Fights between Mussolini’s supporters and opponents, and huge Nazi rallies honoring Hitler, were taking place not only in Rome and Berlin but also in New York. One could watch brown-shirted Nazis marching down the streets of Yorkville and black-shirted Fascists meeting in East Harlem in the 1930s. Mussolini’s and Hitler’s rise to power, which did so much to disrupt life in Europe, also caused problems in New York. The emergence of Nazism in Germany, for example, provided the explosive issue which threw New York’s Jewish and German communities against each other, and made each aware of a struggle.

Both groups, as well as the Italian-Americans, were deeply affected by the events in Europe and considered their fate and status in the New World to be dependent on the American reaction to the Old World dictatorships. Since greater prestige for Germany and Italy would enhance the status of German- and Italian-Americans in the United States, these groups were reluctant to criticize any aspect of their ancestral homes, and they took pride in these countries’ achievements. The Jews, however, felt their interests threatened by a favorable American and world response to Germany and, later, Italy and were highly critical of these countries and their supporters. With such vital interests at stake, the Germans and Jews, and eventually the Italians and Jews, in New York found themselves in disagreements over their responses to Nazism, Fascism, and related issues which could easily lead to conflict.

**GERMAN-AMERICANS AND NAZI GERMANY: THE INITIAL RESPONSE**

Although Italian Fascism was the first to appear on the world scene, Nazism was by far the more disruptive force in America because it emphasized anti-Semitism
and exaggerated the decline of the German-American’s status in the United States. Moreover, many German-Americans found it difficult to look at Nazism and Germany objectively. They were reluctant initially to criticize, especially publicly, anything German, unwilling to believe what was really happening to the Jews in Germany, and slow to react to the dangers of the American Nazis. A number of factors, each of which could operate separately, contributed to this reluctance. One was a fear of reviving in any way the traumatic World War I experience in which German-Americans had been abused so unfairly. A renewed anti-German crusade seemed a possibility in New York in 1933 and continued to be of concern to some German-Americans throughout the decade. The American Nazis made effective use of this point, claiming that an attack on them was an attack on all German-Americans. Other factors were the desire not to malign the ancestral home without full knowledge of what was happening there, plus a pride in the new respect Germany had secured among the world’s nations. As Albert Zimmer, a Cincinnati Nazi leader, said: “Of course, most of these people [Germans in Cincinnati] do not agree with Hitler, but at the same time Hitler represents Germany to them. And they will not tolerate any criticism, verbal or written, of Germany. They consider it a reflection on themselves.” Finally, one must also note that the German government probably pressured the German-American organizations to avoid criticism of Germany and Nazism.

Although there was fear of a new anti-German crusade in 1933, mainly in New York, for most German-Americans, particularly those who did not belong to the German organizations, were less ethnic conscious and less concerned about Nazi issues unless it directly threatened to affect their lives, this fear did not appear again as a serious one until 1938. At that time, when America began to react hostilely toward Germany, all German-Americans began to feel that their vital interests were at stake and they became sensitive to the issues involving Germany.

German-American statements on Nazi atrocity stories illustrate this ethnic group’s reaction to criticism of Germany in the early 1930s. The Steuben News stated that “we recognize in the authors of these reports the same elements which were extremely venomous during the period both before and after the World War in creating a feeling of hatred and contempt for the German people.” Theodore Hoffmann, national chairman of the Steuben Society, on returning from a visit to Germany in 1934, commented that the reports of oppression against the Jews were exaggerated. Hoffmann thus helped to perpetuate the belief that Nazi Germany was receiving unfair criticism. Even German-Americans who strongly stated their opposition to any Jewish persecutions in Germany could not accept the news from the Old World. Bernard Ridder, copublisher of the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, while admitting that anti-Jewish actions had occurred, noted that these events were very likely exaggerated and the work of a “small group of young fanatics” who mistakenly thought that the Nazi party wanted this. Ridder claimed that Germany would solve this problem, and therefore he urged Jews not
to overreact. One German New Yorker said, "I believe there is not a German-American in New York whose pride has not been hurt by the apparent willingness of many Americans, especially the people of the Jewish faith, to regard as truth the sensational atrocity accounts coming from sources outside of Germany."³

Some Germans also asked whether other Americans had any right to question Germany's choice of government. German-Americans wanted their fellow Americans to regard Germany as just another country, disregarding the Nazi government there. Therefore, they were angered when the Jews attempted to keep the Olympics from being held in Berlin in 1936 or to keep Germany out of the World's Fair in 1939.⁴

**NAZISM COMES TO AMERICA**

While the advent of Hitler and Nazism in Germany alone would have caused problems for Germans in the United States, a greater difficulty was faced in determining how to respond to Nazi organizations set up in this country. The first of these groups appeared in the 1920s and was the seed which eventually blossomed into the German-American Bund.

The organized Nazi movement began in the United States after World War I when many Germans, some belonging to Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), emigrated to America. A local unit of the Nazi party was formed in the Bronx in 1922, but the more important of these early Nazi efforts came in 1924 with the formation in Detroit of the National Socialist Teutonia Association, led by Fritz Gissibl and others. This organization was made up of newly arrived German immigrants, most of whom did not belong to the NSDAP. By the early 1930s chapters had been set up in Cincinnati, Chicago, Milwaukee, New York, and other cities with a declared membership of over 500. The aim of Teutonia was not to convert the German-American community to Nazism but rather to present Nazi ideas to German citizens living in America.⁵ Although this group represented the beginnings of Nazism in this country, it attracted little attention. Hitler had not yet come to power in Germany, and the people of the United States, German-Americans as well as others, did not at this time regard Nazism as a serious concern.

Teutonia prospered until 1931, when it failed to receive the designation as the official unit of the Nazi party in the United States; shortly thereafter it was dissolved. Instead the seal of approval went to a New York City Nazi party cell established by members of the NSDAP. This cell was now named a Gau (department) of the German Nazi party. Divisions of the New York Gau were then organized in other cities, but the hub of the Nazi movement remained in New York. Many of the German nationals belonging to Teutonia soon affiliated with the Nazi party Gau. Some Americans, mainly of German ancestry, also joined
this group, but by 1933 had formed in New York the Friends of Germany (a separate Nazi society for American citizens). This organization was led by Colonel Edwin Emerson, an early German-American supporter of Nazism and a man with important connections in the Yorkville German community, and particularly in the United German Societies, a federation of German-American organizations.6

The Nazi party organization in the United States was dissolved in 1933 due to intra-party dissension which caused unfavorable publicity for the Nazis. To rebuild the movement, Heinz Spanknoebel, originally a member of Teutonia, was sent to the United States by the foreign bureau of the German Nazi party in 1933. In July 1933 he created the Friends of the New Germany, which was an amalgamation of the supporters of many of the earlier Nazi organizations. Also joining with this new society were the Friends of Germany under Colonel Emerson, who now became the head of the American Section of the Friends of the New Germany.7 Like the earlier Nazi party, the Friends were also plagued with problems. In 1934 Hubert Schnuch, leader of the Friends, and Anton Haegele, assistant national director, engaged in what was mainly a power struggle which resulted in a well-publicized court case and the formation of a separate American National Socialist League by Haegele. This damaged the reputation of the Friends, although the organization retained most of its members. In 1936 the name of the Friends was changed to the American German Bund, or German-American Bund, and came under the control of Fritz Kuhn, who was thought to be someone who could provide stable, effective leadership to the strife-torn organization.8

The Bund made a concerted effort to capture German-American support. This appeal was aimed at any discontent felt within the German-American community. In 1933 this organization issued a platform which indicated its direction. The goals, which were two-fold, fit very well into Nazi ideology. First, the American Nazis were to awaken German-Americans to the fact that they had been denied their proper position of power in American society and consequently should unify racially to correct this wrong. Secondly, Jews were the enemy, the ones who had taken an unfair amount of power and barred the German’s rise to his proper place. Anti-Semitism, emphasizing an exaggerated portrayal of Jewish economic and political power, and chauvinistic Germanism, picturing an oppressed and humiliated German-American community, were the two main elements of the American Nazi program. The Bund also stressed a Jewish alliance with Communism and therefore pictured itself as saving America—and particularly German-Americans—from the all-powerful and communistic Jews.9

Any grievances, however small, within the German-American community were emphasized and exaggerated within the above framework in order to create discontent and win support. The Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter (the Bund’s newspaper) claimed that the Bund was made necessary “by the persistent anti-German propaganda of a violent and all inclusive character that has been waged
since 1914.' A Bund pamphlet stated that ‘‘our movement is not a pilgrimage; it is a defensive war, a last call for you to rally to the rescue. . . . What German immigration brought to America in cultural values and contributed to the cultural fructification of their new home, should have sufficed to insure our pioneers of toil and intellect a merited place in the history of the country.’’ This place, the Bund claimed, was denied to the Germans. Although this propaganda appealed to some, the membership remained relatively small and, most important, did not attract very many German-Americans who had emigrated before World War I.10

Although the exact size of the Bund is not known, its numbers have been estimated. The Justice Department suggested that Bund strength was 8,500 in 1938. Kuhn claimed it numbered 20,000, with 40 percent of its members in the New York City area. The German Ambassador to the United States in 1938 said it was 6,000. Local leaders of the Bund in New York City put the number at 3,000 in 1939 for the metropolitan area. Finally, the American Legion arrived at a figure of 25,000 for their estimate of Bund membership, as did the House Committee on Un-American Activities.11

More important is that occupationally the Bund was drawn from the middle to lower economic classes. A Department of Justice description of Bund officers in New York noted that most of them were ‘‘mechanics, restaurant workers, clerks, odd-job men and the like, with a scattering of technicians such as draftsmen, chemists and so on.’’ A description of a Brooklyn Bund meeting in 1939 noted that 90 percent were working class and 10 percent were business people. An observer at a 1941 Bund meeting asserted that the poor quality of German spoken by the members suggested that the Bundists did not have a great deal of education. A study of the Bundists who in the late 1930s returned to Germany stated that they were mostly skilled workers. ‘‘More than half of the returnees had been trained as skilled industrial workers or artisans before emigrating to America.’’ The occupations included locksmiths, carpenters, and other skilled jobs. Many, however, were thwarted in their attempt to practice these skills in the United States and had to take other jobs such as waiters or dishwashers when the Depression struck. Many of the returning Bundists had found themselves out of work at various times during the economic collapse.12

Sociological theory indicates a connection between a concern with status, downward occupational mobility, and prejudice.13 The Bund members who returned to Germany certainly had been downwardly mobile, and many had been mobility- or status-minded (in the sense that they had higher occupational class orientations). However, others in the German-American community who also fit this description did not join the Bund. The difference may lie in the fact that most of the Bundists had recently arrived in America (during the 1920s), and many of these had been identified with right-wing anti-Communism and anti-Semitism in Germany and therefore already were prone to see the Jews as a source of their economic and other problems. The acceptance of anti-Semitism was already there; the Depression simply gave it new reason to emerge.
The ethnically conscious members of the older German-American community as a group, although experiencing some of the same economic difficulties, were not, in their American experience, inclined toward an anti-Jewish attitude. They were also increasingly sensitive to charges of Nazism and anti-Semitism—particularly in a city where a large and well-organized Jewish community could retaliate—and were reluctant to join an organization which, as the 1930s progressed, appeared more and more to be un-American. The few members of the older German-American community who joined the Bund apparently did so mainly out of fear of an anti-German crusade in America: they looked to the Bund as a protector. Fear of or anger at the Jews was not a motivating factor at first, but was later absorbed along with other points of Nazi propaganda. There were also those who joined because of pride in Germany's new, powerful position in Europe. However, these people were few. Bundists and the Bund were products of Germany and its ethnic environment rather than that of the United States. The Bund therefore was not at all similar to that other 1930s anti-Semitic organization which operated in New York—the predominantly Irish Christian Front, which grew out of the intergroup frictions in America.

The rank and file of the Bund, of whom the returnees were representative, were mainly recent immigrants, Catholics, from the South German states and were either German citizens or newly naturalized. The membership of a Brooklyn local in 1934 consisted of 126 citizens and 332 aliens, with most of the citizens recently naturalized. The Manhattan unit in the 1936–38 period had no citizens out of an estimated 115 members, although some of the members had begun the process of attaining American citizenship. The leaders of the Bund, including Kuhn, were predominantly naturalized Americans. A Justice Department report stated that “in the majority of cases the leaders of the Bund have come to the United States from Germany since the World War.” Spanknoebel, Ignatz Griebl, Gissibl, Reinhold Walter, Schnuch, and Kuhn, all leaders of the Bund or predecessor organizations, were German-born. The last three and Griebl were naturalized Americans who were chosen as leaders in order to emphasize the American character of the Bund.

Persistent efforts were made to make the Bund appear more American. For example, in 1935 and again in 1938, the German government directed that German citizens withdraw from the organization. This order was also given so that German citizens in the Bund would not embarrass the German government nor jeopardize its relations with America. The orders were ignored, and German nationals continued to join the American Nazi organizations. Furthermore, the Bund attempted to promote itself as within the American mainstream. “Who are these so-called Friends of New Germany?” asked the Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter. “They are the kind of people who have helped to build up this country, who have done their share in fighting for true democracy, and the right it implies.” The Bund claimed that it sought mainly to defend the Constitution, combat Communism, and reawaken German-Americans. The goal of the organi-
zation, the leaders said, was not to establish National Socialism in the United States or weaken American institutions. "We German-Americans," stated J. Wheeler-Hill, the National Secretary of the Bund, "are unequivocally committed to the defense of the Flag, Constitution and Sovereignty of our United States." By 1938 the Bund had replaced its cry "Sieg Heil" with "Free America." Bund gatherings were referred to as pro-America meetings, patriotic American songs were sung, and English was used at all rallies and more extensively than before in the Bund's newspaper.17

The German-American community never saw the Bund as an American organization—a fact which kept citizen membership low. The Bund's superficial changes convinced only a few that the Bund was American. German-Americans remained very conscious of the questionability of the Bund's Americanism. Still smarting from the alien label applied to them in World War I, German-Americans were reluctant to get involved with a foreign organization. The Bund's ties to Germany were always suspected and later proved.18 Its activities in America were constantly attacked as treasonous. Therefore, although some second-generation German-Americans and those of more remote ancestry did join the Bund, it stayed basically an organization of the newly arrived who had not gone through the searing World War I experience in America. Of course, members of the older German-American community could have joined extremist groups with more American roots; some did, but very few.

**PENETRATING THE GERMAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

However, the Bund still achieved much influence through its penetration of established German-American societies, and it is here that the older German-American community was criticized for being too lenient and foolish with the Nazis. Conflict involving the older German-American community and the Jews in New York did not arise as the result of any active and strong pro-Nazi element among these Germans; it came instead because of a lack of a strong anti-Nazi response.19 While the organized and leadership elements among the non-Nazi German-Americans avoided contact with the anti-Semitic component of Nazism—which immediately would have put a Nazi label on them—their silence and willingness to work with the American Nazis did virtually the same. Some German-Americans understood the Nazi danger early. For example, in 1934 Eugene Grigat, a prominent anti-Nazi German-American, noted that "it is... surprising that the major protests and other counteractions [against Nazism] were launched by our Jewish friends with the magnificent support of Christians here and everywhere; but with no notable German-American endorsement." He went on to warn the German-American community that if they did not speak out against the Nazis, "our fine friendships formed here with our Jewish fellow-
citizens and neighbors, social and otherwise, are bound to suffer. If we do not raise our voices in sincere and determined protest—coupled with action—we deserve to be suspect of being tacit Hitler admirers."20

This was the German-American dilemma of the 1930s: how to prevent being labeled Nazis while expressing pride in the achievements of the Fatherland and avoiding all criticism of anything German. The initial response of the older German-American organizations was either silence or an attempt to minimize the significance of the Nazis. Herman Kudlich, chairman of the political committee of the Steuben Society, questioned as late as 1937 whether the Bund should be considered important. He asked that "if these young fellows find pleasure in playing at soldiering, what harm is that? Why take them seriously?" There was also the feeling that the right of the Bund to hold meetings should be protected.21 Although the Bund was a nuisance to some Germans because of its tactics, little attempt was made to criticize its ideology, since this represented the new Germany.

Since the older German societies were often lax in ostracizing the American Nazis from their community, the societies sometimes found themselves the captives of the Nazis, as in the case of the United German Societies of Greater New York (UGS), an important German-American organization in the City. The Bund was not a member of this federation, nor was it likely to be admitted to an organization which included many Jews and had voted against flying the swastika flag or inviting the German ambassador to its German Day celebration in 1933 (a yearly event held by the UGS marking the arrival of German settlers in America). Nevertheless, the Nazis penetrated the UGS by capturing control of two minor organizations which were members, the Stahlhelm, a German veterans group, and the Commercial Society of 1858. Spanknoebel, the Bund leader, appealed to a number of UGS officials on the basis of their emotional ties to Germany and was able to secure the calling of a special meeting to reconsider the actions concerning the German flag and an invitation to the ambassador. As a delegate from the Stahlhelm, Spanknoebel attended the special meeting held in September 1933. He also was placed on the program with the aid of Colonel Emerson's pro-Nazi connections in the UGS such as Ignatz Griebl (soon after chosen leader of the Bund). Spanknoebel then packed this poorly attended meeting with his supporters and, with threats of physical harm, forced his changes through. The anti-Nazi President of the UGS was compelled to resign; Spanknoebel was put on the organization's board of directors; the German ambassador was invited to the German Day celebration; and the meeting exploded into a vicious tirade against the Jews. Once the Nazis had gained control of the leadership, they began to oust many of those who had opposed them. Others resigned, as did the German Jewish groups. Therefore the Nazis, both members and nonmembers of the Bund, were able to capture at least the name and machinery of one of the largest and most prestigious German-American organiza-
tions. At the next meeting, when Bernard Ridder attempted to denounce the
Nazis, he was shouted down. The Ridder brothers, Bernard and Victor, were
expelled from the UGS, and as a final act the flying of the German flag was
approved.22

The UGS never did hold its German Day celebration in 1933. Mayor John
P. O'Brien, fearing that violence would erupt at the Nazi-controlled event,
threatened to revoke its permit to meet at a city armory, so the organization
cancelled the festivities. A belated celebration (held under the auspices of the
Steuben Society) to which the German ambassador was invited to speak, took
place in December. However, the UGS, still under Nazi control, planned the
German Day event through most of the 1930s. The Bund took part in all the
celebrations from 1934 to 1937, except the one in 1935. In that year, because of a
dispute over tactics between the Nazis in the Bund and those in the UGS leader­
ship who were not Bundists, the Bund was not invited to participate.23 Essen­
tially the UGS leadership came to accept a more moderate approach toward
fostering Nazi principles among the German-American community. Also the
Bund was considered too divisive, since it had attacked other German-American
organizations. In 1936, however, the reorganized German-American Bund was
invited to take part in German Day.

The Nazis also attempted to infiltrate and control many other German-
American societies and newspapers.24 The German-American Conference of
Greater New York (a larger federated group than the UGS to which all German-
American organizations, including the UGS, belonged) was taken over by the
Nazis in 1934. Earlier, the Nazis had attempted to eliminate the influence of
Victor and Bernard Ridder, who had been active in challenging the American
Nazis in various German-American societies. In July 1933 Spanknoebel pre­
sented the Ridders with letters from Dr. Robert Ley, head of the German Labor
Front, and Ernst Bohle, chief of the foreign division of the German Nazi party,
notifying the Ridders that their pro-Jewish articles must cease and giving
Spanknoebel the authority to take control of the Staats-Zeitung. Although
Spanknoebel thought the letters would be enough to frighten the Ridders into
compliance, it was not—he was thrown out of the office. The newspaper re­
mained in the hands of the Ridder family, although it did not speak out against
Nazism until much later. The Steuben Society of America also was threatened as
the Nazis attempted to infiltrate the organization. Some Steubenites joined the
Bund, and some Bundists joined the Steuben Society. Even the Roland Society
(made up of German-American Democratic party clubs) was forced to expel
members—including a former president in 1933—for Nazi sympathies and for
advocating race prejudice. Also a number of very small German-American so­
cial, sport, and cultural societies began to affiliate with the Bund because it
promised them funds. Throughout this period the Nazis continued their tactic of
penetrating other German-American groups with the intent of taking over the
name and machinery of the organization. In the late 1930s they concentrated on smaller societies, such as singing groups, or on setting up such groups within the Bund in order to draw in new members.25

At their peak the Nazis actually controlled only a few German-American organizations, but their influence was felt in all. As the impression began to be created that German-Americans were not willing to destroy fully the Nazi influence, efforts were made to limit the Bund and other Nazi influence. For example, Nazi control of the German-American Conference was short-lived. The split in the Bund movement in 1934 permitted the older German-American groups to rally and regain their dominance of the conference, although, even with Victor Ridder as the new president, some Nazi sympathizers remained in positions of power. The New York State chairman of the Steuben Society, Gustav W. M. Wieboldt, not only publicly attacked the Bund but refused to allow Nazi doctrine to be discussed at meetings and threatened to withdraw the charter of any unit which had Nazis within its ranks. In 1936 a charter revision specifically forbade membership to Nazis and others who were against the American form of government.26

Although an attempt was made to fight for control of these organizations, there was still, with few exceptions, no open criticism of Nazi ideology or Germany and only muted criticism of the Bund until later in the decade. For instance, the German-American Conference, although no longer pro-Nazi after 1934, still was willing to participate in German Day celebrations with the UGS and the Bund until 1938. The Steuben Society, whose leadership had offered one of the few open attacks on the Bund and which had refused to participate with them in the German Day celebrations in 1934, soon changed its attitude. Perhaps because of pressure from the German government, an unwillingness to continue public denunciations of a German organization, or the split over this issue within the society itself, the Steubenites no longer publicly criticized the Bund and after 1934 agreed to attend the German Day celebrations with them. Their position on German Day was explained simply that they wanted to honor their German-American ancestors, and this should not be inferred to indicate a desire to establish Nazism in the United States. However, this was the impression created. Some German-American organizations were so torn over the issue of criticism of Nazism that they voted to prohibit any political discussions at their meetings.27

The editorials in the Staats-Zeitung also illustrate the dangerous and misunderstood ambivalence which prevailed; at the same time the Ridders were fighting the Nazis for control of the organizations, their newspaper avoided criticism of Nazism and actually offered glowing praise of Hitler’s Germany. In a 1934 editorial which looked at what a year of National Socialism had meant for Germany, the paper noted that “the union of the German tribes, the apparent complete setting aside of class hatred—if not also of race hatred—the economic successes as claimed on Sunday by Propaganda Minister Goebbels . . . , the recession of unemployment, the revival of industry, [and] the stabilization of the
financial picture speak on behalf of the new regime.” The increasing racial abuses of the Hitler regime were largely ignored by the *Staats-Zeitung* during the early to middle 1930s, as they hoped that these practices would subside. They noted in 1934 that since the National Socialist Revolution was not tied to a rigid doctrine, and therefore might evolve, this should give hope to those who deplored certain features of it. Therefore when riots against Jews in Berlin occurred in July 1935 and the infamous Nuremberg laws (which delineated the Jews’ status in Germany) were passed in September 1935, the *Staats-Zeitung*, although reporting these events, offered no editorial comment on them.28

However, a small segment of the German-American community had immediately condemned Nazism. They opposed Hitler and his ideology for political or humanitarian reasons—or because of an early recognition of the danger inherent in remaining silent. The most prominent of these early opponents was Senator Robert F. Wagner, who in March 1933 had strongly criticized the Nazi government and its anti-Semitic activities. The German-American Socialist newspaper *Neue Volkszeitung* in 1933 had been the sponsor of a large anti-Nazi meeting. Eugene Grigat also had spoken out forcefully against Nazism, warning his fellow Germans not to give the impression of siding with Hitler. In 1935 he organized the Friends of German Democracy, a German-American society devoted to fighting Nazism in the United States.29 However, the general German-American response was a non-Nazi one; that is, either favorable toward Germany for non-ideological reasons or indifferent.

**JEWS AND GERMANS**

Whatever the reasons for the various delays in the German-American response against Nazism, the effect of this on Jewish-German relations was profound. Both the Jews and those Germans who were ethnically conscious were aware of their incompatible opinions on Germany. Although a sense of this existed, the only conflict which immediately emerged was that between the Jews and the Nazis (mainly the Bund). Each wanted to injure or eliminate the other. Although the Jews had every intention of striking out at only the Nazis, it became increasingly difficult for them to determine who was a Nazi and who was merely reluctant to criticize Germany. This was particularly true after the Nazis gained entry into or secured control over various German-American organizations. At times the distinction was not made, and therefore non-Nazi elements of the German-American community were brought into the conflict. While the expanding conflict was a natural consequence of the division over the Nazi issue, it was also unintentional, and was based on misconceptions of each other’s opinions and motivations.30

The Jews, of course, were aware of their threatened position in the world during the 1930s and were very worried about the emergence of Nazism in the
United States and the fate of their brethren in Germany. Concern was also expressed about the general increase in anti-Semitic activities and sentiments in America. As one Jewish New Yorker, after seeing a Nazi poster, commented to his newspaper’s editor, “I thoroughly agree with you that this incident is only a beginning, and that in the future we may well expect other types of defamatory propaganda, up to and including bombs.” The *Jewish Examiner* in 1934 warned Jews not “to be lulled into a false sense of security. . . . Less than a year ago the leaders of German Jewry were making light of the Hitler peril.”31 They therefore sought to fight Nazism, although there was no consensus among the major Jewish organizations on how to do this. In general the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee were more activist, favoring demonstrations and boycotts, than were the American Jewish Committee or B’nai B’rith. The principal tactic of response which eventually emerged was the anti-Nazi boycott of German goods; however, not all Jews supported this initially.

The Jewish War Veterans, in March 1933, were the first group to support a boycott of German goods. The event which caused more Jews to become interested in this response was the Nazis’ April 1, 1933 general boycott of Jewish businesses in Germany. The American Jewish Congress, working separately from the Jewish War Veterans, soon became active in the anti-Nazi boycott. In addition an ad hoc boycott organization called the American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights was formed in May 1933. This organization was later taken over by Samuel Untermyer, a prominent Jewish lawyer and civic leader, and renamed the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League to Champion Human Rights. The American Jewish Congress, failing to amalgamate its boycott effort with Untermyer’s organization, joined with the recently formed Jewish Labor Committee and set up a Joint Boycott Council in 1936. Thus at one point there were three boycott organizations. In 1937 the three agreed to partial union through an Actions Committee designed to investigate possible boycott violations. However, no real union of all boycott agencies ever was secured, and the boycott movement therefore was not as strong as it could have been.32 B’nai B’rith, which did not participate in the boycott until 1939, and the American Jewish Committee both opposed this tactic in 1933, feeling that such action would only lead to retaliation against Jews in Germany. This was part of the great controversy going on within Jewry on what to do about anti-Semitism. Jewish— as well as German-Americans never represented a monolithic community with one opinion. Although the majority might be in favor of one thing, there always would be others supporting something else. However, by the end of 1938, according to a Gallup Poll, 96 percent of the Jews supported the boycott, along with 64 percent of the Catholics and 61 percent of the Protestants in America.33

The Jews who did favor the boycott were often fervent in their support, considering it to be a great moral as well as material weapon. However, the problems associated with it were numerous. German-American merchants, both those who sold and those who did not sell German-made goods, were affected by
the boycott. For example, the *Jewish Examiner* reported a story of a German-American storeowner in Brooklyn who lost all of her Jewish customers when it was rumored falsely that she had Nazi ties. The article warned its readers to be careful how they used the boycott. This event probably was not an isolated case, since there were attempts in various Jewish papers throughout the decade, and from anti-Nazi German-Americans, to emphasize that Jews should not think that all Germans were Nazis and to remind them that the fight was only with the Nazis. Essentially, though, if the German-American was not explicitly anti-Nazi, he was thought of as a Nazi. Moreover, rumors were plentiful. The Joint Boycott Council received many letters urging the organization to investigate rumors that various companies were selling German goods. There were, of course, reasons why some German-Americans were affected. German merchants who continued to carry goods from Germany because of Nazi sympathies, indifference, or a reluctance to take part in a campaign against their ancestral home were candidates for the boycott.

As a result various German-American leadership elements began to complain about unfair treatment. Bernard Ridder protested to Samuel Untermyer that the boycott increasingly was being directed against the German-Americans in the City, especially grocers and delicatessen owners, and noted that the friendly relations between Germans and Jews could be affected. Untermyer insisted that the “boycott is directed against German goods and German ships” and not against German-Americans as long as they did not handle German goods. Since this was not always the case, the protests continued. The National Council of the Steuben Society of America claimed “that a widely advertised boycott of articles of German manufacture was extended to a concerted attack on everything German-American, and as a matter of course retaliation would be preached.” In contrast, the Bronx County District Council of the Steuben Society was upset that the boycott was finding its true mark. They reported that people were being prevented from entering stores that sold German goods and asked for an end to the boycott.

Nazi sympathizers in the German-American community took advantage of the increasing bitterness over the anti-Nazi boycott and planned a retaliation aimed at the Jewish community. The United German Societies in December 1933 established the German-American Business League (DAWA), which organized an anti-Jewish boycott and encouraged German-American merchants to import German goods. Businessmen who belonged to the league put its emblem on their store windows and were included in a shoppers’ guide. Handbills and stickers with mottos such as “Buy German” urged German-Americans to buy at these stores. Although the league was initially a product of the UGS, the Bund, through the intervention of Colonel Emerson and the German consulate, became active in DAWA and by 1935 had absorbed the organization. The German Consumers’ Cooperative (DKV), a Bund subsidiary since its inception, also took part in the anti-Jewish boycott. DKV stickers appeared in shop windows carrying
messages such as "Don't Buy from Jews." The German-American Board of Commerce (in Yorkville) also operated on behalf of the boycott; by the mid-1930s this organization was controlled by the German consulate. At the inception of the anti-Nazi boycott, while some merchants actually became Bund members as a response, DAWA was the most successful of the various organizations in appealing initially to non-Nazi German-American merchants who were affected by and wished to protest against the boycott. A DAWA emblem on their shop windows could possibly increase sales from Nazi and Germany-oriented customers.

Jewish merchants and other Jews in German sections of the City now began to feel the effects of the Nazi-planned anti-Jewish boycott. Jewish merchants lost customers, and some even were forced to close up their shops. According to one report, Jewish doctors, dentists, and lawyers were moving out of German areas in Queens because of a loss of German business. As an article in the *Jewish Examiner* stated, "Sharp lines are being drawn between German and Jew, ... and the blind bigotry that burns in Germany is being ignited in this country." A pamphlet issued by the American Jewish Congress commented that the peace and harmony which used to categorize relations between Germans and Jews was now a thing of the past, as Germans had taken up the slogan "Boycott the Jews of America!"

Another effort was now made by Jewish leaders to explain the anti-Nazi boycott to the German-American community. In an open letter addressed to "our patriotic German-American Fellow-Citizens," Samuel Untermyer tried to explain that Jews were compelled to undertake the boycott as their only available weapon. "Why," he asked, "should decent German-American citizens seek to retaliate upon the American-Jewish storekeepers for this boycott?" and he urged German-Americans not to be misled by Bund propaganda. Understanding the mood of the German-American community, Untermyer stressed that "to love one's Fatherland does not mean to love or support Hitler, or to condone his monstrous cruelties."

Although Untermyer tried to make a distinction between German-Americans who simply refused to criticize Germany and those who were solidly pro-Nazi, for many Jews it was increasingly difficult "to distinguish friend from foe." Incidents other than the boycott revealed this clearly. For example, in 1934 during an election for a state committeeman in Brooklyn the *Jewish Examiner* noted that "malicious rumors have been spread to the effect that because [John H.] Gerken is of German descent he is racially prejudiced." While the conflict between Jews and Nazis continued unabated during the 1930s, eventually fewer non-Nazis were involved. The anti-Jewish boycott was short-lived owing to a lack of continued non-Nazi participation. As the pressure to declare oneself to be against Nazism increased, more German-Americans did so. By 1938 some distinction between those who were or were not Nazis could more readily be made.
THE GERMAN-AMERICAN SHIFT

At the beginning of the decade (except in New York, where the Jewish community was large and the Nazis were very active) the Bund and Nazi Germany had been largely ignored by the American people. However, anti-German attitudes began to increase slowly during the 1930s as the result of Germany's hostility toward the Jews (as seen by the world in such events as the Berlin Riots) and the beginning of attacks on the Catholic Church. Because of this shift in the American outlook, as well as out of concern for co-religionists in Germany, there were some new responses from the German-Americans. The New York State Branch of the Catholic Central Verein of America protested Germany's treatment of Catholics in 1935. While expressing hope for a change in policy, the Verein resolution condemned Germany for its actions against Catholics and for "innumerable actions of a like nature." The Roland Society, which up to 1936 had refrained from discussing foreign politics, now joined the anti-Nazis and noted that it was time for German-Americans to "decide whether we want to be German-Americans or Germans." The Federation of German Workers Clubs in 1936 initiated a signature campaign "demanding the disbanding and disarming of the Nazi Bunds in Yorkville and other centers." Particular pro-Nazi events now brought a German-American response. For example, in 1936 an anti-Nazi German Day celebration was held to protest Bund participation in the regular ceremony.43

The most significant change in German-American opinion toward Nazi Germany and the Bund eventually came in 1937–38 as the result of a growing American awareness of the threat of Nazism. Because of Bundist activities, what little concern most Americans had at first felt about Nazism had centered on this organization. However, by 1938 various events in Europe were increasing the awareness of a threat from Germany (and subsequently also the Bund) and brought the burgeoning anti-Germanism to a point where America's Germans had to speak out. They became by this time much more fearful of an anti-German response from other Americans.44 The first event was the annexation of Austria in March 1938, which strengthened Germany's position in Central Europe. American press opinion reacted hostilely to the takeover, and there was renewed criticism of Nazism in the United States. Anti-Nazi articles began appearing with frequency in several national magazines. The general feeling that had emerged by this year was that Nazism was for export and consequently a serious threat to America. Increasing this fear were the arrests of some German nationals in 1938 for espionage against the United States. The growing awareness of the Nazi threat also manifested itself in attacks on the Bund. Disorders occurred when Bund leaders tried to speak at mass meetings in 1938. The government began a series of investigations into Nazi activities in the United States. In May 1938 the House of Representatives voted to set up a committee, under Martin Dies, to
investigate un-American activities, including, of course, Nazism. New York State organized a similar committee under State Senator John J. McNaboe which looked into Communism and Nazism. In New York City, Mayor La Guardia ordered an investigation of the Bund in an effort to destroy the organization. The Sudetenland problem later in 1938 and the subsequent penetration and takeover of Czechoslovakia in 1939 further increased this new awareness of the Nazi danger from abroad and from within.45

German-American press and organizational opinion also continued to shift, although slowly. The initial thrust of their shift was in relation to the American Nazis. Although the non-Nazi organizations such as the Steuben Society met with the Bund in German Day celebrations in 1937, there was uneasiness at this time about doing so. Kuhn was not allowed to speak at the 1937 meeting, and the Steubenites objected to the wearing of Nazi uniforms by some of Kuhn's followers. By August 1938 the Steuben Society was publicly hinting that it was reappraising its relationship with the Bund and that a break was imminent.46 In October 1938, in an effort to correct the impression the general public had of German-Americans, the society lashed out at the American Nazis. The Steubenites claimed that their earlier silence had been the result of an unwillingness to attack members of their own race and a desire to keep the disagreements of the German-American community within the confines of the societies involved. The Bund was now accused of being un-American and having caused dissension among German-Americans during a difficult and dangerous period. Particularly the Steubenites were upset by Bund attacks on their society. "The attacks and vilification on the part of the American-German Bund have become so violent and arrogant, the taunts of cowardice so ruthless, the situation so intolerable," declared the Steuben News, "that it is now deemed the better part of wisdom to speak up now in order to clarify a situation that has become unbearable." The German-American Conference also decided that the time had come for a public attack on the Bund and castigated them for undermining a united front of German-American organizations during an especially critical period. The conference proclaimed that they did not and never would recognize Fritz Kuhn, the Bund Fuhrer, as their leader, "not only for political reasons but for other weighty and important reasons." At the insistence of the German-American Conference and the Steuben Society and with the approval of the German consulate in New York, which suggested that German societies not connected with the Bund refrain from joint activities with that organization, the American Nazis were left out of the plans for German Day in October 1938. The celebrations, however, found Hoffmann, of the Steuben Society, noting his contentment with Germany under Hitler and with its expansion into Austria and the Sudetenland.47 Increasing fear of being labeled Nazis would eventually force a change in the attitudes of the German-American community toward aspects of Nazism other than the Bund.

The next major shift for the German-Americans came just one month later
as the result of repercussions from an event which occurred on 7 November 1938. On that day a young Polish Jew, Herschel Grynszpan, assassinated Ernst vom Rath, third secretary of the Germany Embassy in Paris. What followed this incident was the Kristallnacht (night of broken glass) pogrom in Germany, in which many Jews were injured and a number of synagogues and Jewish-owned stores were destroyed. The Nazi government also levied a one-billion-mark fine on the Jewish community and passed new anti-Semitic decrees. Although the earlier anti-Jewish policies and actions had adversely affected Germany in world diplomatic and economic circles as well as in public opinion, and some German government officials had expressed concern over this, there was no indication whatsoever, especially now, that the anti-Semitism would end in the foreseeable future.\(^{48}\)

The reaction in American public opinion to these excesses was noteworthy. There were protests against Germany from a number of labor, religious, political, and social groups as well as newspapers. The United States ambassador to Germany, Hugh Wilson, was recalled, and Roosevelt, at a press conference, expressed surprise that such barbarity could still occur in the twentieth century. Hans Dieckhoff, the German ambassador to the United States, in a communication to the German foreign ministry, noted the anger in America over this incident. He stated that "any expression of public opinion is without exception incensed against Germany and hostile toward her. And as regards this, the outcry comes not only from Jews but in equal strength from all groups and classes, including the German-American camp." The Ambassador also remarked that "the good prospects for a gradual spread of anti-Semitism has suffered a serious setback...; even the most bitter anti-Semites are anxious to disassociate themselves from methods of this kind." The Forward, a Jewish newspaper, also noted the impact of the anti-Semitic excesses at this time: "The savagery involved is so horrible that this time the Christian world has been shaken up deeper than by any of the previous Nazi brutalities against the Jews... prominent Christians in all walks of life, statesmen, writers, clergymen, political leaders, have come out with the strongest words of condemnation against the regime of darkness." A Gallup poll of 9 December 1938 on Nazi persecutions of Jews revealed that 94 percent of the American people disapproved of Germany's anti-Jewish activities.\(^{49}\)

The German-American community was forced at this time to take a stand not only against the American Nazis but also against Germany's anti-Semitism. Silence at this emotionally tense moment could easily be construed as signifying a pro-Nazi position. The Steuben Society offered its first criticism of the Nazi government with a rank-and-file–supported declaration condemning the Nazis' anti-Semitic activities. On 15 November 1938 the Staats-Zeitung, in an editorial entitled "Cold Terror," also strongly attacked the anti-Semitic practices of the Nazi Government. An unwillingness to believe that the German people could engage in such acts still existed, and the paper therefore again preferred to blame
the excesses on fanatics within the party. However, no attempt was made to suggest that the party did not really support anti-Semitism or that the Nazis would mellow with time. No attempt was made to belittle the anti-Semitism or to claim that the reports were exaggerated. There was only disgust and a plea that it stop.

We enter a protest against the dark powers which now make an assassination a welcome occasion to turn loose the lowest and most degraded instincts against defenseless people.

All of us still have parents, brothers, and sisters, and other relatives in the old country whom we love and respect. All of us cannot and will not permit a beautiful dream, indestructible memories, to be torn from our hearts and trampled underfoot and soiled by those who are unworthy to be called Germans. And, therefore, in the name of our loved ones over there, we protest the defamation of the German name by fanatics, by those elements in the ranks of the party in power... who want to drag a great people into the mud of their sadistic meanness.

In another editorial, the paper proclaimed that “all those upright and good citizens of this land who bear the good name of Germany, the good name of the German people, as a sacred legacy in their hearts must realize that what is going on in the Reich today cannot be reconciled with American ideals... just as little as it can be reconciled with what is truly German.” Statements favorable to the Nazi government no longer appeared in this paper. The Staats-Zeitung now began to carry articles describing protests against the Third Reich on this issue.

The motivating force behind a strong German-American anti-Nazi stand was the fear that silence would inspire a revival of the anti-German excesses of World War I. The presence of the Bund became more and more an embarrassment and liability, especially after the American Nazis defended the November pogrom. The non-Nazi German-Americans therefore had to speak out. Other efforts of the non-Nazis to cleanse the German-American name included a radio address on WNYC by Victor Ridder and Gustav Wieboldt on 22 November 1938 in which both excoriated the Bund and Hitler. A few weeks later Ridder was a speaker at a Carnegie Hall meeting to protest racial and religious persecution. In an editorial in the Staats-Zeitung he noted that his presence at this gathering was the result of his feeling that German-Americans must either reject what was happening in Germany or be classified as supporting the Nazis and therefore face rising anti-German prejudice. “Woe to us,” Ridder said, “if an enraged American public opinion turns against the German-American element in the mistaken opinion that we agree with the harassment which is now being promulgated in Germany. We would pay a terrible price for this error.”

Ridder also made a special effort to improve German-Jewish relations in the City during this period. Speaking at a synagogue shortly after his November 15th editorial (quoted earlier) appeared, he urged both Jews and German-Americans to eschew the spread of racial prejudice. He tried particularly to make others understand what German-Americans were going through at this time. “Our element,” he stated, “is having a difficult time. They find it hard to believe what
they are now slowly being compelled to believe, and that is that things are going on in their old Motherland which shock them and which they would have believed impossible." Ridder pleaded with the Jews to consider this and avoid any hatred or economic discrimination against German-Americans.\footnote{53}

Those in the German-American community who had earlier declared themselves to be against Nazism stepped up their attacks on the Third Reich during this time in an effort to avoid the Nazi label. Anton Weidman, president of the Roland Society, stated in July 1938 that "we German-Americans who are loyal to the United States . . . are practically on trial before the American public" and therefore must show their loyalty. The Rolanders were also very worried about anti-German discrimination, particularly in relation to jobs. The Roland Society later asked the Dies Committee for a chance to testify in an effort to counter the image of German-Americans created by the Bund, which was causing the public to take "a discriminatory attitude toward German-Americans in general."\footnote{54} Volks-front, organ of the German-American League for Culture (which had been created by the Socialist German-American newspaper \textit{Neue Volkszeitung}) commented that since the Nazis were turning the American people against everything German, it was crucial for German-Americans to declare against Nazism "in order that you may not yet be knocked on the heads as traitors to your own country."\footnote{54}

The increasingly hostile attitude toward the Nazis in the German-American community, especially from those who had not declared themselves before, brought a favorable response from the Jews. For example, the refusal of the German-American Conference to allow the Bund to participate in German Day celebrations in 1938 caused the \textit{American Hebrew} to state that this was "an indication of a definite trend away from Nazism on the part of Germans in America." The \textit{Jewish Examiner} gave front page headlines to this repudiation of the Bund. Further German-American condemnations of the Nazis brought renewed feelings of friendliness on the part of the Jews. After the \textit{Staats-Zeitung} editorial condemning anti-Semitism, the \textit{American Hebrew} commented that this German newspaper, "heretofore generally regarded as sympathetic to the Nazi regime," had now denounced that regime. The \textit{American Hebrew} went on to note that "the Jews of America want to live in peace and harmony with the Germans of America and the Germans of Germany who feel, with them, that the Hitler regime is a blot upon civilization." Other indications of change in the Jewish attitude were evident. In 1939, a New York Lodge of B'nai B'rith presented an award to Victor Ridder, citing him as an outstanding protector of human rights, presumably for his statements and actions against the Nazis.\footnote{56}

While an intense conflict continued between the Jews and Nazis, the actions of the non-Nazis in 1938 helped to clarify their position. Had the non-Nazi segment of the German-American community not taken an anti-Nazi position after 1938, certainly the intensity of their conflict with the Jews would have increased. An anti-Nazi response after the pogrom of November 1938 was ex-
tremely important in controlling this conflict. The reaction of the non-Nazis was based simply on their realization that what they feared the most—a revival of anti-Germanism—would happen if they did not speak out and remove the Nazi and anti-Semitic labels. Their vital interests now compelled them to move in this direction and served as the main mitigating factor in this conflict situation.

However, not all difficulties between Germans and Jews were eliminated. Many German-Americans continued to take pride in Germany's foreign policy and military accomplishments. Therefore, although a willingness to attack Nazism existed, there was still a reluctance to criticize Germany and her increasing power in the world. While this reluctance produced less ethnic friction than the original failure to condemn anti-Semitism and Nazism, relations remained strained between Jews and Germans, and some conflict still occurred over the continued use of the anti-Nazi boycott. The *Staats-Zeitung*, for example, favored the annexation of Austria, convinced that this was something which both the German and Austrian people desired and which would right the wrongs of the World War. The headlines in this newspaper on 15 March 1938 stated that "Hitler has Triumphant Entry into Vienna" and noted that there were "a million people in the streets in undescribable jubilation." The paper was merely reflecting the sentiments of the German-American community. In Ridgewood, Queens, where the Bund chapter was not strong, a local editor remarked that "Ridgewood glowed with pride at the annexation of Austria." These people, the editor noted, were not Nazis, yet continued to take pride in Germany's victories. Even after the German army had marched into Czechoslovakia and the nation was absorbed, the *Staats-Zeitung* could not accept that Hitler would do such a thing and continued to believe the best. Their editorial asked, "who or what has forced [Hitler] to begin this attack?" The paper hoped that Hitler was not bent on aggression, and it tried, when possible, not to interpret his motives unfavorably. The ambiguity of the *Staats-Zeitung* in relation to German foreign policy led to Victor Ridder's loss of a 1945 libel suit in which he branded as liars three writers who accused him of supporting a pan-German conspiracy. The jury decided that Ridder could not prove that he was not in favor of pan-Germanism. The Steuben Society and its officers also found it difficult not to endorse Germany's foreign policy successes.56

**NAZISM AND THE OTHER ETHNICS**

Although Germany presented problems for Jewish-German relations, it had little effect on the Irish or Italians. The Irish press, being hostile toward England and sympathetic toward Germany, could therefore generally agree with the German-American newspapers on foreign policy.57 The concordat signed between Germany and the Pope in 1933 did much to satisfy Irish Catholic opinion and take their attention away from that country to other matters, such as the
Spanish Civil War or anti-Catholicism in Mexico and Russia. However, after the Vatican expressed dissatisfaction in July of 1935 with Germany’s infringements of the concordat and in March 1937 issued an encyclical to Germany’s Catholics castigating the Nazi government for its attempts to undermine Christianity, the Catholic press, including the Tablet, began to criticize Germany. Also some Irish Catholics criticized Germany’s anti-Semitic policies. Still, many continued to hold the attitude that if Hitler would cease his anti-Catholic activities, he would be acceptable. Communism remained the real enemy which Hitler was helping to fight. The issue of Nazism then was diminished as a point of contention, and the Irish and Germans were not involved in conflict over it. The end of the decade even saw cooperation between the Bund and Irish anti-Semites which Bund leader Fritz Kuhn encouraged. Bundists, Christian Fronters, and other kindred spirits often went to each other’s meetings, and at one point a merger was discussed between the Bund and the Christian Mobilizers, a largely Irish group similar to the Front. However, after the arrest of Kuhn the Bund’s new leaders dropped all ideas of merger.

A similar situation developed for the Italian community. Nazism was not a major issue to the Italians, although they did note to other Americans the differences between Hitler and Mussolini, with the intent of showing Italian Fascism in a favorable light. However, at the beginning of the decade, when Italy and Germany were competitors in Europe, Il Progresso was critical of Hitler, referring to him at times as “dictator Hitler” and objecting to various foreign policy moves such as Germany’s attempted union with Austria in 1934. As Italy and Germany drew closer as allies, comment in the Fascist Italian-American press became favorable toward Germany. England and France were now accused of causing all the trouble in Europe. This response to Germany continued until American entry into World War II.

In the United States, Bundists and Italian Fascists collaborated as their ideological homelands drew together. In 1937 the Bund and the Italian Blackshirts held a joint meeting at Camp Nordland, a Nazi Youth Center, in New Jersey. The Bund also met with other Italian Fascist organizations, such as the Associazione Italiano All’Estero (Association of Italians Abroad). The issue of Germany’s anti-Semitism did bring adverse comment from the Italian anti-Fascists such as Marcantonio, La Guardia, and Luigi Antonini. However, concern with the fate of Germany’s Jews was not widespread in the Italian-American community until later in the decade, when efforts were made to respond to Italy’s anti-Semitism. La Guardia probably did the most damage to Italian-German group relations in the United States by singling out Germany for attack a number of times while saying nothing about Mussolini and Italy. The Nazis and non-Nazis in the German-American community thought La Guardia to be unfair, but their attitude toward him was never extended to include hostility toward Italian-Americans. Nazism and other matters involving Germany remained mainly a German-Jewish issue.
ITALIAN-AMERICANS AND FASCISM

While Nazism was an immediate source of intergroup friction, the initial impact of Fascism came within the Italian-American community, where it was the cause of much in-fighting. Only later, and in muted form compared to the Nazi issue, did it contribute to group conflict. Even in New York, Mussolini was less a danger than Hitler.

Italian-Americans supported Italy for very much the same reasons that German-Americans supported Germany. The achievements of their ancestral home enhanced the prestige of the Italians in America and inspired pride in the accomplishments of the Mussolini regime. As one Italian-American noted: "Whatever you fellows may think of Mussolini, you've got to admit one thing. He has done more to get respect for the Italian people than anybody else. The Italians get a lot more respect now than when I started going to school. And you can thank Mussolini for that." Moreover, the agreement signed between Mussolini and Pope Pius XI in 1929, ending a long dispute between the Vatican and the Kingdom of Italy, made Il Duce appear as a champion of the Church.

While the German-Americans were called upon immediately to declare either for or against Nazism, and then were regarded suspiciously by other Americans if they hesitated, Italians faced no such ordeal. Americans in general tended to react much more favorably to Mussolini than to Hitler throughout the 1930s. Therefore it was easier for Fascism to gain a foothold in the United States and for Italian-Americans to support it—which the majority of them did. However, for the most part, this support was nonideological, since they were actually only expressing support for Italy.

Organized Fascism first appeared in America in the 1921-23 period with the emergence of a number of independent Fascist clubs. One of these was the Fascist League of North America, which, with the help of the Italian government, was able to absorb the other clubs. The league met with some opposition within the Italian-American community from anti-Fascists and from those who were apprehensive that an obvious Fascist presence would allow hostile nativist sentiment to emerge. By 1929 an exposé of the league in Harper's and the expression of some concern in Congress about this organization finally convinced the Italian government, which wanted to keep a low profile on Fascist activities in the United States, to abolish the league.

To replace the league, a number of smaller organizations arose with the help of Italian consular officials in the United States. These new groups included the Lictor Federation, established by Dominic Trombetta, a man who played an important role in the ethnic conflict of the late 1930s; and the Dante Alighieri Society, originally founded in 1890 but taken over by the Fascists in the 1920s. This organization disseminated Fascist propaganda through its cultural centers. A group that later became active in the Fascist cause was the Committee Pro-Italian Language, which propagandized Italian neighborhoods under the pretext of promoting the Italian language. The activities of the Dante Alighieri Society and the
Committee Pro-Italian Language were coordinated by the National United Italian Associations, an organization believed to be under the control of the Italian consulate in New York City. This coordinating body also worked with the United States section of the Association of Italians Abroad under the direction of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These organizations for the most part discarded the tactic of violence which their predecessor, the league, had used against anti-Fascists. However, the American Union of Fascists, a Blackshirt group similar to the German-American Bund, did not disclaim the use of physical assaults.66

Efforts to penetrate legitimate Italian-American fraternal societies caused an emotional reaction in this ethnic community. A particularly bitter battle erupted in the Sons of Italy during the mid-1920s over the issue of Fascism. Irreconcilable differences resulted in the splitting of the New York State section, led by La Guardia and State Senator Salvatore Cotillo, from the national body and the establishment of an anti-Fascist American Sons of Italy Grand Lodge.67

Among the Italian-Americans there was a vocal anti-Fascist opposition represented by men such as Salvatore Cotillo and Luigi Antonini, president of Local 89, the Italian Press and Waist Makers Union of the ILGWU, and by such events as the split within the Sons of Italy. Antonini, for example, lashed out in weekly radio talks against the Fascists and received many threats for his stand.68 In 1923 the Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America was created. This organization received support from the ILGWU and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union of America. The ILGWU also endorsed Il Nuovo Mondo, an anti-Fascist newspaper which began publication in 1925.69

However, those that were outright Fascists or sympathizers with the Mussolini regime were numerically stronger within this community. The major Italian-American newspapers, including the formidable Il Progresso, supported Mussolini. An indication of the weakness of the anti-Fascist opposition occurred during the Italian-Ethiopian War of 1935–36 when the leadership of the Italian labor unions criticized Mussolini’s invasion but won little support among the rank and file for their views.70

FASCISM AND THE OTHER ETHNICs

Since most Americans, including the other ethnics, did not yet regard Mussolini as a threat, the battles within the Italian community and the pro-Mussolini sympathies of the majority of Italian-Americans concerned few. In the Irish press, for example, there was no criticism of Italian Fascism. The settling of the Vatican-Kingdom of Italy dispute had perhaps satisfied many Irish Catholics that Mussolini was acceptable. Later in the 1930s the Coughlinite Irish would heap praise on Mussolini and Fascism. Indeed, when Hitler began his attacks on the Catholic Church in Germany, Mussolini looked even better. The German-American press at first responded differently. At the beginning of the 1930s, when Germany and
Italy were competitors in Europe, the German-Americans were critical of Mussolini. The *Staats-Zeitung* clearly blamed the Ethiopian War on Italy and was quick to point out Italian atrocities committed in that struggle. References were also made to Mussolini as a dictator. However, this attitude quickly changed as relations between Italy and Germany improved, and by the end of the 1930s the troubles in Europe were being blamed not on Italy but on the English and French. However, even with the early criticism of Italy, there is no indication that this issue impaired relations between the Germans and Italians in New York.

The Jews, who offered the most vehement opposition to Nazism, had a different reaction to Fascism until the late 1930s, when anti-Semitism became a factor. The Jewish press constantly compared Italian Fascism favorably to the degenerate German Nazism. "As Mussolini has gained in the respect of the world, the obsessed Führer has won the odium of enlightened mankind," commented one Jewish paper in 1934. Nazism was described as "counterfeit Fascism." The Jews in Italy were pictured as enjoying a renaissance under Mussolini. Statements in Italy’s newspapers critical of Hitler’s racial dogmas were given prominent space in the Jewish press. A full-page article in the *Jewish Examiner* described how Mussolini was aiding Jewish refugees from Germany and Jews in Italy. In 1933 a poll taken of forty-three Jewish newspaper editors to choose the twelve greatest Christian champions of the Jews in the previous year produced the name of Mussolini. Il Duce was chosen because he “took pains to demonstrate that Italian Fascism does not tolerate racial and religious persecution.”

Some Jews in New York, of course, were opposed to the Italian government on an ideological basis. The Jewish leadership of the ILGWU and the Amalgamated, along with the Yiddish socialist newspaper *Forward*, were prominent in anti-Fascist ranks. Rabbi Stephen Wise was a member of the American Friends of Italian Freedom, an early anti-Fascist organization. However, Italian Fascism did not evoke any hostility or even concern from the majority of the Jewish community in New York during the 1920s or early 1930s.

The Italian-Americans were very pleased not to antagonize the Jews and made a major point of showing the differences between Italian Fascism and German Nazism. Until 1938 Italy was pictured as a society where all could live in peace. “In Italy everybody is equal: Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, all Italians,” commented one Italian-American newspaper (which was later to become rabidly anti-Semitic). Mussolini himself noted in 1933 that “it is impossible to imagine in Italy... any persecution of Jews.”

**MUSSOLINI AND ANTI-SEMITISM**

However, Italian Fascism did eventually emerge as an explosive issue as Mussolini gradually drew closer to Germany and introduced racial policies which fit the
Nazi model. This shift began slowly. As late as 1936, when German and Italian “volunteers” were aiding Franco in Spain and the Rome-Berlin Axis was forming, the Italian delegate to the World Jewish Congress could still refer to his country as the “noblest example of perfect equality for Jews.” By 1937, the year when Italy joined the German-Japanese anti-Comintern pact, indications of change appeared as Mussolini’s Milan newspaper, *Popolo d’Italia*, asked Jews to give total support to Fascism or leave Italy. The paper stated that any opposition to Nazi ideas would be “irreconcilable with the friendship that binds us to Germany, which has objectives far more vast and fundamental than the Jewish question.” The paper noted, however, that Italy did not wish to rid itself of its Jewish population. Mussolini also indicated that a definite policy toward Jews had not yet been formulated when in July 1937 he venerated an Italian Jewish soldier killed in the Spanish Civil War and refused to accept the resignation of Italy’s Jewish communal authority, the council of the Union of Israelitic Communities in Italy.75

By 1938, however, the racial policy had been set. During this year, the world witnessed the German takeover of Austria and the Munich Conference. With these events came Italy’s anti-Semitic decrees. On 14 July 1938 ten Fascist university professors issued a government-sponsored manifesto charging the Jews with ruining the qualities that made up the characteristics of the Italian race. By the end of July Jews were gradually being removed from high office. This action served as the immediate prelude to the actual decrees, the first of which was promulgated on September 2. This anti-Semitic order prohibited Jewish teachers and students from entering the schools. It also ordered all Jews who had come to Italy since 1919 to depart within six months. Throughout September, October, and November in 1938 decrees were passed which restricted marriages between Jews and non-Jews, land and business ownership, Fascist party membership, and service in the armed forces or government. Later decrees in 1939 prohibited Jewish professionals from serving anyone but fellow Jews. The simultaneous establishment of a privileged class of Jews who were excluded from the restrictions softened these edicts. This group originally included the families of men who lost their lives in Italian wars or for the Fascist cause, who volunteered in wars or received the military cross, or who were members of the Fascist party in the early years of its growth. The privileged category remained until 1943, when the Germans occupied Italy after the overthrow of Mussolini. The Italian public, in contrast to the higher levels of Mussolini’s government, did not entirely endorse the anti-Semitic decrees. The result was an effort to soften the provisions through nonenforcement or by placing Jews in the privileged class.

As far as Italian-Jewish relations in New York were concerned, however, the most important fact was that the decrees had been passed at all, amid a great deal of publicity, and that a number of Jews in Italy were affected by them.76
REACTIONS TO THE DECREES

Some Jews were aware as early as 1936 that the edicts might be forthcoming in the near future. For example, in 1936 Rabbi Stephen Wise, President of the American Jewish Congress, suggested to a number of prominent Italian-Americans that they contact Mussolini "so that he may know of the value of Jewish citizenship to America. If that were done, it might avail to avert that anti-Semitism in Italy which up to this time has not been, but which seems to be foreshadowed by [Roberto] Farinacci's recent attack." However, there remained in the Jewish community an unwillingness to believe that Italy would really follow Germany's sordid policies. Consequently many Jews were unprepared for the events of 1938. One Jewish periodical commented that "Fascist Italy's ruthless campaign against the Jews in Italy came as a shock to many Jews and non-Jews, who somehow associated Jew-baiting with Nazi Germany alone and who thought that Italian Fascism was above the taint of anti-Semitism." However, the *Forward*, an early critic of Mussolini, expressed no surprise and reminded its readers that "there is no good Fascism."  

Aware of the problems that Italy's actions could cause, the Jewish press immediately attempted to calm the situation by urging continued harmony with all Italians. Evident, however, in the frantic pleas for harmonious relations, particularly with Italian-Americans, was the fear that ethnic relations were already, or soon going to be, deeply strained. The *New York Jewish News*, for example, commented that "to allow this black poison of hate, imported from abroad, to interfere with the mutual respect the Jews and Italians now feel toward one another would be a grave mistake." The *American Hebrew* pleaded that Jews "should be careful not to be so blinded by fury that they strike at innocent persons who happen to be standing nearby." The editorial continued with the hope that Jews would "not transfer our quarrel with the Italian government to this country by undertaking boycotts against Americans of Italian extraction." An article in the *Jewish Examiner* urged Italians and Jews to work together in America in order to avoid repercussions from events in Italy. The newspaper also noted that "Italian sentiment in America is definitely opposed to Mussolini's newly formulated 'Aryan' theory and its implications of anti-Semitism." One writer in the *Jewish Veteran*, perhaps trying to convince himself as well as his readers, stated that "the insane situation in 'Aryan' Italy will not affect the friendly relationship existing between Jews and Italians in our country."  

Besides urging and pleading with Jews not to retaliate against Italian-Americans, the Jewish press attempted to mollify tensions by exonerating Italians abroad for their actions. In an open letter to Mussolini, the *American Hebrew* stated that "we want to believe—our former admiration and respect urges us to believe—that what you have done in recent days you have not done of your own free will." An article in the *Jewish Examiner* noted that Mussolini and
the Italian people were not really in favor of the anti-Semitic campaign. Even the _Forward_ commented that Mussolini had "finally caught the ugly Hitleristic disease," which they attributed to the new friendship between the two dictators. This viewpoint was supported by some Italian-Americans. Antonini, while condemning Italian anti-Semitism, stated that it was being instituted as a result of Nazi orders.80

The leadership of the Italian-American community did not wish to see a conflict emerge between Jews and Italians, either, and therefore it too urged harmony. Generoso Pope, the publisher of _Il Progresso_, although remaining a Fascist supporter, rejected the anti-Semitic decrees and made repeated efforts in letters and editorials to calm the situation. When Jews first became concerned about possible anti-Semitic action in Italy, Pope optimistically pointed out that Mussolini intended no harm to the Jews in Italy; after the anti-Semitism had begun, his editorials stressed that Italy had no desire to imitate Nazi policies. Pope urged that Jews and Italians in America not allow their friendship to be affected by events abroad. Letters to the newspaper echoed Pope’s thoughts.81 Other Italian-American leaders were critical of Italy’s new policies and urged that there be no repercussions in America. This opinion was voiced by such notables as Marcantonio, La Guardia, Poletti, Antonini, Cotillo, Philip Bongiorno (former Supreme Master of the Sons of Italy), Santo Modica (Grand Master of the American Sons of Italy Grand Lodge of New York State), and Joseph Tigani (president of the Roman American Progressive League). These leaders were joined by many others when a number of Italian-American patriotic, civic, and religious organizations met in Manhattan in November 1938 to protest the persecution of Jews in Italy and Germany.82

Within six months after the beginning of Italy’s anti-Semitic policy, the leadership of the Italian-American community had clearly rejected it. However, during these six months a reaction similar to that in the German-American situation developed, indicating the explosiveness of the Italian anti-Semitic issue. Essentially, before Italians expressly rejected the decrees, they were suspect in the same fashion as were the non-Nazis. Conflict was evident until the Jews were convinced of the Italian community’s position on this matter. Reports from a number of sources during these months indicated an increasing friction between the two groups. Jews began to retaliate against Italians by using their economic power. A study prepared for the American Jewish Committee in November 1938 observed that fewer Jews were shopping at Italian-owned stores because of the decrees. Furthermore, in some instances Italian workers and union members had a definite feeling that work was being denied them because of Jewish discrimination. This was particularly the case in the Painters Brotherhood and the garment industry. For example, the report stated that Italian painters “resent a certain lack of work, although it has not been proven openly that this is a result of Jewish discrimination. They are, however, convinced that such a thing exists.”
report continued that a number of Italian-owned garment shops, which rely on Jewish jobbers for their business, had experienced an abrupt decrease in orders. This drop in orders was perceived to be a reaction to the decrees.83

The concern with this problem was expressed by *Il Progresso* publisher Generoso Pope when he noted that “in my business enterprises I have faithful and loyal workers of many nationalities; I have Jews who hold high positions. . . . It never occurred to me to discriminate against anyone because of race or creed. I hope that Jewish industrialists and businessmen harbor the same sentiments.” The Jews’ greatest threat, and the Italians’ most often-expressed fear, was that of a Jewish boycott of Italian products similar to the anti-Nazi boycott begun against Germany in 1933. Concern was expressed that any boycott would extend to all things Italian. For example, Pope noted that he had heard of a proposed Jewish boycott of Italian goods “which probably would not stop at importations from Italy.” Cotillo, in a cable to Mussolini, asked that the decrees be lifted because there was “serious talk of boycotting Italy in our great city of New York where we live in close interdependent relationship” with the Jews. The Italian government also worried about a boycott and other repercussions. They saw their fears becoming reality after a decline in Italian bonds on the New York market was considered to be a reaction to the anti-Semitic events in Italy.84

As a result, Mussolini had little enthusiasm for pushing the anti-Semitic campaign either in Italy or America. Only a few Italian-American Fascists supported these decrees.85 The most blatant was Dominic Trombetta, publisher of *Il Grido della Stirpe* (Cry of the Race). Trombetta’s newspaper engaged itself in a defense of the Nazis and began to repeat the accusations against Jews found in the German-American Bund newspaper in New York. While the newspaper claimed that reports of anti-Semitism in Germany were exaggerated, it emphasized the plight of Italians in America and Catholics in Mexico, Spain, and Russia. Jews were described as Communists and anti-Fascists whose goal was to destroy Italian Fascism. In addition, the paper defended the German-American Bund, noting that “it is needless to say that the Bund is a patriotic organization determined now more than ever to fight the world’s worst parasite, namely Communism.” The intent of the newspaper seemed to be to coordinate activities, including anti-Semitic propaganda, between Fascists and Nazis in New York City and to convince Italian-Americans to support Nazi Germany.86

Partly because of Trombetta’s rhetoric and the initial Jewish response to the decrees, anti-Semitism soon began to appear among Italians. One study focusing on Italian East Harlem indicated that the area was seeing the growth of overt anti-Semitism, especially among “Italians who worked in Jewish sweatshops.” Another study mentioned a burgeoning anti-Semitic movement among Italians in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union and an “increasing coolness” between Italians and Jews in the Painters Brotherhood. The Italians drawn to anti-Semitism were mainly those who were working in Jewish-dominated industries and affected by the Jewish reaction to Italy’s decrees. Also involved here
was some Italian resentment of real or perceived Jewish success. For example, one Italian-American garment worker who joined an anti-Semitic organization at this time complained that in the Jewish-dominated ILGWU "65 percent of the union is Sicilian and we don't hold one office." As with the non-Nazi experience, the conflict expanded as retaliation was preached.

RESOLVING THE CONFLICT

Many Italian-Americans were concerned that the conflict would grow more intense if it were not checked quickly. Marcantonio remarked in February 1939 that "there is existing the danger of the spread of anti-Semitism among our people" and urged that a conference of Italian-American leaders, to which Jewish representatives were invited, be held soon. This, he felt, would "help destroy once and for all the misunderstanding which is being engendered by dishonest people between Jews and Italians." By June 1939 a circular sent out by the American Sons of Italy Grand Lodge noted that "anti-Semitism in Europe, unfortunately, has had a repercussion in America, particularly in the City and State of New York, causing a spirit of hatred and resentment between Italians and Jews that can only culminate in a daily struggle." This organization set up a Bureau of Good-Will Between Italians and Jews in America whose main purpose was to "promote brotherhood and settle any dispute caused by discriminatory acts." Members were requested to notify the bureau regarding grievances involving the loss of business or employment due to the Italian-Jewish conflict. As with the explosive issue involving non-Nazi German-Americans and Jews, conflict had developed out of misunderstanding. However, the effort of the Italian leadership to repudiate anti-Semitism and to work to improve relations with the Jews helped to mitigate the conflict.

The desire of the Italians to avoid conflict with the Jews was the result of many factors. Foremost was a concern over Jewish economic power. Being more vulnerable to Jewish economic retaliation than the Germans, the Italians expressed particular concern about this aspect of conflict. Even the anti-Semitic Il Grido della Stirpe expressed this concern. At the same time that the newspaper was calling Jews Communists, it also reported cases of Jewish economic discrimination against Italians. The result was that the paper requested that Jews maintain their friendship with Italians in America and disregard the events in Italy. "We wish to live in peace with others" said the anti-Semitic journal. The Jews, of course, were not unaware of their power in this respect. The Jewish Examiner claimed that the two largest Italian-American newspapers in New York had remained neutral on Mussolini's decrees because Jewish businesses provided three-fourths of their advertising. Whether or not the claim is true, it indicates that some Jews perceived that economic power kept the Italians in New York from supporting the decrees.
Jewish economic power was certainly not the whole explanation, however. Italians were also more willing than Germans to castigate certain aspects of the Fatherland, for the German’s World War I experience made them extremely uneasy about criticizing anything German. Even pro-Fascist Italian-Americans were willing to repudiate the anti-Semitic decrees while maintaining support for Mussolini’s government. Furthermore, the racial theories which were such an integral part of Nazism were not a vital part of Italian Fascism and could therefore be more easily rejected.

The point in time at which this conflict emerged also must be noted. By 1938 American public opinion was showing an awareness of the German threat, thereby forcing German-Americans to declare themselves to be against Nazism; there was also a budding awareness of the danger of Italy. Starting in 1937 a number of exposés of the Italian Fascist movement in the United States began to appear in American periodicals. Gradually, pressure increased on Italian-Americans to state their position or be suspect as enemies of America. In this changing atmosphere, and with the response of the Jews, most segments of the Italian community moved relatively quickly to declare themselves against anti-Semitism. Had there been no repudiation of the decrees, the conflict would have continued. Again, a group’s vital interests eventually had compelled them to shift their position and speak out against their ancestral home and the sources of the conflict.

The Jews also moved away from the conflict situation for a number of reasons. They were under attack during the 1930s not only by German Nazis but also from organizations operating in New York, such as the German-American Bund and the largely Irish Christian Front. As problems with the Bund and Front increased toward the end of the decade, Jewish leaders began to focus their attention on these groups. The much less vocal Italian anti-Semitism faded into the background of Jewish concern. The relatively small number of Jews in Italy and the mildness of Mussolini’s anti-Semitism also aided the Jewish effort to suppress conflict. Il Duce was never fully identified in the Jewish mind with anti-Semitism; Hitler occupied this position, and the Jews concentrated on him. The forthright denunciation of the decrees by Italian-American leaders eventually convinced enough Jews that the Italian community was not hostile to them. It was extremely important to have major Italian and Jewish leaders urging harmony. Although some difficulties between Italians and Jews remained because of continued Italian-American support for Mussolini, the main point of friction had been eliminated.

Explosive issues that can easily lead to conflict can also easily be moderated. In the case of both the German-Americans and Italian-Americans, a group’s vital interests had compelled a stand which led to conflict, and then, by a twist of events, these same interests were responsible for the elimination of the main source of conflict. For a group to survive in America’s competitive society, it is only natural that it behave in this way.