

THEME

MARK OPPENHEIMER (VO): Welcome to LBI Presents—a new podcast from the Leo Baeck Institute, New York. I'm Mark Oppenheimer. I'm the director of open learning at American Jewish University, and I've spent my career writing about Jewish history. On this series, we dive into LBI's archive, with key experts as our guides, to learn about the lives of German Jews throughout history...beyond the stories you already know. Today, LBI presents...a dose of propaganda with your morning news.

THEME OUT

HEIDI TWOREK: The house, furnished harmoniously, according to the best of German traditions, contains beautiful common rooms, a large central hall, a sitting room facing west and overlooking the deep bowl amid Alpine heights *[fades out]*

MARK OPPENHEIMER (VO): In 1939, the *New York Times* published a lifestyle piece about a chalet in the Alps. A chalet that was best known as Adolf Hitler's vacation home.

HEIDI TWOREK: Hitler can be a good listener and seems to gather a good deal by letting American solo dancers or German film stars talk to him *[fades out]*

MARK OPPENHEIMER (VO): This soft, almost loving piece of pseudo-journalism ran on August 20, 1939. This was almost a year after Kristallnacht. Four years after the Nuremberg Laws. By this point, most people knew what Hitler was about. I mean just two weeks later, the Nazis invade Poland, marking the official start of World War II.

HEIDI TWOREK: It's a very strange article for so many different reasons.

THEME

MARK OPPENHEIMER (VO): Heidi Tworek teaches history at the University of British Columbia. She's the author of *News From Germany: The Competition to Control World Communications, 1900-1945*.

It's no secret that information is power. And that controlling information means even more power. Hitler knew this. That's why he often used the term *Lügenpresse* or lying press to discredit major media outlets in Germany, many of them Jewish-owned. That's why he had his own state news agencies, like DNB or TransOcean: not just to control his image in his own country, or even in Europe, but worldwide. Of course, there were other ways that more reliable information flowed. And there were other players who fought against Hitler's propaganda machine, like the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, and emigre papers like *Aufbau*, held in the LBI library. We touch on some of this and more in my conversation with Heidi Tworek, which ranges from how Hitler used state news agencies to how Nazis propaganda ended up in U.S. media, with and without Hitler's help.

THEME OUT

MARK OPPENHEIMER: So Heidi, before we get to how the U.S. News was implicated in the propaganda machine of Adolf Hitler, I want to talk a little bit about the newswires, because it seems like the birth of newswires in Germany in the 1920s played a crucial role in all of this. And newswires are this thing that's come and gone. I mean, now if you say to someone who's 15, "it went out on the wire," they don't know what you're talking about because the whole world is a wire. But this was actually very, very important for Hitler's propaganda goals. Is that right?

HEIDI TWOREK: Yeah. So news agencies still exist, though most people, I agree, don't really think about them. So something like the Associated Press, for example. But it's also something that many people in the 1920s weren't necessarily aware of either. So basically the easy way to think about news agencies is they're like news wholesalers, and newspapers are like the retailers. So news agencies, they emerge in the mid-19th century, along with the growth of telegraphy all around the world. And Germans have a news agency just like the British, the Americans, etc., etc.. But what really begins to happen with Germans from around the turn of the 20th century is they start to think that they can use news agencies as a way to spread German news around the world. But hidden, right? Because this is news that will then be published in a newspaper. But people won't necessarily know that it's come from Germany or from a German news agency. And I say this becomes particularly important after Germany is defeated in World War One because many Germans really want to invest in news as a way to try and win any future wars, cultural beliefs about Germany. But also, there are many Germans who think that this will

prop up Germany politically on the global stage, and it will also prop up things like German exports as well. So this is a view that's really shared from the left all the way through to the far right. And it means that many different groups of Germans invest in, whether we want to call them newswires or news agencies. So they start to found new news agencies and they want to use them to achieve all these enormous goals that have very little to do with information. These big, political, economic, and cultural goals.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: Now, when Hitler was running for chancellor, one of his great claims was that the press, the *Lügenpresse*, the lying press, was this horrible, you know, agent of internal Jewish subversion. They were against the German people, even though, in at least one case, these were agencies funded by the government. Then he takes over and he keeps the government news agency. So is he keeping the one that he thought was a subversive lying agency but then just torquing it to his own aims?

HEIDI TWOREK: Yeah, so partly. But he also changes things quite dramatically. So I'd say the thing that stays the same is that the Nazis do retain this belief that you can use news agencies to achieve these big political and economic goals, and they also want to use the new technology of wireless-slash-radio to do so. But there are lots and lots of internal changes to the press, right? So we've all heard about newspapers getting shut down, journalists getting imprisoned, new laws about journalism, and so on. There's also huge changes in the news agency landscape. So what Hitler does is he takes the government-funded news agency. He also takes a more right wing news agency. And he merges the two to create a new news agency called *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro*, or the DNB. And that's the major Nazi news agency. At the same time, he keeps yet another news agency which is primarily supplying news abroad and news around the world called *Transocean* or TransOcean. And this is a news agency that was, even in World War I, actually sending a bunch of news to the United States. So Hitler keeps TransOcean because he can use that to send news to places like China or South Africa, etc., etc.. And the other thing that's very important is that he really changes so much of how the news agencies function. There's a whole color coded system of which news can be sent out and which news can't. Newspapers are allowed to print certain things and not others. And that's a very different system than had existed before. But the idea that you can use a news agency to send news around the world, that the newspapers will print, and consumers who are reading the newspaper don't know it's news from Germany, that's something that the Nazis retain.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: And this happened in the United States. How did this happen? What's the actual mechanism? And how do they get these articles into American newspapers?

HEIDI TWOREK: Yeah. So to understand this, we'll have to take a tiny step back just to talk about the history of news agencies. So as I said, news agencies are founded in the mid-19th century, but at this point, it's very expensive to send news via telegraph, right? Especially submarine telegraphy. Very expensive. So what happens is that the three main news agencies, the British, French, and Germans, they set up a cartel. So essentially they say, we're going to divide the world between us and we're not going to compete with each other, we're going to exchange news. And the American Associated Press is part of this cartel from 1870 until 1934. When the Nazis come into power in 1933, they remain part of this cartel. All the way until World War II breaks out in 1939. So it means that a lot of news from Germany, which is actually Nazi news, is getting printed through this cartel. Once World War II breaks out in Europe, obviously the cartel breaks down. For the British and the French, they no longer have any correspondents in Germany. But that's different for Americans. There are still Associated Press correspondents and others who are in Germany. And in fact, even once World War II breaks out, Americans are still receiving some news from German news agencies. It's just coming via the neutral country of Portugal. A couple of other mechanisms include that there are news agency correspondents who, until 1941, are based in the United States. And in fact, just to give a little bit of a further sense of some suspicions that Americans did have of what the Nazis were doing, J. Edgar Hoover gets very interested in news agency correspondents from Germany because he comes to believe that they're not just news agency correspondents, that they're also spies. So, to come back to your original question, when Americans are getting news from Nazi Germany, they're getting it from a variety of places. Before 1941, some of it is American correspondents based in Nazi Germany. Some of it is coming through news agencies via this cartel system, and some of it is potentially coming from Germans themselves based in the United States.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: So that raises a few questions. Number one, J. Edgar Hoover thought that some of these German correspondents in the United States were spies. He was right, wasn't he?

HEIDI TWOREK: Oh, it's such a good question. Are they spies when they supply news back to Nazis? Depends on how we want to define a spy. So they're not working for an espionage agency, but they're definitely providing confidential information. The thing that we can say that they're doing is they are being funded by the Nazi government, right? So if we want to call them foreign agents, which is what the Foreign Agents Registration Act does, then yes, technically they are definitely foreign agents because they're working for a news agency that is funded by the Nazi government. So I think if we wanted to take a contemporary definition of a spy as somebody who's supplying information that isn't then made public? Yes, they are both journalists and spies, but there are not necessarily as many of them as J. Edgar Hoover fears. And they're not necessarily doing all the things that he worries about. And maybe most importantly, they don't have as much effect on the American public as he fears. A lot of the Nazi sympathies in the American public, they come from Americans talking about fascism and supporting fascism more than some of the German journalists-slash spies who are based in the United States.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: So that's Germans based in the United States. Then, of course, there are the American journalists based in Germany and eventually in Nazi-controlled lands. And they have their own trustworthiness issues, right? Because they have to be careful about what they report lest they get thrown out of the country.

HEIDI TWOREK: Yeah, absolutely. So any journalist who's based in Nazi Germany is treading a very fine line about what they're reporting so that they won't be expelled from the country. And we do see, and those American journalists also saw, in the 1930s, there are other journalists who are being expelled. So, for example, in the 1930s, there's a French journalist who gets expelled because he reports too much about a flu epidemic, right? Or the ability of journalists to even be able to uncover some of what is happening in Nazi Germany, whether it's around concentration camps or the persecution of Jews. We see a lot of journalists not reporting on that or not actually pushing to find out exactly what is happening, in part because they don't want to get pushed out of the country. And certainly you can say this is a dilemma that journalists continue to face all the way up to the present when they are reporting in authoritarian countries. They're often treading these kinds of fine lines. And we see American journalists doing that for longer, of course, than the British and French journalists, because some of them were in the country until 1941.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: So what are some examples of particular stories that landed in American media that originated with Hitler's propaganda machine?

HEIDI TWOREK: Yeah. So one that's quite surprising, in fact, and this is quite late in the war, is that actually news about the D-Day landing comes from TransOcean. And that is what is printed in the United States. So we see that actually, all the way until 1944, there are some stories that land in the United States that come from TransOcean or from DNB. What I would say, though, is that often Americans are not aware of this, right? That's one of the crucial things. And that's what makes it actually quite hard to still uncover some of these questions is that it's often filtered through American news agencies as well. So if you look at stories of D-Day landings, you see they're coming from the Associated Press. But actually the Associated Press is getting some of that from TransOcean. So this is what makes this landscape so incredibly powerful for the Nazi propaganda machine is that people do not realize that that's where it's coming from, in many cases.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: Were they getting that right? Was our D-Day news that we were getting...

HEIDI TWOREK: Yes, yes! So the D-Day news was correct, not to fear. D-Day did happen on the day that we think that it did. But it's just an example of how this news continues to be printed in the U.S. Now, I wouldn't say it's super pervasive. The vast majority of the news that Americans are getting is coming from more reliable sources. But there are multiple instances where it's coming from German sources as well. And I'd say another example is that the Associated Press actually uses a lot of photographs that come from DNB. And again, everybody who's looking at them doesn't realize it, so it's difficult for readers to be able to take this with any kind of grain of salt because they're not being informed that this really is a propaganda photo. So a lot of photos that show up in TIME or LIFE, they are actually Nazi photos that have been sent via neutral Portugal and have made it to the Associated Press and are then printed in a whole host of American newspapers. So it's not just news itself, it's also photography, which is a huge source of propaganda as well.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: And of course, that gets us to the Americans' culpability in all of this, which isn't just failure to report the origin of certain photographs or stories, their origination in German media, but also propaganda that's pretty homegrown. Pro-Nazi

propaganda, you know, that makes them seem cuddlier or more likable than they are that's originating in the United States from American reporters. I want to talk about that notorious article that was printed in The New York Times in one of their Sunday editions in 1939. I say "notorious" because I've come to understand that among scholars of this period, like you, it's notorious. I had never heard about it. But it's this article about Hitler's Alpine chalet. It describes his home as, quote, "furnished harmoniously according to the best of German traditions." It mentions that he's a vegetarian and a teetotaler, which every time I'm reminded of that, it makes me want to quit my vegetarianism, which I take very seriously. But you know, I soldier on! We're reclaiming it from Hitler. But the story, it's a total trip reading it. What surprised you the most about this New York Times article?

HEIDI TWOREK: I think the thing that is most surprising for me in this article is the way that it portrays a sort of openness of this location, that there are so many people who are just able to come in and discuss with Hitler. I find it extremely strange. And that's really the surprising part, that it portrays him almost as a bon vivant who is just having people come in and then he's sort of making decisions. But there's no real sense of the political consequences of any of this and what any of the decisions he's making are and the effects that they might have on tens of millions of people.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: It's so interesting the way dictators always want to be portrayed as ministers of culture. You know, they're never satisfied to just be ruthless murderers. They also want to be the poets, the salonnières. Did Americans buy this portrayal? Do we have any sense of whether this moved the needle at all in terms of how Americans thought about Adolf Hitler?

HEIDI TWOREK: Difficult question. So the first thing I would say is we have to remember that the vast majority of Americans did not read The New York Times. The New York Times is so important now that we don't remember that actually it wasn't as important in 1939. So of the Americans who read it, it's hard to tell exactly whether it...did it change their mind about Hitler? It maybe made them less worried about him. But the other thing that makes it extremely hard to assess is, of course, less than two weeks later, World War II will break out in Europe. So if you were thinking of Hitler as a very cuddly guy, he's clearly not completely cuddly by the time we get to September 1939. What this article, I think, tells us is that the United States was in a place in 1939 where publishing an article like this about Hitler was acceptable, that already there was an atmosphere where Hitler was not seen as

such a problematic figure that you couldn't publish something like this. We can't imagine someone publishing an article like this about Vladimir Putin right now. But that was possible in 1939.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: One news agency we haven't talked about yet is the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, or JTA. They reported from Germany until they were kicked out in the late '30s, but they had sources there throughout the war. Why didn't the New York Times draw on JTA's reporting?

HEIDI TWOREK: The Jewish Telegraph Agency, or the JTA, provides a lot of news that indeed could have been printed. And we know that they did have sources and could document various aspects of persecution. So I think it does indeed raise the question of why are some things being printed by newspapers and not others? This is a question that's still relevant today. So there are several potential explanations for that. One is, sometimes, disbelief at what is happening. The idea it couldn't possibly be that bad. Another is, perhaps, that they believe that American readers won't care as much. I think maybe one final background is also the general hostility in the United States amongst a decent percentage of the population to accepting Jews as refugees or broader antisemitism in general. So there are a whole host of different potential reasons why this isn't being printed, even though there is a decent amount of evidence that's coming out of the JTA. And I would also say, just to add, that the JTA was quite a long standing source. So this wasn't a completely esoteric news agency by the time we get to World War II, it was something that was definitely well known. And maybe one other thing I would just add, just as an aside that we now know as historians, is that the JTA does, during World War II, actually end up collaborating with British secret services to try to plant fake stories that will push the American public towards participating in World War II. And we know that some of those stories do actually get printed in The New York Times, as one historian discovered. So it's not that The New York Times doesn't print JTA stories—in that case, under a different news agency name. But certainly one of the JTA's goals by 1940-41 was to try to use news, including some fake stories to push the American public towards participating in World War II. So all that, I think, in the end to say, there were stories by the JTA or its other agencies called the Overseas News Agency, The New York Times did print. And so then the big question is, why not print the stories about Jewish persecution?

MARK OPPENHEIMER: So did The New York Times print stories about Jewish persecution?

HEIDI TWOREK: Very few, very few. There's a couple of historians who've investigated this. One of the books is called *Buried by the Times*, which really shows there's very little coverage by the New York Times of persecution of Jews during World War II. And that's really a puzzle, then, to be explained, because, of course, the people at the time don't know all of the details of the genocide that is happening against Jewish people. But some of the details are emerging, and yet these are not necessarily being printed by the Times. So this is a puzzle that historians then explain in these kinds of books, is why do we end up with a situation where this isn't being reported on as much as one might have expected looking back 75, 80 years later?

MUSIC

MARK OPPENHEIMER: I want to shift to another part of American media at the time. For people who have never heard of Charles Coughlin, who was one of the most famous Americans alive back then, can you tell people who he was?

HEIDI TWOREK: Yeah. So he's a Canadian-American priest in Detroit, and when radio really emerges, he starts to be a radio figure. He's basically broadcasting sermons. They start to get syndicated around 1930 on CBS. They're reaching a huge number of Americans. Yeah, so Coughlin is initially very much pro-New Deal because he sees it as something that will support the working man. Now, this is partly because he's extremely anti-communist. So he's a Catholic priest, which is, also, I think, an important context here. But he's also rabidly antisemitic as well. He gets dropped in the early 1930s by CBS, but then is privately funded. So this gets syndicated and sold to radio stations throughout the United States. Coughlin is very much an isolationist, so he's really not interested in the United States getting involved in anything in Europe, but he is also quite pro-fascist. And it will really only be when war breaks out in 1939 that slowly the United States government will come to take away Coughlin's ability to be on the radio. So once the United States is in World War II, he's no longer broadcasting. Those views are no longer reaching millions of Americans. But throughout the 1930s, one in four Americans is effectively choosing to listen to virulent antisemitism. And I'd also add that there's some evidence not that he was directly funded by the Nazis, but that there was some indirect funding, that some people

who were bankers for high level Nazis in the United States were funding Coughlin. And that the Nazis were aware of this.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: Now, the fact that Father Coughlin may indirectly have been getting funding from the Nazis does make me wonder again about J. Edgar Hoover. He is so often seen now by academics as some sort of villain. And yet, was he prescient about foreign attempts to influence American politics during World War II?

HEIDI TWOREK: I would say that when you look at the files, which for me was incredible, I went to the archives and I honestly, Mark, did not expect to suddenly see J. Edgar Hoover all over the place and so obsessed with Nazi journalists. I would say that he was right to the extent that German news actually did have a much bigger spread, in terms of how it was being published, than many scholars thought for quite a while after World War II. So it's really when we look at news agencies, we see, oh, goodness, actually a lot of Nazi news is getting printed. It's just not being labeled as such in newspapers. So in that sense, J. Edgar Hoover is right. I think where he's less right is in the influence of this news. We don't see that large numbers of Americans are, after 1941, still Nazi supporters. So, of course, information is deeply important, but it's not that I read one newspaper article and suddenly someone becomes a fascist. There are all sorts of other reasons why. And I think the other thing that Hoover is a little bit wrong about is, he is blaming this solely on Nazis. Whereas what we see is that it's a lot of it coming from Americans themselves. So if we want to really understand American support for Nazism, for fascism, we want to understand things like the infamous rally in Madison Square Garden. We can't just look to foreign influence. We also need to look to what's happening in the United States itself and what Americans themselves are doing. That's the bit where I think Hoover is wrong in his assessment.

CLIP - GERMAN AMERICA BUND MEMBER: Ladies and Gentlemen. My fellow Christian Americans *[applause, fades out]*

MARK OPPENHEIMER: Do you want to give us just 15 seconds on when and what the rally in Madison Square Garden was?

HEIDI TWOREK: Yes. So the Madison Square Garden rally is organized in February of 1939 by the German American Bund, which is a pro-fascist organization.

CLIP - GERMAN AMERICA BUND MEMBER: Again it is my very great privilege to welcome you to another impressive patriotic mass demonstration sponsored by the German American Bund [*applause, fades out*]

HEIDI TWOREK: And I would just just add, if we want to go back to Father Coughlin, that he tries then to distance himself from that rally. So he's trying to not portray himself as rabidly far right, even though many of the things he says sound like they could have showed up at that Madison Square Garden rally.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: So listening to this question about whether the pro-fascist influences are coming from without or from within. It sounds a lot like the way we talked about Russian influence in the past couple American elections. And, of course, we now have this same debate about concerns of external influence—bots on Twitter, Russian meddling—and internal influence, because, of course, the people who were storming the Capitol were Americans who were doing it for what one has to presume were their own notions of American reasons. When you look at today's political scene and the media, I wonder, do you feel like there are a lot of similarities? The social unrest, the polarization, the scapegoating, the antisemitism? Do you sometimes feel like all your research on 1930s Germany is being recapitulated, or am I pushing things way too far?

HEIDI TWOREK: Sometimes when I was doing this research, it suddenly felt like the past had very much become the present. That was true in Germany, where words like "*Lügenpresse*" were all of a sudden being used by far right parties in a way that frankly had not happened since World War II. But it also felt like that in the United States, where we were seeing strange resurrections of support for antisemitism in ways that, again, had not been so prominent for many, many decades. That has led scholars, I think, to rethink our understanding of what happened after World War II. What happened to many of these pro-fascist influences that we saw in 1939 in Madison Square Garden. It led us to think that perhaps they didn't go away in the ways that we had come to think and that we really needed to trace what had happened post-1945 in different sorts of ways. But there are also other questions, as you indicated, that came to the fore. For example, how do we try to evaluate what new technologies do for elections? My research was indicating things like radio can have negative consequences for democracy. And suddenly here we all were in 2016 and onwards, asking questions about the present that were actually very similar to

the ones that I was asking about the past. So many of the questions we asked about Russian interference, they look surprisingly similar to the questions we were asking about foreign interference in the 1930s. Even to the extent that the legislative instruments that were used to try and sanction Russian journalists or Chinese journalists with things like the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which were created in the late 1930s, for the very purpose of sanctioning the kinds of Nazi journalists that we were talking about earlier in this episode. And those kinds of acts actually lay pretty dormant for many decades. The final thing that I would say is, that hopefully this past reminds us, though, that just blaming things on Russians really doesn't help us to ask questions about what is happening in the United States and why we are seeing so many Americans dock onto antisemitic ideas and so on and so forth. This is not just about external influence, but also about why we have so many Americans who are receptive to that and eager to participate.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: And what about our search for solutions? The Nazis thought that controlling the state media was a great idea and that it could be very effective. Today, I think in the United States, it's often people on the left who think that the solution to a right wing capitalist media or a privately held Twitter, let's say, is to have government regulation. That tends to be a progressive talking point, that the government should come in, or that there should be moral suasion and a kind of cartel-like agreement on the part of social media platforms to censor themselves. You've written for The Atlantic Magazine that we should be a little bit wary of government influence because you never know who the next government is going to be. So how much government control should we want of our media?

HEIDI TWOREK: Yeah. So the reason that I think we need to be quite careful in exactly where we go with government regulation is that we can look to the Weimar Republic as an example of where this can go deeply wrong. So, in the Weimar Republic, we have the new medium of radio that starts to emerge, and many people that are very democratically minded, are worried about what this new medium can do. Can it incite violence? They're worried about its simultaneity across the entire country. And of course, as the atmosphere gets more and more febrile in the Weimar Republic, they're more and more concerned about whether this will provoke further violence on the streets. And so their solution to this is to create more and more government supervision of radio. But the sad irony of this is, of course, when the Nazis come to power, what is the one medium they immediately control? It's radio. It takes them a year, a couple of years to regain control of newspapers. But radio

is instantaneous. And in, already in August of 1933, Joseph Goebbels is saying that radio is the medium that enables the Nazis to stay in power. So I think this just reminds us that when we're thinking about how to regulate social media, we need to bear in mind that, A, we never know what the next government will be. And B, that even when we have the most democratically-minded intentions, sometimes that can go hideously wrong in the sort of ten year perspective. Doesn't mean government should do nothing. But it just means we need to be wary about what exactly we mean by regulation. If you have an authoritarian government in power. There is no panacea through media. Media can only take you so far. And I think that's also one of the lessons of the 1930s, is that there's a huge amount of concern about information, what it means, propaganda, what it can do. But we also see that, despite the Father Coughlins, despite the fact that one in four Americans are listening to this person, when Pearl Harbor happens, Americans are willing to enter into the war. So news and information are incredibly important. They, of course, influence how we see the world and how we understand things. But at certain points, events overtake that. There is a certain point at which people's reality on the ground will supersede that kind of propaganda. So I think that's, it's a pretty banal point, but it also does matter. It reminds us that just because we see one article that may have been sponsored by Russians, it doesn't mean that then every American is suddenly going to have that point of view.

MARK OPPENHEIMER: Heidi Tworek, thank you for being on LBI Presents.

HEIDI TWOREK: Thank you so much for having me.

THEME

MARK OPPENHEIMER (VO): That was Heidi Tworek. I'm Mark Oppenheimer. And this is LBI Presents. 'Til next time.

PRODUCER: For more information and to visit LBI's digitized archive, go to lbi.org.

On the next episode of LBI Presents...In the Czech transit-camp-slash-ghetto Theresienstadt, food was as valuable as gold. In a world of scarcity, butchers and bakers had all the power.

ANNA HÀJKOVÀ: I think food is an incredibly salient part of everyday life, and if you want to understand a society, you need to look at food.

PRODUCER: Food as power. Coming up on LBI Presents.

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