The Plot Against America

Philip Roth

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To S.F.R.

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June 1940–October 1940

Vote for Lindbergh or Vote for War

FEAR PRESIDES over these memories, a perpetual fear. Of course no childhood is without its terrors, yet I wonder if I would have been a less frightened boy if Lindbergh hadn't been president or if I hadn't been the offspring of Jews.

When the first shock came in June of 1940—the nomination for the presidency of Charles A. Lindbergh, America's international aviation hero, by the Republican Convention at Philadelphia—my father was thirty-nine, an insurance agent with a grade school education, earning a little under fifty dollars a week, enough for the basic bills to be paid on time but for little more. My mother—who'd wanted to go to teachers' college but couldn't because of the expense, who'd lived at home working as an office secretary after finishing high school, who'd kept us from feeling poor during the worst of the Depression by budgeting the earnings my father turned over to her each Friday as efficiently as she ran the household—was thirty-six. My brother, Sandy, a seventh-grader with a prodigy's talent for drawing, was twelve, and I, a third-grader a term ahead of himself—and an embryonic stamp collector inspired like millions of kids by the country's foremost philatelist, President Roosevelt—was seven.

We lived in the second-floor flat of a small two-and-a-half-fam-

ily house on a tree-lined street of frame wooden houses with red-brick stoops, each stoop topped with a gable roof and fronted by a tiny yard boxed in with a low-cut hedge. The Weequahic neighborhood had been built on farm lots at the undeveloped southwest edge of Newark just after World War One, some half dozen of the streets named, imperially, for victorious naval commanders in the Spanish-American War and the local movie house called, after FDR's fifth cousin—and the country's twenty-sixth president—the Roosevelt. Our street, Summit Avenue, sat at the crest of the neighborhood hill, an elevation as high as any in a port city that rarely rises a hundred feet above the level of the tidal salt marsh to the city's north and east and the deep bay due east of the airport that bends around the oil tanks of the Bayonne peninsula and merges there with New York Bay to flow past the Statue of Liberty and into the Atlantic. Looking west from our bedroom's rear window we could sometimes see inland as far as the dark treeline of the Watchungs, a low-lying mountain range fringed by great estates and affluent, sparsely populated suburbs, the extreme edge of the known world—and about eight miles from our house. A block to the south was the working-class town of Hillside, whose population was predominantly Gentile. The boundary with Hillside marked the beginning of Union County, another New Jersey entirely.

We were a happy family in 1940. My parents were outgoing, hospitable people, their friends culled from among my father's associates at the office and from the women who along with my mother had helped to organize the Parent-Teacher Association at newly built Chancellor Avenue School, where my brother and I were pupils. All were Jews. The neighborhood men either were in business for themselves—the owners of the local candy store, grocery store, jewelry store, dress shop, furniture shop, service station, and delicatessen, or the proprietors of tiny industrial job shops over by the Newark-Irvington line, or self-employed plumbers, electricians, housepainters, and boilermen—or were foot-soldier salesmen like my father, out every day in the city streets and in people's

houses, peddling their wares on commission. The Jewish doctors and lawyers and the successful merchants who owned big stores downtown lived in one-family houses on streets branching off the eastern slope of the Chancellor Avenue hill, closer to grassy, wooded Weequahic Park, a landscaped three hundred acres whose boating lake, golf course, and harness-racing track separated the Weequahic section from the industrial plants and shipping terminals lining Route 27 and the Pennsylvania Railroad viaduct east of that and the burgeoning airport east of that and the very edge of America east of that—the depots and docks of Newark Bay, where they unloaded cargo from around the world. At the western end of the neighborhood, the parkless end where we lived, there resided an occasional schoolteacher or pharmacist but otherwise few professionals were among our immediate neighbors and certainly none of the prosperous entrepreneurial or manufacturing families. The men worked fifty, sixty, even seventy or more hours a week; the women worked all the time, with little assistance from labor-saving devices, washing laundry, ironing shirts, mending socks, turning collars, sewing on buttons, mothproofing woolens, polishing furniture, sweeping and washing floors, washing windows, cleaning sinks, tubs, toilets, and stoves, vacuuming rugs, nursing the sick, shopping for food, cooking meals, feeding relatives, tidying closets and drawers, overseeing paint jobs and household repairs, arranging for religious observances, paying bills and keeping the family's books while simultaneously attending to their children's health, clothing, cleanliness, schooling, nutrition, conduct, birthdays, discipline, and morale. A few women labored alongside their husbands in the family-owned stores on the nearby shopping streets, assisted after school and on Saturdays by their older children, who delivered orders and tended stock and did the cleaning up.

It was work that identified and distinguished our neighbors for me far more than religion. Nobody in the neighborhood had a beard or dressed in the antiquated Old World style or wore a skullcap either outdoors or in the houses I routinely floated through

with my boyhood friends. The adults were no longer observant in the outward, recognizable ways, if they were seriously observant at all, and aside from older shopkeepers like the tailor and the kosher butcher—and the ailing or decrepit grandparents living of necessity with their adult offspring—hardly anyone in the vicinity spoke with an accent. By 1940 Jewish parents and their children at the southwestern corner of New Jersey's largest city talked to one another in an American English that sounded more like the language spoken in Altoona or Binghamton than like the dialects famously spoken across the Hudson by our Jewish counterparts in the five boroughs. Hebrew lettering was stenciled on the butcher shop window and engraved on the lintels of the small neighborhood synagogues, but nowhere else (other than at the cemetery) did one's eye chance to land on the alphabet of the prayer book rather than on the familiar letters of the native tongue employed all the time by practically everyone for every conceivable purpose, high or low. At the newsstand out front of the corner candy store, ten times more customers bought the *Racing Form* than the Yiddish daily, the *Forvertz.*

Israel didn't yet exist, six million European Jews hadn't yet ceased to exist, and the local relevance of distant Palestine (under British mandate since the 1918 dissolution by the victorious Allies of the last far-flung provinces of the defunct Ottoman Empire) was a mystery to me. When a stranger who did wear a beard and who never once was seen hatless appeared every few months after dark to ask in broken English for a contribution toward the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine, I, who wasn't an ignorant child, didn't quite know what he was doing on our landing. My parents would give me or Sandy a couple of coins to drop into his collection box, largess, I always thought, dispensed out of kindness so as not to hurt the feelings of a poor old man who, from one year to the next, seemed unable to get it through his head that we'd already had a homeland for three generations. I pledged allegiance to the flag of our homeland every morning at school. I sang of its marvels with my classmates at assembly programs. I eagerly observed its national holidays, and without giving a second thought to my affinity for the Fourth of July fireworks or the Thanksgiving turkey or the Decoration Day double-header. Our homeland was America.

Then the Republicans nominated Lindbergh and everything changed.

For nearly a decade Lindbergh was as great a hero in our neighborhood as he was everywhere else. The completion of his thirty-three-and-a-half-hour nonstop solo flight from Long Island to Paris in the tiny monoplane the *Spirit of St. Louis* even happened to coincide with the day in the spring of 1927 that my mother discovered herself to be pregnant with my older brother. As a consequence, the young aviator whose daring had thrilled America and the world and whose achievement bespoke a future of unimaginable aeronautical progress came to occupy a special niche in the gallery of family anecdotes that generate a child's first cohesive mythology. The mystery of pregnancy and the heroism of Lindbergh combined to give a distinction bordering on the divine to my very own mother, for whom nothing less than a global annunciation had accompanied the incarnation of her first child. Sandy would later record this moment with a drawing illustrating the juxtaposition of those two splendid events. In the drawing—completed at the age of nine and smacking inadvertently of Soviet poster art—Sandy envisioned her miles from our house, amid a joyous crowd on the corner of Broad and Market. A slender young woman of twenty-three with dark hair and a smile that is all robust delight, she is surprisingly on her own and wearing her floral-patterned kitchen apron at the intersection of the city's two busiest thoroughfares, one hand spread wide across the front of the apron, where the span of her hips is still deceptively girlish, while with the other she alone in the crowd is pointing skyward to the *Spirit of St. Louis,* passing visibly above downtown Newark at precisely the moment she comes to realize that, in a feat no less triumphant for a mortal than Lindbergh's, she has conceived Sanford Roth.

Sandy was four and I, Philip, wasn't yet born when in March 1932, Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh's own first child, a boy whose arrival twenty months earlier had been an occasion for national rejoicing, was kidnapped from his family's secluded new house in rural Hopewell, New Jersey. Some ten weeks later the decomposing body of the baby was discovered by chance in woods a few miles away. The baby had been either murdered or killed accidentally after being snatched from his crib and, in the dark, still in bedclothes, carried out a window of the second-story nursery and down a makeshift ladder to the ground while the nurse and mother were occupied in their ordinary evening activities in another part of the house. By the time the kidnapping and murder trial in Flemington, New Jersey, concluded in February 1935 with the conviction of Bruno Hauptmann—a German ex-con of thirty-five living in the Bronx with his German wife—the boldness of the world's first transatlantic solo pilot had been permeated with a pathos that transformed him into a martyred titan comparable to Lincoln.

Following the trial, the Lindberghs left America, hoping through a temporary expatriation to protect a new Lindbergh infant from harm and to recover some measure of the privacy they coveted. The family moved to a small village in England, and from there, as a private citizen, Lindbergh began taking the trips to Nazi Germany that would transform him into a villain for most American Jews. In the course of five visits, during which he was able to familiarize himself at first hand with the magnitude of the German war machine, he was ostentatiously entertained by Air Marshal Göring, he was ceremoniously decorated in the name of the Führer, and he expressed quite openly his high regard for Hitler, calling Germany the world's "most interesting nation" and its leader "a great man." And all this interest and admiration *after* Hitler's 1935 racial laws had denied Germany's Jews their civil, social, and property rights, nullified their citizenship, and forbidden intermarriage with Aryans.

By the time I began school in 1938, Lindbergh's was a name that provoked the same sort of indignation in our house as did the

weekly Sunday radio broadcasts of Father Coughlin, the Detroit-area priest who edited a right-wing weekly called *Social Justice* and whose anti-Semitic virulence aroused the passions of a sizable audience during the country's hard times. It was in November 1938—the darkest, most ominous year for the Jews of Europe in eighteen centuries—that the worst pogrom in modern history, *Kristallnacht,* was instigated by the Nazis all across Germany: synagogues incinerated, the residences and businesses of Jews destroyed, and, throughout a night presaging the monstrous future, Jews by the thousands forcibly taken from their homes and transported to concentration camps. When it was suggested to Lindbergh that in response to this unprecedented savagery, perpetrated by a state on its own native-born, he might consider returning the gold cross decorated with four swastikas bestowed on him in behalf of the Führer by Air Marshal Göring, he declined on the grounds that for him to publicly surrender the Service Cross of the German Eagle would constitute "an unnecessary insult" to the Nazi leadership.

Lindbergh was the first famous living American whom I learned to hate—just as President Roosevelt was the first famous living American whom I was taught to love—and so his nomination by the Republicans to run against Roosevelt in 1940 assaulted, as nothing ever had before, that huge endowment of personal security that I had taken for granted as an American child of American parents in an American school in an American city in an America at peace with the world.

The only comparable threat had come some thirteen months earlier when, on the basis of consistently high sales through the worst of the Depression as an agent with the Newark office of Metropolitan Life, my father had been offered a promotion to assistant manager in charge of agents at the company's office six miles west of our house in Union, a town whose only distinction I knew of was a drive-in theater where movies were shown even when it rained, and where the company expected my father and his family to live if he took the job. As an assistant manager, my father could soon

be making seventy-five dollars a week and over the coming years as much as a hundred a week, a fortune in 1939 to people with our expectations. And since there were one-family houses selling in Union for a Depression low of a few thousand dollars, he would be able to realize an ambition he had nurtured growing up penniless in a Newark tenement flat: to become an American homeowner. "Pride of ownership" was a favorite phrase of my father's, embodying an idea real as bread to a man of his background, one having to do not with social competitiveness or conspicuous consumption but with his standing as a manly provider.

The single drawback was that because Union, like Hillside, was a Gentile working-class town, my father would most likely be the only Jew in an office of some thirty-five people, my mother the only Jewish woman on our street, and Sandy and I the only Jewish kids in our school.

On the Saturday after my father was offered the promotion—a promotion that, above all, would answer a Depression family's yearning for a tiny margin of financial security—the four of us headed off after lunch to look around Union. But once we were there and driving up and down the residential streets peering out at the two-story houses—not quite identical but each, nonetheless, with a screened front porch and a mown lawn and a piece of shrubbery and a cinder drive leading to a one-car garage, very modest houses but still roomier than our two-bedroom flat and looking a lot like the little white houses in the movies about small-town salt-of-the-earth America—once we were there our innocent buoyancy about the family ascent into the home-owning class was supplanted, predictably enough, by our anxieties about the scope of Christian charity. My ordinarily energetic mother responded to my father's "What do you think, Bess?" with enthusiasm that even a child understood to be feigned. And young as I was, I was able to surmise why: because she was thinking, "Ours will be the house 'where the Jews live.' It'll be Elizabeth all over again."

Elizabeth, New Jersey, when my mother was being raised there in a flat over her father's grocery store, was an industrial port a

quarter the size of Newark, dominated by the Irish working class and their politicians and the tightly knit parish life that revolved around the town's many churches, and though I never heard her complain of having been pointedly ill-treated in Elizabeth as a girl, it was not until she married and moved to Newark's new Jewish neighborhood that she discovered the confidence that led her to become first a PTA "grade mother," then a PTA vice president in charge of establishing a Kindergarten Mothers' Club, and finally the PTA president, who, after attending a conference in Trenton on infantile paralysis, proposed an annual March of Dimes dance on January 30—President Roosevelt's birthday—that was accepted by most Newark schools. In the spring of 1939 she was in her second successful year as a leader with progressive ideas—already supporting a young social studies teacher keen on bringing "visual education" into Chancellor's classrooms—and now she couldn't help but envision herself bereft of all that had been achieved by her becoming a wife and a mother on Summit Avenue. Should we have the good fortune to buy and move into a house on any of the Union streets we were seeing at their springtime best, not only would her status slip back to what it had been when she was growing up the daughter of a Jewish immigrant grocer in Irish Catholic Elizabeth, but, worse than that, Sandy and I would be obliged to relive her own circumscribed youth as a neighborhood outsider.

Despite my mother's mood, my father did everything he could to keep up our spirits, remarking on how clean and well-kept everything looked, reminding Sandy and me that living in one of these houses the two of us would no longer have to share a small bedroom and a single closet, and explaining the benefits to be derived from paying off a mortgage rather than paying rent, a lesson in elementary economics that abruptly ended when it was necessary for him to stop the car at a red light beside a parklike drinking establishment dominating one corner of the intersection. There were green picnic tables set out beneath the shade trees full with foliage, and on this sunny weekend afternoon there were waiters in braided white coats moving swiftly about, balancing trays

laden with bottles and pitchers and plates, and men of every age gathered at each of the tables, smoking cigarettes and pipes and cigars and drinking deeply from tall beakers and earthenware mugs. There was music, too—an accordion being played by a stout little man in short pants and high socks who wore a hat ornamented with a long feather.

"Sons of bitches!" my father said. "Fascist bastards!" and then the light changed and we drove on in silence to look at the office building where he was about to get his chance to earn more than fifty dollars a week.

It was my brother who, when we went to bed that night, explained why my father had lost control and cursed aloud in front of his children: the homey acre of open-air merriment smack in the middle of town was called a beer garden, the beer garden had something to do with the German-American Bund, the German-American Bund had something to do with Hitler, and Hitler, as I hadn't to be told, had everything to do with persecuting Jews.

The intoxicant of anti-Semitism. That's what I came to imagine them all so cheerfully drinking in their beer garden that day—like all the Nazis everywhere, downing pint after pint of anti-Semitism as though imbibing the universal remedy.

My father had to take off a morning of work to go over to the home office in New York—to the tall building whose uppermost tower was crowned with the beacon his company proudly designated "The Light That Never Fails"—and inform the superintendent of agencies that he couldn't accept the promotion he longed for.

"It's my fault," announced my mother as soon as he began to recount at the dinner table what had transpired there on the eighteenth floor of 1 Madison Avenue.

"It's nobody's fault," my father said. "I explained before I left what I was going to tell him, and I went over and I told him, and that's it. We're not moving to Union, boys. We're staying right here."

"What did he do?" my mother asked.

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"He heard me out."

"And then?" she asked.

"He stood up and he shook my hand."

"He didn't say anything?"

"He said, 'Good luck, Roth.'"

"He was angry with you."

"Hatcher is a gentleman of the old school. Big six-foot goy. Looks like a movie star. Sixty years old and fit as a fiddle. These are the people who run things, Bess—they don't waste their time getting angry at someone like me."

"So now what?" she asked, implying that whatever happened as a result of his meeting with Hatcher was not going to be good and could be dire. And I thought I understood why. Apply yourself and you can do it—that was the axiom in which we had been schooled by both parents. At the dinner table, my father would reiterate to his young sons time and again, "If anybody asks 'Can you do this job? Can you handle it?' you tell 'em 'Absolutely.' By the time they find out that you can't, you'll already have learned, and the job'll be yours. And who knows, it just might turn out to be the opportunity of a lifetime." Yet over in New York he had done nothing like that.

"What did the Boss say?" she asked him. The Boss was how the four of us referred to the manager of my father's Newark office, Sam Peterfreund. In those days of unadvertised quotas to keep Jewish admissions to a minimum in colleges and professional schools and of unchallenged discrimination that denied Jews significant promotions in the big corporations and of rigid restrictions against Jewish membership in thousands of social organizations and communal institutions, Peterfreund was one of the first of the small handful of Jews ever to achieve a managerial position with Metropolitan Life. "He's the one who put you up for it," my mother said. "How must *he* feel?"

"Know what he said to me when I got back? Know what he told me about the Union office? It's full of drunks. *Famous* for drunks. Beforehand he didn't want to influence my decision. He didn't

want to stand in my way if this was what I wanted. Famous for agents who work two hours in the morning and spend the rest of their time in the tavern or worse. And I was supposed to go in there, the new Jew, the big new sheeny boss the goyim are all dying to work for, and I was supposed to go in there and pick 'em up off the barroom floor. I was supposed to go in there and remind them of their obligation to their wives and their children. Oh, how they would have loved me, boys, for doing them the favor. You can imagine what they would have called me behind my back. No, I'm better off where I am. We're all better off."

"But can the company fire you for turning them down?"

"Honey, I did what I did. That's the end of it."

But she didn't believe what he'd told her the Boss had said; she believed that he was making up what the Boss had said to get her to stop blaming herself for refusing to move her children to a Gentile town that was a haven for the German-American Bund and by doing so denying him the opportunity of *his* lifetime.

The Lindberghs returned to resume their family life in America in April 1939. Only months later, in September, having already annexed Austria and overrun Czechoslovakia, Hitler invaded and conquered Poland, and France and Great Britain responded by declaring war on Germany. Lindbergh had by then been activated as a colonel in the Army Air Corps, and he now began traveling around the country for the U.S. government, lobbying for the development of American aviation and for expanding and modernizing the air wing of the armed forces. When Hitler quickly occupied Denmark, Norway, Holland, and Belgium, and all but defeated France, and the second great European war of the century was well under way, the Air Corps colonel made himself the idol of the isolationists—and the enemy of FDR—by adding to his mission the goal of preventing America from being drawn into the war or offering any aid to the British or the French. There was already strong animosity between him and Roosevelt, but now that he was declaring openly at large public meetings and on network radio

and in popular magazines that the president was misleading the country with promises of peace while secretly agitating and planning for our entry into the armed struggle, some in the Republican Party began to talk up Lindbergh as the man with the magic to beat "the warmonger in the White House" out of a third term.

The more pressure Roosevelt put on Congress to repeal the arms embargo and loosen the strictures on the country's neutrality so as to prevent the British from being defeated, the more forthright Lindbergh became, until finally he made the famous radio speech before a hall full of cheering supporters in Des Moines that named among the "most important groups who have been pressing this country toward war" a group constituting less than three percent of the population and referred to alternately as "the Jewish people" and "the Jewish race."

"No person of honesty and vision," Lindbergh said, "can look on their pro-war policy here today without seeing the dangers involved in such a policy both for us and for them." And then, with remarkable candor, he added:

> A few far-sighted Jewish people realize this and stand opposed to intervention. But the majority still do not . . . We cannot blame them for looking out for what they believe to be their own interests, but we must also look out for ours. We cannot allow the natural passions and prejudices of other peoples to lead our country to destruction.

The next day the very accusations that had elicited roars of approval from Lindbergh's Iowa audience were vigorously denounced by liberal journalists, by Roosevelt's press secretary, by Jewish agencies and organizations, even from within the Republican Party by New York's District Attorney Dewey and the Wall Street utilities lawyer Wendell Willkie, both potential presidential nominees. So severe was the criticism from Democratic cabinet members like Interior Secretary Harold Ickes that Lindbergh resigned his reserve commission as an Army colonel rather than serve under FDR as his commander in chief. But the America First

Committee, the broadest-based organization leading the battle against intervention, continued to support him, and he remained the most popular proselytizer of its argument for neutrality. For many America Firsters there was no debating (even with the facts) Lindbergh's contention that the Jews' "greatest danger to this country lies in their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio, and our government." When Lindbergh wrote proudly of "our inheritance of European blood," when he warned against "dilution by foreign races" and "the infiltration of inferior blood" (all phrases that turn up in diary entries from those years), he was recording personal convictions shared by a sizable portion of America First's rank-and-file membership as well as by a rabid constituency even more extensive than a Jew like my father, with his bitter hatred of anti-Semitism—or like my mother, with her deeply ingrained mistrust of Christians—could ever imagine to be flourishing all across America.

The 1940 Republican Convention. My brother and I went to sleep that night—Thursday, June 27—while the radio was on in the living room, and our father, our mother, and our older cousin Alvin sat listening together to the live coverage from Philadelphia. After six ballots, the Republicans still hadn't selected a candidate. Lindbergh's name was yet to be uttered by a single delegate, and because of an engineering conclave at a midwestern factory where he'd been advising on the design of a new fighter plane, he wasn't present or expected to be. When Sandy and I went to bed the convention remained divided among Dewey, Willkie, and two powerful Republican senators, Vandenberg of Michigan and Taft of Ohio, and it didn't look as though a backroom deal was about to be brokered anytime soon by party bigwigs like former president Hoover, who'd been ousted from office by FDR's overwhelming 1932 victory, or by Governor Alf Landon, whom FDR had defeated even more ignominiously four years later in the biggest landslide in history.

Because it was the first muggy evening of the summer, the win-

dows were open in every room and Sandy and I couldn't help but continue to follow from bed the proceedings being aired over our own living room radio and the radio playing in the flat downstairs and—since an alleyway only barely wide enough for a single car separated one house from the next—the radios of our neighbors to either side and across the way. As this was long before window air conditioners bested the noises of a neighborhood's tropical nights, the broadcast blanketed the block from Keer to Chancellor—a block on which not a single Republican lived in any of the thirty-odd two-and-a-half-family houses or in the small new apartment building at the Chancellor Avenue corner. On streets like ours the Jews voted straight Democratic for as long as FDR was at the top of the ticket.

But we were two kids and fell asleep despite everything and probably wouldn't have awakened till morning had not Lindbergh —with the Republicans deadlocked on the twentieth ballot—made his unanticipated entrance onto the convention floor at 3:18 A.M. The lean, tall, handsome hero, a lithe, athletic-looking man not yet forty years old, arrived in his flying attire, having landed his own plane at the Philadelphia airport only minutes earlier, and at the sight of him, a surge of redemptive excitement brought the wilted conventioneers up onto their feet to cry "Lindy! Lindy! Lindy!" for thirty glorious minutes, and without interruption from the chair. Behind the successful execution of this spontaneous pseudo-religious drama lay the machinations of Senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota, a right-wing isolationist who quickly placed in nomination the name of Charles A. Lindbergh of Little Falls, Minnesota, whereupon two of the most reactionary members of Congress—Congressman Thorkelson of Montana and Congressman Mundt of South Dakota—seconded the nomination, and at precisely four A.M. on Friday, June 28, the Republican Party, by acclamation, chose as its candidate the bigot who had denounced Jews over the airwaves to a national audience as "other peoples" employing their enormous "influence . . . to lead our country to destruction," rather than truthfully acknowledging us to be a small

minority of citizens vastly outnumbered by our Christian countrymen, by and large obstructed by religious prejudice from attaining public power, and surely no less loyal to the principles of American democracy than an admirer of Adolf Hitler.

"No!" was the word that awakened us, "No!" being shouted in a man's loud voice from every house on the block. It can't be. No. Not for president of the United States.

Within seconds, my brother and I were once more at the radio with the rest of the family, and nobody bothered telling us to go back to bed. Hot as it was, my decorous mother had pulled a robe over her thin nightdress—she too had been asleep and roused by the noise—and she sat now on the sofa beside my father, her fingers over her mouth as though she were trying to keep from being sick. Meanwhile my cousin Alvin, able no longer to remain in his seat, set about pacing a room eighteen-by-twelve with a force in his gait befitting an avenger out searching the city to dispose of his nemesis.

The anger that night was the real roaring forge, the furnace that takes you and twists you like steel. And it didn't subside—not while Lindbergh stood silently at the Philadelphia rostrum and heard himself being cheered once again as the nation's savior, nor when he gave the speech accepting his party's nomination and with it the mandate to keep America out of the European war. We all waited in terror to hear him repeat to the convention his malicious vilification of the Jews, but that he didn't made no difference to the mood that carried every last family on the block out into the street at nearly five in the morning. Entire families known to me previously only fully dressed in daytime clothing were wearing pajamas and nightdresses under their bathrobes and milling around in their slippers at dawn as if driven from their homes by an earthquake. But what shocked a child most was the anger, the anger of men whom I knew as lighthearted kibbitzers or silent, dutiful breadwinners who all day long unclogged drainpipes or serviced furnaces or sold apples by the pound and then in the evening looked at the paper and listened to the radio and fell asleep in the living

room chair, plain people who happened to be Jews now storming about the street and cursing with no concern for propriety, abruptly thrust back into the miserable struggle from which they had believed their families extricated by the providential migration of the generation before.

I would have imagined Lindbergh's not mentioning the Jews in his acceptance speech to be a promising omen, an indication that he had been chastened by the outcry that had caused him to relinquish his Army commission or that he had changed his mind since the Des Moines speech or that he had already forgotten about us or that secretly he knew full well that we were committed irrevocably to America—that though Ireland still mattered to the Irish and Poland to the Poles and Italy to the Italians, we retained no allegiance, sentimental or otherwise, to those Old World countries that we had never been welcome in and that we had no intention of ever returning to. If I could have thought through the meaning of the moment in so many words, this is probably what I would have been thinking. But the men out on the street thought differently. Lindbergh's not mentioning the Jews was to them a trick and no more, the initiation of a campaign of deceit intended both to shut us up and to catch us off guard. "Hitler in America!" the neighbors cried. "Fascism in America! Storm troopers in America!" After their having gone without sleep all night long, there was nothing that these bewildered elders of ours didn't think and nothing that they didn't say aloud, within our hearing, before they started to drift back to their houses (where all the radios still blared away), the men to shave and dress and grab a cup of coffee before heading for work and the women to get their children clothed and fed and ready for the day.

Roosevelt raised everyone's spirits by his robust response on learning that his opponent was to be Lindbergh rather than a senator of the stature of Taft or a prosecutor as aggressive as Dewey or a big-time lawyer as smooth and handsome as Willkie. When awakened at four A.M. to be told the news, he was said to have predicted from

his White House bed, "By the time this is over, the young man will be sorry not only that he entered politics but that he ever learned to fly." Whereupon he fell immediately back into a sound sleep—or so went the story that brought us such solace the next day. Out on the street, when all anyone could think about was the menace posed to our safety by this transparently unjust affront, people had oddly forgotten about FDR and the bulwark he was against oppression. The sheer surprise of the Lindbergh nomination had activated an atavistic sense of being undefended that had more to do with Kishinev and the pogroms of 1903 than with New Jersey thirty-seven years later, and as a consequence, they had forgotten about Roosevelt's appointment to the Supreme Court of Felix Frankfurter and his selection as Treasury secretary of Henry Morgenthau, and about the close presidential adviser, financier Bernard Baruch, and about Mrs. Roosevelt and Ickes and Agriculture Secretary Wallace, all three of whom, like the president, were known to be friends of the Jews. There was Roosevelt, there was the U.S. Constitution, there was the Bill of Rights, and there were the papers, America's free press. Even the Republican *Newark Evening News* published an editorial reminding readers of the Des Moines speech and openly challenging the wisdom of Lindbergh's nomination, and *PM*, the new left-wing New York tabloid that cost a nickel and that my father had begun bringing home with him after work along with the *Newark News*—and whose slogan read, "*PM* is against people who push other people around"—leveled its assault on the Republicans in a lengthy editorial as well as in news stories and columns on virtually every one of its thirty-two pages, including anti-Lindbergh columns in the sports section by Tom Meany and Joe Cummiskey. On the front page the paper featured a large photo of Lindbergh's Nazi medal and, in its Daily Picture Magazine, where it claimed to run photographs that other papers suppressed—controversial photos of lynch mobs and chain gangs, of strikebreakers wielding clubs, of inhuman conditions in America's penitentiaries—there was page after page showing the Republican candidate touring Nazi Germany in 1938, culminating in the

full-page picture of him, the notorious medal around his neck, shaking the hand of Hermann Göring, the Nazi leader second only to Hitler.

On Sunday night we waited through the lineup of comedy programs for Walter Winchell to come on at nine. And when he did and proceeded to say what we had hoped he would say just as contemptuously as we wanted him to say it, applause erupted from across the alleyway, as though the famous newsman weren't walled off in a radio studio on the far side of the great divide that was the Hudson but were here among us and fighting mad, his tie pulled down, his collar unbuttoned, his gray fedora angled back on his head, lambasting Lindbergh from a microphone atop the oilcloth covering on the kitchen table of our next-door neighbor.

It was the last night of June 1940. After a warm day, it had grown cool enough to sit comfortably indoors without perspiring, but when Winchell signed off at nine-fifteen, our parents were moved to go outside for the four of us to take in the lovely evening together. We were just going to walk to the corner and back—after which my brother and I would go to sleep—but it was nearly midnight before we got to bed and by then sleep was out of the question for kids so overcome by their parents' excitement. Because Winchell's fearless bellicosity had propelled all of our neighbors outdoors as well, what had begun for us as a cheerful little evening stroll ended as an impromptu block party for everyone. The men dragged beach chairs from the garages and unfolded them at the foot of the alleyways, the women carried pitchers of lemonade from the houses, the youngest of the children ran wildly from stoop to stoop, and the older ones sat laughing and talking off by themselves, and all because war had been declared on Lindbergh by America's best-known Jew after Albert Einstein.

It was Winchell, after all, whose column had famously ushered in the three dots separating—and somehow magically validating—each hot news item ever so tenuously grounded in fact, and it was Winchell who'd more or less originated the idea of firing into the

face of the credulous masses buckshot pellets of insinuating gossip—ruining reputations, compromising celebrities, bestowing fame, making and breaking showbiz careers. It was his column alone that was syndicated in hundreds of papers all across the country and his Sunday-night quarter of an hour that was the country's most popular news program, the rapid-fire Winchell delivery and the pugnacious Winchell cynicism lending every scoop the sensational air of an exposé. We admired him as a fearless outsider and a cunning insider, a pal of J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, as well as a neighbor of the mobster Frank Costello and a confidant of Roosevelt's inner circle, even a sometimes guest invited to the White House to amuse the president over a drink—the in-the-know street fighter and hardboiled man about town whom his enemies feared and who was on our side. Manhattan-born Walter Winschel (a.k.a. Weinschel) had transformed himself from a New York vaudeville dancer into a callow Broadway columnist earning big money by embodying the passions of the cheesiest of the new subliterate dailies, though ever since the rise of Hitler, and long before anyone else in the press had the foresight or the wrath to take them on, fascists and anti-Semites had become his number one enemy. He'd already labeled as "ratzis" the German-American Bund and hounded its leader, Fritz Kuhn, over the air and in print as a secret foreign agent, and now—after FDR's joke, the *Newark News* editorial, and the thoroughgoing denunciation by *PM*—Walter Winchell had only to disclose Lindbergh's "pro-Nazi philosophy" to his thirty million Sunday-evening listeners and to call Lindbergh's presidential candidacy the greatest threat ever to American democracy for all the Jewish families on block-long little Summit Avenue to resemble once again Americans enjoying the vitality and high spirits of a secure, free, protected citizenry instead of casting themselves about outdoors in their nightclothes like inmates escaped from a lunatic asylum.

My brother was known throughout the neighborhood for being able to draw "anything"—a bike, a tree, a dog, a chair, a cartoon

character like Li'l Abner—though his interest of late was in real faces. Kids were always gathering around to watch him wherever he would park himself after school with his large spiral pad and his mechanical pencil and begin to sketch the people nearby. Inevitably the onlookers would start to shout, "Draw him, draw her, draw me," and Sandy would take up the exhortation, if only to stop them from screaming in his ear. All the while his hand was working away, he'd look up, down, up, down—and behold, there lived so-and-so on a sheet of paper. What's the trick, they all asked him, how'd you do it, as if tracing—as if outright magic—might have played some part in the feat. Sandy's answer to all this pestering was a shrug or a smile: the trick to doing it was his being the quiet, serious, unostentatious boy that he was. Compelling attention wherever he went by turning out the likenesses people requested had seemingly no effect on the impersonal element at the core of his strength, the inborn modesty that was his toughness and that he later sidestepped at his peril.

At home, he was no longer copying illustrations from *Collier's* or photos from *Look* but studying from an art manual on the figure. He'd won the book in an Arbor Day poster contest for schoolkids that had coincided with a citywide tree-planting program administered by the Department of Parks and Public Property. There'd even been a ceremony where he'd shaken the hand of a Mr. Bannwart, who was superintendent of the Bureau of Shade Trees. The design of his winning poster was based on a red two-cent stamp in my collection commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of Arbor Day. The stamp seemed to me especially beautiful because visible within each of its narrow, vertical white borders was a slender tree whose branches arched at the top to meet and form an arbor—and until the stamp became mine and I was able to examine through my magnifying glass its distinguishing marks, the meaning of "arbor" had been swallowed up in the familiar name of the holiday. (The small magnifying glass—along with an album for twenty-five hundred stamps, a stamp tweezers, a perforation gauge, gummed stamp hinges, and a black rubber dish called a watermark detec-

tor—had been a gift from my parents for my seventh birthday. For an additional ten cents they'd also bought me a small book of ninety-odd pages called *The Stamp Collector's Handbook*, where, under "How to Start a Stamp Collection," I'd read with fascination this sentence: "Old business files or private correspondence often contain stamps of discontinued issues which are of great value, so if you have any friends living in old houses who have accumulated material of this sort in their attics, try to obtain their old stamped envelopes and wrappers." We didn't have an attic, none of our friends living in flats and apartments had attics, but there'd been attics just beneath the roofs of the one-family houses in Union—from my seat in the back of the car I could see little attic windows at either end of each of the houses as we'd driven around the town on that terrible Saturday the year before, and so all I could think of when we got home in the afternoon were the old stamped envelopes and the embossed stamps on the prepaid newspaper wrappers secreted up in those attics and how I would now have no chance "to obtain" them because I was a Jew.)

The appeal of the Arbor Day commemorative stamp was greatly enhanced by its representing a human activity as opposed to a famous person's portrait or a picture of an important place—an activity, what's more, being performed by children: in the center of the stamp, a boy and a girl looking to be about ten or eleven are planting a young tree, the boy digging with a spade while the girl, supporting the trunk of the tree with one hand, holds it steadily in place over the hole. In Sandy's poster the boy and the girl are repositioned and stand on opposite sides of the tree, the boy is pictured as right-handed rather than left-handed, he wears long pants instead of knickers, and one of his feet is atop the blade pressing it into the ground. There is also a third child in Sandy's poster, a boy about my age, who is now the one wearing the knickers. He stands back and to the side of the sapling and holds ready a watering can—as I held one when I modeled for Sandy, clad in my best school knickers and high socks. Adding this child was my mother's idea, to help distinguish Sandy's artwork from that on the Arbor

Day stamp—and protect him from the charge of "copying"—but also to provide the poster with a social content that implied a theme by no means common in 1940, not in poster art or anywhere else either, and that for reasons of "taste" might even have proved unacceptable to the judges.

The third child planting the tree was a Negro, and what encouraged my mother to suggest including him—aside from the desire to instill in her children the civic virtue of tolerance—was another stamp of mine, a brand-new ten-cent issue in the "educators group," five stamps that I'd purchased at the post office for a total of twenty-one cents and paid for over the month of March out of my weekly allowance of a nickel. Above the central portrait, each stamp featured a picture of a lamp that the U.S. Post Office Department identified as the "Lamp of Knowledge" but that I thought of as Aladdin's lamp because of the boy in the *Arabian Nights* with the magic lamp and the ring and the two genies who give him whatever he asks for. What I would have asked for from a genie were the most coveted of all American stamps: first, the celebrated 1918 twenty-four-cent airmail, a stamp said to be worth $3,400, where the plane pictured at the center, the Army's Flying Jenny, is inverted; and after that, the three famous stamps in the Pan-American Exposition issue of 1901 that had also been mistakenly printed with inverted centers and were worth over a thousand dollars apiece.

On the green one-cent stamp in the educators group, just above the picture of the Lamp of Knowledge, was Horace Mann; on the red two-cent, Mark Hopkins; on the purple three-cent, Charles W. Eliot; on the blue four-cent, Frances E. Willard; on the brown ten-cent was Booker T. Washington, the first Negro to appear on an American stamp. I remember that after placing the Booker T. Washington in my album and showing my mother how it completed the set of five, I had asked her, "Do you think there'll ever be a Jew on a stamp?" and she replied, "Probably—someday, yes. I hope so, anyway." In fact, another twenty-six years had to pass, and it took Einstein to do it.

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