had a Jewish friend, and when you have a friend who's a Jew you tend to develop friendly feelings toward Jews in general; it's the same when you have a friend who's black, or Muslim, and so forth. This is a well-established sociological fact, and it helps explain at least in part why, later on, Lincoln had numerous other Jewish acquaintances.

But back to Jonas, who was something of a political genius. Indeed, he played a role in Lincoln's nomination at the 1860 Republican national convention in Chicago. William Seward had arranged to pack the hall, ensuring that when his name was proposed, an enormous demonstration would erupt, thus ensuring his own bid to head the Republican ticket. Learning of Seward's plan, Jonas said, in effect, "I can play that game, too," and arranged a similar ovation for Lincoln. If you read the proceedings of the convention, you can follow the unfolding drama. Seward failed to win on the first ballot, was abandoned by many of his supporters, and Lincoln took the third ballot.

Incidentally, among those rounded up by Jonas for his counter-demonstration was a contingent of non-Republican outsiders, including some Jews. Chicago politics never changes.

Meir Soloveichik: And so Lincoln was elected in 1860. But it seems that at the time, some of the most prominent rabbis and Jewish leaders in America didn't support him. Nor were all of them opposed to slavery. And this went from Reform to Orthodox.

Jonathan Sarna: The most famous example is Rabbi Morris Raphall, the first glamor rabbi in American Jewish history. He was then rabbi of B'nai Jeshurun synagogue in Manhattan, which in 1825 had broken away from Shearith Israel. It was a very significant congregation.

Now, many of the members of B'nai Jeshurun had business ties to the South. If you were a clothing manufacturer in those days, the cotton for your cloth came from the South. So the last thing many of them wanted was a war, which is understandable: war could be bad for business. Some of them felt the most important thing was to preserve the Union, and Raphall had the idea of finding a compromise on the slavery issue that would conduce to that end.

There was a big debate at the time about, in particular, biblical slavery. Raphall was the first to come out and say, point blank, that yes, there was slavery in the Bible, but that biblical slavery was much more humane than slavery in the American South.

Meir Soloveichik: For instance, if you wound your Israelite slave, he goes free. And of course he also goes free after six years of service.

Jonathan Sarna: Exactly. Raphall used the example of biblical slavery to argue for a middle ground between American slavery as then practiced in the South and outright abolition. This defense of some form of slavery was reported across the length and breadth of the United States, for here was a rabbi who knew Hebrew and could be credited with an authoritative reading of the Old Testament. One Southern newspaper proclaimed that it was as if Moses himself had come down from Mount Sinai to confirm and justify the Bible's "defense" of slavery. Obviously, abolitionists didn't agree.

To be sure, Jews were hardly of one mind on the matter. David Einhorn,

another prominent rabbi, then in Baltimore, argued the abolitionist side in a debate with Raphall. The lawyer Abram Dittenhoefer, a young supporter of the Republican party who had grown up in the South, had been pro-slavery, and had undergone a conversion to the anti-slavery cause after coming to New York, became one of that cause's most effective and influential spokesmen. And then I might parenthetically mention Michael Heilprin, another of Raphall's opponents, who retorted sarcastically that in addition to slavery, the Bible permits concubinage and polygamy, so perhaps Raphall should urge that these be brought back as well.

Wherever they lived, north or south, Jews tended to follow their non-Jewish neighbors—which could sometimes get them into trouble. A prominent example here is that of Isaac Mayer Wise, one of the most important figures in American Reform Judaism and a prolific writer. An antiwar Democrat, he lived in Cincinnati—just across the Ohio River from Kentucky, a slave state. Many of his readers and followers kept slaves. Wise had very little good to say about Abraham Lincoln—until Lincoln was assassinated, whereupon he executed a complete 180-degree turn.

Unlike Wise, Raphall, who also thought Lincoln's election was a disaster, was staunchly pro-Union. Both of his children fought for the Union, and one lost an arm. In another telling vignette, Raphall's son-in-law, C.M. Levy, was appointed assistant quartermaster in the Union army. Upon recommending him for the position, Lincoln wrote, "We have not yet appointed a Hebrew," making this the first case of affirmative action for a Jew in American history. Lincoln's letter to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, dated November 4, 1862, is in the Shapell Manuscript Collection.Incidentally, the president also went on to write of Levy: He "is well vouched, as a capable and faithful man." This was a characteristic bit of Lincolnian wordplay, intimating that Levy would be faithful to the Union because he was a faithful Orthodox Jew. And indeed that quality distinguished Levy from earlier Jewish appointees of Lincoln's, all of whom were assimilated. In naming Levy, who was known to be Orthodox, Lincoln was naming someone who would not "only" be a token representative of the Jews.

From the cover of Ike's Gamble, by Michael Doran. Simon & Schuster.

MICHAEL DORAN

OCTOBER 11, 2016

About the author
Michael Doran, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and the author of *Ike's Gamble: America's Rise to Dominance in the Middle East* (2016), is a former deputy assistant secretary of defense and a former senior director of the National Security Council. He tweets @doranimated.

Ike vs. Obama in the Middle East

One of them learned from his mistakes, re-examined his fundamental assumptions, and changed course as necessary.

When Dwight D. Eisenhower became president of the United States in 1953, Great Britain was facing a crisis in the Arab Middle East. Although it had formally given up much of its empire (as well as its mandate in Palestine), Britain still exercised a great deal of influence through outright protectorates like the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms, friendly monarchies like Jordan and Iraq, and a network of military bases. But the linchpin of the system was Egypt, where the United Kingdom had 80,000 troops stationed along the Suez Canal—and Egypt was in danger. King Faruq, the obliging ruler over a British protectorate, had recently been overthrown, and the nationalist military men who had seized power, known as the Free Officers, were publicly demanding that London evacuate its forces from the country.

What stance would the new American president adopt toward the crisis in Egypt and toward the rest of the Middle East? In general, Eisenhower believed that America's task was to be an honest broker between the British and the new Arab nationalists seeking redress from their former overlords. In no way idiosyncratic, Ike's view of the American role in the region was by far the dominant perspective in Washington—a perspective reinforced by the foreign-policy elite's stance toward Israel, which at best could be described as arm's-length when not positively adverse.

Indeed, the two postures went together. Like Britain, Israel was a country inextricably linked to the United States but regarded by the Arabs with deep hostility. Since the goal of American policy was to acquire as much Arab goodwill as possible by demonstrating, in the terminology of the

administration, "impartiality," it was necessary to avoid any stigma of association with the Jewish state. This chilly attitude expressed itself, among other ways, in the flowering under the Eisenhower administration of the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME), a CIA front organization one of whose aims was to counteract the support for Zionism in domestic American politics.

It is impossible to exaggerate the impact that the image of America as an honest broker had on Eisenhower's thought. The notion that the top priority of the United States was to win the friendship and gain the confidence of Arab nationalists by helping them extract concessions from Britain and Israel not only preempted other views but shaped policy proposals up and down the line. So pervasive was the idea that Eisenhower and his colleagues regarded it not as an intellectual construct but as a description of reality itself. It was not open to debate.

When it came in particular to the new regime in Egypt, the United States entertained very large hopes indeed. Although outwardly the reins of power in Cairo were held by General Muhammad Naguib, the country's first president, it soon emerged that the true leader of the Free Officers was Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, who also cut a charismatic figure in the wider Arab world. In keeping with the honest-broker approach, Eisenhower identified Nasser as nothing less than a strategic partner: the only leader capable of ushering in a new era of cooperation between all of the Arabs and the West.

With this in mind, Eisenhower helped Nasser oust the British from Egypt. While doing so, he also allowed the CIA to equip the Egyptian strongman with a powerful, state-of-the-art broadcasting system, in the expectation that Nasser would use this equipment to help unify the Arabs behind the United States in its cold-war struggle with the Soviet Union. But this was a gigantic miscalculation. Soon the broadcasting system was beaming Nasser's radical pan-Arab ideology, in all of its anti-Western and anti-Zionist glory, into every Arab household in the Middle East. In the end, gravitating not toward Washington but toward Moscow, Nasser would work assiduously to undermine the Western position in the Middle East.

What went wrong? Accounts differ on the precise cause of Nasser's alienation. In some versions, a ham-fisted America subverts itself. In others, a belligerent Israel drives Egypt into the arms of the Soviet Union. In still others, both factors conspire together. But a major theme runs through much of the vast literature on the subject. Eisenhower and his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, came into office—so the tale goes—with good intentions and with the right ideas, but in the course of events they willy-nilly adopted the old attitudes and habits of empire. Against their better instincts, they alienated Nasser and, along with him, much of the rest of the Arab world; by the time they realized their mistake, it was already too late.

The real story is, however, quite different. Imbued with their honest-broker mentality, Eisenhower and Dulles subordinated all other issues to the effort to settle the Anglo-Egyptian and Arab-Israeli conflicts. This, for them,

would eliminate the obstacles to an American strategic partnership with the Arabs. In sedulously cleaving to this approach, they turned a blind eye to the fierce, ongoing conflicts among the regional Muslim powers themselves and especially to Egypt's hegemonic aspirations. Exploiting the American fixation on peacemaking, Nasser adroitly deflected Washington's attention from his own revolutionary, pan-Arab program, which, even as it screamed about Zionism and imperialism, sought to eliminate Arab rivals to his regional leadership.

What finally brought home to Eisenhower the deficiencies of his honest-broker approach was the long-term impact of the Suez Crisis.

The crisis came to a head in late 1956 when Britain, France, and Israel jointly attacked Egypt in an effort to regain Western control of the Suez Canal, which Nasser had nationalized. Taking a strong position against the three nations, Eisenhower went so far, in the United Nations, as to side with the Soviet Union against America's own allies. By publicly demonstrating his firm opposition to the European and Israeli action, the president expected to reap a large strategic payoff for the United States in the form of widespread Arab goodwill. Instead, Washington handed Nasser yet another political victory—the greatest of his career—thereby helping to transform the Egyptian leader into a pan-Arab hero of epic proportions.

The consequences for the United States would be profound. When Eisenhower first took office in 1953, the Arab world was still tied to the West, thanks in no small measure to the continued influence of British and French imperialism. The Soviet Union had been successfully locked out of the region for almost three decades, and the American goal was to keep it out. By the end of his second term, however, a wave of revolution had swept the region. It did its greatest damage in Iraq, where revolutionaries, modeling themselves on Nasser, toppled the pro-British Hashemite monarchy. The new leaders quickly looked to Moscow for support, and the Middle East became a major arena of cold-war competition.

Watching these results unfold in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis, Eisenhower would reverse course, discarding, once and for all, his fundamental assumptions about the Middle East. No longer did he believe, as during the Suez Crisis, that helping the Arabs balance the power of the Israelis and the Europeans was the key to a successful regional strategy. In fact, he dispensed altogether with the notion of any one-size-fits-all policy toward the Arabs. The key challenge before the United States, he now realized, was to manage inter-Arab conflict by helping one network of Arab states balance the power of a rival network. In later life, he expressed regret for having treated his allies so harshly at Suez, and even came to see Israel as a strategic asset.

"History does not repeat itself, but it often rhymes," Mark Twain supposedly said. In 20th-century Middle Eastern history, no period rhymes more powerfully with our present moment than the era of the Eisenhower presidency. Today, as then, we are witnessing the fall of a discredited old order and the rise of something new. Transnational Isla-

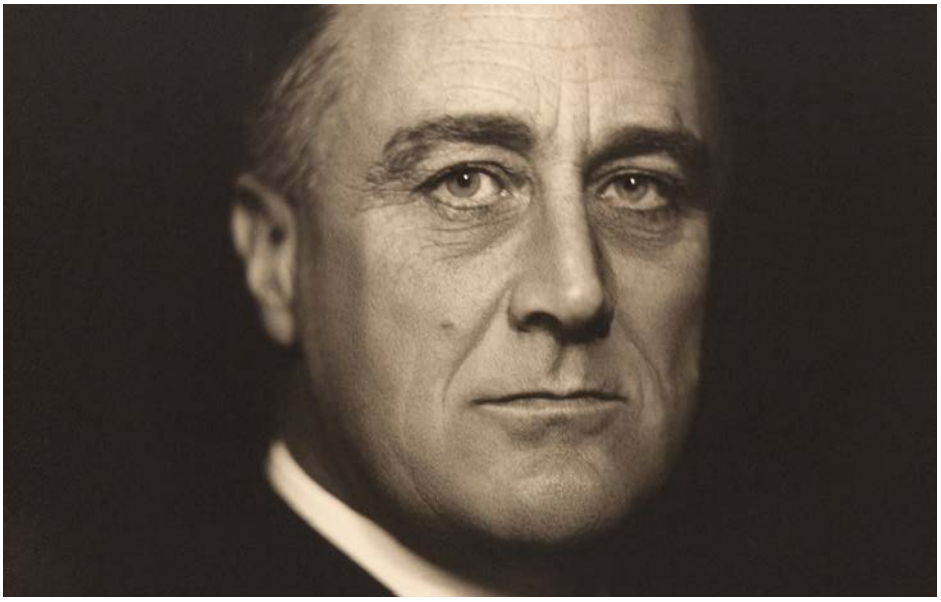
mist movements are shaking the region in a manner similar to Nasser's pan-Arabism. Where Nasser had Radio Cairo to spread his message, today's revolutionaries have Facebook and Twitter.

To be sure, there are also big differences. Vladimir Putin's Russia is a thorn in the side of the United States today, but it does not pose so grave a threat as did the Soviet Union. Nor is there a contemporary Arab figure analogous to Nasser. The role played by Egypt in the international system of the 1950s does bear some resemblance to that played today by Iran, but the differences are almost as great as the similarities.

Nevertheless, many of the key questions that plagued Eisenhower continue to challenge us today as the Obama presidency nears its end. Should Washington make policy toward Arab and Muslim regimes and publics collectively, or should it focus on the narrow interests of specific elites? Is Israel a liability or an asset? In a region so riven with conflict, how much support does America owe its allies? Indeed, what criteria should the United States use to distinguish between allies and enemies?

The story of Eisenhower's relations with Nasser offers a sober lesson in the dangers of calibrating that last distinction incorrectly and of then stubbornly sticking to one's erroneous analysis. That was not Eisenhower's way. The first American president to formulate a comprehensive strategy for the Middle East, he was also one of the most sophisticated and experienced practitioners of international politics ever to reside in the White House. Thanks to his military experience, he was accustomed to reviewing his actions and assessing their effectiveness; when he made mistakes, he paused, thought deeply about them, and adjusted course as necessary.

The hard lessons Eisenhower learned from the Suez Crisis, and then acted upon, have an enduring quality. They may not provide us with a detailed route out of the Middle Eastern labyrinth today, but they can certainly make us wiser about how to negotiate it.



Franklin D. Roosevelt around 1932, taken by Vincenzo Laviosa. Wikipedia.

JARED SORHAINDO

MARCH 3 2020

About the author
Jared Sorhaindo is a New York-based writer. He holds an MA in international relations and international economics from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

Did FDR Really Abandon the Jews of Europe?

He did. A recent book is a damning polemic against him and also against America's most politically connected Jewish leader. Yet it's hard to imagine things ending differently.

In writing about so fraught a topic as America's failure to help the Jews during World War II, it's well to begin by dispensing with the obvious: the Holocaust was a crime orchestrated by the Germans. Their leaders were propelled by a hate-filled ideology born of the humiliating aftermath of their defeat in World War I, a defeat they could fathom only as the byproduct of Jewish machination, cloaked in the twin (if also opposing) guises of Bolshevism and capitalism. As for ordinary citizens, German and otherwise, they were complicit in Nazi crimes; although the extent of their complicity still remains disputed, it is certain that the systematic persecution and extermination of Europe's Jews could not have happened without the assistance and indifference of the populations of all countries under Nazi control.

Nor is the complicity of Europeans the only remaining controversy. Why did the Allies fail, or refuse, to save the Jews of Europe? Was it simple, bald indifference to the fate of the Jewish people? Or, given Nazi domination of the European continent and the overriding need to defeat Germany on the battlefield, did operational constraints thwart the possibility of any mission to protect or rescue the Jews? Or was it a combination of these and still other factors that left the Jews, hunted to the ends of the European continent, with nowhere to turn in their agony?

In *The Jews Should Keep Quiet: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust*, the historian Rafael Medoff, who directs the David

Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, wades into these questions with compelling evidence about one of those "other factors"—and an eye-opening one at that. No stranger to historiographical combat, Medoff is previously the author of *The Deafening Silence: American Jewish Leaders and the Holocaust* (1987) and *FDR and the Holocaust: A Breach of Faith* (2013), as well as numerous articles, postings, and comments refuting what he identifies as the errors of others.

In his new book, an extension of the earlier volumes, Medoff charges flatly that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was an anti-Semite; that Rabbi Stephen Wise, America's most politically connected Jewish figure, was the president's obsequious sycophant; and that the Allies knowingly allowed the slaughter of European Jewry because they simply didn't care.

To understand how Medoff reaches this conclusion, it helps to recall the post-World War I political atmosphere in the United States. Having fought in the fields and forests of northern France, Americans figured they had done their part for global order and retrenched into an isolationist mood. The Senate would not ratify American participation in the League of Nations, conceived by President Woodrow Wilson in order to "end war." Congress passed acts capping immigration at minuscule levels, and zealous officials found ways to approve even fewer applicants than were allowed by the stringent quotas. Only once before World War II did Washington fill its annual quota for Germany, and that was in 1939, when the Nazis were still allowing Jews to leave, not yet actively bent on annihilating them.

It's not as if no one knew about Jewish efforts to leave. In 1938, FDR himself convened a global conference in Evian, France to discuss what to do with the many Jewish refugees created by Nazi policy. The attendees made it perfectly clear that they were not wanted anywhere, except for the Dominican Republic, which offered to take in 100,000; a resolution by the nearby U.S. Virgin Islands to open its own borders was nixed by the State Department. By demonstrating that the Jews were everywhere unwanted, the conference played perfectly into Hitler's hands.

Later that same year, after the murderous *Kristallnacht* pogrom, Roosevelt showed no interest in allowing 20,000 German Jewish children into the U.S.—in stark contrast to his rush a couple of years later, when the Germans bombed Britain, to open America's doors to thousands of British children. Meanwhile, in 1939, the British themselves severely curtailed Jewish emigration to mandate Palestine, a major destination for Jews fleeing Germany.

In 1943, another international conference on the problem of Jewish refugees was held in Bermuda, to similar effect: the Allies would not agree even to providing transport and food—the bare minimum—for Jews lucky enough to have escaped the Nazis' grasp. Thus, more than once, the nations of the West had consciously chosen to prevent the Jews from escaping the butchers pursuing them.

Throughout this period, American Jewry, though it made its voice heard, was unable to influence American policy. When it comes to Rabbi Stephen Wise, the unofficial leader of the community, the portrait painted by

Medoff reveals two disabling sides of his personality. A cautious diplomat, he was convinced that his close relationship with the president would result in America's making the rescue of European Jews an official war aim. At the same time, he was a jealous political operator who resented others whom he sensed encroaching on his place in the political establishment.

In this latter capacity, Wise looked down not only on grassroots appeals but also on political activism. He was disgusted by the members of the so-called Bergson group (named for its leader Peter Bergson), who protested in the streets, held rallies, and took out advertisements in major newspapers to excoriate the Nazi treatment of European Jews. Their loud clamoring, he argued, would not induce Americans to confront anti-Semitism; to the contrary, it would provoke anti-Semitism.

In Medoff's devastating judgment, if Wise was altogether too much in awe of Franklin Roosevelt, too eager not to be a nuisance, for his own part the canny president took advantage of the rabbi's affection, stringing him along with a series of empty promises, each one taken at face value and believed. Throughout his presidency, moreover, Roosevelt also explicitly told Wise and other Jewish leaders to keep quiet; hence the title of Medoff's book. In a damning recitation, he writes:

> [In 1936, the presidential adviser and future Supreme Court justice] Felix Frankfurter, conveying the president's sentiments, had warned Wise "not to make any outcry" against the British Royal Commission investigating Palestine. Also in 1936 FDR had spoken directly to Wise about "the necessity for a time of Jews lying low [in the face of rising anti-Semitism]." In 1938 Roosevelt pressed Wise to neuter [a] planned American Jewish plebiscite [to fight anti-Semitism].

And so on. Even Eleanor Roosevelt, after *Kristallnacht,* lectured the Jews to lie low: "I think it is important in this country that the Jews as Jews remain unaggressive and stress the fact they are Americans first and above everything else."

Wise heeded these admonitions. One might protest that in doing so he was operating no differently from many other well-placed Jews in Diaspora history who sought to secure Jewish communal interests by appeasing rather than confronting power. Not that he was indifferent to Jewish suffering or wholly passive; he discreetly pushed and prodded officials who were in a position to do something, and he issued public statements against Nazi atrocities. But, in Medoff's telling, his fear of pushing too hard lest he antagonize the president and the administration led him into such cringe-worthy actions as putting the blame on Britain for the failed Evian and Bermuda conferences.

Medoff's criticism of Wise rings true. Recognizing but reluctant to acknowledge the true dimensions of the threat, he took shelter in the ordinary, time-tested tactics for dealing with Diaspora governments. But America was no ordinary Diaspora, and the Nazis no ordinary threat.

The mass murder of the Jews of Europe began in the summer of 1941, when German forces invaded the Soviet Union and Nazi death

squads, bolstered by auxiliaries from the native population, drove Jews from their homes and shot them by the thousands. Only infrequently did news of these massacres filter out to the West, obscuring the scale of the Nazis' overarching intentions. In 1942, there were vague rumblings of "gassing in the hamlet of Chelmno," but, cautioned by the experience of World War I, when several stories of atrocities committed by the German army in Belgium and France turned out to have been fabricated, many intelligence officials remained skeptical.

In August 1942, Gerhard Riegner, the representative of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva, was informed by a German industrialist with close ties to the Nazi leadership that it was now official Nazi policy to eliminate the Jews. (The Wannsee Conference planning the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" had been held in January of that year.) Riegner sent a report to the State Department, where it was promptly bottlenecked, and to the British, from where it made its way to Rabbi Wise. The State Department urged Wise not to speak publicly until the information could be verified. As soon as that happened, Wise held a press conference announcing the Nazi plan to annihilate the Jews, and the following month the Allies issued a joint declaration condemning this "bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination." By then it was late November.

As Medoff relates, the State Department did not just delay the release of reliable intelligence. Its officials actively requested that American diplomats stop sending information about these crimes to Washington. A key figure in the campaign was Assistant Secretary Breckinridge Long, a nativist and anti-Semite who in a 1940 memorandum had explicitly stated his intention to do everything possible to prevent Jewish immigration to the United States. Even now, in possession of the facts, he remained committed to his goal of American inaction.

Long was opposed by Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, for whom the State Department's obstructionism meant that the American government was in the position of "aiding and abetting Hitler." When Morgenthau confronted the president about Long, FDR defended the man, who had been his good friend for decades.

The president's defense of Long gets to the heart of Medoff's assessment of FDR himself. In brief: he positively disliked Jews, whether the American Jews who had supported him or the European Jews whom he was content to let die by the millions. Adducing further pieces of circumstantial evidence, Medoff records an instance in the 1930s when the president expressed sympathy with the Nazis' discriminatory treatment of the Jews, explaining how there were

> specific and understandable complaints which the Germans bore toward the Jews in Germany, namely, that while they represented a small part of the population, over 50 percent of lawyers, doctors, schoolteachers, college professors, etc. in Germany were Jews.

As Medoff writes, the president also enjoyed telling "mildly anti-Semitic stories in the White House"; told Wise in a 1938 conversation that Polish

anti-Semitism was the result of Jewish dominance of the Polish economy; once stated to an adviser that "Catholics and Jews are here [in the U.S.] on sufferance"; and objected to the presence of "too many" Jews in federal offices in the state of Oregon.

The president's anti-Semitism seemed partly based on the same racial science appealed to by the Nazis themselves. For instance, Medoff links Roosevelt's dislike of the Jews with his dislike of the Japanese: both groups lacked "blood of the right sort" and needed to be spread throughout the country in order to prevent them from exercising a disproportionate influence in any one place. Regarding the internment of Japanese-Americans, Roosevelt stated that, after their incarceration, they should be "scattered around . . . [so as not to] discombobulate the existing population"; he used similar language regarding the settlement of Jewish refugees, citing examples of counties in New York State and Georgia where, he thought, no more than four or five Jewish families per county was advisable.

In 1944, years after the Nazi killing was known to all, the president did sign an executive order forming the War Refugee Board (WRB), an interdepartmental organization charged with rescuing innocents in Nazi-occupied Europe. But he did so under duress: legislation to create a similar body was already pending in Congress, and it was politically expedient to pre-empt it. Although the WRB saved approximately 200,000 Jews and 20,000 non-Jews, its formation did not owe to any initiative on the part of Franklin Roosevelt; quite the contrary.

The single most damning—and still controversial—piece of evidence regarding the administration's wartime attitude toward the Jews of Europe was its refusal to bomb the Nazi concentration camps. In April 1944, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler escaped Auschwitz-Birkenau and made their way to Slovakia. Their report about the camp, in which they detailed its layout and operations, made its way through Jewish organizations to the Allies. Vrba and Wetzler recommended that the camp be bombed. It was not.

The reasons remain fiercely debated (and it is also not clear that the question ever reached Roosevelt's desk). Medoff, who believes that the Allies should have bombed the camp, lists the main rationales for not doing so. A bombing raid, let alone multiple raids, would divert resources from the overall war effort and, given the inaccuracy of aerial bombing at the time, could not be guaranteed to succeed. Bombing the railways and bridges leading to the camp, as many urged specifically, would be all but useless, as the routes could be repaired almost immediately. Bombing the camp itself would put the prisoners' lives at serious risk. In sum, as awful as were the reports, the only way to put an effective stop to the Nazis' crimes was to defeat the Wehrmacht on the battlefield.

Medoff then counters vigorously that the Allies did divert resources from the war effort in order to aid the Polish insurgents who in 1944 rose up against the Nazis in Warsaw. Moreover, they did so in full knowledge that the Poles had no chance of prevailing, and that the arms and supplies

would be of symbolic value only. (They wound up mostly in German hands.) If the Poles could be aided despite being in a hopeless situation, why not the Jews?

That question is especially pointed in light of the fact that the Americans and British were even then bombing industrial plants throughout Upper Silesia, the region in which Auschwitz is located—including in Katowice, a city some 20 miles from Auschwitz, and in Monowice, part of the Auschwitz complex itself and a mere five miles east of the gas chambers. By 1944, when these campaigns were authorized, the western Allies had already captured strategic air bases in Italy from which bombers could reach the site. The German Luftwaffe was by then a spent force, and the Allies had complete control of the skies. A campaign to bomb Auschwitz still might not succeed, but by now it no longer carried heavy operational costs.

This leads Medoff to conclude that the refusal to bomb was a real choice, reflecting the Allies' conscious decision not to prioritize rescue of the Jews.

Defenders of FDR have repeatedly brought up the fact that his cabinet contained more prominent Jews, among them Henry Morgenthau himself, than had any previous administration's: a datum that should give the lie to any idea that the president harbored anti-Semitic attitudes. In light of the many statements cited by Medoff, and the president's conscious, deliberate inaction to protect Jews during the war, that argument appears weaker than ever.

The Jews Should Keep Quiet is an unsparing and damning polemic against Roosevelt, and also against America's most politically connected Jewish leader at the very moment when history most required his courage. But if Medoff's book is significant for its corrections of the historical record, one comes away from it wondering whether, in the end, any of this mattered. Suppose Roosevelt had not been an anti-Semite; suppose a more insistent Wise had succeeded in moving him to resolute and swift action. How different would have been the fate of the Jews of Europe?

For one thing, who is to say that the State Department, or the War Department, on grounds either rational or disreputable or both, would not have succeeded in stymieing the president's efforts? For another thing, what exactly could a more galvanized and determinedly activist American Jewish community have done to help their kin in Nazi-occupied Europe, who were thousands of miles away and caught in a whirlwind of unprecedented scope? Even had the administration prioritized rescue of the Jews among its other war aims, could it ever have matched the Nazi obsession with killing them?

In a world before the reestablishment of a sovereign Jewish state with a Jewish army capable of defending Jews anywhere in the world, the European Jews were utterly powerless, abandoned, and alone. The awful, heartrending truth is that, in the end, the only other people who cared about their existence, and with single-minded ferocity, were the relentless murderers empowered with the means to destroy them.

Ronald Reagan walking along the White House colonnade and waving goodbye on his last day in office, January 20, 1989. Alamy/Wonderstock.

MEIR SOLOVEICHIK

JULY 18 2022

About the author
Meir Soloveichik is the rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel and the director of the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University. His new website, containing all of his media appearances, podcasts, and writing, can be found at meirsoloveichik.com.

What the Right Still Has To Learn From Ronald Reagan

A new history of the American right seeks from the first page to alert the reader to what it is not about: the 40th president. But in the end conservatives can't escape Reagan—nor should they.

"Doc, I'm from the future. I came here from a time machine that you invented. Now I need your help to get back to the year 1985."

"Then tell me, Future Boy. Who's president of the United States in 1985?"

"Ronald Reagan."

"Ronald Reagan? The actor!? Then who's vice-president, Jerry Lewis?"

—Back to the Future

Matthew Continetti's new history of the American right seeks from the first page to alert the reader to what it is *not* about: "Unlike most other histories of the American Right," Continetti tells us, "this book is not just about Ronald Reagan. In these pages, he is one character among many." Thus *The Right: The Hundred-Year War for American Conservatism* begins not in the 1970s with the presidency of Jimmy Carter, nor with Ronald Reagan's run for the California governorship in the 1960s, nor in the 1950s with the *National Review* editor William F. Buckley. Instead, it starts much earlier. Continetti's point of departure is in the 1920s, before the New Deal, and the American conservatism he traces throughout *The Right* finds early expression in the administration of Calvin Coolidge. Continetti's readers learn much about the debates over isolationism in the

age of Robert Taft. And from these debates now a century old, he skillfully leads us through the pulsing, fractious, improbable story of American conservatism all the way to today's fractured Republican party. In any event, it is technically true that Ronald Reagan is not *the* main character in this book.

And yet the front cover of Continetti's book features the picture of only one man: President Reagan. There we see the 40th president's back, waving as he seems to walk off the scene. Just as Benjamin Franklin pondered, at the Constitutional Convention in Independence Hall, whether the image of the sun hanging over the horizon that was engraved onto Washington's chair was rising or setting, one can ponder whether the silhouette on the cover is intended to evoke the rise or the decline of Reagan's conservatism. But whether his conception of America's purpose and American politics is on the way up or down, it is Reagan, and only Reagan, who appears as the book's embodiment of the American right: not Calvin Coolidge or Bill Buckley.

Continetti describes Reagan as the most successful Republican president since Theodore Roosevelt. This judgement is of course correct, allowing for the fact that Roosevelt was a Republican progressive, whereas Reagan was very much a product of the conservative movement cultivated in magazines like *National Review* and *Commentary*. And Reagan had political skill. He, and only he, could bring together the various factions of the American right and, in the 1984 election, win 49 states. For Continetti, this massive success is the very reason why we should *not* identify Reagan's extraordinary achievements with the ordinary right:

> Reagan's charisma and clarity were something of an exception. His unique political talent led almost every faction of American conservatism to think that he was on its side. To this day, every conservative wants to claim him. The truth is messier. Reagan's presidency was not the inevitable outcome of the conservative movement. His triumph in 1980 was contingent, unplanned, and unpredictable. It was not until he left office that he acquired mythic status. Reagan was one alternative among many.

This of course is true, but contingency is a feature to be found in the rise of every great figure. Lincoln might very well have lost the Republican nomination to William Seward or Salmon Chase, and his re-election was itself contingent, probably due more to Sherman's conquest of Atlanta than to his rhetoric or ideas. Likewise, George VI might have chosen Lord Halifax instead of Churchill as prime minister in 1940. Continetti wisely reminds us, however, that if we miss out on the contingency in Reagan's career we can miss out on the tensions in American conservatism:

> There is not one American Right; there are several. Yes, American conservatives are firm believers in the U.S. Constitution. Yes, they oppose state intervention in the structures that lie between the individual and government, such as family, church, neighborhood, voluntary association, and the marketplace. Yes, they resist the

> totalitarian Communist regimes of the former USSR and the People's Republic of China. Go further, however, and differences emerge. Fault lines appear. Conservative writers and thinkers disagree more than they agree. They comprise a movement defined by a lively debate over first principles. They look for deviation and betrayal. And sometimes they form a circular firing squad.

This is also true; but in a certain sense that makes Reagan more, not less, seminal in his achievements. If Reagan succeeded in holding together the group of geniuses and cranks, intellectuals and public figures that made up the American right that Continetti so deftly brings to life, then that makes Reagan's success not less important to the story of American conservatism but more so. The book that is not only about Reagan thus inspires us to ask of Reagan: what is the source of his success? And what lesson does his success teach the conservative movement today?

In order to answer this question, we must go back even further into American history than does Continetti. By expanding our scope, we can see that Reagan is somewhat less of an aberration than Continetti makes him out to be, and in fact the inheritor of a political tendency that predates even Coolidge. It begins, in fact, with the first Republican president, and the country's greatest.

In his youth, when he was known as the local agnostic, Abraham Lincoln gave his famed Lyceum address, where he pondered how the next generation of Americans could remember the founding ideals of the revolution. Originally, he said, "in the form of a husband, a father, a son or brother, a *living history* was to be found in every family." But, with the death of the Founders and their contemporaries, "those histories are gone, what invading foeman could never do, the silent artillery of time has done."

How, then, to keep alive the vision of the very thing that Americans are charged to conserve? Young Lincoln's original answer was that cold reason alone could perpetuate all that the previous generation had fought for, or as he put it:

> They *were* the pillars of the temple of liberty; and now that they have crumbled away, that temple must fall, unless we, their descendants, supply their places with other pillars, hewn from the solid quarry of sober reason.

Without relying on commemoration, or imagination, or emotion at all, the younger Lincoln would seem to have each generation of Americans discover for themselves the propositional truths that even Jefferson thought were common to the American mind. "Passion has helped us," Lincoln added, "but can do so no more. It will in future be our enemy. Reason, cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason must furnish all the materials for our future support and defense."

But as the Civil War descended and then hundreds of thousands died, Lincoln began to perceive the limits of cold reason. He began to think more

biblically, more emotionally, more covenantally. The man who delivered the Gettysburg address was not the agnostic who stood at the Young Men's Lyceum. For Lincoln at Gettysburg, equality and inalienable rights were not merely abstract propositions; as Leon Kass has pointed out, whereas the Founders spoke of equality as an *a-priori* self-evident truth, Lincoln, by describing it as a "proposition" that we owed "our Fathers," transformed "the intellectual truth of the declaration, something accessible to human reason, into something that Americans must demonstrate through wholehearted devotion." The American idea is indeed an idea. But it is an idea realized in political life by Americans themselves, who must enact it, one by one, individually. That demonstration is how Americans can transform Gettysburg's propositions back into the Declaration's truths.

From here, a fascinating dialectic emerges: the concept of America as an instrument to protect natural rights points to the individual, but the perpetuation of America binds us one another, and also to our fathers who brought forth a new nation dedicated to this idea. And if, as Lincoln seems to have ad-libbed at Gettysburg, it is only "under God" that a new birth of freedom can be attained, it is not only because the assistance of Providence is necessary, but also because Americans need to see themselves as called to a majestic and covenantal purpose.

Framed against this backdrop, Reagan stands in a tradition of Republican leadership whose elements Lincoln could recognize. For just as Lincoln did nearly a century earlier, Reagan's greatest gift was his ability to express simultaneously the individual and social dimensions of American national belonging: the pride in being bound to generations that had fought for equality in freedom, and the political instantiation of that old biblical truth, that each individual is born in the image and likeness of the Author of creation.

To understand Reagan's gift, let us study the moment when Reagan first burst on the political scene. As Continetti tells us, Reagan's emergence coincided with the winding down of Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential candidacy:

> [Buckley] told the New York Conservative Party, which he first conceived in 1957 and had helped start in 1962, that despite Johnson's assured victory, "In America there are those who are dragging our feet; resisting, kicking, complaining, hugging tightly to the ancient moorings. What do we cling to? Among other things, the individual, and the individual's role in history." A day later, on October 27, one individual stepped forward.

That individual was Ronald Reagan, who would two years later become governor of California. In defending the liberty of the individual, Reagan also bound individuals together. Just before the 1964 election, Reagan delivered his famous endorsement of Goldwater, "A Time for Choosing," which was about much more than the upcoming election. As Continetti observes, Reagan in this speech didn't emphasize tradition, but progress, which he saw as "identical with the enhancement and expansion of human

freedom." Thus, while the American progressive movement saw government, and not the individual, as the engine that would move humanity forward, Reagan saw in statist control a reactionary force that at times "pulled human beings back from the realization of their full potential." As a result, his thinking defied the political divisions of his time. This, for Continetti, is the implication of this striking passage:

> You and I are told increasingly we have to choose between a left or right. Well I'd like to suggest there is no such thing as a left or right. There's only an up or down—[up]: man's old-aged dream, the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order, or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism. And regardless of their sincerity, their humanitarian motives, those who would trade our freedom for security have embarked on this downward course.

Reagan went on to quote Winston Churchill's admonition that "the destiny of man is not measured by material computations," and thus, "like it or not," people must also confront their duty. With this invocation of the prime minister who faced down Hitler, Continetti explains, Reagan emphasized the importance of "spiritual strength and self-confidence in the battle against the Soviet enemy." But Continetti, somewhat surprisingly, does not adequately attend to the next, and most famous, passage in the address.

> You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We'll preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth, or we'll sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness.

Whence did Reagan take this phrase, "rendezvous with destiny?" It came from a man whom Reagan, as *The Right* informs us, admired greatly: Franklin Roosevelt, who used it to describe America as a beacon of liberty in the 1930s amid the rise of fascism and Soviet totalitarianism. The emphasis on a "rendezvous with destiny" calls upon Americans to come together to defend the rights of the individual, and remind them that their country has been called by God to be a beacon—what Reagan, in a reference to the Puritan preacher John Winthrop, called "a shining city on a hill."

Here we have a striking contrast between Reagan, the most successful statesman of the second half of the 20th century, and Churchill, the most successful statesman of its first half. Churchill too spoke of destiny, but whose? He famously described his feelings when he first assumed the premiership thus:

> I cannot conceal from the reader of this truthful account that as I went to bed at about 3 a.m., I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. At last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with Destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial. . . . I thought I knew a good deal about it all, and I was sure I should not fail. Therefore, although impatient for the morning, I slept soundly and had no need for cheering dreams. Facts are better than dreams.

The destiny that most concerned Churchill, who quite rightly saw himself as a Great Man of history, was his own. As his biographer Andrew Roberts once quipped, Churchill believed in God, but in his theology God's role was largely taking care of Winston Churchill. Contrast this with Reagan, who spoke not of himself walking with destiny but of "you and I" together having this rendezvous. And sixteen years later, he concluded his acceptance of the Republican nomination by making these themes even more explicit, synthesizing personal freedom and communal belonging:

> The time is now, my fellow Americans, to recapture our destiny, to take it into our own hands. But to do this will take many of us, working together. I ask you tonight to volunteer your help in this cause so we can carry our message throughout the land.
>
> I have thought of something that is not part of my speech and I'm worried over whether I should do it. . . . Can we doubt that only a Divine Providence placed this land, this island of freedom, here as a refuge for all those people in the world who yearn to breathe freely: Jews and Christians enduring persecution behind the Iron Curtain, the boat people of Southeast Asia, of Cuba and Haiti, the victims of drought and famine in Africa, the freedom fighters of Afghanistan and our own countrymen held in savage captivity.
>
> I'll confess that I've been a little afraid to suggest what I'm going to suggest—I'm more afraid not to—that we begin our crusade joined together in a moment of silent prayer.
>
> God bless America.

To be sure, the coalition that Reagan united was made up of diverse, infighting groups. The same can be said of the movements galvanized by all great leaders in American history. At their best, these leaders ably expressed the essence of the American idea in a way that united the variegated parts of their movements, and made outsiders into insiders. In the 100-year history of the right, only one man has successfully achieved this: an actor, playing the part for which he was born.

Reagan's success as a leader allows us to understand what sets him apart from the other principal individuals described in the book. As Continetti ably illustrates, the battle within the right has largely been a battle about *ideas,* waged by the people who expressed them: hawks and cold warriors vs. isolationists, fusionists who sought to unite free-market economics with social conservatism vs. Catholic traditionalists, the freedom-loving economist Friedrich Hayek vs. the moralist Russell Kirk, the Claremont scholar-provocateur Harry Jaffa vs. everyone else—but in the end a truly successful right will only achieve its aims through *political leadership*, and leadership is about more than ideas. And it should not be shocking that an actor could emerge as such a successful leader. Let us take it from one of the conservative movement's foremost intellectuals, Midge Decter, whom we have just lost and who well understood the power of ideas herself:

> Reagan was . . . sufficiently at ease with himself, and sufficiently distanced from those around him, to be willing to say simple things. And probably never before in the country's history had simple things been more in need of repeated and authoritative saying. Primary among these were that Americans were on the whole a very decent people, that the productive and responsible among them must not be shoved aside for the sake of the willfully unproductive and non-responsible, and that the Soviet Union was an evil empire.

Today, of course, the age of Reagan has passed. The challenges he rose to confront have changed. And the conservative intellectual Yuval Levin has rightly emphasized the costs of substituting nostalgia for a contemporary political agenda as forward looking as Reagan's was. As much as one might wish it otherwise, Doc Brown's invention from *Back to the Future* has yet to be realized, and there is no going back in time.

Nevertheless, a movement that seeks to conserve must look to the past, and in so doing, it is appropriate to seek guidance from American conservatism's most successful leader, one who was, as Doc Brown reminds us, also an actor, whose statesmanship embraced not only intellect but also emotion. Continetti, at the conclusion of his books, seeks the guidance of two prominent public intellectuals:

> However the future unfolds, conservatives must return to the wisdom of their best minds and advocates. "The proper question for conservatives: What do you seek to conserve?" George Will wrote in *The Conservative Sensibility* (2019). "The proper answer is concise but deceptively simple: we seek to conserve the American Founding." Or as Bill Buckley said in 1970, "I see it as the continuing challenge of *National Review* to argue the advantages to everyone of the rediscovery of America, the amiability of its people, the flexibility of its institutions, of the great latitude that is still left to the individual, the delights of spontaneity, and, above all, the need for superordinating the private vision over the public vision." Buckley's challenge to *National Review* is also the challenge to today's conservatives and Republicans.

These intellectuals were correct that conservatism in America seeks first and foremost to conserve the vision of the American founding, in its simplicity and complexity. But the question that Lincoln asked at Lyceum remains: *how* shall the memory of the revolution and the founding be preserved? Shall this take place, as Will argued in the very same *Conservative Sensibility*, through what he sees as atheism or deism—or, at the very least, a skepticism about faith—as enshrined as the true heart of the founders' vision? Can we do away with emotional appeals to a providential rendezvous with destiny, and rely on the free, autonomous individual alone? That may have been the vision of the young Lincoln as he addressed the Young Men's Lyceum, but it was not the view of the wiser, battle-weary Lincoln at Gettysburg, nor was it the vision that compelled the prophetic Lincoln who, the following year, would deliver his Second Inaugural address. And this skepticism was certainly *not* at the heart of the vision of Ronald Reagan.

Meanwhile, there are those on the "New Right" who attack the aims and impulses of the American conservative movement that helped to shape Reagan's vision, and assault the Founding itself. We are told that the Lockean ideas of the Declaration are irreconcilable with religious tradition and faith, an assertion belied by the eloquence and impact of Lincoln and Reagan's rhetoric. And one role for traditional Jews to play in American conservatism may be to help make the case for the exceptional nature of this country for which Jews have always been grateful. The welcome that Jews received in America from the very beginning highlighted America's uniqueness, how its founders revered the Hebraic tradition, and fused Lockean ideas with the covenantal thought they found in the Hebrew Bible, forging a worldview that saw Americans as endowed with individual rights but also bound in common destiny. This is the fundamental truth that Lincoln learned after his Lyceum address; it is the one Reagan relied on to defeat the Soviet Union, and it is at the core of the American political tradition.

Finally, the legacies of Lincoln and Reagan remind us of the importance of political leadership. Continetti ably shows how intellectuals—men and women of ideas—were indispensable to the formation of the conservative movement. But the right will not find future success solely through magazines, or podcasts or Substack newsletters, as important as they may be. The achievements of American conservatism, and every social institution it means to protect, will only be safeguarded from a left that seeks their destruction through electoral means. As William Barr has recently reflected, governing like Reagan requires that conservatives can first win like Reagan.

Of course, to learn from Reagan does not mean mimicking his every policy proposal. On defense, tax policy, social policy, the judiciary, immigration, and many other public concerns, we live, some four decades on, in a very different country than the one that elected him. But if we are to exit the narrow electoral divisions of our era, if we are to move beyond the political war of all against all, then the right must find a leader who in his or her own way learns from Reagan's ability to draw the people of America together, and to make them feel that America has a rendezvous with destiny. "It seems unlikely," Decter reflected in 1989, "that American politics will soon again turn up a president so inexplicably and yet so perfectly fitted to the particular moment of his appearance." And for all the importance of the many ideas that Continetti describes in *The Right*, it is the man on the cover who still, to this day, has the most to teach us.

President Obama speaks at Congregation Adas Israel in Washington, DC on May 22. Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images.

MICHAEL DORAN

MAY 28 2015

About the author

Michael Doran, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and the author of *Ike's Gamble: America's Rise to Dominance in the Middle East* (2016), is a former deputy assistant secretary of defense and a former senior director of the National Security Council. He tweets @doranimated.

A Letter to My Liberal Jewish Friends

The president's address last week to Congregation Adas Israel as "an honorary member of the tribe" was something other than it seemed.

Dear Congregants of Adas Israel:

On Friday, May 22, President Obama, calling himself "an honorary member of the tribe," addressed you not just as the president of the United States but also as an explicit adherent of the "*tikkun olam*" tradition: a Jewish viewpoint for "repairing the world" that, in his reading, promotes universal progressive ideals like fighting bigotry and working for social justice everywhere. Thus, for him, the same "shared values" that underlay the civil-rights movement in the United States were what led him to identify himself with the cause of Israel—and also with the cause of Palestinian nationalism.

Although, as you may have noticed, the president never mentioned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by name, the heart of his speech was devoted to justifying his own role in their by now famous conflict. At the heart of that conflict, he suggested, was Netanyahu's presumed hostility to recognizing the rights of the Palestinians. Making references to Ramallah in one breath and Selma in the next, and sketching an ethical map that made the civil-rights movement and Palestinian nationalism interchangeable, the president implied that support for Netanyahu's policies was tantamount to rejecting the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.

It was Chemi Shalev, the U.S. editor of *Haaretz*, who best captured the essence of Obama's May 22 message to you: "I represent your core values far better than the elected leader of Israel."

To judge by the enthusiastic applause, many of you accepted the president's sincerity and strongly agreed with his message. May I ask you, however, to pause and consider an alternative view? I cannot claim, as Obama did, membership in the tribe, but I can say that I am well informed both about the Middle East and about United States policy toward that region. In addition, I am deeply concerned about the deterioration in Israeli-American relations.

Here's my question. As Obama donned his yarmulke and embraced your community, did you also catch the hint of a warning? If you did, it was because the president was raising, very subtly, the specter of dual loyalty: the hoary allegation that Jews pursue their tribal interests to the detriment of the wider community or nation. Obama was certainly not engaging in anything so crude as that; nor is he an enemy of the Jewish people. But he did imply that many Jews—that is, Jews who support Benjamin Netanyahu—have indeed placed their narrow, ethnic interests above their commitment to universal humanistic values. In his view, they have betrayed those values. And so the warning was faint, but unmistakable: if Jews wish to avoid being branded as bigots, then they—you—must line up with him against Netanyahu.

"But the president is right," many of you would no doubt reply. "Netanyahu's values are *not* my values." That may well be the case. Yet this is also why it is a trap for you to accept Obama's claim that his fight with Netanyahu is a struggle over "values." The struggle is *not* over values. Rather, at the core of the Netanyahu-Obama grudge match is one issue and one issue only: the president's long-sought détente with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

To be sure, there are other sources of tension between the two men, both personal and political. Among them is the Israel-Palestinian issue, which the president dwelt upon at length in his remarks to you—but in the service of a goal that has nothing whatsoever to do with Israeli-Palestinian relations. If this sounds too calculating by half, consider three key points.

First, every informed observer knows there is no chance of moving Israel-Palestinian relations forward in the next two years—and also that, what with the Arab and Muslim Middle East exploding in violence, Benjamin Netanyahu is hardly the only skeptic in Israel when it comes to advancing a two-state solution any time soon. Had Isaac Herzog, the leader of Israel's main opposition party, won the election in March, the prospects of reaching such a compromise solution would have remained the same as under Netanyahu: that is, next to nil.

Let's not forget that, back in April 2014, it wasn't the Israeli government that put the final nail in the coffin of the American initiative to solve the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Netanyahu, for his part, grudgingly accepted the Americans' draft framework agreement; Mahmoud Abbas refused. I have yet to hear the president excoriate Abbas for his betrayal of the values of progressive humanism.

Next, Obama has fallen out with or pulled away from almost every traditional American ally in the Middle East—a development that, even if it did not create the chaos now engulfing the region, has certainly played a major

role in abetting it. The president's relations with the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey are nearly as strained as his relations with Netanyahu. While these leaders may shrink from disagreeing with him in public, they have unmistakably signaled their conviction that the president's deal with Tehran will not achieve its stated goal of stopping Iran's progress toward a nuclear weapon and that, in his obsessive pursuit of this deal, American policy is actively helping to turn the aggressively hostile regime of the mullahs into the dominant power in the Middle East.

Which brings me to the third point. In the course of extolling the virtues of his emerging nuclear deal, the president paused to express his unyielding commitment to shielding Israel from the threat of Iranian expansionism. Or did he? Take a look at his exact words:

> [E]ven if we do get a good deal, there remains the broader issue of Iran's support for terrorism and regional destabilization, and [its] ugly threats against Israel. And that's why our strategic partnership with Israel will remain, no matter what happens in the days and years ahead. And that's why the people of Israel must always know America has its back, and America will always have its back.

This gauzy rhetoric may sound reassuring but it is deliberately devoid of content—for good reason. The plain fact is that the United States is doing nothing to arrest the projection and expansion of Iranian power in the region; quite the contrary. In Lebanon, for example, Washington has cut funding for Shiite figures who remain independent of Iran's proxy Hizballah. In Iraq, the United States, through the Iraqi armed forces, is actually coordinating with Iranian-backed militias and serving as their air force. Indeed, wherever one looks in the Middle East, one can observe an American bias in favor of, to say the least, non-confrontation with Iran and its allies.

The pattern is most glaring in Syria, where the president has repeatedly avoided conflict with Bashar al-Assad, Iran's closest ally. The tendency surfaced again a few weeks ago in connection with mounting evidence that Assad has routinely attacked his own people with gas. If true, this fact should trigger a sharp American response in keeping with the president's famous "red line" on the use of chemical weapons. But when questioned on this matter at a press conference, he contrived to find a loophole. Assad's forces, he said, have been deploying chlorine gas, which "historically" has not been considered a chemical weapon.

The president's sophistry demonstrates a simple but profound truth: his commitment to the progressive values of *tikkun olam* is governed by its own "red lines," and is entirely utilitarian. Which again raises the question: what was his purpose in stressing this shared progressive commitment in his address to you, and what was his purpose in subtly reminding you of the costs of failing to abide by its terms?

The answer, I hope, is obvious. On June 30, Obama will likely conclude a nuclear deal with Iran. This will spark a faceoff with Congress, which has already declared its opposition to the deal. Congress will inevitably pass a vote of disapproval, which Obama will inevitably veto. In order to

defend that veto from a congressional override, however, he must line up 34 Senators—all Democrats. This calls in turn for a preemptive ideological campaign to foster liberal solidarity—for which your support is key. If the president can convince the liberal Jewish community, on the basis of "shared values," to shun any suspicion of alignment with congressional Republicans or Benjamin Netanyahu, he will have an easier time batting down Congress's opposition to the deal with Iran.

Progressive values have nothing to do with what is truly at stake in this moment of decision. Only one final question really matters: in your considered view, should the Islamic Republic of Iran be the dominant power in the Middle East, and should we be helping it to become that power? If your answer is yes, then, by all means, continue to applaud the president—loudly and enthusiastically—as he purports to repair the world.

Your friend, Michael Doran

Wikipedia.8

PHILOLOGOS

MAY 25 2016

About the author
Philologos, the renowned Jewish-language columnist, appears twice a month in *Mosaic*.

The Gematria of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump

Fun with Hebrew numbers.

A correspondent who might prefer to remain anonymous writes:

The gematria of Donald Trump is "the messiah son of David":

משיח בן דוד = *424* = דונלד טראמפ.

Not wanting to be a one-party animal, however, I took the liberty of gematrifying Hillary Clinton, too, and found that ירליה *and* וטנילק *have identical values of 255. That's the gematria of* amalekiyah*, an Amalekite woman.*

The Amalekites, for the scripturally challenged, are arch-enemies of the Israelites in the Bible who became a symbol of anti-Semitic evil in Jewish tradition. And my correspondent ends with the question: "So whom are you voting for?"

Although I assume that this was written tongue-in-cheek, one can never be sure. Gematria, the custom of calculating and comparing the arithmetical values of Hebrew words in order to arrive at truths supposedly concealed in them, lends itself to nonsense as readily as do all other forms of numerology. It is based on the fact that the Hebrew letters from *alef* through *yod* traditionally stand for the numbers one to ten; those from *kaf* through *kuf* for 20 to 100; and *resh, shin,* and *taf* for 200, 300, and 400.

By also placing letters at the beginning of sequences to represent thousands, it is possible to write any number one wishes. Thus, for example, 776 is *taf-shin-ayin-vav*. Preceded by a *heh*, the fifth letter of the alphabet, it becomes 5716, which is the full way of writing the current year of the

Jewish calendar. Such a method, while impractical for mathematical operations, is a perfectly good one for writing simple numbers.

The practice of gematria was originally borrowed from the ancient Greeks, who, since the time of Pythagoras, also made occult numerological use of their alphabet. (The Hebrew word gematria was itself taken from the Greek term for "earth-measuring," i.e., geometry, because of the Greeks' resort to letters to mark geometrical sections and the arithmetical proportions between them.) One finds many cases of it in the Talmud. A typical one, in the tractate of N'darim, starts with a discussion of a verse in Genesis 14 in which Abraham, his nephew Lot having been captured in battle, is described as having "armed his trained servants born in his own house, three-hundred and eighteen, and pursued [Lot's captors]."

Since, apart from his trusty retainer Eliezer, the Bible has not previously mentioned Abraham's having had servants, let alone so large a number of them, the rabbis were puzzled. In an attempt to resolve the difficulty, N'darim speculates that the number 318, being the sum of the letters *alef* (1), *lamed* (30), *yod* (10), *ayin* (70), *zayin* (7), and *resh* (200) with which Eliezer's name is written, is a coded reference to him alone. This is followed by a second gematria, whereby it is asserted that Abraham, who died according to the Bible at the age of one-hundred-seventy-five, began to worship God as a child of three. The proof? In Genesis 26, the Lord says to Isaac, "I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven . . . because that [*ekev*] Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge." Since the numerical value of the letters *ayin* (70), *kuf* (100), and *bet* (2) that spell *ekev* is 172, the conclusion is that Abraham served God for all but the first three years of his life.

Such gematrias were of course arbitrary (why choose *ekev* rather than some other word in the verse?) and cannot be said to have been taken very seriously by the rabbis of the Talmud, who proposed them in a spirit of play. Recognizing this, the 12th-century biblical exegete and arch-rationalist Abraham ibn Ezra, commenting on Genesis 14, stated that "the sum of the letters of Eliezer is only a homily, because Scripture does not resort to gematria. Whoever wants to, can [by using it] get any name to mean anything. Names are just names."

And yet in the Middle Ages this was an uncommon view. Even Maimonides, ibn Ezra's contemporary and no less a rationalist in his approach to Scripture, disagreed with it. In his *Epistle to Yemen,* a long open letter seeking to calm the messianic fever then sweeping the persecuted Jews of that country, he wrote:

There are verses in the Torah which contain cryptic allusions in addition to their simple meaning. For example, the word *r'du* [descend] in the words of Jacob to his sons "Descend thither [to Egypt]" has the numerical value of 210 and contains a hint to the length of [the years of] Israel's stay in Egypt.

Indeed, as time passed, particularly with the advent of Kabbalah, the use of gematria grew increasingly widespread, both as a way of eliciting kabbalistic mysteries and as a way of predicting the future in an age fired by messianic expectations. In the latter part of the 16th century, for instance,

the notion spread in kabbalistic circles that the year of redemption was nigh, based on the cryptic statement in Genesis 49:10, "The staff shall not depart from Judah . . . until Shiloh comes." Inasmuch as the shin (300), *lamed* (30), and *heh* (5) of Shiloh added up to 335, the messiah's coming was prophesied for the Hebrew year 5335, the Christian year 1575. When it failed to materialize, a new calculation, built on the gematria of *mashiaḥ*, "messiah," pushed the date onward to 1598.

The gematrias offered by our correspondent are in this tradition. But as Abraham ibn Ezra wisely observed, gematria can make a word or name yield almost any significance. Besides "messiah son of David," Donald Trump's value of 424 also gives us *me'umad ra* (40+70+40+4+200+70), "a bad candidate" and *shed-lets* (300+4+30+90), "clown-demon." And Hillary Clinton? Well, *t'hi malkah* (400+5+10+40+30+20+5), "She will be queen," adds up to the combined 510 of her first and last names.

If not taken seriously, gematria can be a mildly entertaining form of numerical doodling. The next time you can't fall asleep at night, you might try it instead of counting sheep. It's guaranteed to work at least as quickly.

ADVANCING JEWISH THOUGHT Mosaic

Photo Credit: Godong/Universal Images Group via Getty Images