New Perspectives on Kristallnacht

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Kristallnacht had an impact in the United States, but not in the way we think. Scholars have documented reactions in the public realm, but in Los Angeles, the most consequential responses to Kristallnacht occurred in the often hidden world of private actions taken both by Nazis and by resistors.¹

The initial American response to Kristallnacht came from President Franklin D. Roosevelt who denounced the pogroms and recalled his ambassador to Germany, Hugh Wilson, and US commercial attaché Douglas Miller. Roosevelt also demanded that the German government pay compensation for damages to the property of American Jews and that they reverse their decision to forbid foreign Jews from doing business in Germany. Yet, rhetoric aside, the American government took no real action to stop German territorial aggression or the persecution of European Jews. Congress rejected a bill that would have allowed twenty thousand Jewish children to emigrate to the United States, and while Roosevelt recalled his ambassador to Germany, he did not break off diplomatic relations. Jews would have to fend for themselves. “Extermination” was the goal of the November pogroms, warned the Los Angeles B’nai B’rith Messenger. “Unless the democracies evacuate the German Jews at once and at
their own expense, they will be starved into crime and then exterminated with ‘fire and sword.’”

The tepid response of the American government was matched by the ambivalent response of the American public. Kristallnacht, numerous scholars have insisted, marked a turning point in American public opinion toward the Hitler regime. That is true, but only to a limited extent and one that had little significant impact on American Nazi and fascist leaders. Politicians, clergy, and civic leaders throughout the nation denounced the pogroms, and a Gallup poll taken that November revealed ninety-four percent of respondents disapproved of the Nazi treatment of Jews. Americans condemned anti-Semitism abroad, but they remained more equivocal in their attitude about Jews at home. A Roper poll taken after Kristallnacht revealed only thirty-nine percent believed Jews should be treated like everyone else; fifty-three percent believed Jews were different and should be restricted; and ten percent believed Jews should be deported.

Kristallnacht was not an isolated incident and responses to it need to be seen in the context of a series of European events that began with the Anschluss in March 1938. The lack of any serious reaction to Hitler’s take over of Austria during the Anschluss, the subsequent capitulation of western leaders at Munich later that September, and Germany’s seizure of the Sudetenland in October emboldened Nazis and fascists throughout the United States and reinforced their belief that Hitler could not be stopped by faint-hearted western leaders.

Nazi aggression abroad was accompanied by Nazi aggression in the United States. In Los Angeles, members of the German-American Bund reacted to news of the pogroms with unfettered joy. On Wednesday evening, November 16, 1938, an ebullient Hermann Schwinn, leader of the local Bund and the number two Nazi in America, addressed an excited crowd of several hundred who had come to attend a special meeting celebrating Kristallnacht. Surrounded by storm troopers dressed in full uniform, the slender thirty-three-year-old führer with a thin Hitler mustache blamed Jews for causing the massacre. Hitler and the German people, he told the sympathetic audience, had simply given “the Jews what is coming to them.” Schwinn denounced the “Jew controlled press” for its “malicious campaign against Germany” and insisted that American Christians were finally waking up to the Jewish menace. “I predict that within less than five years we will see Jews dangling from telephone posts and trees.”

Los Angeles was one of many Nazi strongholds in the United States. Hitler’s American minions, operating as the Teutonia Association, established
their initial beachhead in Chicago in 1924. In the spring of 1933, Heinz Spanknöbel, head of the Friends of New German (renamed the German-American Bund in 1936), sent German veteran Captain Robert Pape to Los Angeles to organize Nazi branches along the Pacific Coast. Several months later, Pape was succeeded by Hamburg-born Hermann Schwinn, who moved to Canton, Ohio, in 1924 with his parents and worked as a bank clerk until settling in Los Angeles in 1928. Schwinn soon rose to become head of the entire western region of the German-American Bund and the number two Nazi in the United States.6

Inspired by Kristallnacht, Schwinn and his Nazi cohort began working toward Der Tag, “the day” when Nazis and their supporters would seize control of the American government—either through force or the ballot box. Once in power, they would eliminate the dual threats of communism and Judaism. Unafraid of blustering national politicians, Schwinn and his lieutenants were far more concerned that local Jews and their allies would respond to the Kristallnacht massacre with violence. Following the November 16 Deutsches Haus celebration, Ordnungsdienst leader (OD, or uniformed service, a militia equivalent to the storm troopers) Mike Drey gathered his men and warned,
“Things are rapidly coming to a point where physical violence will be the order of
the day.” Fearing that “bombs or rocks may be thrown by ‘enemies,’” Schwinn or-
dered all Deutsches Haus windows to be covered with sturdy wooden shutters.\(^7\)

The overt physical attacks and violence Schwinn feared never occurred, but Angelinos did voice their anger at Kristallnacht with a series of highly pub-
licized anti-Nazi meetings. On November 18, 3,500 local residents flocked to
Philharmonic Auditorium for a “Quarantine Hitler” rally to hear actor John
Garfield and director Frank Capra give speeches condemning Germany.

Speakers called upon the crowd to send President Roosevelt telegrams de-
nouncing western “capitulation to Hitler” and demanding that he take action
to express “the horror and the indignation of the American people.”\(^8\) Ten days
later, over one thousand men and women turned out for a similar mass pro-
test at Grace Methodist Church organized by Jewish and Protestant clergy and
leaders of the United Anti-Nazi Conference.\(^9\)

Hermann Schwinn and his Nazi cohort remained unmoved by such ac-
tions. Anti-Nazi protestors believed words and rhetoric could serve as effective
weapons. Schwinn believed that guns and well-drilled troops would prove far
more useful in attaining his vision of a Jew-free America—a vision shared by
Fritz Kuhn, the German-American Bund’s national leader. The Munich-born
Kuhn moved to the United States in 1928 and worked as a chemist for Henry
Ford before assuming control of the Bund in 1936.\(^10\)

On November 30, 1938, nearly three weeks after Kristallnacht, Mike
Drey read a twenty-one-page set of secret orders sent from Bund headquar-
ters in New York instructing local Ordnungsdienst members to begin rigorous
training in firearms and hand-to-hand combat. All training activities, the or-
ders warned, must be camouflaged and appear to be private practice and not
Bund sponsored. Schwinn called upon all Bund members who were American
citizens to join the National Rifle Association, from whom they could then
purchase new guns for $14 and second-hand weapons for $7.50 each. Over
the next several months, the Bund’s storm trooper unit began secretly training
in hand-to-hand combat in the Hollywood Hills far away from prying eyes.
“It seems we are in the Army now,” quipped Schwinn lieutenant Reinhold
Kusche.\(^11\)

Raising and training a well-drilled military force was only a part of
Schwinn’s strategy for bringing National Socialism to the United States.
Following Kristallnacht, Bundists created a network of local secret cells among
sympathetic Americans, each no larger than ten men that would be spread
across the country. Modeled on the cell system used by the Nazi party in the
1920s, all meetings were held in secret and no cell knew of the existence of the other. By the end of December 1938, the Los Angeles Bund had organized eighteen cells and anticipated more. Each member of the cell, according to Hans Diebel, Schwinn’s closest lieutenant, “can be relied upon in an uprising. It is to be done exactly as it was done in [1920s] Germany.”

Knowing the importance of swaying public opinion to their cause, Schwinn and Diebel also organized “private discussion groups” in the homes of sympathetic Americans who supported the Nazis but did not want that fact known to neighbors and acquaintances. Bund meetings were regularly attracting 250–300 people, but Schwinn wanted to build a support network that ran into the thousands. By early 1939, Diebel succeeded in organizing one hundred discussion groups throughout Los Angeles and nearby Pasadena and Glendale. Much to the Bund’s delight, the leaders of these groups included prominent members of the city’s social register, such as wealthy Beverly Hills socialite Mrs. Preston Harris Fisher, who recruited like-minded people from the city’s Women’s Club. Schwinn also worked to gain additional supporters by hosting a weekly program of news and music featuring National Socialist songs that
could be heard on the German Radio Hour every Friday night and Sunday morning on KRKD.14

German-American Bundists in Los Angeles were not the only ones working toward Der Tag. Hitler’s forces threatened the city on multiple fronts. The vapid response of the American government to Kristallnacht led Germany to step up its spying activities along the Pacific coast. The Los Angeles port proved a godsend for the German government. Unlike the docks of New York City (“Jew York” as Nazis called it) that were closely monitored by the city’s outspoken half-Jewish mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, Nazis discovered they could funnel money, propaganda, and secret agents through the western city’s ports without detection. Following the Anschluss, and especially after Kristallnacht, Berlin sent unprecedented numbers of highly trained spies to assess the nation’s readiness for war and to scope out military installations and defense plants along the Pacific Coast. “We have no difficulties at all,” Hans Diebel boasted to friends in December 1938, “in getting certain people into this country with or without papers.”15

Hermann Schwinn knew he had to forge a broad coalition of similarly minded men and women if he was to succeed in convincing Americans to join his cause. Several years earlier, he created the United Front, an alliance of the city’s many fascist groups. That alliance grew far stronger after Kristallnacht. With Hitler’s forces seemingly invincible, Schwinn found it easy to assemble a consortium of anti-Semites prepared to take militant action: Silver Shirts, Ku Klux Klan, Japanese and Italian fascists, Mexican Gold Shirts, and White Russians who had participated in pogroms in Russia and were anxious to do the same in the United States.16

With over 750 Nazi and fascist groups operating in the United States in 1939, Schwinn’s vision of establishing a Jew-free nation did not seem so far-fetched. “So thorough has been the Nazi infiltration among the native anti-Jewish groups,” the American Jewish Yearbook reported in 1939, “that it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate one from the other.”17 Public denunciations of Kristallnacht and subsequent anti-Nazi rallies did little to stem rising Nazi and fascist aggression in Los Angeles. Concerned about Nazi activities on American soil, Congress gave the FBI $300,000 in October 1938 to increase their counter-espionage activities. However, the FBI’s Red-obsessed director J. Edgar Hoover did not think Nazis posed a serious threat to the nation. Despite pleas from local agents, Hoover did not order the Los Angeles bureau to put Hermann Schwinn—the number two Nazi in the nation—under surveillance until November 28, 1941, nine days before the attack on Pearl Harbor.18
In the aftermath of Kristallnacht, Hermann Schwinn and his fascist allies felt confident that the New Year would bring more good news and more converts to the cause. His confidence was misplaced. The Nazi defeat in Los Angeles would not come from public protests or the actions of government agencies. Rather, Schwinn and his cohort would be brought down by a small group of men and women led by Leon Lewis, the man Nazis referred to as “the most dangerous Jew in Los Angeles.”

JEWISH RESISTANCE
Local resistance to Nazism began on July 26, 1933, when Los Angeles Nazis, operating as the Friends of New Germany, held their first open meeting and announced their intention to save America from its two greatest threats, communists and Jews. Several days later, as national organizations such as the American Jewish Congress and American Jewish Committee continued debating what to do about Adolf Hitler, Jewish attorney and World War I veteran Leon L. Lewis took direct action. Approaching four fellow members of the Disabled American Veterans, he asked them and their wives to risk their lives by going undercover and spying on every Nazi and fascist group in the city and then sending him daily reports describing their activities. Lewis and his Community Committee (a small advisory board of local Jewish leaders) maintained their undercover spy operation from summer 1933 until the end of World War II. Often rising to leadership positions, his spies foiled a series of Nazi plots to kill the city’s Jews and to sabotage the nation’s military installations: plans existed for murdering twenty-four Hollywood actors and power figures such as Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Charlie Chaplin, Louis B. Mayer and Samuel Goldwyn; for driving through Boyle Heights and machine-gunning as many Jewish residents as possible; for fumigating Jewish homes with cyanide; and, for blowing up defense installations and seizing munitions from National Guard armories on the day Nazis planned to launch their American putsch.

There was nothing in Lewis’s past to indicate he would one day become a highly successful spymaster. Born in Hurley, Wisconsin on September 5, 1888 to German-Jewish immigrants Edward and Rachel Lewis, Leon attended public school in Milwaukee, went to college at the University of Wisconsin and George Washington University, and earned a law degree from the University of Chicago Law School in 1913. Upon graduating, he accepted a position as
the founding executive secretary of the recently organized Anti-Defamation League—a position he maintained until 1925. Suffering from a variety of war-induced health issues, Lewis moved his family from Chicago to Los Angeles in the early 1930s.22

Lewis’s spy activities, which are thoroughly described in Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America, took on a new urgency in the months between the Anschluss and Kristallnacht. Until then, he ran a one-man operation assisted only by his part-time volunteer, Hollywood story editor Joseph Roos. Unlike Lewis, the Vienna-born, Berlin-raised Roos was familiar with the worlds of espionage and counter-espionage. In 1933, after learning that he and his uncle Julius Klein had been spying on Nazis in Chicago and fearing the untrained Roos was likely to be discovered, Army Colonel George C. Marshall ordered his men to train him in espionage and counterespionage techniques. Over the course of several weeks, Marshall’s army intelligence operatives taught their Jewish pupil to “keep your eyes wide open, never get into any arguments with anybody, talk as though you are in agreement with them, don’t egg them on in order to have a better story to tell.” His instructors also took him out on night maneuvers and taught him how to evade detection.23

Arriving in Los Angeles in the spring of 1934, Roos went to work as a story editor for Carl Laemmle and then for Jesse Lasky and Mary Pickford. The former newspaper reporter earned a good living in the movie business, but the work left him unsatisfied. The diminutive twenty-five-year-old writer with a heavy accent and bottle-like eyeglasses began spending evenings and weekends assisting Lewis, whom he met through mutual friends. “Before I knew it, I was his one and only volunteer who trained his under-cover people, taught them how to watch even for the smallest details, how to write reports, etc.”24

For the next several years, Lewis urged Roos to work for him full time. Roos resisted until the evening of April 10, 1938, when he went to Deutsches Haus to observe 450 Bundists, Silver Shirts, White Russians, and Italian and Spanish fascists celebrate Hitler’s triumphant entry into Vienna following the Anschluss. “The reaction of the populace,” Roos reflected, “was as if Jesus Christ had arrived.”25 That evening changed the course of his life. “I felt it wasn’t fair for me to continue thinking up nice boy-meets-girl stories for the movies, because I understood what Nazism stood for.” Encouraged by his wife Alvina, Roos gave up his cushy job at United Artists and became Lewis’s full-time associate spymaster.26

Following Kristallnacht, Lewis and Roos found themselves involved in a deadly race between two opposing forces: Nazis who called for eliminating
communists and Jews, and, a small group of Jews and their spies who worked to stop them. With the FBI dragging its feet, and with Los Angeles police chief James Davis and county sheriff Eugene Biscailuz showing little interest in monitoring anyone other than communists, it was up to Lewis and Roos to stop the Nazi assault on Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{27}

As news of Nazi militancy at home and abroad increased, Roos expanded the scope of Lewis’s undercover operation by bringing in several new full-time spies as well as a number of trusted informants. By January 1939, he succeeded in placing three undercover operatives inside Deutsches Haus. In addition to recruiting former Burns Detective Agent William Bockhacker, who rose to become Schwinn’s right-hand American advisor, Roos also enlisted Charles Young, a German-born naturalized citizen and financial investigator who deplored the bad name Germans were getting because of Hitler, and life insurance salesman Roy Arnold, who loathed the city’s Nazi cohort and was happy to feign being one of Schwinn’s desired American followers.\textsuperscript{28}

Roos recruited four other informants who worked for him on a sporadic basis: Mrs. Anna Friedman, a German American who provided important information gleaned from mingling with Bund women; Harwood E. Park, an American-born aircraft mechanic who alerted the spymasters to potential sabotage at local aircraft factories; Walter Hadel, who investigated incidents of anti-Semitism and tracked Nazis and fascists working in the movie studios; and Jimmy Frost, an investigator who acted as a go-between with a number of local and federal officials.\textsuperscript{29}

With his spies in place, Roos began reorganizing Lewis’s chaotic system for filing spy reports. “Everybody was identified by [code] number, and you had to figure out who is this and who is that. It was terrible.” Roos created individual index cards with the names, addresses, and vital information about hundreds of local Nazis and fascists, as well as separate cards for the many right-wing organizations to which they belonged. Roos soon turned himself into a “walking encyclopedia” who knew the name of every Nazi and what he or she looked like.\textsuperscript{30} More importantly, he sent his extensive list of Nazis, fascists, and suspected spies to the FBI, Army Intelligence, and Naval Intelligence—and updated them on a regular basis.\textsuperscript{31}

Until Kristallnacht, most of Lewis’s work had been confined to the secret world of espionage. But Roos changed that. Taking a page from Joseph Goebbels, a man he considered the “most clever, ablest propaganda operator in the world,” the Austrian-born Jew began his own propaganda campaign by launching the News Research Service in January 1939. Drawing upon his
considerable skills as a newspaperman and Hollywood story editor, Roos’s weekly *News Letter* turned his spy reports into a read as gripping as any detective thriller. Over the next three years he sent copies to myriad government agencies, newspapers, popular magazines, and influential political columnists.\(^\text{32}\)

Roos slowly transformed Leon Lewis’s local spy ring into a successful national operation whose *News Letter* “reached millions practically every week because of the ‘pickup’” by syndicated columnists such as Walter Winchell and the team of Robert Allen and Drew Pearson.\(^\text{33}\) The popular political columnists regularly used material from the *News Letter* to provide newspaper readers with an often-frightening look at Nazi activity inside and outside the nation’s borders. The normally modest Roos insisted that as a result of these exposés, several “slow-moving government forces were compelled to take action against a number of Nazi propaganda agents who had failed to register as foreign agents with the State Department.”\(^\text{34}\)

In the months between the Anschluss, and especially after Kristallnacht, Lewis and Roos began fighting their enemies on two fronts: a secret undercover operation, and a public relations campaign aimed at alerting Americans to the threat Nazism posed to democracy. The strategy in both cases was to weaken, if not destroy the Nazi movement in Los Angeles, by discrediting Hermann Schwinn, sowing dissension within the Bund, and creating so much national publicity through the use of Winchell, Allen, and Pearson that government officials would be forced to take action against the Bund. Their strategy worked, though it would take several years before Lewis and Roos would enjoy their ultimate victory.

Following Hitler’s many European triumphs, William Bockhacker reported that the local Bundists were growing increasingly divided between militants such as storm trooper leader Michael Drey, who wanted to pursue a more aggressive National Socialist course of action, and those who favored Hermann Schwinn’s more accommodationist plan aimed at enticing Americans to join the Bund. As a result of the open feud, many local Bundists grew disillusioned with both sides. Members accused the warring leaders of being too arrogant and insufficiently *kameradschaftlich* (comradely). Worse yet, they suspected Schwinn was pocketing money belonging to the Bund. Resentment against Schwinn grew so great that the Bund leader kept his home address secret from all but his trusted confidantes Diebel and Bockhacker. Only obedience to the *Führer-Prinzip* (unquestioning loyalty to the leader) prevented opponents from ousting him.\(^\text{35}\)
Lewis and Roos's plan of action was simple: have Bockhacker pit rivals against one another so as to weaken the Bund and stifle its ability to carry out plots against the city's Jews. Bockhacker ingratiated himself with leaders on both sides of the divide and slowly turned them against one another. When Drey bitterly complained about Schwinn's inability to stop Jewish spies from penetrating Deutsches Haus, Bockhacker agreed to track them down. But he was playing a very dangerous game, for Drey warned that when they caught the spy, “he would have nothing to laugh at.” He was deadly serious. Three of Lewis's spies would die under highly suspicious circumstances.

Knowing that the Führer-Prinzip would make it nearly impossible to dislodge Schwinn from office, Lewis and Roos pursued a second strategy: convince government authorities to revoke his citizenship and, in so doing, throw the Bund into chaos. In September 1938, acting on information provided by Lewis and Roos's spy Neil Ness, the Department of Naturalization and Immigration began taking steps to revoke Schwinn's citizenship. Apparently, when Schwinn signed his naturalization papers in July 1932, he perjured himself by swearing he had been in Los Angeles since October 1926; in fact, he moved to Los Angeles in October 1927, which left him three months shy of the required five years residency in the same city. The Bund leader also failed to disclose his Nazi activities in Germany and the United States when he filed his papers, an oversight that provided a possible second reason for denial of citizenship.

On December 14, 1938, acting on the recommendation of the chief of the US Immigration Service, the US Attorney General began proceedings to revoke Schwinn's citizenship. A week later, Assistant US District Attorney Ira Brett filed formal charges in Los Angeles Federal Court claiming that Schwinn's citizenship had been “illegally procured.” The flustered Nazi downplayed the charges, explaining, “It was merely a mistake which I made while filling out my application of citizenship papers.”

Simple mistake or not, Schwinn had to shift his attention away from laying the groundwork for Der Tag and focus instead on remaining in the United States. Lewis was playing the long game—and it worked. In June 1939, federal prosecutors, armed with evidence provided by Lewis and Roos, persuaded judge Ralph Jenney to revoke the Bund leader's citizenship on the grounds that the witnesses signing his papers had made false statements about the length of his residency in Los Angeles and that Schwinn was not of “good moral character.” Two hours after the verdict, Leon Lewis received more good news from his informant Jimmy Frost: the Immigration and Naturalization Service
Steven J. Ross was now preparing deportation proceedings against Schwinn. Schwinn’s reign as Gauleiter (district leader) of all Bund branches in the western United States and the nation’s number two Nazi had effectively come to an end.

After removing Schwinn from the scene, Lewis and Roos worked hard to convince the three major government intelligence agencies—the FBI, Army Intelligence (G2), and Naval Intelligence (ONI)—that Nazis in Germany and the United States posed a serious threat to national security. Knowing the FBI had little interest in using their scarce resources to monitor domestic Nazis and their fascist allies, Lewis and Roos provided all three intelligence agencies with a steady stream of information about potential sabotage in the city’s aircraft factories. Los Angeles produced more than half the nation’s airplanes and storm trooper leader Mike Drey repeatedly urged members who had citizenship papers to apply for jobs at the Lockheed plant in Burbank or “any other airplane factory.” Drey assured them they would be okay if they kept “their mouths shut about politics” and did not let anyone know they were connected to the Bund.

Anna Friedman provided a chilling account of what Nazis and Fifth Columnists intended to do once inside the aircraft factories. Establishing herself as a regular patron at Charlie’s T-Bone Steak House on 54th and Broadway, a popular haunt of Bundists, Friedman became friendly with a waitress who told her how a number of Germans got rip-roaring drunk one evening and “boasted about their sabotage activities at the Douglas Aircraft plant. It appears that they have taken bolts out of planes which will endanger the safety of the planes.” Chuck Slocombe, Lewis’s ace spy, filed an equally disturbing report in April 1939, warning that fascist Silver Shirts were securing positions at the Douglas factory and were planning to subvert production if Germany went to war. Lewis sent the information to grateful security officers at the airplane factories, who placed potential subversives under surveillance.

The two spymasters also assigned their agents to monitor the city’s ports, looking for evidence of Japanese and German plots to sabotage local docks. In February 1939, after completing the enormous task of systematizing the office files, Roos began sending Commander Ellis Zacharias, head of Naval Intelligence for the Pacific Coast and a Jew, the first of many updated reports on “Nazi Spies and Agents in the United States.” His initial eighteen-page memorandum contained the names, addresses, and activities of 157 suspected Nazi and Japanese spies and their fascist allies scattered across the United States. Zacharias forwarded the report to Naval Intelligence headquarters in Washington, DC with a note explaining that the data he received from
a “private source” in Los Angeles contained valuable information “that has never reached this office.” Obeying President Roosevelt’s executive order to share information, Naval Intelligence sent the reports to Army Intelligence and to the FBI.  

Following the outbreak of war on September 1, 1939, Lewis and Roos compiled a several-hundred-page “Summary Report on Activities of Nazi Groups and their Allies in Southern California.” The report described in great detail the activities of every Nazi and fascist organization in Los Angeles and contained equally extensive profiles of their leaders. Lewis and Roos revised their report every September and sent it to the FBI, Army Intelligence, and Naval Intelligence hoping someone would pay attention.

On December 7, 1941, Japanese forces attacked the American Naval base at Pearl Harbor, killing more than 2,400 Americans and damaging or destroying eight Navy battleships and 188 airplanes. Three hours later, the Japanese government declared war on the United States and Great Britain. At 4:35 p.m., December 8, FBI Los Angeles Special Agent in Charge Richard Hood received a teletype from J. Edgar Hoover with the names of people “recommended for custody.” Four hours later, Hoover sent a second teletype ordering the arrest of all German and Italian aliens who posed a threat to the “Internal Security of this country.” Heading the “A” list of dangerous suspects were Hermann Schwinn and Hans Diebel.

In the days and weeks after Pearl Harbor, Hoover’s men received nationwide acclaim for the speed and efficiency with which they rounded up suspected German, Italian and Japanese spies and fifth columnists. Yet, as Roos would later reflect, the Los Angeles FBI “had scant security information of their own.” Hoover had not ordered a thorough investigation of Hermann Schwinn until less than a month before Pearl Harbor. What material the local FBI had compiled on the west coast Nazi leader was filled mainly with newspaper clippings; Los Angeles agents gathered virtually no important information on their own. The bureau had even less material on Schwinn’s lieutenants. What useful information they did have came almost exclusively from Lewis and Roos’s operatives William Bockhacker and Charles Young.

So how did authorities know whom to arrest? Justice Department arrests lists in Los Angeles were compiled from the massive amounts of information that Lewis and Roos sent them after Kristallnacht. The FBI simply retyped the data provided by Lewis and Roos and claimed it as their own. Hoover’s agency received all the glory, while the two Jews quietly basked in the knowledge of what they had achieved. The Jews’ spy reports were put in the service of
national security as Bureau agents began rounding up Los Angeles’ most dan-
gerous Nazis and fifth columnists.\textsuperscript{48} 

With the FBI, Naval Intelligence, and other authorities on the alert for espionage and subversive activities, Lewis and Roos no longer needed to run the extensive spy network they employed from 1933 until 1941. But the two men did not trust local authorities to protect the city’s Jews from harm, so they relied on a series of undercover agents—most notably Charles Slocombe and the mother and daughter spy team Grace and Sylvia Comfort—to monitor hate groups that openly called for violence against Jews, blacks, and Catholics.\textsuperscript{49} 

Without ever firing a weapon, the two Jewish leaders managed to keep Los Angeles and its citizens safe. They and the men and women who risked their lives to spy on Nazis and fascists understood that when a government failed to stem the rise of extremists bent on violence, it was up to every citizen to protect the lives of every American no matter their race, ethnicity or religion.

CONCLUSION
The full history of American Jewish response to Kristallnacht and resistance to Nazism remains to be told. As the story of Leon Lewis and Joseph Roos suggests, we need to reconsider the nature of American Jewish resistance before World War II. American Jews were far more active in opposing Nazism and fascism during the 1930s, and especially after the Anschluss and Kristallnacht, than we previously thought. Much of the scholarship about American reaction to Hitler has focused on the responses of national groups and leaders—responses that have led many to condemn Jews for not opposing Hitler’s minions more aggressively. The Los Angeles story reveals that American Jews were often highly successful in resisting Nazism, more so than most government agencies and public protest groups.

Eighty years have passed since the events of November 9–10, 1938. And eighty years later, we still need to know more about the ground-level actions of Nazis and resisters in places where Bund leaders were given a warm reception, especially in cities with German strongholds such as New York, Chicago, and Milwaukee. If scholars are to raise questions about passivity and cowardice, the proper focus should not be on the nation’s Jews but on an American government that did little to stop the spread of Nazism and fascism at home. Let us flip traditional questions about Jewish passivity on their head and ask instead
what did Jewish resistors accomplish and why did “patriotic” government authorities in so many cities turn a blind eye to Nazi activities in their own backyards? The answers are as important today as they were eighty years ago.
Notes


3. See sources in note 1.


7. Bockhacker Report, November 17, 1938, CRC2 box 66, folder 25. Schwinn’s activities are documented in the spy reports collected by Leon Lewis and housed in the special collections department at California State University Northridge mentioned in n. 5.


11. “Summary Report on Activities of Nazi Groups and Their Allies in Southern California, September 1939” (henceforth “Summary Report”), 484, box 10, Joseph Roos Papers, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California. The NRA sold weapons to citizens who joined their organization and paid $3 in
annual dues. For a description of the increased militarization of the Bund after Kristallnacht, see “Summary Report September 1939,” 479–84.

12. Ibid., 509.

13. Ibid., 727.

14. The German Radio Hour ran for only thirty minutes from 7:45–8:15pm. The show repeated on Sundays. For Leon Lewis’s efforts to halt the radio show, see “Confidential Memo: Herald Examiner,” March 5, 1938, in Leon Lewis File, Los Angeles Examiner Clippings, Special Collections, University of Southern California.

15. “Summary Report,” 549. The Gestapo was training spies at espionage-sabotage schools in Berlin, Dresden, and Hamburg and funneling money for their American operations through consular offices. For the training and funding of German and fascist spies, see Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn, The Plot Against Peace: A Warning to the Nation (New York: Dial Press, 1947), 172; Richard Wilmer Rowan, Secret Agents against America (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1939), 8.

16. For the United Front and Schwinn’s forging a fascist cohort bent on violence, see Ross, Hitler in Los Angeles.


19. Ross, Hitler in Los Angeles, 16.

20. The full story of Leon Lewis and his undercover operation is told in ibid.


22. For Lewis’s background and the beginning of his spy operation, see Ross, Hitler in Los Angeles, 7–20.


25. Folder “Background of Joseph Roos,” box 6, Roos Papers, USC.

26. Ibid.

27. Not only did Police Chief James Davis and Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz ignore Lewis’s calls for help, but several members of their departments were implicated in various Nazis plots; a number of their men also belonged to the Silver Shirts and/or Ku Klux Klan. Ross, *Hitler in Los Angeles*.

28. The backgrounds of Bockhacker, Young, and Arnold are described in Ross, *Hitler in Los Angeles*, 235, 248–49.

29. The backgrounds of these informants are described in ibid., 249.

30. Joseph Roos, Oral History Interview, 10, 15, conducted December 18, 1979, January 7 and 28, 1980, February 14, 1980, Interview conducted by Dr. Leonard Pitt, Professor Department of History, CSUN, and Murray Wood, Executive Director, Community Relations Committee, box 6, Roos Papers, USC.

31. The Los Angeles FBI bureau was so dependent on Lewis and Roos for information that they eventually asked if they could have Bockhacker spy directly for them.

32. Selected copies of Roos’s *News Letter* can be found online at http://jfk.hood.edu/Collection/White%20Materials/Weisberg%20Harold%20Dies%20Committee%20Files/News%20Research%20Service%20Inc%20News%20letters/.

33. Roos, interview, USC SF VHA; Roos, oral history interview, 14, Roos Papers, USC.

34. Folder “Background of Joseph Roos,” box 6, Roos Papers, USC.

35. “Summary Report, September 1938,” 33. For the Bund’s financial status, suspicion of Schwinn’s larcenous activities, and hiding his home address, see Bockhacker Report, May 5, 23, 1938, CRC2 box 32, folder 13.


41. Ibid. For further coverage of the trial and deportation preparations, see *Los Angeles Examiner*, June 23, 1939; *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, June 25, 1939; “Summary Report, Sept.1939,” 437–38, box 10, Roos Papers, USC.

42. Memo from Lewis to Ellis Zacharias, April 20, 1939, CRC2 42-2.

44. Ellis Zacharias Memorandum, February 9, 1939, CRC2 box 42, folder 1. For more reports from Lewis and Roos to Zacharias, see correspondence in CRC2 box 42, folder 2. Copies of these and other reports sent by the spymasters to American intelligence agencies can be found in Navy Department Office of Naval Intelligence, Washington, DC, September 10, 1940: "Memorandum, for Mr. Clegg, FBI, Colonel Lester, MID," from E. B. Nixon, Capt. US Navy, file 2801-943, folder 2801-943/1 [Arno Risse], Box 166, RG165: Military Intelligence Division General Correspondence, 1917–41, National Archives, College Park, MD. Lewis and Roos kept sending updated reports that were in turn forwarded to other intelligence agencies.

45. For the original and updated copies of their reports, see “Summary Report,” box 10, Roos Papers, USC.

46. Memo to: Mr. Ladd from J. F. Buckley, May 26, 1944, 65-94-107, Hermann Schwinn FBI file, obtained through Freedom of Information Act; also see, Telemeter: to Director from LA Office, May 13, 1944, 65-9483-110, Schwinn FBI file. The 1944 memo reported on local FBI activities following Pearl Harbor.


48. Most of their reports were sent to Lewis’ favored contacts at Naval Intelligence, who then forwarded them to Army Intelligence and the FBI. Those lists can be found in Army and Naval Intelligence files at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. For examples of various reports, see “German Known Suspects,” “Navy Dept. Office of Naval Intelligence, Washington, D.C., 10 September 1940: Memorandum for Mr. Clegg, FBI, Colonel Lester, Military Intelligence Division, from E. B. Nixon, Capt. U. S. Navy, Subject: Suspect Lists,” RG 165: War Dept.: Military Intelligence Division, Correspondence, 1917–41, Entry 65: MID General Correspondence, 1917–41; File #2801-943; Box 1866; Folder 2801-943/1 “Supplementary List—Known German Suspects,” RG 165: War Dept.: Military Intelligence Division, Correspondence, 1917–41, Entry 65: MID General Correspondence, 1917–41; File #2801-943; Box 1866; Folder 2801-943/1; “German Agents,” Entry 65: MID. General Correspondence, 1917–41, File #10110-2723-62, Box 2857, RG 165: War Dept.: Military Intelligence Division, Correspondence, 1917–41, NA, College Park, MD.

49. The activities of Lewis, Roos, and their operatives after Pearl Harbor are described in Ross, Hitler in Los Angeles, 316–40.
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