

Arthur Hays Sulzberger and His Time at *The Times*:
The Power of The Publisher and The Moral Tragedy of Jewish Shame

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Introduction: “History never repeats itself, but it does often rhyme.” — Mark Twain

Within the thousands of pages of the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible, there are dozens of characters Jews are taught to revere—Moses for leading Jews out of slavery in Egypt, Abraham and Sarah for their undying faith, Solomon, for his wisdom—and yet, there is one unassuming figure whose bravery is remembered on the most joyous day of the Hebrew calendar: Purim. The Book of Esther teaches that in history’s darkest moments, those in power are often forced to choose between a life of courage and a life of cowardice; a choice that bleeds beyond the silos of time and place, with repercussions extending beyond the individual and into the lives of those over whom they rule.

Spread across 127 separate lands of The Persian Empire in the 4th Century BCE, the heart of the Purim story begins when King Achashverosh appoints Esther to be his Queen, unaware of her Jewish identity.¹ For some time, Esther decided to keep her identity a mystery as it was safer to do so. Esther was put to the test when the King passed a decree ordering the destruction of all Jews across the empire at the urging of the Prime Minister, Haman. A meaningful portion of the Purim story is dedicated to Esther grappling with the gravity of the decision before her: to prioritize her own safety by continuing to conceal her identity, but watch the destruction of the Jewish people, or risk revealing herself to the King, and plead on behalf of the Jewish people, while risking her own life. Esther bravely chose the latter: to risk her life all while courageously standing by her community, despite their seemingly impending extinction. She used her access to power for the good of her people rather than the security of her own livelihood. Upon disclosing her identity, King Achashverosh chose to save Esther along with the rest of the Jews across his Empire.²

¹Est 2:7-9 (OT)

²Est 2:7-9 (OT)

Esther is one of the most revered characters in the Hebrew Bible because when given the choice to hide, she did not falter. The story of Purim teaches that the power of one affects the lives of many, and even further, that great power comes with even greater responsibility. Esther was forced to decide who her community was, and instead of leaning into the temptation of identifying with royalty and saving herself, she was true to her Jewish identity and her people.

At two critical moments in history, when the destruction of Jews seemed imminent, there were Jews with great access to power with the potential to be an obstacle to the annihilation of their people. In the 4th Century BCE, Esther stood up to a monarchy that was intent on slaughtering her people, and instead, she saved them. 2,335 years later, in 1935, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the publisher of *The New York Times*, was faced with a similar predicament. He failed to follow in Esther's footsteps.

Arthur Hays Sulzberger was born into a prominent Jewish family on September 12th, 1891, in New York City to Cyrus and Rachel Sulzberger. Sulzberger grew up as a reformed Jew, attending synagogue for high holidays and occasionally lighting ritual candles on Shabbat. He was born and raised a New Yorker, attending Horace Mann School and later graduating from Columbia University in 1913.³ In 1917, Sulzberger married Iphigene Ochs, an American socialite, heiress, and daughter of Adolph Ochs, the publisher of *The New York Times*.⁴ Ochs, too, was from a prominent Jewish family, a descendant of Rabbi Isaac Wise, the father of Reform Judaism, who, after his death, was referred to as "the foremost rabbi in America."⁵ That same year, Sulzberger became a reporter for the *Times* and quickly worked his way up to chief of

³Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler, "Hays," Jewish Encyclopedia, accessed March 22nd, 2023, <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7356-hays>.

⁴Iphigene Ochs Sulzberger, *Iphigene: Memoirs of Iphigene Ochs Sulzberger of the New York Times Family* (New York: Viking Press, 1981), 52.

⁵"Sorrow in this City," *New York Times*, March 27, 1900, TimesMachine.

international bureaus during World War I. In 1935, Sulzberger became publisher of the *Times*, succeeding his father-in-law, Adolph Ochs.

While fostering immense success for his paper, Sulzberger was particularly concerned with the image of the *Times*, and, perhaps more importantly, his image. Sulzberger's primary concern was that he would be seen as a Jewish publisher of a Jewish newspaper. Although Sulzberger was highly respected for his role at the *Times*, the fear of being identified as a Jew by the American public pushed Sulzberger to over-compensate. He went to great lengths to avoid being categorized as Jewish, both amongst friends and co-workers, and within the greater American eye. Sulzberger proclaimed that Jewishness was a religion and not a race. Of course, if being Jewish was just a belief system, one could choose not to be Jewish by rejecting those beliefs. On the other hand, if being a Jew is a race—as Hitler and even other Jews have argued—one cannot escape that identity, regardless of their belief system. In a world of rampant antisemitism in which Sulzberger lived, it was not helpful to be Jewish if one was seeking access to power in the most influential spaces. Thus, his view on Jewishness aligned with his quest for influence.

The life of Arthur Hays Sulzberger tells the story of how one's efforts to be perceived in a certain way can have enormous consequences on the lives of others. It tells us that failing to know and accept ourselves makes one vulnerable to immense tensions that force us to choose between maintaining power and honoring a greater responsibility to our communities and the world at large. Arthur Hays Sulzberger, as publisher of the *Times*, had a responsibility to publish “all the news that’s fit to print,” the famous *New York Times* slogan coined by Adolph Ochs in 1897, which still appears on the masthead of the newspaper today.⁶ But his story raises a number

⁶“The New York Times Used a Slogan to Emphasize Its Commitment to Impartiality,” ReadWriteThink, accessed March 3rd, 2023, <https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/york-times-used-slogan>.

of important questions: *To what extent does the obligation to publish “All the News That’s Fit to Print,” get trumped by an individual’s need to be perceived a certain way? Should one man have the power to determine what is newsworthy? How much pain and injustice is someone willing to promulgate in order to disassociate from the parts of themselves they are most ashamed of?*

The following pages seek to understand the complex forces behind Arthur Hays Sulzberger’s decisions, which not only affected what people read, talked about, and thought, but also people’s careers and chances to live freely in the face of Nazi extermination. Arthur Hays Sulzberger, motivated by a strong, unwavering desire to ensure his paper, *The New York Times*, was regarded with utmost prestige, and a vigorous commitment to ensuring he himself would not be regarded as a Jew, made editorial, staffing, and personal decisions that bled beyond the confines of his office and affected the minds and lives of the world at large, all due to a complex and disturbing relationship with his Jewish identity.

The state of American newspapers during the years of the Holocaust has been written about at great length by some of the most prominent scholars on Judaism and American history, including famed historians Deborah Lipstadt, Peter Novick, and author Laurel Leff. Most of their scholarly work focuses on American-Jewish identities, the American response to the Holocaust, and the public policies that shaped the mainstream media’s reporting of Jewish news. While providing a surveille of many American newspapers, none of their works provide a deep dive into the *New York Times* and Arthur Hays Sulzberger explicitly. Nor do they examine what effects the mainstream media had on the lives of Americans beyond what they were reading in their newspapers.

The seemingly most relevant secondary source on the subject of American media and the Holocaust is Lipstadt's 1985 publication, *Beyond Belief: The American Press And The Coming Of The Holocaust, 1933-1945*. In *Beyond Belief*, Lipstadt looked closely at the twelve year period and the events that shaped them: Hitler's rise to power, Kristellnacht, and The Final Solution. Lipstadt draws immense focus on the American attitudes and policies that shaped the reaction to these events, and ultimately concludes that from 1933 to 1945, the reports pertaining to the Nazi treatment of Jews were written with an implicit disbelief of the facts set forth.⁷ Lipstadt makes the case that the lack of coverage was a result of skepticism from publications about the extent to which Jews were subject to hatred, violence, and extermination. This "disbelief," Lipstadt argues, shaped public perceptions of the Holocaust that failed to pressure government action, because both the publications and their readers were hesitant to accept the gravity of the situation.⁸ What is startling about Lipstadt's scholarship, however, is that in her 726 page book, Arthur Hays Sulzberger is mentioned only once, not in the body of her work, but in the Notes section. While her reference alludes to Sulzberger's aversion to Jewish news, Lipstadt does not make the case in the remaining 725 pages that Sulzberger was a driving force behind the lack of *New York Times*' coverage of the Holocaust.⁹ It should give pause that a book described as the "most complete study to date of American press reactions to the Holocaust," fails to thoroughly engage with the publisher of the most widely read paper of its time.¹⁰ It is this precise scholarly gap—the role of the most important publisher in the Western world—that the following pages seek to explore.

⁷Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 52.

⁸Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 79.

⁹Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 673.

¹⁰Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945* (New York: Free Press, 1986), in Google Books, accessed April 3, 2023, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Beyond_Belief/IMELYD5xxXAC?hl=en.

Published in 1999, *The Holocaust In American Life* by Peter Novick is far less focused on American media, but instead, on how Americans understood and defined the Holocaust in real time, and how those definitions affected public remembrance.¹¹ In his discussion of American newspapers, however, Novick does acknowledge the lack of coverage on the Holocaust. Yet, Novick attributes this lack of coverage to two factors: publications having only “secondhand and thirdhand reports of problematic authenticity,” and the proposition that the murder of European Jewry just “didn't seem interesting.”¹² In his argument, Novick points to the fact that senior news editors in World War I “had themselves been made to appear foolish by gullibly swallowing fake atrocity stories, and they weren't going to let it happen again.”¹³ In essence, like Lipstadt, Novick argues that the reports from Nazi occupied Europe were looked at with skepticism. And even further, that Americans were simply uninterested in news about Jews abroad. It is worth examining, however, if this alleged disinterest from the American public that Novick points to was caused by lack of knowledge due to the media’s failure to communicate the Holocaust as a newsworthy story. Perhaps Americans were taken to be disinterested because they didn’t know that there was a story worthy of their interest. Not once does *The Holocaust In American Life* mention Arthur Hays Sulzberger or *The New York Times*.

The most in-depth scholarship on *The New York Times* during Arthur Hays Sulzberger’s time as publisher is *Buried By The Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper*, in which Laurel Leff meaningfully dissects the outcomes of the papers printed publications during the World War II years. Leff draws careful attention to the placement of reports within the paper, the oftentimes vague and unemotional language, and even further,

¹¹Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Mariner Books, 1999), 2.

¹² Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 23.

¹³ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 23.

Sulzberger's role in those decisions.¹⁴ Leff's scholarship provides a worthwhile foundation for understanding the state of the *Times* between 1930 and 1948. She paints a vivid picture of office dynamics, the policies that shaped them, and the key players who were keen on their execution. Leff's work is focused on the irresponsible Holocaust coverage of the *Times*, successfully arguing that the *Times* failed in its obligation to deliver news on the most important story of its time.¹⁵ Although Leff provides a thorough analysis of Sulzberger and his relationships with his staff and powerful members of American society, Leff's scholarship is dedicated to understanding the printed publications of the *Times* rather than the man that shaped them.

This thesis, in addition to building upon the work of scholars like Leff and Lipstadt, will reveal that in addition to the *Times*' Holocaust coverage, Arthur Hays Sulzberger's attitude about his Jewish identity was responsible for the demotion and concealment of Jewish staff members, the *Times* approach to Jewish news at large, and the immigration status' of Jews across Europe. In doing so, first-hand accounts from those who dealt directly with Sulzberger will be utilized. In *The Times of My Life and My Life With The Times*, Max Frankel reflects on the years he spent as a member of *The New York Times* staff. Frankel's experience as a Jewish reporter who struggled to be promoted as a result of his religious affiliation supports the claim that Sulzberger's reign as publisher affected far more than the printed publications of the *Times*.¹⁶ In understanding an employee's perception of Sulzberger and the paper he controlled, Frankel's account provides meaningful insights into the culture and unspoken rules of a paper that disfavored its Jewish employees.

While using the scholarship of Leff and Lipstadt as an entry point into the conversation of American media during the Holocaust period, my thesis relies on primary sources to more

¹⁴Leff, *Buried by the Times*.

¹⁵Leff, *Buried By the Times*, 22.

¹⁶Max Frankel, *The Times of My Life and My Life with The Times* (New York: Random House, 1999), 399.

closely examine Sulzberger. This paper will use Leff to establish that the *Times* failed to cover the Holocaust, and even further, that Sulzberger was hesitant to be considered as a Jewish publisher. I will further rely heavily on the printed publications of *The New York Times* to examine the placement of stories and their respective language, as well as the responses they generated from readers and staff members. In addition to the printed publications, the majority of my sources are utilized to more deeply understand Sulzberger's motivations, fears, values, and priorities. In reading over 800 archived diary entries, speeches, personal memos, letters to readers, colleagues, peers, friends, and staff members, the more personal, seemingly mundane writings of Sulzberger give critical insights into his time as publisher. Additionally, I examine the letters, newspaper clippings, and announcements that made their way to Sulzberger's desk, and through his brief memos to key staff members, I seek to understand why such letters, news items, and announcements generated the responses they did.

While the immense primary sources being utilized provide vital insights into Sulzberger's persona, the task of understanding a figure from their writings and correspondence alone does not paint a full picture. Sulzberger had a life outside of his work as publisher, and like everyone, he surely had fears, anxieties, and insecurities that he never wrote about or shared with others. That said, the vast array of primary sources included in this paper supply strong evidence that Sulzberger was at odds with his Jewish identity.

This paper will begin with a thorough analysis of Sulzberger's perspectives on religion, faith, and his own identity. In examining his refusal to be publicly acknowledged as Jewish, the first chapter will provide a snapshot of Sulzberger's philosophies and the decisions he made because of them. Though oftentimes complex, Sulzberger's ideologies on faith and nationality

can be traced back to many of the important outcomes and decisions this paper seeks to understand. I will then capture the stature and reach of *The New York Times*, a critical component to understanding Sulzberger's concerns and motivations. In painting a picture of the public perception of the *Times*, its resources, and its place within the world at large, Sulzberger's concerns with the perceptions of his readers and the American public are illuminated. After laying a foundation of Sulzberger's ideologies and his vital role at the most important paper of its time, I will discuss the results of Sulzberger's time as publisher: Holocaust coverage, reports on Jewish matters, his approach toward Jewish staff members, and his refusal to help those who needed his help the most.

Chapter II begins with a more sympathetic approach to Sulzberger and the *Times*. His own experiences with antisemitism will be discussed, in addition to letters from readers and external publications who criticized his Jewish identity, perhaps in part explaining his strong efforts to disaffiliate from Judaism. The latter half of Chapter II discusses the broader feelings of American Jews in the World War II Era, placing Sulzberger as one of many American Jews who felt ashamed at their religious identities. In trying to understand Sulzberger's position and fears, this chapter is dedicated to deeply and sympathetically grappling with the reality of Sulzberger's position and the tensions with which he was faced.

Chapter III departs from the sympathetic approach of Chapter II, and instead shines a light on Sulzberger's explanations for his actions by pointing to his own shame and arguably, his internalized antisemitism. Chapter III includes the criticisms Sulzberger received from Jewish readers and publications, as well as his reactions, offering immense insight into his true, oftentimes dark, feelings toward his own identity and Jews at large. Using this analysis, I will come to the conclusion that although Sulzberger claimed to be protecting the reputation of his

paper, he was more motivated by not appearing Jewish as a result of his own shame and even hatred toward other Jews. The conclusion will offer a brief synopsis of my argument, as well as the implications of the themes discussed.

Like Queen Esther, Sulzberger had obligations; first and foremost, to deliver on publishing all the news that's fit to print, and to help the people—his people—that needed him most in a time of unprecedented darkness. Sulzberger, in fear that covering Jewish news at all would affect his status, failed to deliver on that sacred promise of *The New York Times*. And perhaps more tragically, Sulzberger failed to use his power to help those in need in the name of protecting his own reputation. In letting his own insecurities affect his primary responsibilities as publisher, and even further, as a human being, Sulzberger prioritized being perceived as an American publisher of an American paper over his journalistic and moral duties.

As Mark Twain wrote in 1874, “History never repeats itself, but it does often rhyme.”¹⁷ The story of Purim and that of Arthur Hays Sulzberger are different for many reasons, but they are the same for the reasons that matter. They both tell a story about the ways in which our identities, when given access to power, can shape the world in which we live, and lives of those we can affect.

¹⁷Mark Twain, 1874.

Chapter I:

“I am not denying the faith; I merely think it is in a wrong association.”

– **Arthur Hays Sulzberger**

In 1954, Dr. Harry Cohen of the American Jewish Literary Foundation wrote to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, announcing that in honor of the Tercentenary of Jewish settlement on American soil, the Foundation would be honoring “those who have enriched America and its Jewry by their thoughts and deeds...who, through their own erudition, skills and talents, have won prominence in their respective professions and welks of life.”¹⁸ At the conclusion of his letter, Dr. Cohen asks Sulzberger if he would accept the honor by writing a contribution titled "Jewish Contributions to Journalism."¹⁹ Ten days later, on August 16th, 1954, Sulzberger declined. In his response letter to Dr. Cohen, Sulzberger reasoned that “[t]o do so would involve an acceptance of the thesis that there is a Jewish contribution to journalism, which, frankly, I do not recognize.”²⁰ He continued to explain that “those on the Times who happen to be of Jewish faith make their contributions as Americans, just as do those of other faiths.”²¹

The American Jewish Literary Foundation was an esteemed organization with an editorial board consisting of bar association presidents, Senate and congressional members, Supreme Court justices, presidents of municipal courts, and highly acclaimed doctors and professors. All of which is to say that the Foundation was of a certain stature, one in which Sulzberger, at first glance, should have been honored to be recognized by. And Sulzberger was, of course, the obvious choice for this award. As the publisher of the most widely read newspaper

¹⁸ Harry Cohen to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, August 6th, 1954, From The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

¹⁹ Harry Cohen to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, August 6th, 1954.

²⁰ Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Harry Cohen, August 16th, 1954, From The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

²¹ Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Harry Cohen, August 16th, 1954

of his time, Arthur Hays Sulzberger was one of the most influential Jews in America and perhaps the most influential individual in the journalism sector, regardless of his faith. And yet, despite being presented with the honor of such an award—one recognizing “unprecedented successes in devotion to humanity and country and through unstinting self-sacrifice [who] have preserved the traditions of centuries for the progress of posterity”—Sulzberger refused to accept, solely based on his assertion that there was no such thing as a Jewish contribution to journalism at all.²²

Sulzberger’s refusal to accept the American Jewish Literacy Foundation award raises many questions, perhaps the most important being: *Why did Sulzberger prioritize the distinction that his vast journalistic contributions were explicitly non-Jewish over accepting an award honoring his achievements and those of The New York Times?*

On the most basic level, it seems that an award from a respected organization honoring prominence and unprecedented success would be readily accepted by its intended recipient. As the publisher and representative of *The New York Times*, Sulzberger’s job was to ensure that his paper was regarded with utmost prestige—something Sulzberger was particularly motivated by, even to a fault. That is why his refusal to accept the American Jewish Literary Foundation award is puzzling. Despite being presented by some of the most respected intellectuals, politicians, and doctors of his time, Sulzberger denied himself and his paper the opportunity to earn public praise. If Sulzberger did not accept the award because he truly believed there was no such thing as a *Jewish* contribution to journalism, it is important to tease out why Sulzberger felt so strongly about this distinction and what that says about Sulzberger’s personal identity and the identity of his paper, *The New York Times*.

Sulzberger’s response to Dr. Cohen makes a clear and noteworthy distinction that provides substantial insight into Sulzberger’s philosophies on faith and nationality. In writing

²²Harry Cohen to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, August 6th, 1954.

that Jewish staffers on the Times “make their contributions as Americans, just as do those of other faiths,” Sulzberger places the American identities of himself—and his entire staff—over his and their respective religious identities.²³ Throughout his time as publisher, Sulzberger made valiant efforts to communicate his strongly held belief that religion was not a basis for any social or political organization.

For instance, in 1954, Harold Riegelman, a U.S. lawyer and public official, granted Sulzberger an honorary membership to Zeta Beta Tau, a historically Jewish fraternity.²⁴ Sulzberger declined the honor. He explained that, as a Jew at Columbia, he could not enter his Christian friend's fraternity. Religion, he reasoned, could not be the basis of social organization. In response, Riegelman assured Sulzberger that Zeta Beta Tau was no longer a faith-based organization and asked him to reconsider. In their final exchange, Sulzberger cited the very Jewish-sounding names of the current members, including Benjamin Cordozo, and affirmed his denial to join because, in his words, “I am not denying the faith; I merely think it is in a wrong association.”²⁵ Here, more so than in his exchanges with Dr. Cohen, Sulzberger rejects religion as a basis for social discrimination one way or another.

But Sulzberger’s personal writings, memo’s with colleagues, and decisions—show that Sulzberger’s philosophy on religion bled beyond his personal identity, and into the printed pages of the *Times*, and the livelihood of his staff and family. Before understanding the implications of Sulzberger’s ideologies, it is important to carefully dissect the ideologies themselves.

²³ Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Harry Cohen, August 16th, 1954.

²⁴ Harold Reigelman to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, November 1st, 1954, From The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

²⁵ Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Harold Reigelman, November 9th, 1954, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

I. Jews Are *Not* a Race

In addition to finding religion as an unsatisfactory basis for organization, Sulzberger had a strongly held belief that Jews are no more than a religious group and could not be qualified as their own race. Sulzberger's assertion that Jewishness was only a belief system was, of course, in his own self interest: while one can choose their belief system, no one can choose their race. Prominent figures, however, disagreed with Sulzberger's philosophies on the matter. President Roosevelt along with Hitler categorized Jews as a race.²⁶ During his rise to power, Adolf Hitler famously said that "The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human."²⁷ And on June 5th of 1942, the same year as the Wannsee Conference, where the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question"—extermination camps—was decided, Sulzberger responded to a letter from a reader asking if Jews were to be considered a religion or race by stating that "what holds Jews together is not so much their heritage as the persecution of them for being Jews," and even further, that Jews "are unable to account for it except in terms of race or people, but as I have endeavored to indicate, I do not believe that is warranted."²⁸ But of course, Hitler made it "warranted." Hitler—who justified the persecution of six million Jews in the name of racial purity—was able to do so by categorizing Jews as a race instead of a religion. Sulzberger rejected this idea in its entirety. In undermining the racial philosophies of Hitler, Sulzberger undermined the validity of Nazi efforts in their entirety. Regardless of Sulzberger's personal philosophies on Jewish credentials, his job was to report that Hitler was exterminating Jews as a race, and give that story prominence.

²⁶ Arthur Sulzberger to Henry Morgenthau, October 18th, 1939, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

²⁷ Art Spiegelman, 1987. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*.

²⁸ Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Evelyn Reimann, June 25th, 1942, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.3

Even after the wake of World War II, when Americans and the world at large better understood the catastrophe of the Holocaust—Sulzberger’s beliefs did not waver. On April 12, 1961, Sulzberger wrote to Turner Catledge, the managing editor of the *Times*:

Several times on our bulletins in reporting this Eichmann case, we have referred to the Jewish “race” and unless that word is used and appears in quotes, I don’t think we should employ it. I should think ‘people’ would be the word that would be least offensive to me and those who feel as I do. And, of course, watch out in all cases when you’re talking about the Jewish people or the Israelis.²⁹

Here, Sulzberger is referring to the trials of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi party official who was in charge of the identification, assembly, and transportation of Jews into extermination camps. Eichmann handled this task with great zeal and, in his 1961 trial, was sentenced to the death penalty in Jerusalem—the first and only time the death penalty was used in Israeli history. In fact, Sulzberger made efforts to try and influence people of power to classify Jews as a religion instead of a people. For example, in a 1939 letter to Henry Morgenthau, President Roosevelt’s Secretary of the Treasury, Sulzberger criticized President Roosevelt’s continuous reference to the Jews as the “Jewish race.” Reasoning that the President’s words impact so many people, Sulzberger asked Morgenthau to suggest to Roosevelt that he use different terminology, as “The Jews are not a people.”³⁰ He ends the note with a subtle boast: “Here at The New York Times, after a great deal of effort, I have finally succeeded in getting the editors to avoid making the word Jew the common denominator for any activities in which people who happen to be Jews participate.”³¹ He made a point to ensure that the loudest voices in the country did not, in his words, “help to play Hitler’s game”—classifying Jews as a race—as if Hitler’s extermination of European Jewry was all but a game. Sulzberger, though just one man, affected what the

²⁹Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Kent Kooper, April 12th, 1944, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

³⁰ Arthur Sulzberger to Henry Morgenthau, October 18th, 1939, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

³¹Arthur Sulzberger to Henry Morgenthau, October 18th, 1939,

American people read, thought, and spoke about Jews, a matter extending far beyond the silos of *The New York Times*.

II. An Inextricable Bond: Sulzberger and His Paper

To understand the byproduct of Sulzberger's beliefs, it is vital to understand the extent to which Arthur Hays Sulzberger and *The New York Times* were intertwined with one another. *The New York Times* was and still is a family publication; Sulzberger was the successor to his father-in-law, Adolph Ochs, who purchased the paper in 1896 and served as publisher until his death in 1935.³² As publisher, Sulzberger had his hand in nearly every matter, ranging from the elevator operations in the *Times* offices, the placement of his foreign correspondents, the members of the editorial board, the stories that *The New York Times* would publish, the language within the articles, and their placement within the paper.

The prominence of the *Times* gave Sulzberger somewhat of a celebrity status, serving as the face of the publication. As a result, the printed publications of the *Times* were seen as a direct reflection of Sulzberger himself; the paper reflected his decisions, his priorities, his values, and above all else, what he considered to be newsworthy.

Sulzberger was keenly aware of his innate and unbreakable ties to the *Times*, as were his readers. Despite the fact that Sulzberger rarely authored his own pieces, when readers wrote to the *Times*, their notes were overwhelmingly addressed to Sulzberger and seldom mentioned the authors of articles or opinion pieces themselves. As the publisher of the most widely read paper of its time, Sulzberger, understandably, had an immense concern with his own image and the image of his paper, as both were a reflection of one another. When a publication spoke of the

³²Elmer Holmes Davis, *History of the New York Times, 1851-1921* (New York: The New York Times, 1921), 179-181.

Times in an unfavorable light, Sulzberger wrote harsh letters to those publishers. And the same was true when publications or readers wrote critical messages about Sulzberger himself.³³

Among many of Sulzberger's concerns was a strong insistence that the *Times* keep an American identity. Because the identities of the *Times* and Sulzberger were inextricably intertwined, Sulzberger demanded he too be seen not as Jewish, but as an American—a phenomenon that must be deeply inspected to truly understand Sulzberger, both as an individual and as the face of the most widely read paper in the United States. Before doing so, the products of Sulzberger's time as publisher—the printed publications of *The New York Times*—must be analyzed with a critical eye.

III. *The New York Times' Coverage of The Holocaust*

During World War II, the *Times* employed more than 30 correspondents across Europe, far exceeding other prominent papers like the *Washington Post*.³⁴ As Deborah Lipstadt notes in *Beyond Belief*, “In a 1944 survey, Washington correspondents concluded by more than five to one that the *Times* was the nation's most reliable and comprehensive newspaper.”³⁵ In 1941, *The New York Times* was awarded a “precedent-setting” Pulitzer Prize for “the public educational value of its foreign news report,” which was regarded as a “supreme journalistic achievement.”³⁶ In 1943, *Time* magazine stated that “*The New York Times* is to journalism what Harvard is to U.S. education and what House of Morgan is to U.S. Finance.”³⁷ The widely accepted prominence of *The New York Times* was largely due to its astonishing resources and number of reporters. The American people held immense trust in the reporting of the *Times*. As Arnold Beichman, a New

³³ Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Joseph Biben, January 6th, 1944, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.3

³⁴ Leff, *Buried By The Times*, 9.

³⁵ Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 17.

³⁶ New York Times, May 6, 1941, 1.

³⁷ Leff, *Buried By The Times*, 9.

York daily newspaper reporter in the 1940s, said, “Everybody knew that if you wanted to get all the news, you had to read the *New York Times*...It didn’t happen if it wasn’t in the *Times*.”³⁸

Between Hitler's rise to power in the early 1930s and the end of World War II in 1945, the *New York Times* published 1200 stories concerning World War II.³⁹ Despite the *Times's* immense coverage of the war, only 26 out of 24,000 front-page stories covered the Holocaust, and of those reports, many failed to acknowledge the mass slaughter of Jews in Europe.⁴⁰ A key factor of the *Times's* Holocaust reporting was not their material—though they regularly failed to acknowledge Jews as the victims of the Nazi party—but their placement within the paper. Leff’s immense research on the *Times* print publications during the World War II period found that *not one* story on the Holocaust earned placement in the right-hand column of the paper, the space designated for the most important news of the day. Even when Jews across Europe were liberated from concentration camps at the war's end, that news was not the lead story.⁴¹

On June 27, 1943, the *Times* published its first story on the Nazi’s extermination campaign, describing it as “the greatest mass slaughter in history.”⁴² However, the story appeared on page five of the print publication, hidden amongst columns on other stories and news pieces. Despite the importance of the news, the fact that it concerned Jews, in particular, is a potential factor for the placement of this story. The Boston Globe and other papers had given the report much more prominence the day before.⁴³ In contrast, when citizens other than Jews had died—even when the number of deaths was fewer than one hundred—they took precedence over the reporting of Jewish deaths, meaning the story appeared in a more readable location of the

³⁸Arnold Beichman, transcript of videotaped interview by Freedom Forum Productions, "Holocaust: The Untold Story," January 5, 2001.

³⁹New York Times, "TimesMachine," accessed April 2, 2023, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/browser>.

⁴⁰Leff, *Buried By the Times*, 341.

⁴¹ Leff, *Buried by the Times*.

⁴² “Views of the Country's Press on Congress Upset of President's Veto”, Sunday June 27, 1943, *The New York Times* (The New York Times), TimesMachine.

⁴³ Frankel, *The Times of My Life and My Life with the Times*, 48-49

print publication.⁴⁴ Even the “unavoidable news” of a 1942 rally of 30,000 people against Nazi genocide blocks away from *The New York Times*’s offices was described antiseptically as a “mass demonstration against Hitler atrocities.”⁴⁵ In essence, if you were reading the *Times* in the World War II era, and you wanted news on Jews in Europe, you had to search for it.

As previously stated, *The New York Times*’ coverage of the Holocaust has been studied at great length by some of the most prominent scholars of American and Jewish history. In Deborah Lipstadt’s “Pious Sympathies and Sincere Regrets: The American News Media and the Holocaust from Kristallnacht to Bermuda, 1938-1943,” Lipstadt reinforces much of what Leff’s research alludes to. She wrote that in the spring of 1942—when the news of the systematic extermination of Jews in Europe reached the west—*The New York Times* was one of the outlets that covered the story. And yet, their report citing that 700,000 Jews had died was a short seventeen lines and could only be found at the bottom of page five of the publication.⁴⁶ Even further, the article failed to mention extermination as the cause of death. Days later, on July 2nd, 1942, a follow-up report on the “slaughter” of Polish Jewry was published. The column placed on page six contained a disclaimer on the previous statistic of 700,000 dead Jews, stating that many of those victims likely consisted of “many who died of maltreatment in concentration camps, or starvation in ghettos or of unbearable conditions of forced labor.”⁴⁷ As Lipstadt argues, the *New York Times* “found it hard to believe that 700,000 could be systematically murdered.”⁴⁸ In fact, Sulzberger often played down Jewish victimhood. In a 1946 address to the Mitzpah Congregation of New York, Sulzberger stated that Jews are “a minor percentage of the total

⁴⁴New York Times, "Germans Execute 70 at Bordeaux," September 23, 1942, 1, "72 Dutch Anti-Nazis Shot," May 5, 1942, 1, "Nazis Kill 10 Hostages in Norway after Proclaiming an Emergency," October 7, 1942, 1.

⁴⁵ Frankel, *The Times of My Life and My Life with the Times*, 48-49.

⁴⁶ Deborah E. Lipstadt, “Pious Sympathies and Sincere Regrets: The American News Media and the Holocaust from Krystallnacht to Bermuda, 1938-1943,” *Bystanders to the Holocaust*, Volume 1, 1989, pp. 99-118,

⁴⁷New York Times, “Allies Are Urged to Execute Nazis,” July 2, 1942, p. 6, TimesMachine.

⁴⁸Lipstadt, “Pious Sympathies and Sincere Regrets,” 99-118.

displaced persons,” but in the United States, “is the only one that is referred to.”⁴⁹ Even further, Sulzberger authored a 1945 article in *The Day*, a Jewish magazine, titled “Not Only Jews Suffer.”⁵⁰ In essence, Sulzberger, even when speaking to a room full of Jews or writing for a largely Jewish audience, firmly maintained that Jews were not the primary victims of the Holocaust, which as Leff shows, bled into the *Times*’ reporting of the Holocaust.

IV. No Good News on Jews

Readers of the *Times* noticed that there were few articles that talked about Jews in a positive light. For instance, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, a prominent Jewish leader who often butted heads with Sulzberger throughout the war, was one of many readers who noticed and took issue with the *Times*’ lack of positive news on Jews. In a 1941 letter to a friend by the name of Slomovitz, Wise wrote that he could not begin to explain “what difficulty we have in getting the publicity we need in the pages of the Times,” and even further, that “The Times seems to consider nothing as news which originates from and through Jews.”⁵¹ Sulzberger’s strong commitment to maintaining an American point of view resulted in immense frustration and ridicule from the Jewish community, a sacrifice Sulzberger was clearly willing to make. In addition to personal letters between friends and memos to the Sulzberger, Jewish papers put the *Times* in the hot seat in their printed publications.

In its November 24th 1939 issue, a Jewish magazine, *The Reconstructionist*, published a piece titled “Realities and Values,” stating that they could not recall when the *Times* had last published a speech or article from a distinguished Jew, “dealing with some positive aspect of

⁴⁹Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Mitzpah Congregation of New York City, Speech, October 26th, 1946, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1 1947-1963.

⁵⁰Arthur Hays Sulzberger in Letters to the Editors, *The Day*, August 6th, 1945. The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.3.

⁵¹ Stephen Wise to Slomovitz, March 17th, 1937, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1.

Jewish life.”⁵² Even further, the article pointed fingers at Sulzberger. It continued by stating that if the publisher of the *Times* thinks that only a few readers would be interested in positive news on Jews, then he should “reflect upon the truth that a great newspaper has tremendous influence over people's thinking,” and even further, that Jews and non-Jews alike would be interested in the words of prominent Jews if they were printed in the pages of the *Times*.⁵³ In essence, the article accuses the *Times* of disregarding positive Jewish news, and even further, makes their lack of coverage on Jews the cause of readers' supposed disinterest.

Sulzberger wrote to the publisher of *The Reconstructionist* four days later, taking issue with the “unfriendly and untruthful” article.⁵⁴ He wrote that the *Times* is not a “sectarian” paper, and “its business is to publish the news, whether that originates from Jews, Catholics, or Protestants.”⁵⁵ Sulzberger continued on by citing the names of the prominent Jews whose statements have appeared in the pages of the *Times*—Dr. Wise, Dr. Einstein, Dr. Weizman, Mr. Hore-Belisha—but adds at the end of his note that the *Times* has not “made it a point to inquire whether or not a man was a Jew before he printed what he had to say.”⁵⁶ Mr. Kaplan got back to Sulzberger promptly, agreeing that the *Times* is not a sectarian paper, which is exactly why “we should like to see all religious groups treated with the same degree of recognition.”⁵⁷ And while Mr. Kaplan acknowledged that Jews have had statements appear in the *Times*, he pointed out that they had, for the most part, not pertained to Jewish subjects or concerns. Kaplan concluded his letter by addressing the *Times*' praises of Catholic accomplishments, and notes that “the Jewish

⁵²*The Reconstructionist*, “Realities and Values,” November 24th, 1939. From The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*.

⁵³*The Reconstructionist*, “Realities and Values,” November 24th, 1939.

⁵⁴Arthur Sulzberger to Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, November 28th, 1939, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.3*

⁵⁵ Arthur Sulzberger to Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, November 28th, 1939.

⁵⁶ *Arthur Sulzberger to Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, November 28th, 1939.*

⁵⁷ Mordecai Kaplan to Arthur Sulzberger, November 29th, 1939, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.3*

community would be equally pleased to have the utterances of their leaders similarly treated, not only when those utterances bear upon general themes, but when they relate to positive aspects of Jewish life.”⁵⁸ The Jewish readership of the *Times* and other publications were keenly aware of the fact that the *Times* defined what was newsworthy. As Mr. Kaplan noted, in failing to print positive news on Jews, the American public felt no interest in such content, due in part to the fact that the *Times* didn’t give them the option of reading it.

The Reconstructionist was not the only publication that took issue with this. On Friday, December 31st of 1943, *The Jewish Times*, a Philadelphia-based paper covering Jewish news and commentary, published a front-page denunciation of the *Times*. Entitled “The ‘Times’ And The Jews,” the article wrote that “When not deliberately deprecating Jews,” *The New York Times* “tones down every instance in which Jews justifiably might take pride, that it takes expert knowledge to discover that Jews had anything to do with it.”⁵⁹ The author and publisher, Joseph Biben, added that when covering the tragic realities of Jews of the Warsaw ghettos, the *Times* “featured the news in a way as if no Jews were involved in that tragic fray.”⁶⁰ Biben affirmed the claims of Leff in real-time: to read Jewish news in the *Times* required expert knowledge on the subject, something the American public surely lacked. In a reply to Biben, Sulzberger wrote that the article was, again, “unjust” and that no other publication in the country covered Jews as fully as *The New York Times* does, despite its harsh stance against Zionism—a belief strongly held by Sulzberger and, in all likelihood, by his employees.⁶¹

The *Times* failure to print news on Jews is in part due to their relationship with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. In 1934, Sulzberger found a memo from managing editor Edwin L. James

⁵⁸ Mordecai Kaplan to Arthur Sulzberger, November 29th, 1939.

⁵⁹*The Jewish Times*. “The Times and The Jews,” December 31st, 1943. The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

⁶⁰*The Jewish Times*. “The Times and The Jews,” December 31st, 1943.

⁶¹Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Joseph Biben, January 6th, 1944, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.3

looking for Sulzberger’s advice on how to handle the JTA’s report on German demands for Jews in Germany. It marked the first instance during the war that Sulzberger was directly asked how to handle Jewish news, in addition to the potential response from their Jewish readership.⁶² Of course, Sulzberger disliked the JTA as he found their purpose—disseminating Jewish news—to be offensive and untrustworthy. In fact, when Ochs was still publisher, Sulzberger pressured him to end the *Times*’ subscription to the JTA, but Ochs refused on the grounds that he felt a sense of loyalty to the JTA staff, which largely consisted of fellow German-Jewish elites.⁶³ As publisher, Sulzberger threatened to end his JTA subscription numerous times, and in 1937, Sulzberger finally cut ties.⁶⁴ Upon receiving news that the *Times* canceled their multi-decade subscription, JTA editor Jacob Landau told his board that the *Times* received reports only from neutral channels, despite the fact that other prominent papers like the Post and Herland Tribune gave “prominent display to J.T.A. news.”⁶⁵

V. ‘So-Called Jewish Experts’

Sulzberger’s claim that Jews did not amount to a race influenced the staff members of the *Times* as well. In 1953, Sulzberger removed Irving Spiegel, a respected Jewish reporter for *The New York Times* from his assignment as a Jewish specialist in Jerusalem.⁶⁶ On September 1st, 1953, Seymour Spiegel, Irving’s brother, wrote to Sulzberger after his brother had been demoted. Seymour told the publisher that his brother had devoted his life to the paper for thirty years and that Irving felt Sulzberger “could do no wrong.”⁶⁷ Before signing off, Seymour directly asked

⁶²Edwin L. James to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, April 26, 1934, ELJ File, JTA Folder, NYTCA.

⁶³Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Adolph S. Ochs, July 26, 1933, ELJ File, JTA Folder, New York Times Company Archives (NYTCA).

⁶⁴Leff, *Buried By The Times*, 37.

⁶⁵“Report to the Board of Directors and Committee on Work of Jewish Telegraphic Agency,” May, 1938. The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

⁶⁶ Seymour Spiegel to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, September 2, 1953, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

⁶⁷Seymour Spiegel to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, September 2, 1953.

Sulzberger, “Who is more qualified to write about Jews except one of them?”⁶⁸ The next day, Sulzberger responded that Jews were not a “specialty” and that “meetings of Jews should not be treated as such but as general news.”⁶⁹ Sulzberger further explained that he felt “afraid we were getting a little bit away from our American point of view by treating this particular minority as though they were something apart and as though they required the work of a specialist.”⁷⁰

Spiegel remained a Jewish specialist for the next few years, but in 1958, Sulzberger wrote to his managing editor, Turner Catledge, asking to take Spiegel off the “Jewish assignment,” despite openly recognizing him to be a qualified specialist.⁷¹ In response, Catledge told Sulzberger that despite trying to shift him in 1953—when Seymour Spiegel first wrote in—the editorial team found Irving Spiegel to be the best man for the job.⁷² At the end of his manuscript, Catledge asked Sulzberger if he had any specific complaints about Spiegel, as Catledge felt the *Times* needed an expert in Jerusalem because of the complicated nature of the news there. The next day, Sulzberger responded to his managing editor: “I can't rid myself of the idea that I hate to see a so-called ‘Jewish expert.’”⁷³ Still, Spiegel remained a Jewish specialist until 1959, when Sulzberger wrote a rather fiery letter to the president of the paper, Orvil Dryfoos. The manuscript reads:

Why is Spiegel in Jerusalem? I protested a long time ago about having a so-called Jewish specialist, and now he's not only going to be a Jewish specialist but a specialist in Jewish politics. I think it's wrong, and I also don't know why I wasn't asked in view of the fact

⁶⁸Seymour Spiegel to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, September 2, 1953.

⁶⁹ Arthur Sulzberger to Seymour Spiegel, September 2, 1953, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

⁷⁰Arthur Sulzberger to Seymour Spiegel, September 2, 1953.

⁷¹Arthur Sulzberger to Turner Catledge, March 31st, 1958, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

⁷²Turner Catledge to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, March 31, 1958,, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

⁷³ Arthur Sulzberger to Turner Catledge, April 1st 1958, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

that I had expressed interest in this particular man. I have no complaint with him; it's the assignments that he gets.⁷⁴

In blatant terms, Sulzbergers “special interest” in Spiegel was because Spiegel was Jewish. Had Spiegel been a non-Jew, Sulzberger would not have had a strong stance on his position. While stating that he had no issue with Spiegel specifically, Sulzberger was instead bothered by the idea that Jewish news required a specialist and, even further, that the Jewish news specialist was a Jew himself. Deeply ingrained in Sulzberger’s memos regarding Spiegel is his troublingly strong assertion that Jews are not a minority, nor deserving of a special focus, especially from a member of the minority group. Despite his managing editor assuring Sulzberger that Spiegel was the man for the job, Sulzberger’s personal ideologies protruded into his role as publisher and into the lives of his staff members.

VI. ‘The Problem of Mankind’: Helpless Cries for Sulzberger’s Help

Like most of the nation during the World War II period, grappling with the question of German refugees, Sulzberger and the *Times* needed to take respective personal and editorial stances on immigration. This stance was, in essence, that immigration was “mankind's” problem, not America's. To remain unbiased and maintain the paper's American point of view, *Times* editorials on immigration never made clear that the immigration discussion was largely pertaining to the question of Jewish immigrants. Despite the fact that the majority of people seeking visas from embassies and desperately boarding ships to a new home were Jews, the *Times* editorials of the 1930s insisted that this was not a Jewish problem in particular. As a July 22nd, 1939 editorial reads, “The problem posed by the German refugees constitutes a test of

⁷⁴Arthur Sulzberger to Orvil Dryfoos, May 27th, 1959, Manuscript, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

civilization itself. It has nothing to do with race or creed. It is not a Jewish problem or a Gentile problem. It does not belong to Europe or to America. It is the problem of mankind.”⁷⁵

Sulzberger was especially set on maintaining this position. So much so that when James G. McDonald, the former League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, was joining the *Times* editorial board, Sulzberger forbade him from accepting an award from the Jewish Forum—honoring McDonald for “promoting the welfare of the Jewish people and humanity.”⁷⁶ Sulzberger even gave McDonald talking points for his refusal. He suggested that McDonald state that the award would place “the emphasis upon the Jewish side of the question,” and take away from the “fact that this is not a Jewish problem but a general one.”⁷⁷

Though perhaps not a result of Sulzberger’s ideology on Judaism and nationality, the true tragedy of Sulzberger’s complex identity as an American-Jewish publisher was the life-threatening effects it had on those who needed his help most. Here, the stakes are much higher than award acceptances or the phrasing of titles in print publications. What makes Sulzberger’s position on Judaism so troubling is that he arguably placed the validity of his personal philosophies over the lives of others.

On September 15th, 1935, the Nazi party enacted the Nuremberg laws—prohibiting marriage and intercourse between Jews and Germans, as well as the Reich Citizenship Law, declaring only those with German blood were considered citizens. Everyone else was considered to be a state subject with no civil rights. In anticipation of enacting these laws, Leonard B. Wohlfeil, an official of the *Times* European offices, wrote Sulzberger from London, discussing the meaning of these laws in relation to the *New York Times* Berlin office.

⁷⁵ Harold Callander, “Refugee Problem Seen as Part of Nazi Policy; Is This the Promised Land?,” July 23, 1939, *The New York Times* (The New York Times).

⁷⁶ James McDonald to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, August 15, 1941, JGM Collection, General Correspondence, Arthur Sulzberger, Columbia University.

⁷⁷ Arthur Hays Sulzberger to James G. McDonald, February 1st, 1943, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

In his letter of September 10th, 1935, Wohlfeil stated that the Germans are making “new demands” on the *Times*’ German company and to make Sulzberger aware of two employees that such “demands” would affect.⁷⁸ Wohlfeil first discusses Herbert Levy, “the most loyal and conscientious member of our Berlin staff,” who “deserved the very best treatment that we can possibly accord him.”⁷⁹ Of course, Herbert Levy was five days away from being considered a state subject without any rights as a Jew in Nazi Germany. Wohlfeil continued to explain to Sulzberger that the last time he was in Berlin, Wohlfeil met with Levy and suggested that he be transferred to Budapest or New York. However, Levy preferred to stay in Berlin as his wife had a small dress shop that he did not want her to give up. Wohlfeil told Levy he thought staying was unwise but stated to Sulzberger that in case Levy does stay in Berlin, the *Times* “ought to do the best we can for him by giving him a respectable cash settlement.”⁸⁰ In essence, Wohlfeil knew that Levy would have to be, in the best-case scenario, fired from the Berlin office and was urging Sulzberger to help him in any way the company could.

Wohlfeil proceeded to discuss another Berlin employee, Mrs. Margarete Aronheim, whom Wohlfeil was far less eager to support. Because Mrs. Aronheim, another Jew, had worked at the *Times* for less than two years, she had already known that her job was “not permanent” under such conditions placed upon her by the Nazi party.⁸¹ The letter further explained that while Mrs. Aronheim was not born Jewish, she is classified by the Nazis as “non-Aryan,” as she was married to a Jewish man. Wohlfeil continues to explain to Sulzberger that he “does not feel particularly obligated to Mrs. Aronheim” but suggests that Sulzberger “might be of a different

⁷⁸Leonard B. Wohlfeil to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, September 10, 1935, Folder 199.1, New York Times Company General Files.

⁷⁹Leonard B. Wohlfeil to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, September 10, 1935

⁸⁰ Leonard Wohlfeil to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, September 10th, 1935.

⁸¹ Leonard B. Wohlfeil to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, September 10, 1935

view.”⁸² Sulzberger was not of “a different view.” In fact, Arthur Hays Sulzberger did not even reply to Wohlfield’s letter.

Unfortunately, this was not the only instance of Sulzberger failing to help those most in need of him. Throughout the 1930s and ’40s, Sulzberger and his wife, Iphongene, received dozens of letters from relatives in Germany pleading for help. In a September 1938 letter, a 41-year-old cousin, Fritz, wrote that “the uncertainty of what will happen to us in Germany, the moral pressure of which we all are subjected – all these things are such compelling reasons that I take the liberty of appealing to you,” and later asked the Sulzberger to sponsor his immigration papers and sign the required voucher.⁸³ Sulzberger was reluctant to help Fritz. He advised Fritz to stay in Germany in his 1938 letter, reasoning that he couldn’t help Fritz get a job in the U.S. Upon asking Sulzberger to intervene with the American consul because his “personality is known and [his] word counts for much,” Sulzberger refused, writing “Because of my position with The New York Times I have made it a rule not to ask any special consideration or favor from men in public office.”⁸⁴ But Sulzberger “broke this scripture repeatedly.”⁸⁵

Two years earlier, in 1936, Sulzberger sponsored the immigration of his cousin, Ernest Sulzberger, and his family. Upon arriving in the U.S. Ernest begged Sulzberger to help his brother, Paul, who was in a concentration camp in Germany. Sulzberger wrote to his sister-in-law that Ernest “wanted me to sign an affidavit to help bring them over to this country, but I told him very frankly that I was unable to do anything further, that I had already signed more than I

⁸² Leonard Wohlfiel to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, September 10th, 1935.

⁸³ Fritz Sulzberger to Arthur Sulzberger, September 27th, 1938, Folder 199.1, New York Times Company General Files.

⁸⁴ Fritz Sulzberger to Arthur Sulzberger, September 27th, 1938, Folder 199.1

⁸⁵ Arthur Sulzberger to Ernest Sulzberger, 1938. Folder 199.1, New York Times Company General Files.

⁸⁶Leff, *Buried by the Times*, 36.

should.”⁸⁷ Sulzberger asked his sister-in-law to sign the affidavit instead. Alas, Paul Sulzberger never made it to the United States.

One month after Ernest’s plea to Sulzberger to help his brother Paul, Ernest asked Sulzberger to help his older sister and her family immigrate. “I appeal to you for the last time to sign an affidavit for my sister and her family so that they may be admitted to this country of liberty,” he wrote. “You know also that this affidavit is a formal procedure. I claim no direct relationship to you, but one thing I like to tell you, that our grandfathers were related, but only your branch had the luck to come to this wonderful country.”⁸⁸ Sulzberger refused to sign the affidavit, reasoning that “The procedure is strictly formal. By signing the affidavits, I make myself responsible for those persons here, and I have already assumed such responsibility already in so many cases that I am unable to do so again.”⁸⁹ Sulzberger added: “I fully sympathize with the effort you are making in your family’s behalf, but I have the right to expect understanding on your part that my present refusal is not made without heart or without comprehension. It is, however, beyond my means to do anymore.”⁹⁰ Eight days later, a radiogram from Altmann Sulzberger, in Wiesbaden said the following: “Dear mister Sulzberger, our brother Ernest Sulzberger has already spoken with you, and we hope with great confidence that you will have the great kindness to give us a affidavit. We hope for your favorable cable.” Arthur Hays Sulzberger neither responded nor signed the affidavits.

The most telling aspect of Sulzberger's approach to immigration was that he was more than willing to help refugees he did not know, so long as his support was private and not public. As Leff importantly noted, Sulzberger sponsored the immigration of an Associated Press

⁸⁷ Leff, *Buried by the Times*, 37.

⁸⁸ Ernest Sulzberger to Arthur Sulzberger, 1938. Folder 199.1, New York Times Company General Files.

⁸⁹ Arthur Sulzberger to Ernest Sulzberger, 1938. Folder 199.1, New York Times Company General Files.

⁹⁰ Arthur Sulzberger to Ernest Sulzberger, 1938. .

advertising executive in Berlin and a 19-year-old from Westphalia, whose school was “terribly demolished” as a result of Kristallnacht, or Night of the Broken Glass.⁹¹ Despite these live-saving gestures, Sulzberger insisted that his help would be separate from his role at the *Times*. He refused to provide jobs at his paper to those he helped immigrate, even to his cousin, who offered to do “any kind of work,” including manual labor. Sulzberger, again, did not respond to his cousin's request.⁹²

Even when prominent individuals like Albert Einstein turned to Sulzberger for help, he refused. When Einstein asked Sulzberger to hire Alfred Kerr, a celebrated Berlin critic, Sulzberger wrote to the famed Jewish physicist that “I am certain that upon reflection you will appreciate how unwise it would be for us to accept political articles from a German refugee.”⁹³ After Einstein's request, David Hays Sulzberger, Arthur's brother, who worked with the Jewish Social Services Association wanted to send “five or six men who have been connected to newspapers” to the *Times* as prospective hires.⁹⁴ Again, Sulzberger responded that he could not help, and suggested to his brother that he write to Victor Ridder of the *Staats-Zeitung*, as he was “in touch with the German press throughout the country and undoubtedly has some Jew well up in his employ here in New York who might function for you.”⁹⁵ In a concerned note back, David wrote that “I have no doubt that Mr. Victor Ridder and his ‘well up’ Jews are estimable gentlemen, but I don’t know them. I suppose you had some good reason for not offering to fix it

⁹¹Teutsch to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, December 16, 1938, AHS File, Refugees Folder, New York Times Company Archives (NYTCA).

⁹²Ernest Sulzberger to Arthur Sulzberger, 1938. Folder 199.1, New York Times Company General Files.

⁹³Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Albert Einstein, May 29, 1934, AHS File, Refugees Folder, New York Times Company Archives (NYTCA).

⁹⁴David Sulzberger to Arthur Sulzberger, July 9th, 1934, AHS File, Refugees Folder, New York Times Company Archives (NYTCA).

⁹⁵Arthur Sulzberger to David Sulzberger, July 10th, 1934, AHS File, Refugees Folder, New York Times Company Archives (NYTCA)

with Ridder, but whatever this reason was, won't you reconsider it?"⁹⁶ Again, Sulzberger responded to his brother, explaining that he is in "the unfortunate position of being able to give jobs to people who apply provided I want to do so. That instantly puts me at a handicap in talking with them, as you must realize. Without my again emphasizing it that we have a special problem which we cannot at any time afford to ignore."⁹⁷

What was this "special problem," we must ask? As the publisher of the *Times*, motivated by an undying fear that he might seem biased, it is fair to argue that this "special problem" was the Jewish identity of the family. Again, Sulzberger's stance on immigration depended on its public or private nature. When those who needed his help were family members or seeking a job at the *Times*, Sulzberger refused to help. And yet, when the immigrants had no connection to him and wanted nothing to do with his paper, Sulzberger was willing to sign the necessary papers. As Sulzberger explained in 1935, he had to keep himself "disassociated from active participation in any movement which springs from the oppression of the Jews in Germany. Only in this way can the unprejudiced and unbiased position of The Times be understood."⁹⁸

The evidence—Sulzberger's refusal of Jewish awards, his encouragement of colleagues to do the same, the *Times*'s coverage of the Holocaust and Jewish news, and his approach to those who were in the most desperate need of his help—paints a troubling portrait of Sulzberger as both a man in his own right and his role as publisher of *The New York Times*. Sulzberger's assertion that Jews are not a race can, on a surface level, explain some of his personal and editorial choices, though there are unanswered questions beneath the surface. Did he truly believe that

⁹⁶David Sulzberger to Arthur Sulzberger, July 17th, 1934, AHS File, Refugees Folder, New York Times Company Archives (NYTCA).

⁹⁷Arthur Sulzberger to David Sulzberger, July 20th, 1934, AHS File, Refugees Folder, New York Times Company Archives (NYTCA).

⁹⁸Arthur Sulzberger to Ira Hirshmann, November 22nd, 1935, AHS File, Refugees Folder, New York Times Company Archives (NYTCA).

denying the Jews of Nazi-occupied Europe entry into America was the only way *The New York Times* could uphold its unbiased position? As the publisher of the most prominent news source of his time, and arguably one of the most influential Jews of his time—though Sulzberger would detest that attribution—we must examine his motivations with a critical eye, as his decisions affected what the American public thought, believed, and read. Beyond the philosophy that Jews are not a race lies a deeply complex identity crisis that, in part, explains the tragic effects of Sulzberger and the *Times*' approach to Jewish news, awards, and individuals, which cannot be sufficiently explained by the ideology that Jews are not a racial group. Instead, Sulzberger's explanations for his personal choices and that of his paper lead to a far more complex answer—that Sulzberger, driven by an immense fear of being publicly seen as a Jewish publisher of a Jewish paper, placed the desired reputation of himself and his paper over the lives of others and, even further, “all of the news that's fit to print.”

Chapter II: Through Sulzberger's Eyes

Arthur Hays Sulzberger, as the publisher of the most widely trusted paper of his time, had an immensely important job. His decisions affected American culture and politics, and perhaps more importantly to Sulzberger, the reputation of *The New York Times*. Sulzberger was largely motivated by upholding the prestige of his paper. As the successor to his father-in-law, Adolph Ochs, Sulzberger had large shoes to fill. With a strong commitment to growth and influence, Sulzberger succeeded. He raised the paper's daily circulation from 465,000 to 713,000 and Sunday circulation from 745,000 to 1.4 million. The *Times* staff more than doubled, and gross income reached 117 million dollars during his reign as publisher.⁹⁹ In addition to maintaining strong readership, staff, and circulation, Sulzberger's deep concern for his reputation and the reputation of his paper induced a strong insistence that the paper maintain its American identity. Of course, in order for the *Times* to be seen as American, Sulzberger too needed to be seen as American.

Sulzberger was deeply concerned by the proposition that the *Times* might be seen as a biased publication; one that favored Jewish news as a result of its Jewish publisher. Much of Sulzberger's concerns were fueled by the fact that during Adolph Ochs's time as publisher, the *Times* received immense criticism for its Jewish ownership. Ever since Ochs, the son of Jewish-German immigrants became the majority stockholder of the paper and created *New York Times Company* in 1896, the paper's management was troubled by the idea that the publication would be regarded as a Jewish paper as a result of its Jewish ownership.¹⁰⁰ In 1933, two years before Sulzberger was publisher and soon after Hitler became chancellor, a German newspaper accused Ochs, a "Jewish publisher" and "immigrant from Germany," of "incendiary action

⁹⁹"Controversial NY Times Publisher Is Born," Haaretz.com, September 12, 2016, accessed April 5, 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Leff, *Buried By The Times*, 20.

against Germany” by printing false reports of atrocities during the First World War.¹⁰¹ Even after Ochs’ death, a German paper depicted him as “one activist foe” of Germany, an article which was immediately sent to Sulzberger by a Berlin correspondent. Such accusations were taken very seriously, as the religious identity of the paper’s ownership was equated to an inability to produce unbiased reporting.¹⁰²

During Ochs’ time as publisher, the *Times* implemented policies to protect itself against accusations of favoring Jewish news and even further, misrepresenting German issues. The editorial page at the *Times* banned letters to the editor on the rise of National Socialism in Germany, and upon becoming publisher in 1935, Sulzberger continued this ban.¹⁰³ In a letter to readers, Edwin L. James, the managing editor of the *Times*, stated that the official reason for this ban was that the paper received too many letters on the matter. Upon receiving a letter regarding the treatment of Jews in Germany, James wrote in a memo to Sulzberger that he “was in favor of lifting the lid on German letters if they related to the general political situation, but this one is on the Jewish angle and none other.”¹⁰⁴ In addition to banning letters raising concerns about antisemitism, the *Times* did not publish letters espousing antisemitic positions either. Sulzberger, in a 1936 letter explained that the *Times* needed to be open to “both sides of any issue” and refused to run letters challenging antisemitism because Sulzberger reasoned that doing so would require the paper to “give this opportunity to those who might urge the extension of anti-Semitism.”¹⁰⁵ On a basic level, this policy made sense; it was put in place to maintain objectivity. That said, the *Times* commitment to objectivity on Jewish subjects especially, often

¹⁰¹ Enderis to James, July 19th, 1933, Edwin L. James File, BB Folder, NYTCA.

¹⁰² Arthur Hays Sulzberger to Jim Rosenberg, June 7, 1943, *Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers*, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

¹⁰³ Leff, *Buried By The Times*, 32.

¹⁰⁴ Edwin James to Arthur Sulzberger, March 16, 1936, AHS File, JJ Folder, NYTCA.

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Sulzberger to Annie Nathan, April 6, 1936, AHS File, JJ Folder, NYTCA.

resulted in over-compensation—under this policy, antisemitism was considered to be an opinion, one with the same validity as anti-Nazi sentiments.

Because the identities of Sulzberger and the *Times* were inextricably intertwined, Sulzberger was set on eradicating the idea that the *Times* was a Jewish paper and he, a Jewish publisher. On one level, this meant the *Times* had to limit its Jewish appearance; this resulted in approximately 30% of the employment advertisements in 1942 in the *New York Times* expressing a preference for Christians.¹⁰⁶ When the *Times* did hire Jews, by-lines from authors with “too Jewish-sounding” names were substituted with their initials.¹⁰⁷ Max Frankel, an ex-*New York Times* staffer wrote that the vast majority of Jewish journalists “found it harder than it should have been to draw assignments abroad and in Washington,” and although “Times bylines gradually came to include names like Weiler, Raskin, and Rosenthal, these writers were somehow all persuaded to render their first names as A. instead of Abraham.”¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Jews rarely held “visible” editorial positions, and as many *Times* staffers noted after Sulzberger’s death, top Jewish contenders for such positions felt their lack of advancement was a result of their Judaism.¹⁰⁹ Frankel explicitly stated that “As a Jew, no matter how compelling my credentials, I would not have been editor of The Times in 1942, or for twenty years thereafter,” twenty years marking the exact year—1962—that Sulzberger stepped down as publisher.¹¹⁰ Frankel was promoted from reporter to Sunday editor in 1972. Frankel, like many Jewish staffers, was acutely aware of Sulzberger’s efforts to diminish Jewish appearances. Sulzberger was careful, in his own words, to “never put a Jew in the showcase,” which Frankel reasoned to mean that “he

¹⁰⁶ Frankel, *The Times of My Life and My Life with The Times*, 399.

¹⁰⁷ John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York, 1976), pp. 172-75.

¹⁰⁸ Frankel, *The Times of My Life and My Life with The Times*, 399.

¹⁰⁹ Frankel, *The Times of My Life and My Life with The Times*, 399.

¹¹⁰ Frankel, *The Times of My Life and My Life with The Times*, 48.

never wanted a Jew as his editor and final arbiter of content—not because he mistrusted the available candidates but because he feared the devaluation of *The Times* in Gentile circles.”¹¹¹

Through these tactics, Sulzberger reduced the chances of appearing to be a Jewish publication to his readers and the public. If the *Times* presented itself as not having Jewish writers and high-level staff, they became less vulnerable to charges of biases and favoritism from the rest of the world.

For Sulzberger, however, the effort to achieve a solely American identity was largely made publicly, and without shame. On November 20th, 1942 *The Day*, a Jewish newspaper, published a letter from Sulzberger rejecting the assertion that *The Times* was “a Jewish” newspaper:

For if, you say ‘The New York Times has been known and is still known in most sections or the country as the Jewish newspaper, there is nothing that would be more useful or more truly save our American system than to have that fallacious idea eradicated. And if anything I have said suggests that I desire to assume the role of ‘a Jewish leader’ I would welcome any efforts to kill that misapprehension as well.’¹¹²

In response, the *Day’s* editor wrote that there was “a difference between the Big Publisher and the Big Jew.”¹¹³ To Sulzberger, though, this differentiation required a valiant effort on his part. In 1941, *Editor & Publisher* sought to repudiate the idea that Jews controlled the press.¹¹⁴ Though it seems Sulzberger would have appreciated this argument, he wrote to the paper's editor, James Brown, that the editorial made it seem as though that *if* the press were to be controlled by

¹¹¹ Frankel, *The Times of My Life and My Life with The Times*, 399.

¹¹² “Mr. Sulzberger’s Attitude,” *The Day*, November 20th, 1942, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

¹¹³ Dr. Margoshes to Arthur Sulzberger, November 22nd, 1942, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

¹¹⁴ “Dirty Business,” *Editor & Publisher*, October 4th, 1941, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

Jews, American democracy would be at stake.¹¹⁵ Mr. Brown was privy to the true concerns of Sulzberger. In his response, Brown noted that “The American people accept *The New York Times* as the greatest of our daily newspapers and evaluate its management as representative of the best in American journalism, without ever a thought as to whether its publisher is Democrat or Republican—Jew or Gentile—Protestant or Catholic.”¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, Mr. Brown was not correct. In addition to criticisms from German papers, readers in the United States were keenly aware of the paper's connections to Judaism. One letter writer wrote: “In spite of what you and the rest of the ‘Jewish Press’ think and say Germany will go on, as she has the past year under Hitler, to again become a great Nation. Can you say as much for the Jews?”¹¹⁷ The letter was not published in the *Times*. For Sulzberger, being privy to the criticism his father-in-law faced as a result of his Jewish identity surely fueled his efforts to abolish the paper's—and his own—public affiliations to Judaism. And even further, he was correct in assuming that being regarded as a Jewish publication would lower the paper's prestige—readers at home and across the world deliberately said so.

On a much deeper level, however, Sulzberger's efforts to conceal the paper's ties to Jewishness are rooted in much of his own lived experience. In a letter to his children in 1962, Sulzberger reflected on what he called “an education in prejudice.”¹¹⁸ He wrote about being called a “sheeny,” a derogatory word for Jews, as a child; he was turned away from secular fraternities during his college years at Columbia and rejected from a Cape Cod resort with his

¹¹⁵Arthur Sulzberger to James Brown, October 6th, 1941, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

¹¹⁶James Brown to Arthur Sulzberger, December 2, 1941, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

¹¹⁷“Letter to The Editor, *New York Times*. January 31, 1934, ELJ File, Antisemitism Folder, NYTCA.

¹¹⁸Arthur Sulzberger to Marian Sulzberger, Ruth Sulzberger, Judith Sulzberger, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, August 31st, 1962, AHS File, JJ Folder, NYTCA.

young children.¹¹⁹ Sulzberger's relationship with his Judaism, he felt, made him vulnerable to immense hate and discrimination. These lived experiences, in part, explain his resistance to being categorized as a Jew. And during his time as publisher, antisemitism was not occurring in a silo. As Jews were being rounded up and exterminated across Europe, America was not free of antisemitic attitudes. In a 1938 poll, about 60 percent of respondents held "a low opinion of Jews," labeling them as "greedy," "dishonest," and "pushy."¹²⁰ Additionally, 41 percent of respondents agreed that "Jews had too much power in the United States," and by 1945, this figure rose to 58 percent.¹²¹ These alarming statistics show that Sulzberger's fears were not irrational. He was correct in feeling that his readers—the American public—would reject the prestige of the *Times* and its publisher for its Jewish connections. And as a result, Sulzberger did everything in his power to assure no visible connection existed.

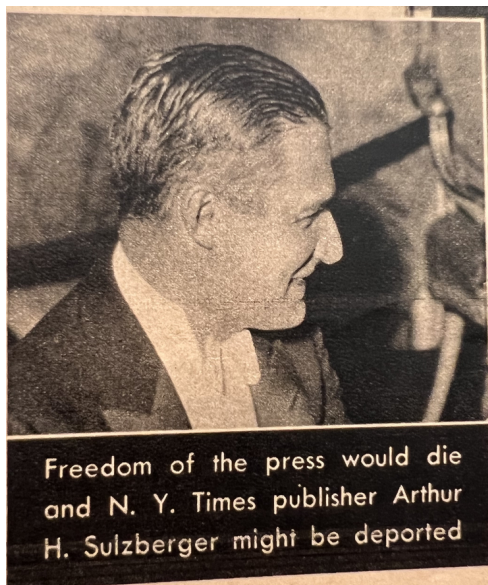
As Americans grappled with the news of Jewish extermination across Europe, many wondered if it could happen at home. In 1938, a publication titled *Will There Be a Jewish Crisis in America?* made its way to the publisher's desk. Within the publication was a full-page spread titled "If Hitlerism came to America," with a headshot of Arthur Hays Sulzberger, and a caption suggesting that he would be deported.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Arthur Sulzberger, September 10, 1963, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

¹²⁰ Susan Welch, "American Opinion Toward Jews During the Nazi Era: Results from Quota Sample Polling During the 1930s and 1940s," *Social Science Quarterly* 95, no. 3 (2014): 615–35.

¹²¹ Susan Welch, "American Opinion Toward Jews During the Nazi Era," 615–35.

¹²² "Will there be a Jewish Crisis in America?," June 20th, 1938, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 101.1*



Sulzberger took great issue with this publication. He ordered his staff to uncover where the sponsorship came from. He ordered an investigator to write a memo on the origins of the publication, resulting in a seven-page detailed report.¹²³ Despite interviewing over five subjects on the matter, Sulzberger's investigator found no clear answer on the origins or financial backing. The use of his photo was never authorized, and the names behind the publication proved impossible to track down. Following the release of the publication, a reader named Sadie Gruenberg wrote to Sulzberger, conveying to him that the publication seemed to be a "threat to Jewish life and pursuits in America," resembling Nazi propaganda.¹²⁴ It is hard to imagine that Sulzberger, upon viewing his face below the headline, would feel anything but worried. For Sulzberger, though, this publication was not troublesome because he feared antisemitic charged violence. In fact, Sulzberger claimed to be free of such fears. In a 1942 letter to the American Jewish Committee, he wrote:

¹²³Trevor Hill to Arthur Sulzberger, June 22nd, 1938, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 101.1*

¹²⁴Sadie Gruenberg to Arthur Sulzberger, June 23rd, 1938, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

I do not believe, however, that I, as a Jew, am concerned because of any fear that it may happen to me if not checked. I know full well that that is true, but I also know that if that happens, America and democracy will be destroyed, which is much more serious than the destruction of a Jew or of all Jews both because America is greater faith and because Americans as such can save Jews.¹²⁵

The irony of Sulzberger's above statement is that America could only save the Jews if the American people knew Jews were being slaughtered, and being slaughtered because they were seen as an inferior race. Of course, the very point the *Times* failed to fully illuminate. Moreover, in a particularly blunt and visual manner, the publication placed Sulzberger as *the* Jewish publisher and steward of a free press. If the *Times* would cease to exist as a result of its Jewish affiliations, Sulzberger apparently believed he could save it through disaffiliating.

Sulzberger's efforts to distance himself and his paper from Jewishness was, on one level, an effort to promote the success and trustworthiness of *The New York Times*. His concerns that both he and his paper would lose some of its prestige and stature as a result of his religious identity were warranted. As publisher however, Sulzberger's job was twofold: to foster the paper's growth and trustworthiness, while simultaneously ensuring that the *Times* upheld its commitment to objectively publish "all the news that's fit to print." On one hand, his readers, the American public, largely held low opinions of Jews, posing a threat to his ability to maintain strong readership and trust. In his efforts to maintain that trust, however, Sulzberger sacrificed objectivity through over-compensation. While he may have published "all the news that's fit to print," like Kristallnacht, or the liberation of concentration camps, the stories were printed in the least visible sections of his paper. And although he had Jewish writers and staff members, their names were concealed. In short, Sulzberger catered to the American public through his disaffiliation from his Jewishness. Beneath Sulzberger's claims—that Jews are not a race and the

¹²⁵ Arthur Sulzberger to Mr. Willen November 26, 1942, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.3*

Times must be unbiased—remains an unresolved identity crisis. Fearful that his Jewish affiliations would result in perceived bias, Sulzberger created the opposite: a paper that disfavored Jewish news and employees. Sulzberger might have considered his actions to be in the interest of his paper, but justifying antisemitism in the name of appearing objective leaves us with a much more complex portrayal of Sulzberger. In short, his obligation to publish “all the news that's fit to print,” came in direct conflict with his goal to ensure the *Times* would not be seen as a Jewish newspaper. While he tried to mediate that conflict, the fact is that he chose the goal of a non-Jewish paper over the promise on the masthead. On a personal level, Sulzberger not only catered to the largely antisemitic American public, but to a dark, deeply-rooted antisemitism within himself.

Chapter III: “A Moral Tragedy” of Jewish Shame

Sulzberger would have explained away his implicit antisemitism as mere defense of the *Times*. And on some level, it could serve as a sufficient explanation. He saw his father-in-law criticized for the paper's Jewish ownership, read letters from readers accusing the paper of biases, and he had his own “education in prejudice” that surely shaped his eagerness to limit his Jewish identity.¹²⁶ But when Arthur Hays Sulzberger is examined as a husband, father, and man, rather than as the publisher of *The New York Times*, it becomes clear that his professional decisions to disaffiliate—regardless of their explanations—were a symptom of a far less explainable internalized antisemitism, or at the very least, Jewish shame.

Even when the *Times* was ridiculed for antisemitic language in his own paper, Sulzberger did not care. In April 1944, the *Times* ran an article from the Associated Press titled “Hails Jews in our Wars,” with the sub-heading, “Curley House Speech and List of Names Cost \$900 in Record.”¹²⁷ Curley was paid \$900 to give this speech by an unknown source, though the *Times* article alluded to the idea that the funding was backed by Jews in order to gain positive Jewish publicity.¹²⁸ The first line reads “Representative James M. Curley made a \$900 speech in the House yesterday to praise the record of Jews in the nation's armed forces in this and other wars.”¹²⁹ Here, the *Times* does report on Jewish news, yet the story is about Jews paying for positive publicity, rather than Jews positively contributing to the war effort. Among many responses to the article was from a friend of Sulzberger and a respected doctor, Jim Rosenberg. Rosenberg thought the article made “it look as if the only concern of the Jews is to advertise their

¹²⁶ Arthur Sulzberger to Marian Sulzberger, Ruth Sulzberger, Judith Sulzberger, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, August 31st, 1962.

¹²⁷ “NYT Hails Jews in Our Wars,” *The New York Times*, April 1, 1944.

¹²⁸ Frank Weil to Arthur Sulzberger, April 7, 1944, *The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.3*

¹²⁹ “NYT Hails Jews in Our Wars,” *The New York Times*, April 1, 1944.

valor no matter how much it costs.”¹³⁰ In response, Sulzberger wrote that he agreed with Rosenberg, and asked him, “What standing orders would you have posted in the news department—‘Print No News About Jews?’”¹³¹ Ironically, this was, in fact, the unspoken order in the *Times* news department.

Another reader, Frank Wiel, wrote that the *Times* was the only paper that reprinted the story and that while the reporting of the Associated Press was disappointing on its own, the *Times* added to its antisemitism by reprinting the piece and “adding to it the offensive headline.”¹³² The same day, another letter appeared on Sulzberger’s desk from Milton Weill of the National Jewish Welfare Board: “I cannot understand how the NYT would permit such a story to appear— one that was ‘angled’ so viciously...I am astonished that your editorial department permitted the vicious item to appear at all.”¹³³ Sulzberger’s terse explanation was that they “put erasers on the ends of lead pencils,” a rather vague way of acknowledging that mistakes happen, and this one was not a matter worthy of deep concern.¹³⁴

Despite the fury from readers, managing editor Edwin L. James wrote to Sulzberger that while he realized that the story might be “construed to have an antisemitic slant,” it was “too exaggerated” to regard it as an antisemitic policy, “as a good many people have done.”¹³⁵ Of course, it was not. Sulzberger took up this issue with the Associated Press directly, who defended their reports by stating that the money involved “emphasizes rep. Curley’s effort to give the Jews

¹³⁰ Jim Rosenberg to Arthur Sulzberger, April 3, 1944, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

¹³¹ Arthur Sulzberger to Jim Rosenberg, April 3, 1944, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

¹³² Frank Weil to Arthur Sulzberger, April 7, 1944.

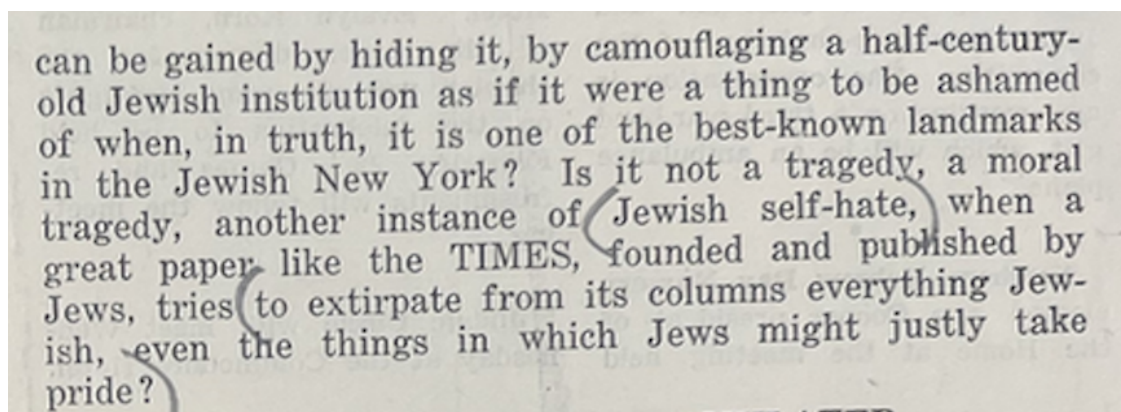
¹³³ Milton Weill to Arthur Sulzberger, April 7, 1944, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

¹³⁴ Arthur Sulzberger to Milton Weill, April 8, 1944, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1*

¹³⁵ Edwin James to Arthur Sulzberger, April 8, 1944, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.3*

a tribute that they seldom get.”¹³⁶ In response, Sulzberger blatantly declared “It was not the antisemitic angle that worried me.”¹³⁷ He later defended the piece by stating that no antisemitic acts had been committed as a result of the article's presence in the *Times* to his knowledge, a rather troublesome litmus test for reporting news about Jews.

On Friday, December 31st, 1943, *The Jewish Times*, decried *The New York Times*' lack of Jewish news coverage. The article concluded: “Is it not a tragedy, a moral tragedy, another instance of Jewish self-hate, when a great paper like the *TIMES*, founded and published by Jews, tried to extirpate from its columns everything Jewish, even in the things in which Jews might justly take pride?”¹³⁸ Although Sulzberger received numerous critiques on the *Times* coverage of Jewish news, this 1943 column, for the first time, drew attention to the cause of such coverage, or lack thereof. Rather than attributing the *Times*' Jewish coverage to its potential lack of newsworthiness, *The Jewish Times* placed the blame upon the “Jewish self-hate” of Sulzberger. The article made its way to Sulzberger's desk, and Sulzberger annotated the very lines charging him with this “moral tragedy.”¹³⁹



¹³⁶Kent Cooper to Arthur Sulzberger, April 10, 1944, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

¹³⁷Arthur Sulzberger to Kent Cooper, April 12, 1944, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records*, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

¹³⁸"The Times and the Jews," *The Jewish Times*, December 31, 1943, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

¹³⁹"The Times and the Jews," *The Jewish Times*, December 31, 1943

The term “self-hating Jew” gained traction in the 1930s when German-Jewish philosopher Theodor Lessing published *Der jüdische Selbsthass*, or *Jewish Self Hate* in 1930.¹⁴⁰ Written as Hitler was rising to power, Lessing’s writings pointed out an age-old phenomenon. Jews, who have fled or been persecuted in nearly every place they have settled—Egypt, Ukraine, Spain, Germany—began to adopt and internalize the language of their oppressors. Especially in Nazi Germany, where anti-Jewish propaganda made its way into children's books and board games, many Jews felt guilty for their success, insecure about their appearance, and ashamed of their identities. Although Jews were not being slaughtered on American soil, the effects of Jewish-self hatred and shame were borderless. American Jews, during and after World War II, made immense efforts to disaffiliate as a result of what we now call internalized antisemitism.

In 1956, Abraham Joshua Heschel, a polish-born American Rabbi, wrote that he “grew up in an awareness that Jews are running away from Judaism and religion. This was true in Poland, where I was born; in Germany, where I studied; and in America, where I found refuge in 1940.”¹⁴¹ Arthur Hays Sulzberger, both as the *New York Times* publisher and a public figure, ran away from his Judaism like many Jews at the time. Yet his escape from Jewish identity affected what the entire nation read, what they understood, and how they spoke about Jews. During the years of the Holocaust, Jews across the United States felt deep fear, and oftentimes shame, for their religious identities. Horace Kallen, an influential philosopher and professor wrote in his 1924 book, that “Men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religion, their philosophies, to a greater or less extent; they cannot change their grandfathers” a statement viewed by social scientists until the 1980s as an operative description of American Jews.¹⁴² In

¹⁴⁰ Theodor Lessing, *Der Jüdische Selbsthass* (München: Matthes & Seitz, 1930).

¹⁴¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Teaching Religion to American Jews,” 1956.

¹⁴² Horace Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States*, (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924), 122.

short, the American public saw Jewishness as an inherited race, not a belief system. In the war period, Jews in America found their religion as an obstacle to become fully assimilated into American culture. All of which is to say that Sulzberger was not alone in his shame or desire to assimilate. Like Sulzberger, many changed the more superficial elements of their persona, yet they resented their inextricable ties to Judaism—their blood-line and ancestry.

As previously discussed, Sulzberger explained his personal lack of Jewish affiliation by reasoning that Jews were not a race, and religion was not a basis of identification. This explanation, however, proves to be a thin veil over a much darker conviction that Sulzberger did not want to be regarded as Jewish at all; not because of the philosophy that religion was not a proper basis for identification, but because Sulzberger, like 60% of the American population, held low opinions of Jews and hated the fact that he was one. He basically said so in a 1938 essay on Judaism. Sulzberger wrote that

Having been made responsible for all Jews by being continuously classified with them, I find myself particularly sensitive to their shortcomings. A vulgar Christian is merely someone who does not concern me—a vulgar Jew is a direct charge upon me. I am being judged with him according to the standards of my fellow Americans. This vulgar Jew therefore saps my nervous energy and unsettles my peace of mind.¹⁴³

Here, Sulzberger identified his own shame in being Jewish. In acknowledging the fact he is begrudgingly classified with “them,” he felt his reputation would be tarnished for the actions of fellow, or rather “vulgar,” Jews. Here, Sulzberger pointed out that he too falls victim to the judgments of the American public, with whom he more willingly and closely identified, despite their remarkable anti-Jewish sentiments. Even more, Sulzberger writes that his mental state—his energy and peace of mind—is burdened by the prospect that the actions of other Jews might reflect poorly upon Sulzberger. Sulzberger was not concerned by the fact that a “vulgar Jew”

¹⁴³ Arthur Sulzberger, July 1938, The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.3.

might increase antisemitism. Instead, he was concerned that he would be personally classified as a “vulgar Jew,” tarnishing his reputation and, even further, his ego.

Sulzberger criticized Jews quite often. In addition to being bothered by the “vulgar Jews” of America, he also took issue with the Jews of Europe. In a 1945 letter to Horace Kallen, Sulzberger wrote that the Jews under the Hitler regime “missed their great opportunity of merging their cause with that of other assailed peoples when Hitler finally declared war.”¹⁴⁴ Here, Sulzberger blames the Jewish victims of Nazi aggression for failing to properly join forces with other victims of the Nazi party, as if they had any power against the forces of Hitler's plans for the Jews of Europe. In the midst of the war, two years after his own paper called it “the greatest mass slaughter in history,” Sulzberger found a way to blame Jews for their own victimhood.¹⁴⁵

But in addition to criticizing the powerlessness of Jews, Sulzberger took issue with the power and influence of Jews as well. In a 1949 letter to New York Lawyer Edward Greenbaum, Sulzberger asked if he had seen the United Jewish Appeal advertisements in the *Times*. He continued on by asking if Greenbaum noted that the American Jewish Committee is associated with the United Jewish Appeal and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. He ends his letter by stating, “The only thing I miss is the Jewish Chiropractors Society. In other words, J E W is to be the common denominator of everything we do. God help us!”¹⁴⁶ Here, Sulzberger takes issue with the fact that the *Times* ran a Jewish ad, and even more, that Judaism seems to have been bleeding into other sectors of his life. Subtly playing into the Jewish doctor stereotype, Sulzberger states that the only place for Jews—the only place that doesn’t bother him—is in the medical field.

¹⁴⁴Arthur Sulzberger to Horrace Kallen, January 16th, 1945, The New York Public Library Archives, *New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.3*

¹⁴⁵Views of the Country's Press on Congress Upset of President's Veto”, Sunday June 27, 1943, The New York Times (The New York Times), TimesMachine.

¹⁴⁶Arthur Sulzberger to Edward Greenbaum, April 13th, 1949, From The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191

In another letter to Greenbaum, Sulzberger bemoaned those who emphasized Jewish cultural identity: “Apparently, if you are a Jew, you have got to contribute Jewishly, eat Jewishly, think Jewishly, part your hair Jewishly—everything for the sake of efficiency. God, I’m sick!”¹⁴⁷ Rather than simply choosing to not contribute, eat, think, or part his hair Jewishly himself, Sulzberger was unsettled by the fact that others did conduct their lives with Judaism as the driving force of existence. The very idea that Jews ate, dressed, thought–lived–Jewishly, made Sulzberger “sick.” In these instances, Sulzberger’s remarks on Jews had nothing to do with upholding credibility of the *Times* or arming himself against accusations of subjectivity. Instead, they point to a level of hatred, of disgust, that made Sulzberger’s professional distancing from Judaism a symptom of something far more personal; in his words, he found Jews to be “much too much” for him.¹⁴⁸

Sulzberger’s unwavering dedication to his American identity was first and foremost a clear effort to diminish and suppress his Jewish identity. Even when speaking on Jewish matters, he did so under the premise that he was commenting as an American rather than a Jew. For instance, in a 1942 letter to an American Jewish Committee member, Sulzberger wrote that he does not believe all Jews are brothers, and even further that “as an American,” he was “overwhelmed by the inhumanity of the treatment Jews have received,” a clearly intentional differentiation that seems out of place given the context.¹⁴⁹ In making his comments as an American, Sulzberger carefully removes himself from any matters where Jews are concerned. Years later, in 1946, Sulzberger addressed the Mitzpah Congregation of Tennessee and opened his speech by stating that he had “excommunicated” himself from American Judaism because

¹⁴⁷Arthur Sulzberger to Edward Greenbaum, March 19th, 1947, From The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191

¹⁴⁸Arthur Sulzberger to Markel, July 23, 1959, From The New York Public Library Archives, New York Times Company Records, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Box 191.1

¹⁴⁹Arthur Sulzberger to Mr. Willen November 26, 1942

“heritage shapes prejudices.”¹⁵⁰ Apart from the oddity of stating his lack of Jewish affiliation to a room full of Jews in a synagogue, Sulzberger drew attention to what he saw as “ex-communication,” but what others saw as a deep sense of shame and humiliation. Sulzberger was clearly against Jewish affiliation, which on its own, does not equate to antisemitism. For instance, if Sulzberger did not wish to be a practicing Jew, it would have been permissible for him to simply disaffiliate. What is impermissible, however, is the fact that the thought of others living Jewishly made him “sick.” Sulzberger did more than merely “excommunicate” himself from Judaism, he instead spoke about Jews with disgust and hatred—a hatred that bled into the pages of the *Times*, the success of his staff members, and the livelihood of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe who were in dire need of his help.

¹⁵⁰Arthur Sulzberger, address to the Mitzpah Congregation, October 26, 1946

Conclusion: When History Rhymes

Like Esther, Arthur Hays Sulzberger was in a position of immense power. Though not royalty, *The New York Times* was the paper of record, and Sulzberger was its King. Sulzberger's time as publisher near perfectly coincided with Hitler's rise to power and The Holocaust, often forcing Sulzberger to address similar choices that Esther had to grapple with 2,335 years prior. Sulzberger, as the publisher of the most widely read paper of his time, was given the task to uphold the paper's reputation, which to him, meant hiding his Jewish identity. But, of course, the magnitude of the Holocaust did not make things so simple. If Sulzberger would have been true to the masthead of his paper, he would have given the story of the Holocaust prominence and reported it fully. But of course, that meant, in his mind, presenting the *Times* as Jewish paper. Sulzberger tried to straddle the issue by, among other things, putting the most important news of the day on the inside pages of his paper. Reporting in such a way was a fig leaf allowing Sulzberger to claim he was fully reporting the news without doing so.

Unlike the revered Queen Esther, Sulzberger chose to identify as an American and with the elites with whom he surrounded himself, rather than the Jewish people at home and across Nazi occupied Europe. Just as Jews in the 4th Century BCE turned to Esther for help, Sulzberger was continuously given the chance to communicate the importance of the Holocaust, positively affect the lives of Jewish readers, and staff members, and even save Jews in concentration camps abroad. Instead, Sulzberger undermined the age-old promise of the *Times*—to deliver “all the news that's fit to print,”—for the sole reason of preserving his firmly held belief that no paper of record could be a Jewish one. And thus, he buried a critical story and risked the lives of others, just because the main characters in these stories were Jews.

The life of Arthur Hays Sulzberger and his time as publisher of *The New York Times* is a story about identity, moral obligation, and journalistic ethics. His decisions lead to questions far beyond the scope of the Jewish identity or antisemitism: *How does one's efforts to be seen in a certain light affect their obligations and moral compass? What is required of someone who can take few steps to save millions of lives and educate the world about an important event and a worthwhile cause? Is it ethical to prioritize the reputation of a paper over the stories it promises to deliver? And most importantly: What are the obligations of the powerful few in times when courage and morality are needed most?*

The power of a newspaper lies in its ability to shape the reality of tomorrow by accurately representing the often dark realities of yesterday and today. Sulzberger understood that what he printed as news dictated what his readers would identify to be the most important issues of their time. If the story of the Holocaust was on the first page of the *Times* rather than the fifth, the minds of readers across the world might have better understood the tragedy surrounding them. And if the paper of record attributed the works of Jewish writers to their God-given names, refused to accept letters in favor of National Socialism, and published positive news on Jews instead of amplifying antisemitic stereotypes, perhaps the hundreds of thousands of *Times* readers would have supported further action to save the Jews, or at the very least, accepted Jews within their own communities. Sulzberger's prioritization to uphold a non-Jewish reputation over saving the lives of Jews facing extermination and placing on page five, a story well deserving of the breaking news slot on page one, is a choice that fails any test of morality.

In Book II of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle put forth his own definition of morality: The Golden Mean. Aristotle found that true morality lies between the extremes of excess and

deficiency.¹⁵¹ The foundation of this maxim is the virtue of courage: when practiced in excess, courage becomes recklessness, and when practiced in deficiency, courage manifests itself as cowardice.¹⁵² In the case of Arthur Hays Sulzberger, we find that his claimed efforts to produce unbiased journalism was instead the definition of bias. In fact, it was a lack of courage to help others and publish accurate news about Jews for the sake of upholding his reputation and that of his paper. This lack of courage, his cowardice, was just what Aristotle warned against. If morality is the balance between recklessness and cowardice, Sulzberger was put to the test during his time as publisher. He had a choice to help those in need and publish the news ethically, or to disrupt this fine balance, and overcompensate, thereby sacrificing the lives of those he had the power to save and foregoing his obligation to tell and prioritize the full story. True courage, and thus, morality, would have resulted in Sulzberger putting the most important news of the day—"the greatest mass slaughter in history," for instance—on the first page of the *Times* rather than tucking it away on page five. It would have resulted in Sulzberger accepting the honor of Jewish Contributions to Journalism. It would have resulted in Max Frankel becoming an editor when he deserved to be promoted. It would have meant Seymour Spiegel keeping the job he well deserved, and Jewish writers putting their real names in their by-lines instead of pseudonyms or initials. And, it would have meant that Herbert Levy, Paul Sulzberger, Fritz Sulzberger, Altmann Sulzberger, and Alfred Kerr would be saved from Nazi Germany by having their U.S. immigration papers signed by Arthur Hays Sulzberger.

¹⁵¹Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Books II--IV*: Translated with an introduction and commentary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

¹⁵²Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Books II--IV*: Translated with an introduction and commentary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

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