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Michelle Mart

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Eleanor Roosevelt, Liberalism, and Israel

Michelle Mart
Penn State University

Eleanor Roosevelt was a leading American liberal and diplomat after World War II. Historians have long noted her strong support for the State of Israel and have attributed it to the decline of antisemitism, the legacy of the Holocaust, and the Cold War. These factors were significant, but perhaps equally important in understanding her attitudes were her liberalism and her Jewish friends. Israel was an American-style reformist republic, putting into action social programs reminiscent to Eleanor Roosevelt and others of the New Deal. For that reason, liberals in particular were enthusiastic supporters of the new state. In addition, Eleanor Roosevelt's support for Israel was shaped by her intimate relationships with a number of Jews—especially in the postwar period—most of whom supported Israel. The extent to which her Jewish friends and liberal ideals influenced her view of Israel is the subject of this article.

Following her first visit to Israel in 1952, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote home to her aunt, “Israel was one of the most exciting experiences I have ever had.”¹ Her enthusiasm never diminished. Eleanor Roosevelt was a strong supporter of Israel from that nation's founding in 1948 until her death in 1962. Yet her call in 1947 for the creation of a Jewish state would probably not have been predicted from a study of her earlier opinions, even those as late as 1946. Until now, much of the explanation for her support for Israel has been attributed to the decline of American antisemitism, the legacy of the Holocaust, and the spreading Cold War. These factors were significant, but perhaps equally important in understanding Eleanor Roosevelt's attitudes toward Israel were her liberalism and her Jewish friends.

¹Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor: The Years Alone* (New York, 1972), p. 137.

Eleanor Roosevelt was among the most important American liberals of the decade and a half after World War II.² Her leadership was notable in liberal political circles as well as in the public culture where she used her newspaper column, articles in the popular press, books, and appearances to great advantage—particularly in championing the cause of Israel. Americans, Eleanor Roosevelt among them, felt a vicarious thrill to see Israel advance politically, economically, and culturally at a time when the United States faced the possibility of flabby softness in a world of postwar luxury.³ The Jewish state was an American-style reformist republic, putting into action numerous social programs reminiscent to Mrs. Roosevelt⁴ and others of the New Deal. For that reason, liberals in particular were enthusiastic supporters of the new state. Importantly, the sanguine views of Israel's supporters were echoed in and reinforced by the public culture, including the mainstream press, popular fiction, and the speeches of prominent politicians. From the late 1940s through the early 1960s (when Mrs. Roosevelt died), the dominant image of Israel in American culture was that of an ideal liberal enterprise: progressive, modern, heterogeneous, youthful, democratic, and Western.⁵

Eleanor Roosevelt's support for Israel was shaped not only by her liberal ideals, but also by her intimate relationship with a number of Jews. Historians have previously argued that her views were affected greatly by her personal

²Allida M. Black, for example, described ER as "America's foremost postwar liberal" and a "consummate liberal power broker" (*Casting Her Own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of Postwar Liberalism* [New York, 1996], pp. 3, 4).

³Anxiety about weakening character in the face of greater wealth and ease was widespread in the postwar period. Popular and intellectual culture contained many examples. To name two: David Reisman's best-selling *The Lonely Crowd* discussed the sociological implications of decreased individualism and self-reliance; Barbara Ehrenreich looked back on this period and discussed the gender implications of perceptions of male weakness in *The Hearts of Men*.

⁴Despite their close relationships, even her intimate friends continued to address her in a formal way. Joseph Lash wrote, and later Edna Gurewitsch agreed, that Eleanor Roosevelt "carried an aura of greatness that set her apart. Neither Earl [Miller], nor David nor I was able to call her 'Eleanor'" (Joseph P. Lash, *A World of Love: Eleanor Roosevelt and her Friends, 1943–1962* [New York, 1984], p. 348). For this reason, and in order to eliminate the possible confusion with President Roosevelt that the simple "Roosevelt" might incur, the editors have decided that this paper will refer to Eleanor Roosevelt as "Mrs. Roosevelt," as her friends did. In the footnotes the commonly used "ER" will be used.

⁵For discussion of this cultural image, see Michelle Mart, "Constructing a Universal Ideal: Antisemitism, American Jews, and the Founding of Israel," *Modern Judaism* (May 2000).

relationships, and that those relationships helped to increase her support for civil rights and liberal causes.⁶ Yet the significance of her personal relationships has not been fully appreciated in examinations of Mrs. Roosevelt's attitudes toward Israel. As historian Frank Costigliola suggests, we can "widen diplomatic history by exploring the connections between the personal and public lives of foreign policy makers."⁷ Eleanor Roosevelt began forming close relationships with Jews in the 1920s and continued up through her death in 1962. The people with whom she was closest later in life—outside of her family—were Jews. Moreover, most of those friends supported Zionism and, later, Israel. The extent to which they influenced Mrs. Roosevelt's views of Israel is the subject of the following article.

Eleanor Roosevelt came of age in a privileged, white, Protestant world of late 19th-century America far from Jews, especially the growing numbers of East European immigrants. Antisemitism was common in her social milieu.⁸ Mrs. Roosevelt, for example, voiced the widespread stereotype that Jews were obsessed with money and status. Her antisemitic views were also manifest in letters such as one she wrote to her mother-in-law Sara Roosevelt in 1920 criticizing the Navy party she had been obligated to attend in honor of Washington insider and diplomat Bernard Baruch; "The Jew party was appalling," she concluded. Baruch, as it turns out, would later be an "intimate frien(d)."⁹ Biographer Blanche Weisen Cook argues that although Mrs. Roosevelt held such opinions in her youth, her antisemitism was never heartfelt:

ER's antisemitism was impersonal and casual, a frayed raiment of her generation, class, and culture which she wore thoughtlessly. She did not quite remove it until the era of the Holocaust caused her to consider deeply, actually to study, her own feelings. Eleanor Roosevelt was not a bigot and she opposed prejudice in public life.¹⁰

⁶See for example, discussion of ER's attitudes toward antisemitism in Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Volume One, 1884–1933* (New York, 1992) and *Eleanor Roosevelt, Volume Two, 1933–1938* (New York, 1999).

⁷Frank Costigliola, "'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration': Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (March 1997), p. 1337.

⁸See, for example, Cook, *ER*, Vol. I, pp. 6–7.

⁹Cook, *ER*, Vol. I, p. 390.

¹⁰Cook, *ER*, Vol. I, p. 390. In all probability, ER in later life was uncomfortable with the memory of her own prejudices. This is apparent in her description of antisemitism in the Roosevelt household to friend Justine Wise Polier. ER told Polier that her mother-in-

Biographers and friends have observed that as Eleanor and Franklin became more involved in the cosmopolitan world of New York and Washington politics, they grew to know more and more Jews, and their attitudes changed.¹¹

Among Mrs. Roosevelt's first Jewish friends were her neighbors in Hyde Park, Elinor and Henry Morgenthau, Jr. Apparently, the upper class, assimilated neighbors with whom Mrs. Roosevelt would become extremely close, were exempt from the pervasive antisemitism in the Roosevelt house. For instance, Sara Roosevelt said that the Morgenthaus were "very Jewish but appeared well."¹² As Mrs. Roosevelt came to know the Morgenthau and other Jews better, she could identify with the experience of being excluded which she knew many Jews had faced. Elinor Morgenthau felt excluded from particular social situations. She remained self-conscious about being Jewish and imagined that Eleanor Roosevelt did not invite her to certain places because she was Jewish. Mrs. Roosevelt reassured her friend that this was not true, but explained that she could understand what it was to feel excluded since she was "a lonely, unbeautiful youngster and felt no one liked her." Mrs. Roosevelt said she knew how difficult it was to overcome the lack of confidence and insecurity that came from such feelings.¹³ Her empathy with Jews and the persecution they faced was heartfelt.

In the 1920s, Elinor Morgenthau was not only a neighbor, but also part of a political alliance with Eleanor Roosevelt and three other friends, Nancy Cook, Marion Dickerman, and Caroline O'Day. The five women, observes Blanche Wiesen Cook, "dominated" the Women's Division of the New York State Democratic Committee. By the 1930s, Elinor Morgenthau was "ER's

law would make antisemitic remarks at lunch or tea, whereupon ER would tell her mother-in-law playfully that one of their ancestors was Jewish. She failed to tell Polier that she, ER, also used to make such antisemitic remarks. See Oral History Justine Wise Polier, 14 September 1977, Eleanor Roosevelt Oral History Project, box 4, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

¹¹Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (New York, 1994), p. 102, for example. Also, author interview with Edna Gurewitsch, 14 May 2003, New York.

¹²Joseph P. Lash, *Love Eleanor: Eleanor Roosevelt and Her Friend* (Garden City, NY, 1982), p. 76. Also see Cook, *ER*, Vol. I, p. 7.

¹³Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor Roosevelt: A Friend's Memoir: A Close-up View of the First Lady of the World* (New York, 1964), p. 134.

closest Jewish woman friend.” She was a riding and traveling companion, and the two exchanged intimate letters and gifts.¹⁴

Among Eleanor Roosevelt’s closest Jewish friends before World War II, the Morgenthau and Bernard Baruch likely shaped her ideas about Jewish identity. In her three friends, she saw assimilationist Jews who wanted to blend into the American landscape and not call attention to the differences between Jews and other Americans. In Mrs. Roosevelt’s experience, then, Jews were just like other Americans—a perspective which would also reflect her universalist, liberal outlook.¹⁵ This assimilationism could have political as well as social consequences. For example, Elinor and Henry Morgenthau and Bernard Baruch advised Mrs. Roosevelt in the 1930s that American protests against Hitler’s persecution of the Jews would only increase antisemitism at home. It is worth noting that Mrs. Roosevelt was also silent on the fate of European Jews, partly because President Roosevelt and State Department officials frequently warned her to stay out of diplomatic affairs.¹⁶ However, there were specific instances when she remained silent even though the President gave her permission to speak out.¹⁷ Whether or not she would have been more outspoken if it had not been for the White House and State Department strictures is not certain. But, at the very least, the advice she received from her friends helped to justify her relative quiet on the issue.

At the same time that her husband’s administration limited her ability to speak out about Hitler’s Germany and Jewish immigration to the United States, Mrs. Roosevelt criticized directly discrimination against Jews in the United States. An active crusader for civil rights, she frequently spoke out against rising antisemitism. She denounced any attacks on Jews and brought public attention to the issue with frequent appearances before Jewish groups. (When it came to deciding which groups to speak before, she followed the advice of Elinor Morgenthau.¹⁸) Mrs. Roosevelt’s speaking engagements be-

¹⁴Cook, *ER*, Vol. I, p. 339 and Cook, *ER*, Vol. II, pp. 315, 295.

¹⁵Cook, *ER*, Vol. II, pp. 319–320.

¹⁶Cook, *ER*, Vol. II, pp. 305, 312.

¹⁷In early 1939, for example, FDR told his wife that she was free to back the proposed Wagner-Rogers child refugee bill (David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938–1941* [Amherst MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1968], p. 97).

¹⁸Cook, *ER*, Vol. II, pp. 314, 315.

fore Jewish organizations drew grateful praise from them as well as strong condemnation from antisemites throughout the country.¹⁹

By the end of the decade, especially after *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, Mrs. Roosevelt's condemnation of antisemitism—including that in Germany—became more frequent and public.²⁰ Her outrage was clear when she wrote after the pogrom, "The German-Jewish business makes me sick and when FDR called tonight I was glad to know [Ambassador Hugh R.] Wilson was being recalled and we were protesting."²¹ Mrs. Roosevelt began sitting in on the meetings of the Interim Committee of the Non-Sectarian Committee for Jewish Refugee Children, formed in December 1938; on the committee was Justine Wise Polier, daughter of the prominent rabbi and leading Zionist Stephen Wise, who became a friend of Mrs. Roosevelt's. Although Mrs. Roosevelt was not an official member of the committee, she acted as its liaison with the White House and gave advice about proposed legislation. When the committee became the United States Committee for the Care of European Children, Mrs. Roosevelt became honorary chair. The committee's goal was to help both Jewish and non-Jewish children escape from Europe to the United States.

Mrs. Roosevelt found herself facing the roadblocks put in place by Breckinridge Long and other antisemites in the State Department who were anxious to block any more Jews coming into the country.²² The First Lady was not only moved by the horrific news from Europe, but awakened to the destructiveness of American antisemitism when—despite her best efforts to lobby the State Department and other Washington officials—she was unable to pry open American doors for Jewish refugees. In one particularly frustrating encounter with her husband during the war over the State Department's refusal to admit more Jews into the United States, Mrs. Roosevelt, describing Breckinridge Long, the officer in charge of visas, blurted out, "Franklin, you know he's a fascist!" (Franklin chided his wife for saying such things.²³) Although

¹⁹In 1934, FDR reached out to both Jewish and fascist groups, sending his greetings to a massive Nazi rally in New York's Madison Square Garden, as well as to a Women's Zionist Organization of America meeting. (Cook, *ER*, Vol. II, pp. 323, 326–7).

²⁰Cook, *ER*, Vol. II, pp. 557, 571.

²¹Lash, *Love, Eleanor*, p. 264.

²²Jason Berger, *A New Deal for the World: Eleanor Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1981), pp. 23, 24, 26; Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time*, pp. 100, 172–176.

²³Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time*, p. 175. Goodwin notes that ER's son Jimmy reported that at the end of her life, one of her biggest regrets was her failure to change FDR's refugee

it is clear from all accounts that Roosevelt “cared deeply” about the plight of European Jews, her public actions remained limited, and she refrained from pressing for radical policies to rescue the Jews.²⁴ It is unclear whether she was constrained in her position as First Lady or that she genuinely believed her husband’s argument that the best way to help the Jews was to focus all attention on the military defeat of Germany.

In addition to her desire to get more Jewish refugees into the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt supported the cause of Jewish refugees trying to find safe haven in Palestine. Importantly, though, she continued to preach the goal of assimilation to American Jews, and described Zionism as almost a negative, but necessary outcome of persecution: Europeans and Americans “have pushed the Jewish races into Zionism and Palestine, and into their nationalistic attitude.”²⁵ She was not yet an enthusiastic supporter for the creation of a Jewish nation-state.

In the 1930s, Eleanor Roosevelt was to make friends with another assimilationist Jew, Joseph Lash. This close, intimate friendship would have a great affect on her. Joseph Lash turned out to be one of the great loves of Mrs. Roosevelt’s life, although the relationship remained platonic.²⁶ In 1936, she first met Lash at a White House tea for an American Youth Congress delegation. (In the 1930s, Mrs. Roosevelt increasingly associated with such radical groups as the AYC.²⁷) It would be another three years before she became close to Lash, when the leaders of AYC were called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Mrs. Roosevelt came to watch the testimonies and support Lash, who was testifying as a former member of the American Student Union. He believed the ASU had become controlled by the communists, but he refused to denounce its members or name names. Afterwards, Mrs. Roosevelt invited Lash to use her cottage at Hyde Park and to share confidences.²⁸ She also went out of her way to intervene on his behalf after the FBI began investigating him as a former communist sympathizer. Moreover, Mrs. Roosevelt was sensitive to the fact that as a Jew, Lash had probably faced discrimi-

policy and let more Jews into the country (p. 176).

²⁴David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941–1945* (New York, 1984), p. 315.

²⁵Quoted in Cook, *ER*, Vol II, pp. 557, 571.

²⁶This has been made clear in many of ER’s biographies and was confirmed in author’s interview with Edna Gurewitsch, May 2003.

²⁷Cook, *ER*, Vol II, pp. 502, 564.

²⁸Lash, *Love, Eleanor*, pp. 284–291.

nation in the past. She told the attorney general, "He is a Jew. Perhaps, that is one more reason why I am concerned not to see him unjustly treated."²⁹

Although Mrs. Roosevelt was well aware that Lash was Jewish, she assumed that he was assimilated. For example, when they were getting to know each other, she gave him an Easter present.³⁰ Lash appears to have lived an unreligious life, and to have joined a variety of holiday celebrations, including Christmas celebrations.³¹

Mrs. Roosevelt and Lash exchanged intimate letters, such as when she told Lash, "I feel as though you are very close to me and your concerns were mine. . . . I think I knew we were going to be friends or rather I wanted to be when I looked across the table at you about a year ago." She expressed her feelings in other ways. In the fall of 1940, for instance, she helped to furnish his apartment. By the time Lash was drafted into the army in 1942, the two had become very close, and Mrs. Roosevelt expressed her deep sadness at his departure.³²

Despite her close friendships with Lash and a number of Jews, it is worth noting that Eleanor Roosevelt had not shed all of her antisemitism by the late 1930s. In a letter to an old German friend in September 1939, she asserted that "there may be a need for curtailing the ascendancy of the Jewish people," but argued that this should be carried out in a more humane and decent way than Hitler was doing.³³ Once news of extermination reached the United States during the war, however, Mrs. Roosevelt's sympathy was further aroused, and she came to celebrate Jews. She wrote in praise of Jews following a 1943 memorial service for Holocaust victims, and condemned the persecution Jews faced: "One could not help having a great pride in the achievements of the Jewish people; they are the great names in so many nations, and yet

²⁹Quoted in Lash, *Love, Eleanor*, p. 371.

³⁰Lash, *Love, Eleanor*, p. 298.

³¹Lash recounts that in 1940 Eleanor told him that she had assumed he was an atheist. He corrected her, saying that he was closer to being an agnostic, still filled with much wonder about the unknown (Lash, *A Friend's Memoir*, p. 150).

³² Lash, *Love, Eleanor*, pp. 322–3, 386.

³³Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Eleanor Roosevelt and Human Rights: The Battle for Peace and Planetary Decency," in Edward Crapol, ed., *Women and American Foreign Policy Lobbyists, Critics, and Insiders* (New York, 1987), p. 99 and Cook, "'Turn Toward Peace': ER and Foreign Affairs," in Joan Hoff-Wilson and Marjorie Lightman, eds., *Without Precedent: The Life and Career of Eleanor Roosevelt* (Bloomington, 1984), p. 115.

rage and pity filled one's heart for they have suffered in this war in so many nations."³⁴

Following the destruction of World War II, Eleanor Roosevelt put her faith in the cooperative effort of many countries to rebuild and remake the world along liberal lines. These liberal ideals would eventually extend to include—for Mrs. Roosevelt and others—strong support for the formation of Israel. Mrs. Roosevelt's faith in international cooperation had been kindled in the aftermath of the world war of a generation before. Having witnessed the devastation of World War I on a tour of the continent in early 1919, she became a partisan for the new League of Nations and an antiwar activist from the 1920s through the 1930s.³⁵ Her work with the successor international organization, the United Nations, began in December 1945 when Harry Truman appointed her to the first American delegation for the organization. She used her prominence and public influence to promote the UN and its endeavors. In the UN organizations, she saw the possibility of bringing postwar reconstruction and development to the whole world—New Deal style. In particular, she supported UNESCO, WHO, FAO, and ILO. She also used her access to Harry Truman to champion particular causes and issues.³⁶ Outspoken and effective in debates and policymaking sessions, Mrs. Roosevelt left her lasting impression on the UN and its legacy when she served on the Human Rights Commission from 1946 until 1952. She was chair of the commission during the writing of the 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. As acknowledged by her UN colleagues and historians since, she was largely responsible for what remains to this day the most important statement on the protection of individual freedoms and rights.³⁷ Even after incoming Republican President Dwight Eisenhower accepted her resignation, she remained devoted to the UN, joining the non-governmental American Association of

³⁴Lash, *Years Alone*, p. 108.

³⁵Cook, "ER and Human Rights," pp. 93–97.

³⁶Cook, "ER and Human Rights," pp. 101, 103.

³⁷See for example, Cook, "ER and Human Rights," pp. 99–100, 113. David Gurewitsch, in his book of recollections of ER, similarly highlighted the importance of the Declaration on Human Rights. See A. David Gurewitsch, *Eleanor Roosevelt: Her Day. A Personal Album* (New York, 1973, 4), pp. 13, 15, 24. Both Cook (p. 113) and D. Gurewitsch (p. 13) describe how ER's UN colleagues gave her an "unprecedented standing ovation" at the organization's acceptance of the declaration. For further discussion of her role at the UN, see Lois Scharf, *Eleanor Roosevelt: First Lady of American Liberalism* (Boston, 1987), esp. pp. 145–153.

the United Nations from 1953 to 1962. She continued to travel the country speaking on issues of peace and human rights.

Eleanor Roosevelt's work on behalf of human rights and refugees made her well aware of the hardships facing refugees throughout the world, including European Jews. Her compassion for the survivors of the Holocaust grew and shaped her attitude toward a Jewish homeland in Palestine. A number of her friends have observed that her horror at the revelations of the Holocaust influenced her later support for Israel.³⁸ She sympathized with the plight of the war survivors, and lamented that they were both physically and psychologically damaged. She recalled her own observations of the poor and unemployed during the Depression, and although "that was not comparable to what these people in Europe have been through," it nevertheless "took several years for people to regain self confidence and initiative."³⁹ Apparently, Mrs. Roosevelt's framework for understanding the situation for war refugees was the liberal reform and rebuilding projects of the 1930s. And based on her past experience, she did not expect that the survivors would be able to accomplish much in the years after the war.

Mrs. Roosevelt's view of Zionism was also affected by the lobbying of activists eager to convince her to support their cause. Their appeal, in part, was based on the hopeful projections of economic development in the new homeland. For example, Rose Halprin, a Zionist leader, sent Mrs. Roosevelt a report by Dr. Walter Lowdermilk, an expert on agronomy and soil development, titled "The Absorptive Capacity of Palestine." Lowdermilk concluded that with the full use of the Jordan River, Palestine could be like California, and was ready to absorb four million refugees. (Zionists also used personal appeals and historical arguments to sway Mrs. Roosevelt. Mrs. Felix Frankfurter brought Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann to see the first lady during the war to tell her about the importance of the Balfour Declaration.⁴⁰)

Mrs. Roosevelt was particularly moved by what she saw when she visited the European refugee camps, and she wrote of the plight of Jewish Displaced Persons in her newspaper column "My Day." She identified with this issue, as she did with many political issues, through the stories of individuals.

³⁸For example, Justine Wise Polier (September 1977) and Trude Lash (November 1977), Eleanor Roosevelt Oral History Project, boxes 3 and 4, Roosevelt Library.

³⁹ER to Harry Truman, 1 March 1946, with enclosed memo on visit to Europe, file E.R., President's Secretary's files, box 321, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

⁴⁰Cited in Lash, *Years Alone*, pp. 110–11.

She was, for example, very moved by an old woman in one of the camps who knelt before her in the road, grabbed her knees, and repeated “Israel” over and over. Mrs. Roosevelt remarked, “I knew for the first time what that small land meant to so many, many people.” She later recalled with admiration the “courage and steadfast hope” of the refugees.⁴¹ As was usual with issues about which she cared deeply, Mrs. Roosevelt used her writing and speaking engagements to convince fellow Americans that they too should care about the refugees. For example, in 1945, she made the argument in “My Day” that the “tortured” Jewish survivors “naturally” wanted to go to Palestine, “the one place where they will have a status where they will feel again that sense of belonging to a community which gives most of us security.” She argued that Americans as a nation must respond to the needs of the refugees, “the greatest victims of this war”: “our consciences can hardly be clear” at the news of their suffering.⁴² In addition, she sent her thoughts directly to Harry Truman and Secretary of State George Marshall in an effort to persuade them to pressure the British to let more refugees into Palestine. She noted that she was not a Zionist, but that the refugees were in a desperate situation.⁴³

She continued to write about the issue in 1946, expressing great frustration with Britain’s refusal to let 100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine. At the same time, she realized the inadequacy of the U.S. response to the needs of the refugees. In answer to British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin’s charge that Americans wanted 100,000 Jews to go to Palestine because they weren’t wanted in New York, Mrs. Roosevelt called for increased immigration to the United States. As Joseph Lash noted in his profile of Mrs. Roosevelt, she “had little sympathy with the extreme Zionist position that Palestine was the only place where Jews might live in safety and without apology.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, she reminded her readers that there were 100,000 Jews in Europe who wanted to go to Palestine, not to the U.S. Moreover, she dismissed the idea that the Arab opposition was insurmountable. Alternately, she argued that “[t]he Arabs are intelligent people and so are we. I cannot believe that they are without mercy

⁴¹*The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt* (New York, 1958), pp. 309–310. Also, ER to D. Gurewitsch 25 October 1948, Letters ER to Gurewitsches, Gurewitsch Papers, Roosevelt Library.

⁴²ER, “My Day,” 7 November 1945, in David Emblidge, ed., *Eleanor Roosevelt’s My Day, Vol. II: The Postwar Years; Her Acclaimed Columns, 1945–1952* (New York, 1990), p. 36.

⁴³Lash, *Years Alone*, pp. 114–15.

⁴⁴Lash, *Years Alone*, p. 109.

any more than we are." If the U.S. did need to play any military role, she also minimized the importance of that commitment: "our allied Chiefs of Staff could work out some form of military defense for Palestine which would not mean an increase in manpower."⁴⁵

Mrs. Roosevelt's primary focus, though, remained a commitment to open access for European Jews seeking to go to Palestine. Nevertheless, it is important to note that she did not, at first, support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.⁴⁶ She was more concerned with the immediate need for a safe haven for Holocaust survivors than with the political future of the territory. At the end of 1946, she favored the solution of a United Nations trusteeship over the area. By 1947, when the future of Palestine had been turned over to the UN by the British mandate authorities, Mrs. Roosevelt was in favor of a Jewish homeland *in* Palestine, but was still not sure of partitioning the land into separate Arab and Jewish states. But even with some ambivalence, once the majority report coming out of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) called for partition, she believed that if the UN was to have any influence on the situation, the best proposal must now be along the lines of the majority report. (Mrs. Roosevelt was, nevertheless, intolerant of extreme politicking on the issue. When *The Nation Associates* sent out a letter criticizing the United States' role and charging Harry Truman with yielding to the Arabs, Mrs. Roosevelt withdrew as chair of the association's dinner and asked for her name to be removed from the letterhead.⁴⁷) The key turning point in Mrs. Roosevelt's thinking seemed to be in November 1947 when the majority report from UNSCOP was approved by the General Assembly of the organization. By this vote, the UN endorsed partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. Roosevelt's support for the UN was so great that she considered partition of Palestine a test of the new organization.⁴⁸

Over the next six months, Mrs. Roosevelt consistently argued in correspondence with President Harry Truman and Secretary of State George Marshall that the United States had to work to implement partition or risk damaging the UN.⁴⁹ Moreover, she argued, it was now the responsibility of

⁴⁵ER, "My Day," 22 June 1946, in Emblidge, *ER's My Day*, p. 65.

⁴⁶Lash's discussion in *Years Alone* of the evolution of ER's thinking on this issue is good, esp. pp. 110–137. Also, Lash, *A Friend's Memoir*, p. 304.

⁴⁷Lash, *Years Alone*, p. 124.

⁴⁸Lash, *Years Alone*, pp. 124–5.

⁴⁹See for example, ER to Truman, 29 January 1948, file ER (2), President's Secretary's Files, box 322, Truman Library.

the United States—with its modern military equipment—to enforce the partition plan.⁵⁰ Her pressure on the president and the secretary was steady, and she even threatened to resign her position on the American delegation to the UN when she believed that the United States was backing away from partition. Her priorities remained consistent, writing to Marshall, “My greatest concern is for the UN even though I also have concern for upholding what I think is a moral obligation [by the U.S. to support a Jewish homeland].”⁵¹

This overarching concern for the UN was even reflected in Mrs. Roosevelt’s reaction to American recognition of the Jewish state in May 1948. Although Mrs. Roosevelt strenuously argued that the United States *should* recognize the new state right away, she objected to the surprise announcement just eleven minutes after the new state was established. She protested to both Truman and Marshall, because the White House had not warned the American delegation to the UN ahead of time and had therefore weakened the organization and the trust between its members.⁵²

In addition to Eleanor Roosevelt’s devotion to the UN, the November 1947 vote was also momentous because she shared the event with David Gurewitsch, her doctor and soon to be intimate friend. Soon thereafter, David Gurewitsch would become the most important person in Mrs. Roosevelt’s life. In fact, for the last three years of her life, she would share a town house in New York with Gurewitsch and his wife, Edna.

Eleanor Roosevelt met Gurewitsch, a physician, through Joseph Lash’s wife, Trude. She became one of Gurewitsch’s patients in 1945. Their friendship began when the two shared a long-delayed flight to Switzerland in November 1947. Mrs. Roosevelt was on her way to Geneva to chair a meeting of the United Nations Commission of Human Rights. Gurewitsch was going to

⁵⁰Lash, *Years Alone*, p. 127.

⁵¹ER argued that this moral obligation grew out of the American acceptance of the Balfour Declaration and “our tacit agreement . . . by allowing capital to be spent and people to settle in the Palestine area” (ER to Marshall, 22 March 1948). Her exchange of letters with Truman and Marshall in March reveal her great displeasure with U.S. policy on Palestine and included an offer to resign her post at the UN. See also, ER to Harry Truman, 22 and 26 March 1948, Truman to ER, 25 March 1948, all in file ER (2), President’s Secretary’s Files, box 322, Truman Library.

⁵²ER to Truman, 16 May 1948, ER (2), Personal Series, President’s Secretary’s Files, box 322, Truman Library. In the final days of the mandate, ER advised the president that the U.S. should recognize the new Jewish state promptly and consistently (ER to Truman, 11 May 1948, file ER, Personal Series, President’s Secretary’s Files, box 322, Truman Library).

a tuberculosis sanatorium in Davos, Switzerland. Mrs. Roosevelt had invited the doctor to fly with her when she heard that he was ill and believed that she might be of help to him on the trip. The two had many days to get acquainted with stops for engine trouble and bad weather in Newfoundland, Canada and Shannon, Ireland. By the time they landed in Switzerland, they had become close friends. They discussed everything from their childhoods to politics. Soon after they arrived in Europe, they began an intimate correspondence that would continue for the rest of Mrs. Roosevelt's life.⁵³

In addition to the emotional significance of their flight, Gurewitsch recalled that he and Mrs. Roosevelt shared a political milestone as well. Gurewitsch wrote in his journal that before take-off, he, Mrs. Roosevelt, and a group of people on the plane were listening "intensely" to the live vote going on in the UN General Assembly for the partition of Palestine. Gurewitsch recorded that Mrs. Roosevelt had worked to get the U.S. to vote for the resolution and that when the vote was over, they were all "elated."⁵⁴ Thus, as Mrs. Roosevelt and Gurewitsch lay the foundations for their close friendship, they shared the experience of the dramatic broadcast of the UN vote. Their newfound intimacy was cemented by their common cause.

Gurewitsch was 18 years younger than Mrs. Roosevelt and from a very different background. While Mrs. Roosevelt came of age in an elite WASP world of the late 19th century, Gurewitsch was born of Russian Jewish parents, his father a philosopher, his mother a doctor and early physical therapist. He did not have the "deep religious approach to life of his mother," but he keenly felt his Jewish identity.⁵⁵ He joined a Zionist organization as a boy, and as an adult went to Jerusalem to work in the Hadassah hospital and on a kibbutz in the Galilee.⁵⁶ Before he left to further his medical studies elsewhere, he bought a piece of land on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. His wife later reported that "[h]e felt he had roots in Palestine and hoped one day to return."⁵⁷ (His mother, too, was attracted to the land of Zion and considered the possibility of moving to Israel in the 1950s.⁵⁸) He moved to the United States in

⁵³For more on this meeting, see Edna P. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls: The Friendship of Eleanor Roosevelt and David Gurewitsch* (New York, 2002), p. 6. Also, a more reserved account is found in A. David Gurewitsch, *Her Day*, pp. 27–28.

⁵⁴Quoted in E. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls*, p. 13.

⁵⁵D. Gurewitsch, *Her Day*, p. 29.

⁵⁶E. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls*, p. 18.

⁵⁷E. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls*, p. 18.

⁵⁸ER helped to facilitate professional contacts for Maria Gurewitsch (ER to D. Gur-

1934, and proceeded to build his medical career in physical therapy, becoming a specialist in poliomyelitis. Edna Gurewitsch observed that his field “had to have connected them [Gurewitsch and Mrs. Roosevelt] from the start. Not only was he attentive and sympathetic, he was also a person who thoroughly understood the nature and complexities of this grim illness and her ordeal in coping with it.”⁵⁹

Letters between Eleanor Roosevelt and David Gurewitsch leave no doubt of the emotional intensity that animated their relationship, especially in the first few months of friendship. While most observers have made it clear that the relationship was not consummated, and the love that each felt for the other was different in nature, it was all but a physical relationship. Joe Lash later observed that Mrs. Roosevelt clearly knew the limits of her relationship with David Gurewitsch (and with Joe himself): “she understood she was not first in his [David’s] life, and that the condition of being allowed to love him, as in the case of Earl [Miller, bodyguard and companion in the 1930s] and myself, was to befriend and draw in the women to whom he was and would be romantically attracted. She was prepared to pay the price.”⁶⁰ David Gurewitsch’s second wife, Edna Gurewitsch, agreed that the love Mrs. Roosevelt felt for Joe and David was different than the love they each felt for her. But she also believed that Mrs. Roosevelt’s feelings for David were deeper and more passionate. Edna Gurewitsch would write later that, “David and Mrs. Roosevelt found that they needed each other. . . . Above all, he was the one who eased her loneliness and gave her the tenderness . . . for which she had always longed. On her part, Mrs. Roosevelt fortified David’s confidence, advised him about practical matters and impractical love affairs.”⁶¹ David Gurewitsch believed that he and Eleanor Roosevelt had much in common, growing up fatherless and with a strong sense of service to others. Moreover, he wrote that “[e]ach of us was shy, felt somewhat ‘outside’ of the established norms, and essentially lonely.”⁶²

ewitsch, 28 March 1955; Lash, *Love Eleanor*, p. 427).

⁵⁹E. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls*, p. 20.

⁶⁰Lash, *A World of Love*, p. 269. Lash clearly felt a certain jealousy toward David, as even Lash admitted to his diary in 1959: “I must say that being thrust aside for David was one of the hardest things to bear these past ten years” (p. 507) Also, author interview with Edna Gurewitsch, 13 May 2003.

⁶¹E. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls*, p. 6. Gurewitsch disagreed with Joe Lash’s assessment that he was ever “thrust aside for David” since ER did not love them in the same way (p. 290, fn).

⁶²D. Gurewitsch, *Her Day*, p. 29.

After the flight to Switzerland and through the summer of 1948, David Gurewitsch and Mrs. Roosevelt kept up a frequent, heartfelt correspondence. Gurewitsch, for example, praised Mrs. Roosevelt's book manuscript (*This I Remember*) and wrote that it brought him closer to her, and "tears into my eyes." He signs off, "My warm devotion and my love. David."⁶³ The intimate letters continued over a period of months, focusing on personal issues, with the intermittent interjection of political discussions. For her part, Mrs. Roosevelt frequently wrote to David with forthright declarations of her love. In the spring, she concluded,

The people I love mean more to me than all the public things even if you do think that public affairs should be my chief vocation. I only do the public things because I really love all people, and I only *love* all people because there are a few people who I love dearly and who matter to me above everything else. These are not so many, and of them, you are now one.⁶⁴

By the end of her life, Mrs. Roosevelt's love did not diminish, and David was indeed part of her family, albeit without blood or matrimonial ties. She wrote to him in 1962, "Above all others, you are the one to whom my heart is tied."⁶⁵

There were many similarities in the relationships Mrs. Roosevelt had with Lash and Gurewitsch. They were both younger men with whom she had a passionate attraction, and close bond. They were both assimilated Jews who were not religiously observant. Both men married non-Jewish women and raised Christian children. (Gurewitsch's second wife and daughter were Jewish.) Both Lash and Gurewitsch were liberals and Zionist supporters. These two Jewish men were, by all accounts, Mrs. Roosevelt's closest postwar friends. They shared love and affection, and political outlooks.

In Gurewitsch's correspondence with Mrs. Roosevelt, he did not hide his great interest in Israel, and wrote to her of his intense criticism of British policies in Palestine. She, in turn, freely discussed the issue with him. Edna Gurewitsch later observed, "Aware of how deeply the survival of Israel concerned David, Mrs. Roosevelt gave him her news on the subject." For example, Mrs. Roosevelt wrote of her favorable impressions upon her first meeting in May

⁶³Gurewitsch to ER, 11 January 1948, David and Edna Gurewitsch, 1947–1952 file, Eleanor Roosevelt General Correspondence, box 3297, Roosevelt Library.

⁶⁴Cited in E. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls*, epigraph (From letter ER to Gurewitsch, 17 April 1948).

⁶⁵Cited in E. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls*, p.3.

1948 with Golda Meir (who had been introduced to her by Henry Morgenthau). She told Gurewitsch that Meir was “[a] woman of great strength and calm and for me she symbolizes the best spirit of Palestine.”⁶⁶

In her correspondence with Gurewitsch, Mrs. Roosevelt continued a pattern of discussing politics, including Palestine and Israel, which was clear in her correspondence with Joe Lash. In Eleanor Roosevelt’s close friendship with Lash, the two not only shared personal confidences and experiences, but frequently discussed the political issues of the day. This is not surprising, since Mrs. Roosevelt was deeply interested in politics and a consummate politician. It is clear, though, that regarding Palestine and Israel, she wrote with an assumption of agreement between her and both Lash and Gurewitsch. They all supported the partition resolution and took the side of the Jews in the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁶⁷

Once Israel was established, Eleanor Roosevelt became a champion of the Zionist experiment. She was an ardent admirer of Israel and its people as well as a critic of Israel’s Arab neighbors. It is significant that her support for the new state grew well beyond her support of UN legitimacy or her compassion for homeless war refugees. She used her political influence on Israel’s behalf many times. For example, in late 1948, she lobbied Washington officials not to support a proposed peace plan which would have given the Negev desert to the Arabs instead of the Jews. In this case as in many others in subsequent years, she based her argument, in part, on what she believed to be the great drive and initiative of the Israelis. Of the Negev, she wrote to one friend, “I imagine that the Jews are the only people who would be energetic enough to develop it.” Similarly, she concluded that the Israelis would soon help to de-

⁶⁶ER to D. Gurewitsch, 26 May 1948, Letters from ER to A. David and Edna Gurewitsch, 1947–1962 [author used typewritten transcripts of ER letters to DG; separate files are not labeled], Gurewitsch Papers, Roosevelt Library. Worried that Israel might not survive without assistance in May 1948, David Gurewitsch observed, “The Jews in Palestine are no communists. A quick show of support in the form of money, arms and quick release and transportation of suitable D.P.s [displaced persons] has to be organized if Palestine is not to become a Czechoslovakia in the middle of the English-American sphere. . .” (E. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls*, p. 30).

⁶⁷For examples, see citations of letters in Lash, *A World of Love*, ER to Gurewitsch 25 February 1948 (p. 254), ER to Gurewitsch 7 March 1948 (p. 255), ER to Gurewitsch 18 March 1948 (p. 256), ER to David 20 May 1948, ER to Lash 16 October 1948 (p. 286), ER to Lash 5 November 1948 (p. 290), ER to Joe and Trude Lash 9 July 1957 (pp. 466–7), ER to Lash 16 July 1957 (p. 467).

velop the whole region: “The Jews in their own country are doing marvels and should, once the refugee problem is settled, help all the Arab countries.”⁶⁸

In 1952, she saw development in Israel first-hand when she toured parts of the Middle East and Asia. First invited to India in 1950 by Prime Minister Nehru, Mrs. Roosevelt went on her tour of what she called the “Awakening East” partly to rectify what she felt to be her ignorance of the region.⁶⁹ She drew a sharp contrast between the accomplishments of the Arabs and the Israelis, identifying strongly with the Israelis. Crossing the border between Jordan and Israel in the middle of Jerusalem was, she wrote, “like breathing the air of the United States again. . . . [O]nce I was through the barrier I felt that I was among people . . . dedicated to fulfilling a purpose.”⁷⁰ She wrote home to Trude Lash, “I felt at home with the people of Israel.”⁷¹

She noted then and in subsequent years that the Israelis had many problems of development and integration of immigrants, but that they were ably tackling these issues. She was impressed with the growth, development, and strength of Israelis and their country. On one of her trips to Israel in 1959, she wrote back to Gurewitsch and his wife, it was “astounding to see how the port [of Elath] is growing.” And regarding a neighboring *kibbutz*: it was “literally reclaiming the desert and making it bloom”⁷² She idealized *kibbutzim* as places where people ceased to be greedy and got all of their needs from communal production.⁷³ In her descriptions of places that she saw in her several trips to Israel, Mrs. Roosevelt often wrote back to her friends and in her column about the beauty of the landscape and the astounding growth from one trip to the next. Her descrip-

⁶⁸Letters quoted in Lash, *Years Alone*, pp. 135–137. See also, ER’s Address to the Nation Associates Conference, New York, 25 May 1952. Originally printed in *The Nation* (7 June 1952): 174, 556–557, reprinted in Allida M. Black, ed. and introduction, *What I Hope to Leave Behind: The Essential Essays of Eleanor Roosevelt*, (New York, 1995), pp. 597–598.

⁶⁹Eleanor Roosevelt, *India and the Awakening East* (New York, 1953), pp. ix–xvi.

⁷⁰ER, *Autobiography*, pp. 326–7.

⁷¹Quoted in Lash, *Years Alone*, p. 137.

⁷²ER to Edna and David Gurewitsch 25 March 1959, file Letters from Eleanor Roosevelt to A. David Gurewitsch 1947–1962, Gurewitsch Papers, Roosevelt Library.

⁷³This comment was in one of her columns describing her conversation with Yugoslavia’s Marshall Tito who had observed that true communism—an absence of greed and the fulfillment of all needs from communal production—did not yet exist anywhere in the world (ER, “My Day,” 12 February 1955, in Emblidge, *Eleanor Roosevelt’s My Day*, Vol. III, pp. 55–56).

tions often emphasized the active educational institutions in the country and the voracious appetite of Israelis for improvement and education.⁷⁴

In particular, she praised the efforts of Israeli leaders, especially Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion who in her eyes “typifies the pioneer in Israel, a man who felt he must live on the soil and make things grow and be as self-sufficient as possible.”⁷⁵ Her praise was sometimes effusive. Following a 1959 visit to Israel, she declared, “What a remarkable man he is! He gives you a feeling of resourcefulness, courage, and flexibility in his thinking, which is quite extraordinary.”⁷⁶ He remained “vigorous” even as he aged, she observed in 1962.⁷⁷ She also discussed other Israeli leaders such as Golda Meir and Abba Eban in her writing. She observed of the members of government whom she met in 1959, “They all seemed to possess strong personalities, with good qualities of leadership, and this perhaps is the distinguishing feature that accounts for their success in meeting problems that must at times seem insoluble.”⁷⁸ She used similar descriptions of the Israeli character in general. For example upon a 1959 visit to a youth center named for her, Mrs. Roosevelt remarked on the youths singing and dance in bare feet in a cold wind: “I thought again what hardy youngsters they were.”⁷⁹ Many of her character assessments of Israelis tended to highlight their masculinity—a view she shared with other friends of Israel in the postwar years.⁸⁰ In addition to her description of self-sufficient pioneers, she also wrote of heroic warriors who had defied the odds to establish their state in 1948.⁸¹

At home, in the late 1940s and 1950s, Mrs. Roosevelt showed her devotion to the Jewish state by lending her considerable political clout to Israeli (and Jewish) causes. The examples are numerous.⁸² In the early 1950s, she served

⁷⁴For example see ER, “My Day,” 6 April 1959, in Emblidge, *ER’s My Day*, Vol. III, pp. 201–202.

⁷⁵ER, “My Day,” 1 April 1955, in Emblidge, *ER’s My Day*, Vol. III, p. 58. See also Lash, *Years Alone*, p. 137.

⁷⁶ER, “My Day,” 8 April 1959 in Emblidge, *ER’s My Day*, Vol. III, p. 203.

⁷⁷ER, “My Day,” 5 March 1962, in Emblidge, *ER’s My Day*, Vol. III, p. 300.

⁷⁸ER, “My Day,” 8 April 1959, in Emblidge, *ER’s My Day*, Vol. III, p. 203.

⁷⁹ER, “My Day,” 6 April 1959, in Emblidge, *ER’s My Day*, Vol. III, p. 202.

⁸⁰Michelle Mart, “Tough Guys and American Cold War Policy: Images of Israel, 1948–1960,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Summer 1996): 357–380.

⁸¹See, for example, ER, *India and the Awakening East*, pp. 38–45.

⁸²These examples are taken from a survey of files in Eleanor Roosevelt’s General Correspondence, Roosevelt Library.

on the advisory council of the American Financial and Development Corporation for Israel (State of Israel Bonds), and she spoke at its functions. She was one of the speakers at a large "Salute to Israel Day" at Yankee Stadium in 1956. She was a patron and supporter of many organizations and their events, such as the Israel Orphan Asylum, Jewish National Fund cultural events, Hadasah, the American Christian Palestine Committee, the United Jewish Appeal, and the Youth Aliyah Organization. Mrs. Roosevelt was particularly fond of this last organization, dedicated to resettling the children of World War II in Israel and preparing them for a productive life; she lent her name to the cause and helped with fundraising. She spoke at a number of American Jewish organizations, including many chapters of B'nai B'rith. In addition, she sat on the Board of Trustees of Brandeis University, a non-sectarian, Jewish-sponsored college, spoke at the school's convocation in 1950, and publicly praised the new university in her newspaper column. She also used her prestige to raise the profile of the school by broadcasting a weekly television talk show from its campus in the late 1950s ("Prospects of Mankind").

Along with her support for organizations and her speaking engagements, Mrs. Roosevelt also showed her support for Israel through her writing. She wrote essays in various books about Israel. These titles included, *The Mission of Israel*, *Youth Aliyah: Past, Present, and Future*, and *This is Our Strength*.⁸³ She also wrote articles concerning Israel and Jews, most often in her regular newspaper column, "My Day," but also in other publications, such as *Midstream* and *Jewish Heritage*.⁸⁴

In her writings, Mrs. Roosevelt praised those aspects of a liberal, progressive Israel that most impressed her. For example, she wrote of the school system in the country, with its "vocational and educational training [which] imbues its charges with the fervor and sense of responsibility without which Israel's young citizens would find it difficult to accept the hardship and toil needed to make the desert bloom."⁸⁵ She praised Israel's potential as well: "The people within the country are indomitable in the way they meet every situation no matter how difficult. . . . [Israel] will become a great nation, not only helping their own people but the people in the other developing nations of the

⁸³See Jacob Baal-Teshuva, ed., *The Mission of Israel* (New York, 1963); Moshe Kol, *Youth Aliyah: Past, Present, And Future* (Jerusalem, 1957); Henry M. Christman, ed., *This is Our Strength: Selected Papers of Golda Meir* (New York, 1962).

⁸⁴See for example, "Children of Israel," *Midstream: A Jewish Monthly Review*, Vol I (Fall 1955): 110–111; "Values to Live By," *Jewish Heritage*, Vol. 1 (Spring 1958): 44–45ff.

⁸⁵Kol, *Youth Aliyah*, p. 7.

world.”⁸⁶ Moreover, Mrs. Roosevelt saw a specific tie between Israeli development and New Deal liberalism; she argued that the “democratic socialism of the labor-Zionists might indeed become the model state that would promote an international New Deal.”⁸⁷ Even in the one area in which Israel was most obviously following a different path from modern, progressive nations—the separation of church and state—she remained hopeful about the future character of Israel. While she acknowledged that Israeli leaders felt the issue too controversial to face immediately, she concluded that “[w]hen it is [time], I am confident that there will be a separation of powers as there is in the United States.”⁸⁸ Meanwhile, she still judged the culture of Israel to be more modern and secular than that of the Arab societies: “I had no feeling that religion was the controlling factor it was in the Arab countries that I visited. Israel is a secular state, a democracy.”⁸⁹

In contrast to her opinion of Israel and Jews, Mrs. Roosevelt criticized many aspects of the Arab countries, including their politics, economics, culture, and values. Long before she became convinced that the establishment of a Jewish state was desirable, she viewed Arabs as different from Jews and other Westerners. While she observed in mid 1946 that Arabs must surely feel mercy for Jewish displaced persons, she also wrote that because they were “a nomadic people leading simple lives,” they were anxious about the potential competition and higher standard of living of the Jews coming into Palestine.⁹⁰ Even before Israel was founded, she described the relationship between the United States and the Arabs as strained. For example, in a letter to Secretary of State Marshall criticizing the American lack of leadership in the UN on impending partition of the Palestine mandate, Mrs. Roosevelt charged that “the Arabs are taking advantage of us and of the situation as a whole.”⁹¹ And, soon

⁸⁶Baal-Teshuva, *The Mission of Israel*, p. 32.

⁸⁷Cook, “Turn Toward Peace,” p. 117.

⁸⁸ER, *Autobiography*, p. 327.

⁸⁹ER, *India and the Awakening East*, pp. 37–8.

⁹⁰ER, “My Day,” 22 June 1946 and 19 August 1946 in Emblidge, *ER’s My Day*, Vol. II, pp. 65, 71.

⁹¹ER to Marshall, 13 March 1948. Two months earlier, she had advised the president that at the request of the UN, the U.S. should end the arms embargo “to provide such things as are essential to the control of the Arabs” (ER to Truman, 29 January 1948, file ER [2]; Personal files, President’s Secretary’s Files, box 322, Truman Library).

after Israel was founded, in a December 1948 memo to Harry Truman, she advised the president that “[t]he Arabs have to be handled with strength.”⁹²

Mrs. Roosevelt’s opinions of Arabs were reflected in her observations from her first visit to the Middle East in 1952. While she celebrated Israeli efforts at development and modernization, she focused on the lack of economic development and westernization among Arabs (e.g., “Their methods of farming are unbelievably primitive”).⁹³ She noted the illiteracy, inefficiency, and disorganization of Arab society as well as the selfishness of many of its leaders, writing to her friend Trude Lash, “The Arab countries are awakening but oh! So slowly and painfully!”⁹⁴ Drawing the conclusion that the Arabs were “*bitterly nationalistic*” and wholly inflexible when it came to Israel,⁹⁵ she observed that Arab leaders and communists were responsible for the continuing Arab refugee problem, arguing that they wanted to keep the refugees “stirred up” as a weapon against Israel instead of resettling them in Arab countries.⁹⁶ She was convinced that communists and Arab leaders had “trained” refugees to say “We want to go home”: “You know it is a slogan, because they say it in unison.”⁹⁷ Especially in light of the Arab attacks against the new country of Israel, Mrs. Roosevelt laid the blame for the creation of the refugee problem in 1948 at the feet of Arab leaders and the British.⁹⁸ At the same time, she contrasted the ability of the Jews to withstand the hardships of refugee camps with that of the Arabs. She observed that the Jews had tried as best they could to make their quarters “homes” and had “kept their hopes alive.” The Arab camps, on the

⁹²Memo for the President, 28 December 1948, file ER (2), Personal files, President’s Secretary’s Files, box 322, Truman Library.

⁹³ER, *India and the Awakening East*, p. 6.

⁹⁴Lash, *Years Alone*, p. 137.

⁹⁵ER, *Autobiography*, p. 325.

⁹⁶ER did not have a longstanding or very detailed knowledge of Arab countries. For example, she wrote in 1952 that Iran was one of the Arab countries in which the Palestinian refugees could be resettled (Lash, *Years Alone*, p. 137. Also, ER to Mrs. [D. K.] Bartlett 25 April 1952, file Israel, ER General Correspondence, box 3309, Roosevelt Library).

⁹⁷ER, “First Need: Resettlement,” *The Nation*, No. 174 (7 June 1952): 552–557, originally, Address to the Nation Associates Conference, New York 25 May 1952. Reprinted in Allida Black, ed., *What I Hope to Leave Behind: The Essential Essays of Eleanor Roosevelt* (New York, 1995), p. 597.

⁹⁸ER, *India and the Awakening East*, p. 32.

other hand, were the “least hopeful” places that she had seen where there was nothing to do and no efforts were made to “preserve the skills of the people.”⁹⁹

This reaction contrasted with how she perceived Jews living in refugee camps in 1945 and 1946; the many pleas she heard then to go to Palestine convinced her of the justice of the Zionist cause. She pitied the Arab refugees and their miserable plight, but believed that Israel was not to blame for their situation and that, in any case, the Arabs had to “stop looking backward.”¹⁰⁰ In general, she concluded that the Arabs were “not very logical,” while the Israelis were “more objective.” Mrs. Roosevelt judged the Arabs to be overly nationalistic and emotional—“because their freedom is a new thing.”¹⁰¹ Illogically, she ignored the fact that the Israelis were also strongly nationalistic in their Zionism and also newly independent. By labeling Arabs as emotional, she weakened them in the context of Cold War political discourse, making them seem different from the U.S. and its allies.¹⁰²

Mrs. Roosevelt found another example of the Arabs’ emotionalism in their understanding of the 1917 Balfour Declaration. In *India and the Awakening East*, she described how she had learned during World War II about the Balfour Declaration from Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann, who explained to her that it guaranteed the creation of a Jewish state. Mrs. Roosevelt implied that she agreed with Weizmann’s interpretation as the objective description of the British policy, but noted that the Arabs who disagreed were turning this into an emotional issue: there are some “emotional questions about which feelings run so high that neither side can concede even the possibility of another point of view.”¹⁰³ Similarly, she wrote following her 1952 trip that she “could talk quite calmly with the Israeli people and that their extraordinary successes give them a kind of strength which does not exist in the Arab countries.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ER, *Autobiography*, p. 326. Also see her column on Arab refugees, “My Day,” 23 March 1956 in Emblidge, *ER’s My Day*, Vol. III, pp. 92–3 and ER, *India and the Awakening East*, pp. 28–31.

¹⁰⁰ER, “My Day,” 16 March 1956 in Emblidge, *ER’s My Day*, Vol. III, p. 89.

¹⁰¹ER, “First Need: Resettlement,” p. 598.

¹⁰²In recent years, there has been much discussion of the importance of gender as a lens through which to understand Cold War discourse. For examples, see, Mart, “Tough Guys”; Emily Rosenberg, “‘Foreign Affairs’ After World War II: Connecting Sexual and International Politics,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Winter 1994): 59–70; Frank Costigliola, “The Nuclear Family: Tropes of Gender and Pathology in the Western Alliance,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Spring 1997): 163–183.

¹⁰³ER, *India and the Awakening East*, pp. 25–27.

¹⁰⁴ER to Mrs. D. K. Bartlett 25 April 1952, file Israel, ER General Correspondence,

Eleanor Roosevelt's assessment of the Arabs and Israelis changed little through the decade. Looking back on her trip to Israel and other countries in the Middle East in 1959, she concluded that the biggest difference between the Arab countries, Iran, and Israel was in "atmosphere." The young people of Israel, she believed, wanted to build up their country and worked with "gusto, with all their strength, with exhilaration . . . [with] faith and hope and conviction. It is the absence of these qualities in the other countries that is so disheartening."¹⁰⁵

Eleanor Roosevelt's low opinion of the Arabs was reciprocated. For example, on her 1952 trip through the region, American officials observed that "[s]he was received everywhere with great cordiality except in the Arab states."¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, Mrs. Roosevelt's recollection six years later of her reception by the Arabs was more benign. While she acknowledged that she "had always been outspoken in my support of the State of Israel," she found the cordon of soldiers to protect her assigned by the Lebanese government unnecessary. She concluded that "there were no signs of hostility," and prevailed upon the government to remove the highly visible escort. She did note that her position on Israel was unpopular, as the Syrians "badgered me with questions about why I should support the Israeli cause."¹⁰⁷

Throughout the 1950s, Mrs. Roosevelt's support of the Jewish state grew stronger, and she increasingly viewed the Arab-Israeli conflict as a reflection of the Cold War tensions in the world. Mrs. Roosevelt, like other support-

box 3309, Roosevelt Library.

¹⁰⁵ER, *Autobiography*, p. 402.

¹⁰⁶In contrast, reaction from the Israelis to ER's visit was enthusiastic, and the secretary observed that "her visit to Israel had a tonic effect on public morale and was an unqualified success from the standpoint of United States interest and prestige." Her schedule also reflected her priorities. Although she spent six days in Israel, she took just four days to visit three Arab countries (Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan) (Dean Acheson Memo for the President and Schedule of Mrs. Roosevelt's Trip to the Middle East and Asia, 10 April 1952, file E. Roosevelt, President's Secretary's Files, box 321, Truman Library).

¹⁰⁷ER, *Autobiography*, p. 325. In her book written just one year after her trip, ER wrote that the hostility she felt was directed toward outsiders in general; of her landing in Beirut, she observed: "There was no doubt that the feeling against foreigners really did exist. Behind the kindness and courtesy of the government officials . . . I was fully conscious of a certain amount of hostility" (*India and the Awakening East*, pp. 2 [and 3]). Most historical accounts agree with all the observers except hers, stressing that the former first lady was greeted with icy cordiality and hostility by the Arabs. See for example, Scharf, *First Lady*, p. 158).

ers of Israel, frequently argued that the small state deserved American support since it was “one of the strongholds of democratic government in the region.”¹⁰⁸ She used other Israeli rhetoric when she emphasized the small size of the state (“even smaller than the state of New Jersey”) which was embattled on all sides.¹⁰⁹ As a reflection of her support for Israel, she repeatedly called for economic and military aid for the Jewish state and used her influence to lobby officials in Washington and to sway public opinion through her column and articles. Beginning with the UN’s endorsement of partition back in 1947, Mrs. Roosevelt argued that the U.S. must see that the Jews get the military equipment they needed. It was, she concluded, the “only thing that will hold the Arabs in check.”¹¹⁰

She continued to lobby for Israeli military aid, even after the Democratic administration had left office. In 1953, she wrote to President Eisenhower and Assistant Secretary of State Henry Byroade, for example, arguing that military and other aid to Israel should not be lessened, because “the Arab states do not espouse the cause of the free world and . . . Israel does.”¹¹¹ In 1955, she explained her concern to Bernard Baruch, arguing that the “Soviets intended to use the Middle East as a corridor to India and Africa.” That year, she convinced Harry Truman and others to join her in petitioning President Eisenhower for arms for Israel.¹¹² Early in 1956, she declared to readers of her column that “Israel is the one place in the Near East where we can be sure that life is being made worth living and where freedom will be fought for . . . if . . . Israel remains free, the whole Near East may remain free.”¹¹³ By the time the Suez crisis erupted in October 1956, she bemoaned American criticism of Israeli actions, arguing that the U.S. was thus put on the side of the Soviet Union and the “dictator of Egypt” (referring to Egypt’s leader, Gamel Abdul Nasir).

¹⁰⁸ER, “My Day” 28 January 1954, in Emblidge, *ER’s My Day*, Vol III, pp. 30–31.

¹⁰⁹ER, *India and the Awakening East*, p. 38.

¹¹⁰Lash, *Years Alone*, p. 127.

¹¹¹ER to Byroade, 6 April 1953, LM 060, National Archives II, College Park MD; ER to Eisenhower, 4 April 1953, also reply, Eisenhower to ER, 16 April 1953, file Mrs. FDR, Name Series, Whitman File, box 30, Dwight David Eisenhower Library, Abilene KS. She added in both letters the argument often made by Israelis that if the U.S. was truly trying to equalize the aid going to the Israelis and the Arabs, than the Mutual Security funds going to Arab countries for the resettlement of the refugees and the oil royalties paid by private companies to the Arab states had to be counted in the total.

¹¹²Cook, “Turn Toward Peace,” p. 116.

¹¹³ER, “My Day,” 24 February 1956 in Emblidge, *ER’s My Day*, Vol. III, p. 85.

Mrs. Roosevelt was never reluctant to make public her views of the conflict. For example, following a dispute among Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States in early 1957 over access to the Gulf of Aqaba, Mrs. Roosevelt wrote in her column, "I hope this incident with Saudi Arabia will teach us that we have no friends in countries like this and can only hope for respect—and respect is not gained through weakness."¹¹⁴

Furthermore, she made the argument that the United States should not send any arms to the Arab states because there was no way that Americans could prevent use of the weapons against Israel. As support for this position in 1954, she cited in one of her columns the "shocking statement" by Saudi Arabia's new king that he would be willing to sacrifice 10 million Arabs to eliminate Israel. She concluded that the king had made what was "tantamount to a verbal declaration of war." In addition, she reminded her readers that both Egypt and Syria were under dictatorships.¹¹⁵

Mrs. Roosevelt's lobbying for arms supplies was less than successful. Before he left office, Harry Truman had disagreed with her, turning down Israeli requests for arms in light of the volatile political situation in the Middle East. Eisenhower at first continued his predecessor's policies, though he secretly encouraged the sale of French and Canadian military jets to Israel. By the summer of 1956, in the midst of the Suez crisis, Eisenhower released to Israel a shipment of helicopters, half-tracks, and machine guns as part of an effort to balance Egypt's new acquisitions. Israel's subsequent requests for more extensive arms shipments were denied; Eisenhower and Dulles, reluctant to destabilize the region, believed that Israel was already capable of defeating any Arab attack.¹¹⁶

By the time that Eleanor Roosevelt became more supportive of Israel as a political cause, so too had her Jewish friends. For example, even before the founding of the state, Elinor and Henry Morgenthau, Jr. became active Zionists. And they sometimes used their connections with Mrs. Roosevelt to further the Zionist cause. For example, following the UN vote approving the partition of Palestine in November 1947, the Morgenthaus sent a telegram to

¹¹⁴ See two "My Day" columns in Emblidge, *ER's My Day*, Vol. III: 2 November 1956 (p. 108) and 16 April 1957 (p. 127); also see 8 January 1957 (pp. 116–17).

¹¹⁵ ER, "My Day," 28 January 1954, in Emblidge, *ER's My Day*, Vol. III, pp. 30–31.

¹¹⁶ Peter L. Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1945–1961* (Chapel Hill, 2004), pp. 81–2, 189–90, 197, 229–30, 234.

Eleanor, “Profoundly grateful for your understanding and consistent leadership on Palestine Affectionate greetings [sic] Elinor Henry”¹¹⁷

After Israel was created, Henry Morgenthau, Jr. remained an active Zionist, chairing the board of governors of the American Financial and Development Corporation for Israel (State of Israel Bonds)—and he continued a close friendship with Mrs. Roosevelt, corresponding and visiting frequently. It was at his invitation that she consented to serve on the organization’s advisory council. She made a very public bond purchase and with it issued a press release celebrating the third anniversary of Israel: Israel “aroused the admiration of freedom-loving people everywhere. Americans have been stirred by the courage and faith that has gone into the building of a new democracy in the face of great hardships.”¹¹⁸ Morgenthau also chaired the United Jewish Appeal, and Mrs. Roosevelt looked to him as the authority on issues of refugees and immigration. For example, she wrote to him concerning a plea she received from a refugee in an Israeli camp about how to get settled in the new country faster.¹¹⁹

Eleanor Roosevelt also answered the requests of other friends active in Jewish and Israeli causes. Henry Morgenthau III probably increased her involvement with Brandeis University. As a staff member of WGBH in Boston, he persuaded her to host a regular talk show from the campus each week. As Brandeis president Abram Sachar later observed, the program helped increase the visibility and reputation of the school.¹²⁰ She served as the honorary president of the Women’s Division of the American Jewish Congress, with the encouragement of her longtime friend Judge Justine Wise Polier.¹²¹ She also answered the entreaty of Polier in 1956 when the Zionist leader came

¹¹⁷Telegram “Elinor Henry” to ER 30 November, file H-L Nov–Dec 1947, United Nations General Correspondence 1947, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, box 4565, Roosevelt Library.

¹¹⁸Henry Morgenthau Jr. to ER 19 March 1951 and Meyer Steinglass (Director of Public Relations) to Eleanor Roosevelt 11 June 1951 with attached press release, file American Finance and Development Corporation for Israel 1951–1952, ER General Correspondence, box 3250, Roosevelt Library.

¹¹⁹Morgenthau to ER, 12 April 1949, file Morgenthau, Henry Jr. and family and Morgenthau Foundation, 1945–1952, ER General Correspondence, box 3334, Roosevelt Library.

¹²⁰Abram Sachar (November 1978), Eleanor Roosevelt Oral History Project, box 5, Roosevelt Library.

¹²¹Justine Wise Polier to ER, 17 November 1949, file American Jewish Congress 1949–1952, ER General Correspondence, box 3250, Roosevelt Library.

to Mrs. Roosevelt upset that 10,000 Moroccan Jews assembled to go to Israel were being prevented from leaving. Coincidentally, the new Moroccan ambassador had recently called on Mrs. Roosevelt to convey the sultan's gratitude for Franklin Roosevelt's advice about water development years before. Mrs. Roosevelt wrote to the sultan, praising his dedication—like that of her husband—to helping people improve their lives; she then pleaded with the sultan to let the Jews leave. A few days later—whether due to her intervention or for the sultan's own reasons—the Jews were released.¹²² (Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Abba Eban was appreciative and wrote to her thanking her for her “statesmanlike and humanitarian action.”¹²³)

Other friends and acquaintances also kept Mrs. Roosevelt interested in and working on behalf of Israel. For example, when the Israeli Minister of Finance visited the U.S. in 1949, Mrs. Roosevelt agreed to have lunch with him at the behest of attorney Abba Schwartz. Some Israelis, similarly, remained in regular touch with her. For example, she exchanged correspondence and received invitations from Israeli Ambassador Abba Eban, and frequently visited with Golda Meir.¹²⁴

Mrs. Roosevelt's close friends often shared in—and reinforced—her fascination with Israel. For example, Trude Lash wrote home to Joe from her trip to Israel with Mrs. Roosevelt in 1955 enthusiastic and admiring about the Jewish state. She was taken with the beauty of the land, the friendliness of the people, and the development of the economy. She told her husband that “for every Jew who is unsure of his heritage and his jewishness [sic] this would be a good place to come to.” She regretted their departure from Israel, and was anxious to return again. Joe, for his part, wrote his wife that he envied her the trip.¹²⁵

And in the years after 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt's relationship with Israel continued to intersect with her relationship with David Gurewitsch. Gur-

¹²²Justine Wise Polier (December 1977), Eleanor Roosevelt Oral History Project, box 4, Roosevelt Library. Also see the letter reprinted in Lash, *Eleanor Roosevelt: The Years Alone*, appendix B, p. 339.

¹²³Eban to Eleanor Roosevelt 10 August 1956, file Eban, Abba c. 1954-56, ER General Correspondence, box 3422, Roosevelt Library.

¹²⁴File Abba Eban c. 1954-56, ER General Correspondence, box 3422, Roosevelt Library, and author interview with Edna Gurewitsch, May 2003.

¹²⁵The Lashes also had mutual friends and contacts in Israel; Trude found herself looking up people and conveying messages to others in Israel (Letters Trude Lash to Joe Lash 18 March 1955, 19 March 1955, 23 March 1955, 26 March 1955, and Joe Lash to Trude Lash 27 March 1955, file Lash, Joe and Trude, 1951-1986, ER General Correspondence, box 9, Roosevelt Library).

ewitsch accompanied her on her first trip to Israel in 1952. She journeyed to three Arab countries first, but since he was Jewish, he was unable to, and met her in Israel. It is quite possible that Mrs. Roosevelt's excitement at crossing over from Jordan to Israel—mentioned above—had something to do with Gurewitsch, who was waiting for her at the Mandelbaum Gate of the Old City. Gurewitsch wrote that it was an emotional moment for them both—for her because she “was intensely and passionately pro-Israel” and for him because he was returning after a 17-year absence. He observed, “No one who goes there escapes being caught up in the current of vitality—and Mrs. Roosevelt was no exception.”¹²⁶

On many political issues, including those involving Israel, Mrs. Roosevelt and Gurewitsch usually agreed. They were both sympathetic with and admiring of Israel. Edna Gurewitsch recalls that part of her husband's very strong Jewish identity was tied to Israel: “He was very emotionally attached to Jews. Half of the people he knew went to Palestine and settled. The other half came to America.” Israel, Edna Gurewitsch concludes, was “part of his heart.” Although Mrs. Roosevelt was not Jewish, Gurewitsch adds that she, too, came to love the country. David Gurewitsch's attachment to Israel was demonstrated in social and organizational affiliations, attending, for example, fund raising dinners for Israeli institutions. In addition, along with Mrs. Roosevelt, the Gurewitsches came to know important Israeli leaders such as Golda Meir, who visited with the three whenever she was in New York.¹²⁷

Although the Gurewitsches were strongly supportive of Israel, they were also assimilated American Jews who were not religious. This was already familiar to Mrs. Roosevelt from her friendships with Joe Lash and Henry Morgenthau. In her correspondence with Joe Lash and David Gurewitsch, for example, there are many references to mutual Christmas celebrations, as well as to Mrs. Roosevelt's many Christmas and Easter gifts for her Jewish friends.¹²⁸

¹²⁶His journal entry echoed ER's focus in her columns and letters on the development and energy of the Israelis in great contrast to the Arabs: “From an airplane and from our rooms in the King David Hotel one could easily discern the border [between the Arabs and the Jews]; the Israeli side was green, the Arab side brown and arid” (D. Gurewitsch, *Her Day*, p. 61).

¹²⁷Author interview with Edna Gurewitsch, May 2003.

¹²⁸For example, D. Gurewitsch to ER 21 and 24 December 1947, file Gurewitsch, David and Edna, 1947–1952, ER General Correspondence, box 3297, and E. Gurewitsch to ER 26 December 1959, file Gurewitsch, David and Edna, 1957–1962, ER General Correspondence, box 3556, Roosevelt Library.

She sent Edna Gurewitsch a Christmas tree to celebrate the holiday.¹²⁹ Thus, although her closest friends were Jewish, but not religious, she remained ignorant about Judaism. When a rabbi married David and Edna Gurewitsch in Mrs. Roosevelt's apartment in 1958, she panicked about what arrangements would be necessary. Judge Justine Polier recounts that Mrs. Roosevelt called her off the bench to inquire whether she had to go purchase red cushions for them to kneel upon. Polier teased her and assured her that no cushions were necessary.¹³⁰

Despite her lack of knowledge, Mrs. Roosevelt displayed an increasing interest in Judaism as she got older. Edna Gurewitsch reports that Mrs. Roosevelt attended Passover seders with her and her husband at the home of her (Edna's) Orthodox boss. Although Orthodox seders are lengthy, "Mrs. Roosevelt . . . wouldn't let us skip a word."¹³¹ Soon after Mrs. Roosevelt and the Gurewitsches had moved into their town house together in 1959, Mrs. Roosevelt produced a *mezuzah* which someone had sent to her as a gift. Mrs. Roosevelt said that if all agreed she would like to have it put up on their doorpost. It was put up complete with traditional prayers at a dinner party with Edna Gurewitsch's Jewish boss doing the honors. (Also in attendance was Nachman Karni, a colonel in the Israeli army and military attaché of the Israeli delegation to the UN.¹³²)

Mrs. Roosevelt's interest in Judaism built upon what her friends described as a deep sense of religiosity throughout her life.¹³³ It was clear, though, that her religious belief was grounded less in specific doctrine and practice than in a world view. For example, she carried with her a copy of the St. Francis of Assisi prayer which had been given to her by Lash in 1940 (and kept it on

¹²⁹Author interview with Edna Gurewitsch, May 2003.

¹³⁰Justine Wise Polier, 8 December 1977 interview, Eleanor Roosevelt Oral History Project, box 4, Roosevelt Library. Edna Gurewitsch's memory of the wedding preparations and the day were different than Polier's, although she does remember ER's offer of the cushions. She observed that ER's difficulty with the wedding had little to do with her knowledge or lack thereof of Jewish ritual. Gurewitsch wrote that ER was visibly upset that day; "She was pale" and "restrained" (E. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls*, p. 128, and author interview with Edna Gurewitsch, May 2003).

¹³¹Author interview with Edna Gurewitsch, May 2003.

¹³²E. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls*, p. 184.

¹³³For example, Trude Lash observed, "She was very religious. . . . [S]he had a strong belief in God" (Trude Lash [November 1977], Eleanor Roosevelt Oral History Project, box 3, Roosevelt Library).

her bedside table), saying that prayer “was not something to be recited only in church. It should be a continuous influence, something carried in the heart and mind all the time, shaping one’s active life.”¹³⁴ In 1940, she further tried to define her own religious beliefs to Lash, telling him that she had a strong “sense of purpose in the world [that] enabled one to carry on under the most discouraging circumstances.” She explained that for her, “Religion meant ‘love thy neighbor.’ That was the essential message of Christ.”¹³⁵

Along with what she carried in her heart, Mrs. Roosevelt made holiday celebrations an active part of her life, bestowing Easter gifts and holding elaborate annual Christmas celebrations. Edna Gurewitsch recalls that her cottage at Val-Kill was “beautifully decorated” and overflowing with presents for all her family and friends.¹³⁶ David Gurewitsch observed that “Christmas was the highlight of the Hyde Park [Val-Kill] year, and Mrs. Roosevelt began preparing for it virtually on January 2. Wherever she traveled she bought presents. . . . And every present was clearly labeled in her mind for a particular person.”¹³⁷ His wife agreed that Mrs. Roosevelt’s greatest joy in the holiday seemed to be giving to others: “it was a grand excuse to give people things.”¹³⁸

So Eleanor Roosevelt’s new-found interest in Judaism co-existed with her continuing enthusiasm for Christmas celebrations and her deeply felt religious outlook. It becomes clear, then, that her interest in Judaism had more to do with her friends and the Jewish people than with the religion itself. Here was a woman who had internalized the antisemitism of the social circles in which she grew up, but had, observers unanimously agree, shed all feelings of antisemitism in the postwar period. Abram Sachar noted that Mrs. Roosevelt

¹³⁴Lash, *Friend’s Memoir*, p. 80. Also, author’s interview with Edna Gurewitsch, May 2003.

¹³⁵ER also said that she enjoyed services in a beautiful church which gave her a feeling of the sublime (Lash, *Friend’s Memoir*, p. 150). ER was not fond of ritual, and it is unclear how often she attended services. Edna Gurewitsch recalled that “I never saw her in a church, ever.” Nevertheless, she remained a member of the family church in Hyde Park, and greatly admired the Reverend Gordon E. Kidd. She was, though, respectful of other’s attendance. Gurewitsch noted that when they traveled, if ER’s observant Catholic secretary Maureen Corr was with them, ER always wanted to know where the nearest Catholic church was when they checked into a hotel (author interview with Edna Gurewitsch, May 2003).

¹³⁶See discussion in E. Gurewitsch, *Kindred Souls*, pp. 174–5, 204.

¹³⁷D. Gurewitsch, *Her Day*, p. 56.

¹³⁸Author interview with Edna Gurewitsch, May 2003.

admired Jews, setting them apart as an extraordinary people.¹³⁹ She admired Jewish family life (which she felt to be extremely close) as well as what she thought of as a Jewish work ethic. Edna Gurewitsch observed that “[s]he was very protective and cared for the rights of the Jewish people, because it was a part of her life.” Mrs. Roosevelt’s close relationship with David, Edna, and others allowed her to observe close-up part of the New York-Russian émigré Jewish world. “She felt,” concluded Edna Gurewitsch, “privileged to be part of what the Jewish people were doing.”¹⁴⁰

Just as Eleanor Roosevelt’s Jewish friends were woven into her life, so, too, did she share their enthusiasm for Israel. Mrs. Roosevelt’s enthusiasm for the Jewish state grew stronger with repeated visits. She saw in Israel an activism and hopefulness that she believed to be both similar to that of the American spirit and unlike that in other Middle Eastern states, in short, the liberal ideal of a modern, progressive state. Moreover, she saw in Israel not only a cause supported by her close and dear friends, but a reflection of the two Jewish men—Joseph Lash and David Gurewitsch—whom she loved so deeply in the postwar years.

¹³⁹Abram L. Sachar (10 November 1978), Oral History Project, Roosevelt Library.

¹⁴⁰Author interview with Edna Gurewitsch, May 2003.