

**Hugo Münsterberg:
A German Jew (?) in America**

Jan-Christopher Horak

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I. The Hun

At the time of his death in December 1916, shortly after he published, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, Hugo Münsterberg may have been one of the most vilified men in America.¹



Hugo Münsterberg
Dr. Phil, Dr. Med. (1863-1916)

The Harvard professor of psychology and philosophy was the man you love to hate, the German Hun ever faithful to the Kaiser, an outright apologist for Imperial Army war crimes, and a rumored agent of the Berlin government. This is not a role Münsterberg would have necessarily chosen for himself, but he played the part out of a sense of duty to the German Fatherland, even though he had been a resident of the United States for

¹ Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1916), reprinted as *The Film: A psychological study. The silent photoplay in 1916*, With an forward by Richard Griffith (New York: Dover Books, 1970).

more than twenty years. He had made a name for himself in America, not only as the one of the most famous academic psychologists in the country, but also as a popularizer of applied psychology, publishing a whole series of studies that looked at everyday life and the efficiency of capitalist industry. Münsterberg had become a household name in America in 1908, with the publication of *On the witness stand; essays on psychology and crime*, which remained in print for more than eighty years.² Not that Münsterberg was a revolutionary, like his nemesis, Sigmund Freud, far from it. Indeed, as a believer in absolute moral and aesthetic values in an age of modernism and relativity, as a Neo-Kantian idealist rather than a Hegelian, materialist-based psychologist, as a cultural elitist in an age of popular culture, as a supporter of the autocratic Prussian government in democratic America, Münsterberg was a man as much out of his time as a part of it. But duty called. His view of life as an obligation to work for the good of higher ideals is illustrated in a comment in Münsterberg's last book, *Tomorrow*.

In the fortieth psalm we Germans read the beautiful words: "Und wenn es köstlich gewesen, so ist es Mühe und Arbeit gewesen;" the English-speaking world reads: "And if by reason of strength they be four-score years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow." The meaning of the English translation is: Even at its best life is filled with labor and sorrow and therefore filled with that which we should like to avoid. The meaning of the German translation is: Life is truly beautiful only if it is filled with labor and toil.³

In many ways, Münsterberg embodied the stereotype of the ugly German. As biographer Phyllis Keller has written: "Some students took exception to his Germanic manner. Others were offended by his pedagogical dogmatism . . ."⁴ Even William James, who had brought Münsterberg from Germany to Harvard and was one of his most faithful supporters, characterized the German privately in his notebooks as "sinister, the ominous Münsterberg."⁵ The straight-laced Prussian exhibited a not unsubstantial degree of inflexibility and rigidity with a firm belief in absolutes. As Keller again noted,

² Hugo Münsterberg, *On the witness stand; essays on psychology and crime* (New York: McClure Co, 1908), reprinted in 1909, 1923, 1927, 1933, 1941, 1975, and 1981.

³ Hugo Münsterberg, *Tomorrow. Letters to a Friend in Germany* (New York/London: D. Appleton and Co., 1916) page 169.

⁴ Phyllis Keller, *States of Belonging. German-American Intellectuals and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), page 32.

⁵ F.O. Matthiessen and K. Murdock (eds), *The Notebooks of Henry James* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), page 317.

The style of Münsterberg's intellectual arguments is revealing. Defining subjects by the method of exclusion, he asserted that "only this" is psychology, "only that" is philosophy, and "only that philosophy" is true . . . Münsterberg imposed a rigid order . . .⁶

On the other hand, his intro to Psychology course was incredibly popular with students, enrollment often topping 450 in the pre-war years, including Robert Frost, who would later call the professor his "greatest inspiration," and Gertrud Stein.⁷ A.A. Roback, another one of his Harvard students and likewise a sympathetic commentator, noted:

He always seemed to be conscious of his superiority, and the play of irony on his lips, as seen in all his photographs, is characteristic of him. Frequently there was a tinge of sarcasm in his remarks, though usually he would take care – perhaps for the sake of policy – not to hurt anyone's feelings.⁸



A.A. (Abraham Aron) Roback (1890-1965),
Professor at Emerson College, Boston, Massachusetts

⁶ Keller, page 34.

⁷ *Harvard Crimson*, 22 January 1917.

⁸ A.A. Roback, "Hugo Münsterberg – The Dramatic Figure in Psychology." In *B'nai B'rith Magazine* (1926), Vol. XLI, No. 3, page 118.

The same source describes Münsterberg as "robust almost burly", "a distinguished appearance, possessing a considerable amount of personal magnetism", "The moustache and chin rather Teutonic."⁹ The Teutonic demeanor could even be mistaken for racist ideology. In a 1914 much attacked essay for the *New York Times*, Münsterberg called for an alliance between Germany, Britain and the USA: "Every day, we fancied, had brought them nearer together, the three Teutonic master nations in which the aristocratic will toward a higher civilization blended with the democratic spirit of individual responsibility."¹⁰ Finally, as early as 1901 in *American Traits*, Münsterberg had articulated his belief in the positive nature of subordination to the State and to State authority. There he noted that the relative lack of individual freedom in Germany was seen as the product of a voluntary self-subordination to the welfare of the whole society. The German reverence for authority was taken to represent a higher degree of civilization. Indeed, Münsterberg floats anti-democratic sentiments: "But worse even than democratic dilettantism is the lowness of aims which results from the belief in equality."¹¹

After *American Traits*, Münsterberg published a series of books in Germany and the United States, including *The Americans* (1904) and *Aus Deutsch-Amerika* (1908), as well as numerous articles and public lectures, which characterized Germany in sympathetic terms for the Americans and the United States in sympathetic terms for the Germans, whereby the emotional weight always shifted slightly towards Germany. He pursued similar ends in his year in Berlin, founding and successfully fundraising for a German-American Institute to foster good relations between the two countries. But it was his 1914 book, *The War and America*, and its follow-up, *The Peace and America* (1915), which really turned the popular psychologist into a *bête noire*, even among his Harvard colleagues. In that work, Münsterberg argues unabashedly for the United States to ally itself with its natural friends Germany and the British or at the very least remain neutral in the event of a European war, so that such an alliance could arise out of the ruins, resulting in an angry attack on the Harvard professor by John Cowper Powys, who published *The war and culture; a reply to Professor Münsterberg*.¹²

Münsterberg also played a prominent role in the German-American community in Boston, was president of Boston's German Association from 1908-1910¹³ and attempted

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Anonymous, "Suggest That Harvard oust Münsterberg," in the *New York Times*, 22 October 1916, quoted in *The Harvard Peace Kite*.

¹¹ Hugo Münsterberg, *American Traits. From the Point of View of a German* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1901), page 194.

¹² John Cowper Powys, *The war and culture; a reply to Professor Münsterberg* (New York: G.A. Shaw, 1914).

¹³ Keller, page 65.

to organize German-Americans into a voting block for peace in the 1916 elections, a move that cost him his friendship with both Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.¹⁴ Other friends deserted him both locally at Harvard and in the country as a whole. As his daughter Margaret Münsterberg later wrote about her father:

As Münsterberg walked to and from his work through the serene streets of Cambridge, where he had walked for twenty-five years, men who had formally stopped him with a pleasant word or joke, now passed by with a stiff bow, and still others passed without bowing at all.¹⁵

In his obituary, William Stern quotes Münsterberg directly:

Day and night I work both before and behind the scenes almost entirely in the interests of the political struggle, and fortunately thus I can accomplish much. Of course almost all of my old relations are severed, especially here in Boston. Most of my friends here no longer recognize me: I have been thrown out of clubs and academies. All their rage has concentrated upon me. But we hold out.¹⁶

The stress was too much for the Harvard professor, as A.A. Roback noted: "It was really the war that brought on his sudden and premature death, the tragic climax of a dramatic life."¹⁷ Indeed, when Münsterberg keeled over and died at his Harvard lectern in December 1916, it was generally agreed he had been done in by the stress of vilification.

II. A Baptized Jew

The great historical irony of Münsterberg's fate as a Prussian martyr for the national cause of the German Reich is that he was born a German Jew, who was excluded from membership in the Prussian power elite, and had been subjected to anti-Semitism in Germany and the United States. Had Münsterberg completely suppressed his Jewish identity, in order to better play the German Imperial patriot? If he did, it mattered little, because he was attacked in some quarters for being a Hun and a Jew. When a wealthy Harvard alumnus of British birth announced that he would donate \$ 10 million to

¹⁴ Münsterberg (1970), page x.

¹⁵ Margaret Münsterberg, *Hugo Münsterberg: His Life and Work* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1922), page 276.

¹⁶ William Stern, "Hugo Münsterberg: In Memoriam," page 187. <http://legacy.earlham.edu/~dominel/obituary.htm>, downloaded 11 December 2015.

¹⁷ A.A. Roback, page 117.

Harvard if they fired Münsterberg, a member of Harvard's Board of Overseers, William Roscoe Thayer, vented against the professor as "the Prussianized renegade Jew."¹⁸

At the turn of the 20th century, Harvard University had a mixed record in relation to the Jewish population, as did other elite American universities. On the one hand, Münsterberg may have been originally hired because he was Jewish. According to Andrew R. Heinze, who has written a book about the influence of Jewish psychologists on American academia in the 20th century:

In supporting Münsterberg, William James made concrete his desire that American universities integrate Jewish scholars and grow to be the organizers of what is new and untried in moral and social lines . . . instead of being guardians of what is traditional and secure.¹⁹

On the other hand, anti-Semitism was alive and well at Harvard, leading to efforts to limit Jewish enrollment at the University after 1900. In 1908, seven percent of the student body was Jewish, causing concern for the university's Anglo-Saxon elite. Privately, the elite freely vented. A year later, A. Lawrence Lowell, a conservative, protestant elitist and anti-Semite who thought immigration a threat to American democracy and the Anglo-Saxon character, was named President of Harvard. He established new rules to better identify Jews in the admissions process and keep them out of Freshman dorms, which were reserved for the Harvard Brahmin.²⁰ Lowell's relationship with Münsterberg was never good, but deteriorated rapidly, as the psychologist became an ever more public target for anti-German sentiment. According to another one of Münsterberg's biographers, Mathew J. Hale, it was well known in America, at least, in the academic community that Münsterberg was Jewish, even if he rarely mentioned it himself and even if his daughter Margaret Münsterberg published a biography of her father in which no mention is made of his Jewish parentage and upbringing.²¹ Consciousness of who was Jewish in academia seems to have been all pervasive: Münsterberg's Harvard colleague in the Psychology Department, Herbert S.

¹⁸ Letter William Roscoe Thayer to O.G. Villard, 21 October 1914, Villard papers, Houghton Library, Harvard, quoted in Keller, page 78, footnote 18.

¹⁹ Andrew R. Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), page 108.

²⁰ Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen. The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, And Princeton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005), pages 45 and 86.

²¹ Matthew Hale, *Human Science and Social Order: Hugo Münsterberg and the Origins of Applied Psychology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), page 53.

Langfeld, would later identify a Jewish student, A.A. Roback [see above, page 3], "as a Jew of the best sort ... rather unusual looking, but not of a distinctive Hebraic type."²²



Students at Münsterberg's Psychology Lab
at Harvard University during a chain reaction experiment.
[Web source: Christopher D. Greene,
York University, Toronto, 2000]

More overtly anti-Semitic, Bryn Mawr University president M. Carey Thomas noted in a letter to Harvard, discussing Münsterberg: "It makes me hope we never have a Jew in our Bryn Mawr faculty."²³ Typical of the veiled anti-Semitic attitudes of the WASP elite, *The Churchman* (New York), wrote in its obituary of Münsterberg: "... from the standpoint of religion Professor Münsterberg could not be pleasing to Christians, because he was intellectually the kind of man who give reason to fear materialistic tendencies in our large universities."²⁴ Connecting Jews to materialism and a lust for money was of course a common trope in the anti-Semitic playbook.

²² Letter Herbert S. Langfeld to President William T. Foster, Reed College, 9 August 1919. bMS Am 2518 (615), Carton 3. A. A. Roback Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University. [Thanks to Jeremy Todd Blatter for making this and other documents available to me.]

²³ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1994), page 340.

²⁴ "Münsterberg", in *The Churchman*, 30 December 1916, quoted in Heinze (2004), page 109.

And in another irony of ironies, the biggest public squabble at Harvard over the World War I question erupted between two Jewish professors, Münsterberg and Slavic languages professor, Leo Wiener. Münsterberg had argued in an interview that Russia would soon capitulate in its war with the Imperial German Army, because "Russia was thoroughly broken in spirit and finances and would seek a separate peace by the Spring."²⁵ That in fact eventually happened in 1917, but in October 1916, Leo Wiener felt it necessary to defend his fatherland. Wiener, however, like Münsterberg, was a non-practicing Jew, who identified himself as Russian, and was married to an "anti-Semitic" Jewess. Indeed, his son, Harvard mathematics professor, Norbert Wiener, would not learn of his Jewish parentage until after his father's death.²⁶ Both professors had relinquished their childhood identities as Jews to become super-patriots of their homelands, despite the fact that nationalists in both countries would have probably decried their overseas supporters as homeless *Ahasvers* or "Wandering Jews."²⁷

So, it seems odd that Münsterberg seemingly feigned ignorance of all things Jewish. Around the Harvard Yard, his Jewish students knew that Judaism was a taboo subject with the Herr Professor, according to his student A.A. Roback, who also reported that Münsterberg had once asked a graduate student in the Psychological Laboratory at Harvard "whether the 'Jewish Easter' was an important holiday."²⁸ Looking over Münsterberg's collected correspondence at Boston Public Library, virtually no letters could be found that addressed Judaism or anti-Semitism directly, except for a single reference to the Dreyfus Affair.²⁹ According to a letter from William James to Josiah Royce, quoted by Rüdiger Steinmentz, though, the psychologist was "painfully conscious of his Judaism."³⁰ His public lack of Jewish consciousness manifests itself further in the total absence of Jewish references in his published work, at times to the point of absurdity. For example, in his chapter on religion in *The Americans*, Münsterberg dedicates exactly one paragraph (four sentences) to the Jews in a book of more than 600 pages, treating them as some kind of unknowable other. He opens by claiming

²⁵ "Suggest That Harvard oust Münsterberg," in *The New York Times*, 22 October 1916.

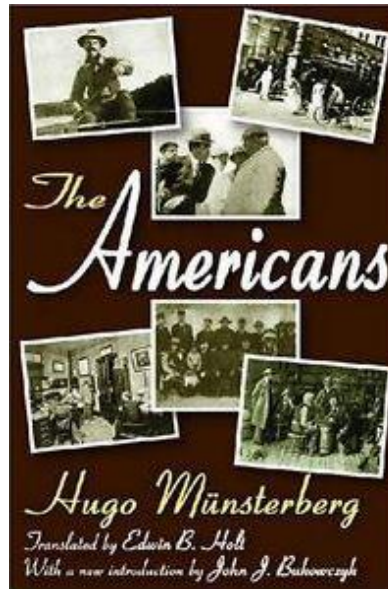
²⁶ Norbert Wiener, *Ex-Prodigy: My Childhood and Youth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1953), page 146, 148.

²⁷ See also Susanne Klingenstein, *Jews in the American Academy, 1900-1940: The Dynamics of Intellectual Assimilation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993

²⁸ Roback, page 120.

²⁹ Letter Paul Hensel to Hugo Münsterberg, 28 June 1900. Folder 1786: Hugo Münsterberg Collection. MS Acc 1501-2500. Rare Books and Manuscripts Department, Boston Public Library. Courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library/Rare Books. [Thanks to Catrina Hoppe for her research at BPL.]

³⁰ Letter William James to Josiah Royce. 22 June 1892. William James Papers, bMS Am 1092.9 (3594-3641), Houghton Library, Harvard University. [Thanks to Rüdiger Steinmetz for making this source available to me.]



Front Cover, Hugo Münsterberg's
The Americans (1904/2009)

erroneously that the first Jews in America came from Brazil, identifying them as some kind of third-world aliens (they were in fact mostly Sephardic Jews from Holland who travelled via Brazil). He then notes that it was not until immigration set in from Eastern Europe that the Jewish population in America increased significantly with more than half remaining in and around New York City. He goes on to write:

The larger part of these people are Russian Jews, who live together in great poverty and are very little Americanized. The division made by the census into Orthodox and Reformed Jews does not represent two sects, but merely a manner of grouping, since the congregations present a very gradual transition from rigid Asiatic orthodoxy to a reform so complete as to be hardly Jewish at all, and in which the rabbis are merely lecturers on "ethical culture."³¹

Apart from his first line which characterizes Jews as other, as existing outside the mainstream of American life, his second is almost unintelligible without further explanation, and finally only demonstrates that the subject of Jews in America bore absolutely no interest for the author. The comment on "ethical culture" at the far left of the Jewish religious belief spectrum is particularly interesting and I will return to it later,

³¹ Hugo Münsterberg, *The Americans*, trans. by Edwin Holt (New York: McLure, Phillips & Co., 1904), page 514.

but I am perplexed by the sheer brevity of Münsterberg's comments, as if talking about Jews might make people identify him as Jewish. The fact is that references to Judaism are virtually non-existent in Münsterberg's work, even when they would have been justified. In *The Eternal Values* (1909), for example, Münsterberg again composes a single paragraph about Judaism in his chapter on religion. There, he only refers to the ancient Judaism of the Old Testament and makes no statements about the value or even presence of Judaism in contemporary society, even though that is the subject of his book.

Yahweh, the god of the Israelites, was at first practically only a naturalistic power . . . The god of Israel was a powerful god who could divide the sea, and yet he was a benevolent god who brought welfare and happiness to his people, and above all he was a just god who would give up even his people if moral justice demanded it. In this unity lies the meaning and the strength of the belief.³²

The attitude here towards Judaism is one of the distanced observer, the scientist analyzing the religion from outside as something foreign and alien. Münsterberg externalizes the religion of his fathers, but Christianity and Lutheranism fair no better, as we will see. When it suited his purposes, he would reveal knowledge of Jewish culture that was far from casual. In an essay on "Naïve Psychology" in *Psychology and Social Sanity* (1914), for example, he notes that "very characteristic psychological remarks can be found among the Russian proverbs, and not a few among those in Yiddish."³³ Ironically, that publication was dedicated to Isaac Adler, who was far from the only Jewish colleague Münsterberg associated with. Andrew R. Heinze has theorized that other Jews would have related to Münsterberg as a fellow Jew, even if converted, and further notes that an "intangible emotional quality may explain the odd fact that, of all the nation's academic psychologists, a pair of Jews who were not close friends and who lived far apart, Wisconsin's Jastrow and Harvard's Münsterberg, produced the first public exhibition of psychology at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893."³⁴ Finally, as Albert Einstein famously noted: "It is furthermore known that a snail can shed its shell without thereby ceasing to be a snail. The Jew who abandons his faith (in the formal sense of the word) is in a similar position. He remains a Jew."³⁵ Was, then,

³² Hugo Münsterberg, *The Eternal Values* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), page 367

³³ Hugo Münsterberg, *Psychology and Social Sanity* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co, 1914), page 309.

³⁴ Andrew R. Heinze, "Jews and American Popular Psychology: Reconsidering the Protestant Paradigm of Popular Thought," in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (Dec., 2001), page 955.

³⁵ Albert Einstein, "Just What is a Jew?" in the *Einstein Reader* (New York: Citadel Press, 2006), page 228-29.

Münsterberg's conversion to Lutheranism "a conversion of expediency that he deemed necessary to pursue his career goals in Germany," as Wertheimer and White have noted?³⁶

Hugo Münsterberg was born in 1863 into an upper-middle class Jewish family in Danzig, now called Gdansk in Poland. His father, Moritz Münsterberg, was a wealthy businessman in the lumber trade, having emigrated from Breslau in Silesia, the home of one of Germany's largest and wealthiest Jewish communities, where Abraham Geiger was Rabbi of the Reformed Congregation. Moritz was also a Vorsteher (Elder) in Danzig's Weinberg Temple, a Reformed *shul* and one of the largest in the city. Münsterberg's mother, Minna Anna Bernhardi, was his father's second wife and Jewish, like his first. Young Hugo, like his two older brothers, Otto and Emil, and his younger brother, Oscar, all received a Jewish religious education, culminating at age 13 in their reformed *Konfirmation*, rather than a conservative *bar mitzvah*. Otto became a leading businessman in Danzig, serving as a representative in the Prussian State Assembly, Emil, the Mayor of Iserlohn, then the Director of Public Charities in Berlin, and Oscar a professor of art history and a specialist on oriental art. Except for Otto, all of them converted to Protestantism within a year of their father's death in 1880. However, the brothers differed in their continued relationship to Judaism, as the following anecdote illustrates. When Otto wrote to Hugo that he and Emil were concerned about the rise in anti-Semitism in Germany in the late 1870s, brought on by a series of speeches by Richard Wagner, Hugo downplayed the matter and specifically asked his brother not to "defend his views publically."³⁷ Like many German Jews, Münsterberg understood that not being a Jew would improve his chances for an academic career immeasurably.

III. The Rise of Reformed Judaism in 19th Century Germany

In the 18th century, Jews in Germany developed a new and different relationship to Germany, at least as compared with the community's relationship to other Eastern and Western European countries or other Europeans relations to the Germans. As Amos Leon notes: ". . . other Europeans often feared, admired, envied, and ridiculed the Germans; only Jews seemed actually to have *loved* them."³⁸ While France was the first nation in Europe to grant Jews citizenship privileges, when the National Convention passed a decree on 28 September 1791, Germany soon followed suit. In 11 March 1812,

³⁶ Gregory, Michael Wertheimer and Charlotte White (eds): *Portraits of Pioneers in Psychology*, Vol. 4 (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association: 1991)

³⁷ Quoted in Keller, page 15

³⁸ Amos Leon, *The Pity of it All. The History of Jews in Germany, 1743-1933* (New York: Henry Holt & Co.: 2002), page 10.

the Prussian King Frederick William III issued an edict, giving Jews German citizenship, rather than treating them as foreigners.³⁹ After German unification in 1871, all German Jewish citizens were granted full civil and political rights without restrictions, based on religious difference. Most importantly, the government now considered Judaism to be a religion rather than a nationality or ethnic group. This status allowed German Jewry not only to assimilate into the emerging German nation, but also to rapidly rise into the middle class. By 1870, over 60% of all Prussian Jews had in fact entered the bourgeoisie, while urbanization among Jews proceeded at a pace two or three times faster than other Germans. Meanwhile, given traditional Jewish values in reference to education, it is not surprising to learn that 14% of all students in Gymnasias (high school) were Jewish, three times higher than their numbers in the general population.⁴⁰ In fact, the "Abitur" was a requisite for careers outside business that lay open to German Jews: medicine, journalism, and, later in the century, law and academics.⁴¹ Another sign of emancipation were the literary salons in Berlin of Henriette Herz and Rahel von Varnhagen, which drew the likes of Alexander von Humboldt, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Friedrich von Schlegel.

Jews could still not join the military's officer corps or enter into government service, and gateways into academia were still extremely difficult, due to anti-Semitism, but a pro forma conversion to Christianity became an ever more frequently sought after option, since such *Taufjuden* converts potentially enjoyed the same privileges and successes as other Christians. As Fritz Mauthner noted in 1912, he had in his own life not seen a single case of conversion out of *Überzeugung* (conviction). "In vast majority of cases the convert is brought to profess a creed in which he does not believe . . ." ⁴² As will be argued below, it remains ambiguous, whether Münsterberg himself ever embraced Christianity beyond his official conversion. Münsterberg's ambitions were clearly focused on an academic career. One study of German university professors in 1889-90, found that 40% of converts at university held full professorships, compared to 48% of Christians, but only 10% of Jews achieved the status of professor.⁴³ German Jewish assimilation proceeded on multiple fronts, but conversion was an important path: Münsterberg's Jewish father-in-law, for example, converted to Protestantism to become Chief Surgeon General of the Prussian Army, although his daughter, Selma Münsterberg

³⁹ Felix Adler, *Religion in America. Creed and Deed. A Series of Discourses* (New York: G.PAGE Putnam's Sons, 1877), page 215 and 216.

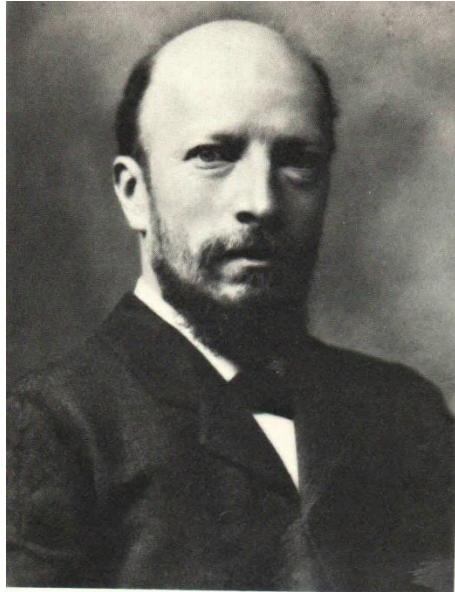
⁴⁰ Leon, page 206 and 207.

⁴¹ Hale, page 19.

⁴² Quoted in Hale, page 20.

⁴³ David L. Preston, "The German Jews in Secular Education, University Teaching and Science: A Preliminary Survey," in *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 38, Spring 1976, page 106.

neé Oppler, would in a letter to A.A. Roback [see page 3 above] likewise feign ignorance of her father's origins.⁴⁴



Felix Adler (1851-1933), German-American Professor,
Chair of Political and Social Ethics at Columbia University;
founder of Ethical Culture

Reformed Judaism, which originated in Germany, appeared as a result of the influence of Enlightenment philosophers on Judaism. Felix Adler in his essay on Reformed Judaism, specifically names Emmanuel Kant as a force: "Philosophy in the person of Kant emphasized the duties of man to man."⁴⁵ Ironically, the giant of the Enlightenment, still

⁴⁴ Heinze (2004), page 372, footnote 13. Selma Münsterberg also objected to Roback's discussion of anything Jewish in his published remembrance of his professor. See Letter Selma Münsterberg to A.A. Roback, 5 February 1927. Roback responded as follows in an undated letter: "And now we come to the crux of the whole complex, which I am afraid I have tapped in my article but too well vis. the emphasis on Jewish origin. You 'decidedly wish' me to leave out all these allusions in publishing parts of the article in a book, on the grounds that Prof. Munsterberg's Jewish origin 'is not of general interest.' With all my eagerness to respect your wish, I fear you are asking more than is warranted... Do you realize that in asking me to refrain from dwelling on Professor Munsterberg's Jewish origins, you are offering me – as a member of the race you are apparently ashamed of – a personal affront?" Letter A.A. Roback to Selma Münsterberg, n.d. bMS Am 2518 (624-786), Carton 4. A. A. Roback Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University. [Thanks to Jeremy Todd Blatter for making these letters available to me.]

⁴⁵ Adler, page 215.

professed certain anti-Semitic attitudes, although he had and supported numerous Jewish students. There were also a significant and influential number of Jewish Neo-Kantian philosophers in Germany, including Hermann Cohen, Hugo Münsterberg, Richard Höningwald, and Ernst Cassirer. Kant nevertheless wrote of the Jews: "All their talents and skills revolve around stratagems and low cunning . . . They are a nation of swindlers."⁴⁶ He was also ambivalent about whether Judaism was a religion, based on his concept of legalism which defined Judaism as an amalgamation of commandments based on external, i.e. divine, authority.⁴⁷ In his study of ethics, Kant had differentiated between legality, i.e. duties based on external laws, and morality, i.e. duty based on inner convictions or duty for its own sake, placing Judaism in the legal category, and therefore opposed to Morality, while Protestantism was seen as a product of inner morality. However, according to the philosopher, Hermann Cohen, Kant's goal here was less focused on Judaism than on elevating Protestantism: "His acknowledged goal was the ethical idealization of Christianity, based on his study of the New Testament, while denying any ethical content in the Old Testament."⁴⁸

Influenced by Kantian philosophy, Reform Judaism, like Protestantism, emphasized the personal autonomy of worshipers who formulated their own understanding of religiosity, giving more weight to personal judgment and free will. Thus, Abraham Geiger considered one of the founders of Reformed Judaism, although he himself never completely relinquished his own Orthodoxy, wished to modernize Judaism from within, making the service more akin to a Protestant service and thereby more appealing to modern German Jews, who were leaving the faith in droves to embrace secular nationalism. As a historian and philosopher, as well as a Rabbi, Geiger believed the Torah and the Talmud were not static documents, but deserved to be read critically, contextualizing them within history. His doctoral dissertation, originally published in Latin, then in German, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* sought to originate many of the Koran's teachings in Jewish monotheism. Finally, as the founder of a scholarly journal, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie*, Geiger established a science of Judaism, whose project was to revitalize the religion for modern times. Thus, Reformed Judaism relinquished their allegiance to *Halachah* (religious law), recasting Judaism from an all-encompassing way of life to simply a religion, and thus allowing for Jewish assimilation into the German national social fabric.

⁴⁶ Alan Dershowitz, *Chutzpah* (Little, Brown, and Co. Boston, Toronto, London, 1991), page 113.

⁴⁷ Nathan Rotenstreich, *Jews and German Philosophy. The Polemics of Emancipation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), page 4.

⁴⁸ Hermann Cohen, *Kants Begründung der Ethik* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1910), page 462. "Sein ausgesprochenen Zweck war die ethische Idealisierung des Christentums, und zwar aussliesslich nach seiner Urkunde im Neuen Testament, mit nachdrücklicher Aberkennung alles ethischen Grundgehalts im Alten."



Moses Mendelssohn
German-Jewish Philosopher (1729-1786)

The first Reformed Jewish temple was founded in Seesen, Germany in 1810 by Israel Jacobson, who then assisted in 1818 in establishing the New Israelite Temple Society in Hamburg. The *Pentateuch*, or traditional orthodox prayer book, had been translated into German by Moses Mendelssohn, who was friends with Kant, and others as early as 1783.⁴⁹ The members of these congregations undertook far reaching changes, including altering the aesthetics of the service: a weekly sermon was introduced, supplanting the ritual repetition of the Torah; prayers were recited in unison in German and Hebrew, songs were sung by a choir, accompanied by organ music, and confirmation replaced the bar/bat mitzvah of teenagers.⁵⁰ All these changes made the event look more like a Protestant church service than anything from the traditional synagogue. But modernization went further.

Thus, the prayers calling for the arrival of a Messiah who would return the Jews to Erez Israel and lead in the reconstruction of Jerusalem's Temple were eliminated. For almost

⁴⁹ Adler, page 220.

⁵⁰ Ibid, page 228.

two-thousand years, Jews had maintained an identity as exiles awaiting a messiah, who had been banished from their homeland in Palestine by the destruction of the great Temple at the hands of the Romans. According to Felix Adler, "the leading proposition upon which Reformed Judaism is founded was that *The Jewish people have ceased to be a national unit, and will exist hereafter as a confederation of religious societies.*"⁵¹ In other words, Jews were no longer a "chosen people," but only a spiritual congregation.

Secondly, Reformed Jews believed that if they wished to cease their state of isolation from the Christian majority and assimilate completely into German society, they would have to give up their Kosher dietary laws and eat what other Germans ate, even if it meant abandoning aspects of Talmudic law that had been in place since the time of Moses. And they would have to give up their orthodox Jewish appearance, cutting their payots (sidelocks), beards, and traditional clothing, such as the tallit (prayer shawl), kippah (skull cap), and tzitzit (tassels), so they would no longer be visually identifiable on the street. German-Jewish businessmen whose clients were mostly non-Jews were particularly susceptible to these reforms; thus the service was moved from Saturday morning to Friday eve to allow for business on Saturday. So, what did the Kantian, and violently anti-Hegelian psychologist and philosopher actually believe?

In *The Americans* Hugo Münsterberg discusses all religions analytically, in the third person. He is not a partisan for the Lutheran Church, nor are there any expressions of personal faith. Given the importance of religion in American life, Münsterberg gives it surprisingly short shrift. Even more surprising, if we accept his baptism at face value, is that, as the passage on Yahweh quoted above, God is objectified in his writing when describing religion, but there are no articles of faith. In *The Eternal Life* (1905), Münsterberg does not mention God even once, nor is there any discussion of Jesus Christ, as the lord and savior who will redeem the sins of man, according to Christian theology, nor any mention of heaven or a spiritual afterlife. In *The Eternal Values*, Münsterberg again discusses Christianity analytically, viewing the belief itself as a real phenomenon. In the same volume he theorizes that the belief in an afterlife was relative new to Judaism, possibly influenced by Greek and Persian mysteries.⁵² Indeed, the very lack of worship, rather a silent acknowledgement of God, lay at the heart of his father's Reformed Judaism, as described by Mathew Hale Jr.:

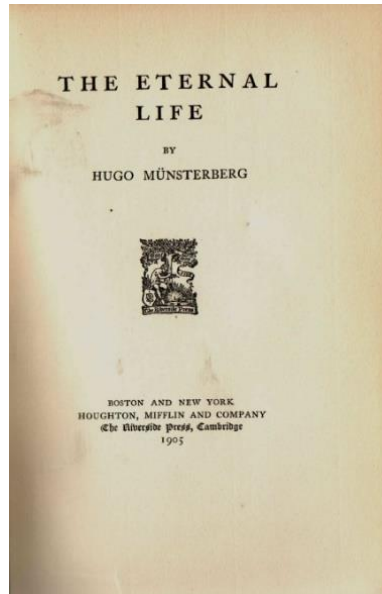
Moritz kept a *Reise-Tagebuch*. The journal has a strongly pious tone, though it completely lacks any reference to Jewish custom or dogma. God appears frequently in a personal but abstracted form – he was to be thanked for good fortune and success in life, but not apparently, to be worshipped.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid, page 238.

⁵² Münsterberg (1909), page 380.

⁵³ Hale, page 14.

Hugo Münsterberg's *The Eternal Life* (1905)⁵⁴ in its slim eighty pages, fails to worship a specifically Christian God, rather, it is a tract of ethical culture, which Münsterberg himself had identified as the left wing of Judaism.



Front Cover of Hugo Münsterberg's, *Eternal Life* (1905)

His is a mixture of German Kantian Idealism and Ethical Culture, especially his conception of eternal life as the sum total of one's moral deeds:

In eternity lies the reality of our friend, who will never sit with us again here at the fireplace . . . He lived his life in realizing absolute values through devotion to truth and beauty, to morality and religion. You and I do not know a reality of which he is not in eternity a noble part; the passing of time cannot make his personality unreal, and nothing would be added to his immortal value is some object like him were to enter the sphere of time again. The man whom we love belongs to a world in which there is no past and no future, but an eternal now.⁵⁵

Münsterberg's final pages of *The Eternal Life* focuses almost solely on the moral deeds of the departed friend, conceptualized now as the product of a will outside of time and

⁵⁴ Hugo Münsterberg, *Eternal Life* (Boston/New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1905).

⁵⁵ Münsterberg (1905), page 67-69.

space. These ideas are very close to those of Ethical Culture. Felix Adler, the founder of Ethical Culture in the 1870s, was the son of the one of Germany's leading Reformed Judaism rabbis, Samuel Adler, and was strongly influenced by Neo-Kantian thought when he completed his PhD. in Heidelberg, especially Kant's theory that a deity cannot be proved or disproved through rational thought. Returning to his father's Temple Emanuel in New York, he gave a sermon in which God was not mentioned, leading to his eviction and the establishment of the New York Society of Ethical Culture. In modern Ethical Culture, the deeds of man on earth are to be honored, whereas the exercise of religious belief was a matter of personal choice. The Society's motto is "Not by the Creed but by the Deed," meaning that humans should be judged not by spiritual beliefs, but by their actions. Morality is independent of theology. Münsterberg's quote indeed echoes the words of Felix Adler: "The dead are not dead if we have loved them truly. In our own lives we give them immortality. Let us arise and take up the work they have left unfinished, and preserve the treasures they have won, and round out the circuit of their being to the fullness of an ampler orbit in our own."⁵⁶ For many, Ethical Culture became a subterfuge of atheists, agnostics, deists, and theists. Münsterberg was, if anything, an Ethical Culturalist.

IV. Jüdischer Selbsthaß

German Jewry assimilated with amazing rapidity into the national mainstream, but they had not become invisible. Despite the many advances made by German Jews, anti-Semitism was alive and well. There were periodic anti-Semitic campaigns, as in the 1819 "Hep Hep" riots, which originated in Bavaria, but spread throughout the German speaking Reich, victimizing countless Ashkenazi Jews. That pogrom may have actually accelerated the Reform movement, which blossomed thereafter. Anti-Semitism was also endemic to the military caste of Prussian Junkers, and to the petty bourgeoisie. Zionist and religiously Conservative oriented German Jews, would later reinterpret the success of 19th century German assimilation in the light of the *Shoah*. As Gershom Scholem rather cynically phrased it in his famous essay, "Against the Myth of the German-Jewish Dialogue," there had never been any real German-Jewish dialogue, because a dialogue implies two entities, whereas the relationship was entirely one-sided.⁵⁷ The Jews loved the Germans, but not vice versa!

⁵⁶ Adler, page 35.

⁵⁷ Gershom Scholem, "Against the Myth of the German-Jewish Dialogue," in Werner J. Danhauser (ed), *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), page 61



"Hep Hep" riots in Bavaria, 1819

Münsterberg, although he often denied the existence of anti-Semitism in Germany was probably a victim himself at least once in his career. In a letter from 1896 to his *Doktorvater* (dissertation advisor), Wilhelm Wundt, Münsterberg discusses going to America permanently, because he sees little chance in Germany for a full professorship, given his Jewish background.⁵⁸ Later that same year, Münsterberg received an appointment to the University of Zurich on Wundt's recommendation, but that appointment was suddenly retracted, Münsterberg felt, due to anti-Semitism.⁵⁹ However, years later, Münsterberg supposedly blamed Hermann Cohen, the Jewish Neo-Kantian from Marburg, who possibly upended the appointment, in order to place one of his own protégées in the position.⁶⁰ It is unclear where the truth lies, but

⁵⁸ Letter H. Münsterberg to Wilhelm Wundt, 26 March 1896, Wundt Estate Archive, University Archive of Leipzig, Signatur: NA Wundt/III/701-800/765e/485-500. See also Sophie Franke, "Hugo Münsterberg in Deutschland," in Steinmetz (2016), about his experience at the University of Freiburg.

⁵⁹ Hale quotes a letter Münsterberg sent to the University, page 53. See also A.A. Roback, "Hugo Münsterberg," 118. A.A. Roback supports his claim in a letter to Selma Münsterberg, who insisted there was no such appointment, noting that he had the full story from Prof. Ludwig Stein, who at the time was a Privatdozent at the Technical University of Zurich. See Letter A.A. Roback to Selma Münsterberg, n.d..

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Münsterberg was certainly aware of the uptick in German anti-Semitism in the late 1870s, as noted above regarding the Richard Wagner controversy. That wave was inaugurated in part by Wilhelm Marr, whose book *Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum* coined the phrase anti-Semitism.⁶¹ At the turn of the century, Otto Weininger's *Geschlecht und Charakter* (1903) dedicated a chapter of almost forty pages to "Das Judentum," theorizing it to be a feminized male race; this unbelievably venomous anti-Semitic tract was composed by an assimilated German Jew. Theodor Lessing, in his influential book, *Der jüdischer Selbsthaß* (1930), in turn dedicates a chapter to Weininger, as an example of a Jewish anti-Semite. He names others, including Rudolf Borchert, Karl Kraus, Hugo v. Hofmannsthal, Franz Werfel, and Jakob Wassermann. To what degree did Münsterberg fit that profile?

Lessing's first thesis is that a wave of hate in late 19th century Germany brought Jews to their senses about assimilation, resulting in the founding of the Zionist movement.⁶² Secondly, one has a sense that Lessing, who evolved from dedicated German Jewish nationalist to Zionist, would like to blame Reformed Judaism and Jewish Germanophilia for the appearance of the anti-Semitic Jew, because modernization and assimilation turned Eastern European and Orthodox Jewry into an other, a primitive relic from the past, causing shame and disgust in assimilated Jewish Germans.⁶³ Relinquishing the prayer for a return to Jerusalem also cast assimilated Jews adrift, allowing them to morph into Lutherans or Ethical Culturalists, argued Lessing. But he also characterized Jewish self-hatred as typically Jewish: "The term 'Jewish Anti-Semitism' seems to be a contradiction in terms. But it is so little a contradiction that when someone says of a Jew that he is a *roshe* (a Jew hater), the others cry out, "That's *echt Yiddisch!*"⁶⁴

So was Hugo Münsterberg, who converted to Protestantism, but advocated in his writing for Ethical Culture, a self-hating Jew, who wished to eliminate every vestige of his Jewishness? Phyllis Keller gives Münsterberg's actions a Freudian interpretation:

⁶¹ Leon, page 210.

⁶² Lessing, page 23.

⁶³ Ibid, page 26 and pages 38 and 39

⁶⁴ Lessing, page 30-31: Der Begriff "juedischer Antisemitismus" scheint ein Widerspruch in sichselber zu sein. Aber er ist es so wenig, daß, wenn irgendwo von einem Juden gesagt wird, er sei ein Rosche (Judenhasser), die anderen alsbald ausrufen: "Das ist echt jüdisch." See also Lessing's discussion of Jewish history and psychology as "nur eine Leidensgeschichte (only a story of suffering)," brought on by Jewish guilt, page 13.

The source of Münsterberg's aggressive-submissive behavior lay primarily in his ambivalent feelings toward his father . . . Despite a limited evasion of Moritz's authority in disavowing his Jewishness, Münsterberg replayed his father's role as a Jew in Germany by insisting upon his own marginal position as a German in America.⁶⁵

I would like to propose another less psychological approach to Hugo Münsterberg and his relationship to Judaism, namely to see the seeming lack of any Jewish consciousness or knowledge of Judaism in his writings as the structuring absence, specifically in relation to Judaism. According to Richard Dyer McCann, a structuring absence is not simply what is not there, or a critic thinks should be there, but what the text cannot ignore, but deliberately skirts around or avoids, creating holes.⁶⁶ I would like to read *The Photoplay*, through the lens of Judaism as a structuring absence, as it is in *The Eternal Life* and *The Eternal Values*. In the former, in particular, we see how Ethical Culture, which was the outgrowth of German Judaism's most reformed wing, influenced Münsterberg's thinking, despite his pro forma conversion to Christianity. The relevance to *The Photoplay* actually came to me after reading another passage in Theodor Lessing's book, describing the self-hating Jew, Paul Rée, a friend of Nietzsche:

Rée belonged to the common sort of young Jews who, completely cut off from tradition and ritual, hide their Jewish heritage like a secret affliction, as if it were a sign of being a convict or an ugly birthmark. At the same time they are too genteel to tolerate any taint on Jews or Jewishness, without however including themselves.⁶⁷

In the light of Lessing's notion of the Jewish insider who pretends to be a sympathetic outsider when Jews are under attack, might we not read Hugo Münsterberg's *Photoplay* as an uplift narrative to improve the image of the Jewish dominated, commercial film industry, constructed by a disinterested, academic observer who raises film to a universal art?

⁶⁵ Keller, page 46.

⁶⁶ Dyer McCann, *The Matter of Images. Essays on Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993), page 14.

⁶⁷ Lessing, page 61-61: "Denn Rée gehörte zu der wunderlichen in jenen vorzionistischen Jahren sehr verbreiteten Art junger Juden, die, völlig abgelöst von Überlieferung und Ritus, das Bewußtsein ihrer jüdischen Herkunft wie ein heimliches Gebrechen hüten, als sei das ein Zuchthäuslerzeichen oder sie enstellendes Muttermal. Und doch fühlen sie andererseits zu vornehm, um einen Makel an Juden oder Judentum zu ertragen, ohne sich selber mit einzubeziehen".

V. The Photoplay

Hugo Münsterberg's relationship to his Jewish heritage was ambiguous at best. In *The Photoplay* there seems to be a glaring gap, which cannot be accounted for through the internal logic of Münsterberg's narrative, which moves from invention of the physical apparatus with some detail on pre-cinema contraptions and the very first experimental film screenings of the pioneers to the "inner apparatus," namely the aesthetics of film viewing. Münsterberg thus completely bypasses the growth and evolution of the film industry as an industrial mode of production from roughly 1900 to 1916, when it emerged as a developing monopolistic system encompassing production, distribution, and exhibition. This seems a rather curious omission, given his widely regarded interest in labor efficiency and empirical studies for American industry, his visits to movie theatres, and his theories on cinema audience reception. One would have naturally assumed more interest in just how the evolution of film language intersected with the actual physical expansion of the film industry, from production to distribution to exhibition. However, this same transition from the early motion pictures of Edison to the failure of the Motion Picture Patents Trust also coincides with the ascendancy of Jewish businessmen, who would control the film industry from that point onwards. Except for the mention of Sigmund Lubin, there is not even a hint of Jewish participation in that development.

Münsterberg begins his history of the outer development of motion pictures with the notion that an actual date for the beginning of cinema can't be found, because of pre-cinema's long development. He states that in America movies began in 1893 with Edison's Kinetoscope parlors at the Chicago World's Fair, then leaps to the fact that twenty years later, 20,000 cinemas are in operation in America.⁶⁸ Münsterberg then jumps back in time to talk about Eadweard Muybridge's experiments in perception, then even further back to 1824 to Peter Mark Roget's experiments in visual perception with the thaumatrope. He then discusses Simon Stampfer's invention of stroboscopic discs in 1832, and Joseph Plateau's invention the same year of the phenakistoscope. As Münsterberg states, "The scientific principle which controls the moving image world of today was established with these early devices."⁶⁹ He then goes on to discuss Muybridge, Étienne-Jules Marey, and Ottomar Anschütz, noting that each of them attempted to capture movement through single frames. All these systems were hampered by the limited number of images on each disc or wheel. Eastman Kodak's 35mm roll film solved that problem, by exposing successive frames of negative that when projected back produce moving images. "With Edison's Kinetoscope the moving image had become a means for popular amusement and entertainment, and the

⁶⁸ Münsterberg (1916), page 2.

⁶⁹ Münsterberg (1916), page 4.

appetite of commercialism was whetted."⁷⁰ Münsterberg then notes that the standardization of formats established by Edison was still in effect in his day, but that films had gotten longer and longer, beginning with Lubin's *Passion Play* and ending with D.W. Griffith's acknowledged formal masterpiece, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). He concludes: "Yet this technical progress and this tremendous increase of the mechanical devices for production have their true meaning in the inner growth, which lead from trite episodes to the height of tremendous action, from trivial routine to a new and most promising art."⁷¹

First, it should be noted that this very confusing and foreshortened history of the technical development of motion pictures was not based on Münsterberg's own research, as some commentators have mistakenly believed, but was most probably cribbed from two sources. Don Frederickson in his analysis of Münsterberg and *The Photoplay* lists Frederick A. Talbot's *Moving Pictures. How They are made and work* (1913) as one source, which is where Münsterberg probably got some information. Another likely source, because it would have been available to the Harvard professor as a German reader is F. Paul Liesegang's *Das lebende Lichtbild. Entwicklung, Wesen und Bedeutung der Kinematographie* (1910),⁷² which gives a very detailed history of 19th century optical experiments. However, it is the detail in this section, contrasted to the utter lack of any history, technical or otherwise, of the subsequent development of the film industry and film language that is of concern here. Thus, through sleight of hand Münsterberg moves from the "outer development" of motion pictures to 1895 to the "inner development" of motion pictures, i.e. their aesthetics, basing those aesthetics on his analysis of an accomplished technological *Gesamtkunstwerk*, like *The Birth of a Nation*. His coherent film theory privileges the pure and the beautiful in film art, reflecting Münsterberg's Neo-Kantian idealism.⁷³

⁷⁰ Münsterberg (1916), page 7.

⁷¹ Münsterberg (1916), page 8.

⁷² Donald Laurence Frederickson, *The Aesthetic of Isolation in Film Theory: Hugo Münsterberg* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), page 103; See also Frederick A. Talbot, *Moving pictures, how they are made and worked* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co, 1912); F. Paul Liesegang's *Das lebende Lichtbild. Entwicklung, Wesen und Bedeutung der Kinematographie* (Leipzig: Verlag M. Eger, 1910).

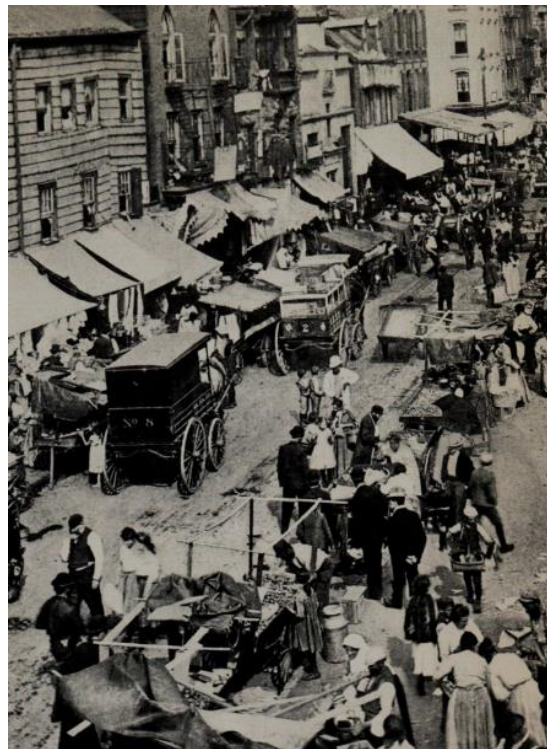
⁷³ For an analysis of Münsterberg's idealist aesthetics in relation to *The Photoplay* see Jörg Schweinitz, "The Aesthetic Idealist as Efficiency Engineer: Hugo Münsterberg's Theories of Perception, Psychotechnics and Cinema," in Annemone Ligensaand Klaus Kreimeier (eds), *Film 1900: Technology, Perception, Culture* (New Barnet, Hert, UK: John Libby Publishing Ltd., 2009), pages 77-86.



Lubin Nickelodeon, Chestnut Street,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, circa 1907

What occurs in that short time period between 1895 and 1915? Film exhibition moves from the store front nickelodeon era to the building of giant movie palaces, film production evolves from a cottage industry of small individual producers to a vertically organized industry of large studios, while film distribution had been invented, but was not yet an integral part of a vertically and horizontally organized system of production, distribution, and exhibition. The players also changed radically, expanding from an almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon founding generation of American pioneers, some of whom were anti-Semites, to Hollywood's largely Jewish generation of Hollywood producers and moguls. It is virtually certain that Münsterberg was aware of these changes. In an essay on "Society and Dance," Münsterberg identifies the rise of nickelodeons and filmed entertainment with East-European Jewry, without actually naming them:

The tremendous influx of warm-blooded, sensual peoples who came in millions from southern and eastern Europe Altered the tendencies of the cool-blooded, Teutonic races in the land. They have changed the old American Sunday, they have revolutionized the inner life, they have brought operas to every large city, and the kinematograph to every village, and have at last played the music to a nation-wide dance.⁷⁴



Vitagraph Lantern Slide,
Hester Street, New York, New York, 1903

Here Münsterberg employs a common trope -- 'warm-blooded for unrestrained' -- among German assimilated Jews for Eastern European, Orthodox Jewry, simultaneously contrasting them to the cool-blooded German nationals, with whom he so identified. The second part of the quote is more ambiguous, - is he talking about the lowered status of church-going? Or can his words be applied to the cinema of his day? Sunday

⁷⁴ Hugo Münsterberg (1914), pages 275-76, quoted in Eric Ames, "What Münsterberg saw at the Movies," in Lynne Tatlock and Matt Erlin (eds), *German Culture in Nineteenth-Century America. Reception, Adaptation, Transformation* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005, page 27.

laws were indeed passed to regulate cinema, the star system had turned Mary Pickford and Wallace Reed into idols for millions, filmed operas had been projected in Germany and France, and itinerant projectionists roamed the American hinterlands. That same essay on society and dance also reveals Münsterberg's opinion of the nickelodeon and transition period in cinema, in particular his analysis of the impact movies were having on American society. Not surprisingly, given his belief in a new age of idealism, Münsterberg formulates a socially conservative position on American, popular culture:

The whole American atmosphere is filled with erotic thought to a degree which has been unknown throughout history of the republic. The newspapers are filled with intra- and extra-matrimonial scandals, the playhouses commercialize the sexual instinct in lurid melodramas, sex problems are the centre of public discussion, all the old barriers which the traditional policy of silence had erected are being broken down. In such inflammable surroundings where the sparks of the dance are recklessly kindled, the danger is imminent.⁷⁵

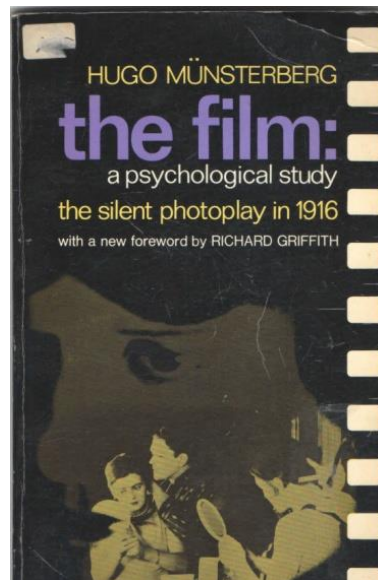
It is clear here, as in other tracts from the period that Münsterberg blamed commercial mass entertainments for the drop in moral values in American public life. In *The Photoplay* he does moralize about "unsavory French comedies" that "poison our youth,"⁷⁶ in a reference to Pathé's massive American distribution network before WWI. In *The Photoplay's* last pages, the Harvard professor characterizes the cinema's "first period" as populated with "tasteless and vulgar eccentricities."⁷⁷ In another essay he expresses a dim view of any alcoholic consumption, putting him firmly on the side of the Prohibitionists who would succeed two years after Münsterberg's death.⁷⁸ But again, it is important to note that these same critiques of public immorality were being leveled by cultural conservatives against the American film industry, especially in the transitional period from 1908 onwards.

⁷⁵ Ibid., page 275.

⁷⁶ Münsterberg (1916), page 96.

⁷⁷ Münsterberg (1916), page 99.

⁷⁸ Hugo Münsterberg, "Das Deutschtum und die Temperenz" (1909), in *Aus Deutsch Amerika* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1909): "Ja, wenn es war wäre, daß jede Hemmung eine Zerstörung bedeutete, dann müßten wir zugeben, daß jede Trank Verderben bringt, den das ist nicht zu leugnen, daß auch die kleinste Menge das Gehirn beeinflusst. Tatsächlich aber liegt es umgekehrt: gerade Hemmung ist der wichtigste und wesentlichste Faktor unser Geistesleben.", page 60.



Front Cover of Hugo Münsterberg's
The Photoplay. A Psychological Study (Reprint 1970)

Münsterberg's teleology leaps over the nickelodeon era to D.W. Griffith, in order to address the larger project of rescuing cinema from the mentality of the push-cart owners. Cinema has within it the power to achieve true works of truth and beauty, in a Kantian sense, if it can overcome its fairground origins. In order to make that case, he must eliminate Judaism from the equation, just as reformed Judaism assimilated into German nationalism, just as Ethical Culture kept the humanism of Judaism, but jettisoned the religion. The point is made in Margaret Münsterberg's book that in researching the film industry for his book, the author paid a personal visit to the Vitagraph Studios in New York's Flatbush neighborhood. Vitagraph had of course been the studio that financed *The Battle Cry of Peace*, a virulently anti-German film, produced as propaganda to convince Americans about entering the war. But Vitagraph was also one of the few remaining non-Jewish film production companies from the pioneering period. He also corresponded with W.W. Hodkinson at Paramount Studios, where he may actually have gained some actual film experience, although his participation has not been confirmed by the evidence of any actual films. Paramount was founded by Adolph Zukor and its upper management was largely Jewish, but W.W. Hodkinson was not. As

Neal Gabler has demonstrated, the founders of Universal, Fox, Goldwyn, and other major production companies, and exhibitors were Jewish.⁷⁹

Ironically, it is also probable that Münsterberg may have been aware of the Jewish connection to the movies, long before he began his own research. One of Münsterberg's other German Jewish students, Horace M. Kallen, had published an article as early as 1910, "The Dramatic Picture Versus the Pictorial Drama: A Study of the Influences of the Cinematograph on the Stage," which analyzed the use of melodrama in motion pictures, and even mentioned that Jews made up a large part of the audience in the nickelodeons.⁸⁰ Kallen does not mention the ethnic origins of the film producers, but as Münsterberg biographer, Jeremy Todd Blatter noted to me, "Moreover, based on their correspondence, Münsterberg and Kallen seem to have been fairly close, so it would seem likely that the two discussed cinema as early as 1910."⁸¹

Perhaps most importantly, Ross Melnick reports of a long meeting between Münsterberg and Roxy Rothafel, the director of the Strand Theatre in New York and even then one of the most highly regarded film exhibitors in the United States, who had helped initiate the construction of movie palaces that would uplift cinema from its nickelodeon origins.⁸² The men had much in common and apparently got along fabulously. Both were secular German Jews; Rothafel, had been born in Bromberg, West Prussia, 100 miles from Münsterberg's birthplace, Danzig, both fathers had lost their first wives early and remarried, their names in both cases identical: Rosalie and Anna. Roxy Rothafel, as Melnick's biography makes clear, was intensely aware of anti-Semitism directed towards the film industry and did what he could to deflect that criticism, for example, by participating in 1917 in government initiated "War Co-Operation Committee," and disseminating war propaganda in his theatres.⁸³ After the meeting, Münsterberg apparently called Roxy "the world's most natural psychologist,"

⁷⁹ Neal Gabler, *An Empire of their Own. How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988).

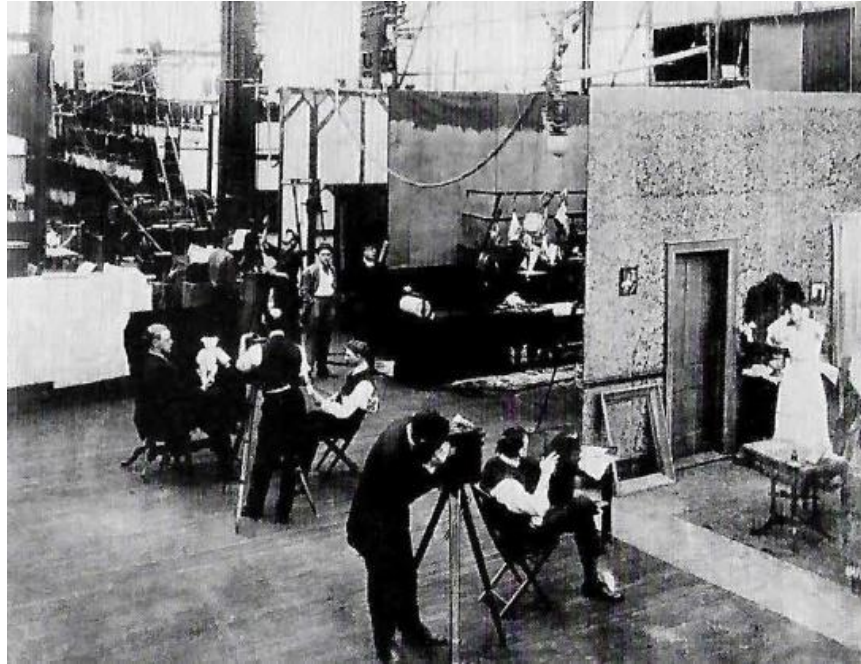
⁸⁰ Horace M. Kallen, "The Dramatic Picture Versus the Pictorial Drama: A Study of the Influences of the Cinematograph on the Stage." *The Harvard Monthly*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1910, 27. Kallen received his PhD. in philosophy in 1909, then lectured at Harvard until 1911, before accepting an appointment at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

⁸¹ Email Jeremy Todd Blatter to J.C. Horak, 7 July 2016. [Thanks to Jeremy Blatter for pointing out the Kallen article to me.]

⁸² Ross Melnick, *American Showman. Samuel 'Roxy' Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pages 110 and 111.

⁸³ Melnick, pages 145 and 146.

and it even is possible that the Harvard professor's notions of film and music had come from Roxy.⁸⁴



Edison Film Studio,
The Bronx, New York, New York, 1914-15

Which raises the question, if Münsterberg understood the organizational nature of the film industry, could he not have been aware of the anti-Semitic attacks on the film industry that were arising even back then? He was aware of the social standing of "Russian Jews," according to Rüdiger Steinmetz, who quotes a Münsterberg letter, in which the professor discusses the difficulties of one of his Jewish students in procuring a position.⁸⁵ And if that is the case, was his idealist reading of the cinema's potential to express human emotion and mimic human thought not also in part a ploy to shield the cinema's institutions from anti-Semitic attacks. Thomas Edison himself was apparently an anti-Semite, as has been established by the *Jerusalem Post*, after Israel planned to

⁸⁴ Lynne Danig. "The Rialto – a Theatre Without a Stage," in *The Theatre*, May 1916, n.p., quoted in Melnick, page 111.

⁸⁵ Letter Hugo Münsterberg to John Wallace Baird, 19 May 1916. BPL Mss. Acc. 2285 (2), quoted in Rüdiger Steinmetz: "The first Film Theory. Hugo Münsterberg's "The Photoplay" (1916) – Its Roots and Context in Psychological Experiment and Theory," in Rüdiger Steinmetz (ed): *Hugo Münsterberg: Biography, experiment, theory, application* (Leipzig: Universitätsverlag, 2016).

issue a stamp in Edison's honor.⁸⁶ Terry Ramsaye discusses anti-Semitism in the film industry as early as 1908, when the Mayor of New York revoked the licenses of all of the city's nickelodeons, which were largely Jewish. Ramsaye also documents the efforts of right-wing, Christian groups, like the International Reform Bureau, headed by the Reverent Wilbur Fisk Crafts, beginning in 1908. Ramsaye quotes the organization's press release:

The lobby of the International Reform bureau, Dr. Wilbur Crafts presiding, voted tonight to rescue the motion pictures from the hands of the Devil and 500 un-Christian Jews. As the first step in removing the menace of the movies, Dr. Crafts told the reformers that he would appeal to the Catholic Church . . . "⁸⁷

Just as virulent is New York theatre critic - himself an anti-Semitic Jew - George Jean Nathan's anti-Semitic outburst against the film industry:

Controlled in the overwhelming main by the most ignorant social outcasts, be they spawn of push-cart immigration, by hereditary toothpick suckers, soup coloraturoas and six-day sock wearers, controlled in the mass by men of a complete anaesthesia to everything fine and everything earnest and everything potentially dollarless.⁸⁸

Again, we have the image of the materialist Jew, who is only interested in any human endeavor if there is a dollar sign attached. As in some of Münsterberg's writings quoted above, which express the self-loathing when confronted with his own Jewish origins, the anti-Semite Nathan decries the film industry for its crass commercialism and vulgar aesthetic ambitions, blaming its Eastern European Jewish leaders through vicious stereotypes. In the 1930s, Hollywood's most powerful censor, Joe Breen, would express identical sentiments.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ See Bradford Hanson, "Thomas Edison was an "Anti-Semite," 18 October 2015, accessed 10 January 2016 <http://nationalvanguard.org/2015/10/thomas-edison-anti-semite>.

⁸⁷ Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights. A History of the Motion Picture Through 1925* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1925/1965), page 477, 483; Gabler, page 2, uses this quote without naming a source.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Anthony Slide, *Early American Cinema* (London: A. Zemmer Ltd., 1970), page 95.

⁸⁹ LETTER Joe Breen to Wilfrid Parsons, 10 October 1932, box 1, Wilfrid Parsons Papers, Georgetown University, quoted in Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Uncensored. Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), page 70: "These Jews seem to think of nothing else but making money and sexual indulgence. The vilest kind of sin is a common indulgence hereabouts..."

Was it then Münsterberg's intention to counteract the threat of anti-Semitism by rescuing the cinema from its Jewish history, demonstrating that the cinema was a moral art, the way German Reformed Jews hoped to counteract German anti-Semitism by looking and sounding like Lutherans? Or was his goal to make the cinema an acceptable art form by cleansing it completely of any Jewish origins? Ironically, aligning the motion picture with high art was also a stated goal of the motion picture industry's largely Jewish producers, while it was also an unstated law that films about Jewish themes be rigorously avoided, in order to not alienate the Christian majority in America. Thus, one can speculate that Münsterberg wrote his film theoretical treatise, in order to uplift the medium beyond its supposedly crass commercial and Jewish origins. By focusing on eternal aesthetic values, by raising the medium to an art that would be acceptable to the middle classes, by bracketing the film industry's historical development as an industry large guided by Jews, Münsterberg rescued the industry and this new modern medium from anti-Semitic attacks, but also point a way forward for film art, rather than cheap filmed entertainment.