In 1943, the American Zionist leader Hayim Greenberg accused American Jewish organizations of "moral bankruptcy" for failing to mobilize to come to the aid of European Jewry. Greenberg, writing in the Yiddish press, marveled at the lack of a frenzied response on the part of a people who had learned that millions of their brethren were being brutally eliminated. His claim that the great number of competing organizations that made up the American Jewish community divided rather than united American Jewry, anticipated the judgment of historians. Greenberg and subsequent scholars, however, tended to ignore an intriguing fact: during the Holocaust era, American Zionist organizations experienced tremendous growth and Zionists became the leaders of the American Jewish community.

In 1933, the year Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, Zionism was a weak movement struggling to survive within the American Jewish community. The major American Zionist organizations in 1933 claimed a combined membership of slightly over sixty-five thousand. In the midst of a major depression, Zionists vainly fought to convince American Jews to join a movement that seemed to be doing little to uplift the Jewish condition either at home or abroad. To make matters worse, within the United States powerful American Jewish organizations, such as the American Jewish Committee and the entire Reform Judaism establishment, refused even to accept the very concept of Jewish nationhood.

On the eve of the Nazi nightmare, Zionist leaders in the United States, like their counterparts in Palestine, did not expect to see the establishment of a Jewish state in their lifetimes. Instead, they looked forward to a slow but steady Jewish settlement of Palestine under the supervision of Great Britain, which held a League of Nations Mandate to prepare
the Holy Land for eventual independence. While this strategy did not promise to immediately alleviate the "Jewish problem" in Europe, it would allow for social experimentation and, through the kibbutz movement, the establishment of a classless Jewish society in Palestine. Slow-paced development would also provide Zionists with time to forge a peaceful relationship with the Arab residents of Palestine. While Palestine's Arab majority might be uncomfortable with Jewish settlement in 1933, most American Zionist leaders optimistically looked forward to the time when the Arabs would realize that the Zionist experiment in the Holy Land was serving their own best interests, as well as those of the Jews.

Following the Nazi's rise to power in 1933, many German Jews sought to flee from their oppressors. The Jewish refugee crisis dramatically transformed American Zionist organizations. The plight of assimilated German Jewry seemed to validate the Zionist claim that Jewish nationalism was the only suitable survival tactic for Diaspora Jewry. American Zionists energetically set out to provide the Jewish refugees with a home in Palestine. Their ability to provide a practical solution to the refugee crisis won the movement new prestige and members.

The thousands of Jewish refugees who found a home in the Holy Land frightened Palestine's Arab majority. Dreading the possibility of becoming "second class citizens" in their own land, the Arabs began a long and bitter armed insurrection in 1936. Arab opposition to Jewish immigration led Great Britain in 1939 to renounce its support of Zionism and eventual Jewish statehood. The necessity to defend Palestine against Arab attacks and to fend off American and British critics of Jewish nationalism slowly changed the priorities of American Zionists. Whereas they had previously been able to focus their attention on presenting Palestine as the most practical and feasible refugee haven, they were now forced to use the refugee crisis as a means to defend the Jewish settlement of the Holy Land.

World War II seemed to offer American Zionists one last opportunity to create a Jewish state. Believing that the Second World War would follow the pattern of the First, American Zionists looked forward to a "second" Versailles conference, which would redraw boundaries and settle territorial and national disputes. To make this dream a reality, Zionists would have to gather massive political and popular support during the war. Knowledge of Hitler's ongoing extermination of European Jewry did not force American Zionists to alter their thinking or strategy; rather it confirmed their conviction that Jewish statehood was the best response to genocide. As American Jews learned about the fate of their European co-religionists, they seemed to flock to the Zionist banner.

Historians have generally conceived of the American Jewish response to the Holocaust and the triumph of American Zionism as two separate events. In fact, they are inseparably linked. Hitler's persecution of European Jewry (which began long before the implementation of an extermination policy) fundamentally determined the development of American Zionism.
American Jews completely transformed their political world between 1933 and 1948. By the end of 1947, Zionist organizations, with nearly one million members, hegemonically controlled the American Jewish community. Zionists had spearheaded a long, bitter political struggle resulting in the November 1947 United Nations vote to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Much of this campaign was waged against a British Empire that, in the minds of American Zionists, had been transformed from a benign benefactor into an accomplice in the extermination of six million European Jews. The struggle for Jewish statehood also fundamentally altered Jewish perceptions of the Arabs. American Zionist leaders no longer looked upon Palestinian Arabs as a people merely needing to recognize the benefits of Jewish development of the Holy Land. Instead, American Zionists viewed their Arab opponents as reactionary neo-Nazis who were attempting to complete the work that Adolf Hitler had begun.

This book is neither a diplomatic history of American Zionism nor an analysis of organizational developments. Other historians have undertaken these tasks. Rather, this is a study of how the worldview, or *weltanschauung*, of American Zionists evolved during the critical decades of the thirties and forties. Particular attention will be given to the dynamic and complex relationship between the Zionist worldview and the policies they pursued during their confrontation with nazism.

Studying how the worldview of American Zionists developed and changed during the critical years between 1933 and 1948 requires a sensitive analysis of sometimes neglected sources. Abba Hillel Silver, Stephen Wise, and their fellow Zionist leaders delivered numerous speeches and published many articles aimed at both Jewish and Christian audiences. The verbatim transcripts of American Zionist conventions total thousands of pages, recording the words of both movement leaders and rank-and-file members. Of course, many of these speeches and comments were repetitious and unoriginal, but some Zionists like Silver and Wise could express themselves eloquently and powerfully. Regardless of the quality of construction or delivery, the speeches and comments of American Zionists provide us with a wonderful means of understanding how Jewish nationalists in the United States attempted to make sense of their world.

American Jews in the 1930s and 1940s lived through times of confusion and tragedy. In the midst of a major economic depression, which at times seemed to threaten the social and political stability of the United States, they confronted the rise of Nazi anti-Semitism. However, these acts of hatred were usually associated with “unenlightened” Eastern Europe. Hitler’s success at enacting anti-Semitic policies reminiscent of the Middle Ages in “civilized” Germany seemed incredible and without precedent. The dilemma of American Jews deepened after the outbreak of the Second World War when they learned about the ongoing mass murder of European Jewry. The systematic, “scientific” extermination of millions of souls was horrifying, all the more so because the victims were not strangers. The over-
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whelming majority of Jews in the United States had roots that stretched across the Atlantic to Nazi-occupied Europe. It was their kinfolk riding the railcars to German gas chambers. During World War II, American Jews desperately struggled both to understand and respond to the European Jewish tragedy.

American Zionists shared in the despair and anguish of the entire American Jewish community. However, they discovered that the ideology of Jewish nationalism allowed them to understand events almost defying comprehension and provided them with a means of responding to Hitler’s death camps. For Zionists, the Holocaust proved that national homelessness caused anti-Semitism and that only through the creation of a nation of their own could Jewry achieve salvation. Convinced that the Second World War offered Zionists their last best chance to create a Jewish state, they were determined not only to rescue European Jewry, but, through the revolutionary step of Jewish statehood, to rescue the entire Jewish people, born and unborn, from the threat of continued persecution. Failure to create a Jewish state would be criminal, as they were sure that it would condemn future generations to death and suffering.

Once Zionists intellectually “understood” the extermination of their European kin, they offered their explanation and solution to the wider Jewish and Christian publics. The powerful Zionist message appealed to the American Jewish masses and to the many Christians desperately searching for an answer to Auschwitz. They flocked around the blue and white flag of Zionism and joined in a crusade that ended with the establishment of the State of Israel.

The pages that follow tell the story of how American Zionists struggled to comprehend and respond to Nazi anti-Semitism and the consequences of their actions.