The Freudsians Come to Kansas

Menninger, Freud, and the Émigré Psychoanalysts

by J. E. Carney

The history of psychoanalysis is a story of migration. Begun in Vienna, psychoanalysis moved quickly to other areas of Europe and beyond the continent. Among Sigmund Freud's inner circle of followers were representatives from Germany, Hungary, France, and England, as well as the United States. As these and other analytic adherents carried psychoanalysis to new territories, changes in Freud's discipline inevitably occurred. Chroniclers of this intellectual and professional movement of analysis have tended to focus on descriptions of national receptions of Freud's theory and therapy. Such national-level studies, however, often overlook the professional and intellectual nuances to be found in specific local situations.

Historians of the American reception of psychoanalysis have not avoided the problems inherent in such national-level treatments. Studies of the Americanization of psychoanalysis go a long way toward explaining why analysis in the United States differs from analysis taught and practiced in other countries. Historians Nathan Hale and Russell Jacoby have described the role of the American medical establishment as it absorbed psychoanalysis as a medical subspecialty.1 Additionally, much has been made of the humanistic and social milieu of European psychoanalysis juxtaposed against the purportedly dry, clinical version of Freud's science found in the United States. While

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Dr. Martin Grofjahn, one of the first refugee analysts recruited by the Menninger Clinic.
such traditional, national-level studies are valuable starting points for discussions on the migration of a scientific discipline, they are necessarily incomplete. Given that early American psychoanalysis developed around local analytic societies and institutes, an examination of a local-level case study may shed light on certain inadequacies found in the broader approach.

The tragedy that was Nazi Germany offers an opportunity to observe the movement of psychoanalysis from Europe to a local situation in the United States. Damned as a "Jewish science," psychoanalysis was not supposed to survive the Third Reich. Jewish analysts and their families fled to a variety of nations including Sweden, the Netherlands, Rumania, South Africa, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Belgium, China, Palestine, and the United States. Although New York, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore were the centers of the analytic community in the United States in the 1930s, a number of the European refugee analysts spent time in Topeka, Kansas.

Topeka may well seem a peculiar destination for these psychoanalytic refugees. A small city in the Midwest, Topeka had little in common culturally with Budapest, Berlin, or Vienna. Topeka was, however, the home of the Menninger Clinic. The clinic was established in 1919, soon after Karl Menninger had returned to his hometown of Topeka with a medical degree from Harvard (1917) and postgraduate study at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital. Initially, the Menninger Clinic was a small group practice established by Karl and his father, Dr. C. F. Menninger. Having specialized in psychiatry, Karl proposed that this field be the focus of their practice. Although C. F. had no formal psychiatric training, he acquiesced to his eldest son's wishes. When William Menninger, the youngest of the three Menninger brothers, joined the staff of the clinic in the mid-1920s, he also had little background in psychiatry; he had, at Karl's urging, completed a four-month psychiatric program at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Karl was undoubtedly the leader of this family practice.

Karl Menninger's position as the leader of this family institution also derived from his popularity

as an author and speaker. Shortly after the clinic was founded, Menninger became one of the most forceful proponents of the "new psychiatry" movement in the United States. Adherents to the new psychiatry sought to move psychiatry beyond nineteenth-century nosology—the description and categorization of psychiatric symptoms. Menninger and other "new psychiatrists" believed that to be truly useful to their patients, psychiatrists must also seek to bring cures to the mentally ill. Menninger's first book, *The Human Mind* (1930), was written with the new psychiatry movement clearly in mind. The optimistic tone and examples of cures through psychiatric intervention gave hope to readers who sought approaches other than the custodial care offered at most mental hospitals of the early twentieth century. Written in a popular style easily accessible to the lay person, *The Human Mind* became a Literary Guild selection and made Menninger a household name.

Menninger's authorial productivity coupled with the respect he garnered from the growing cadre of psychiatrists focusing on cure-oriented treatment for the mentally ill made the young man a force in the Kansas—and the American—mental health scene. It was in part Karl Menninger's name and his message concerning effectively treating and improving the lot of the mentally ill that attracted patients to the Menninger Clinic. His popularity along with his headstrong personality also made Menninger a force among the clinic's decision-making hierarchy. As a family-owned facility until 1941, major decisions at the clinic were made by the three Menningers. It was Karl, however, who wielded the greatest power in influencing the future direction of the clinic. Both C. F. and William usually accepted Karl's proposals; it was no accident that one of his nicknames was "the Founder."

It also is not surprising that when Karl began exploring psychoanalysis as a potentially useful treatment option, the clinic as a whole became analytic in its orientation. Psychoanalytic treatment offered its practitioners a theory and treatment method that was radically different from other psychiatric approaches to patient care common in the early twentieth century. Freud believed that most psychological maladaptations resulted from intrapsychic conflicts of which the patient was largely unaware. Through techniques such as dream interpretation and free association, the analyst attempted to interpret the patient's unconscious wishes, thoughts, feelings, and desires. By understanding and internalizing these interpretations, the patient, having gained a greater self-understanding, was enabled to make alterations in his or her lifestyle and thereby reduce conflict. Due to its reliance on speech and communication, psychoanalysis has often been called the "talking cure." As Freud once summarized his approach, the goal of psychoanalysis is to make conscious those thoughts and memories that were once unconscious.

Menninger's interest in psychoanalysis began during his medical education at Harvard when he heard a lecture by the American psychoanalytic pioneer Eugene Louisville Emerson. Menninger's interest deepened when he met Smith Ely Jelliffe, a New York neurologist and psychoanalyst who was personally acquainted with Freud. Determined to move the clinic toward a more thoroughly psychoanalytic orientation, Menninger and members of his senior staff underwent psychoanalytic training analyses. Conducted by experienced analysts, this type of training analysis allows the analysand, the person undergoing the training analysis, to learn the technique of conducting an analysis and to experience the analytic situation from the patient's viewpoint. In addition, the senior analyst also supervises analyses conducted by the analysand. When the training analyst is satisfied that the analysand understands his or her own unconscious thoughts and is proficient in conducting analyses, the analysand becomes an accredited psychoanalyst.

Although Menninger, his brother William, and other clinic therapists completed this training, by the early 1930s Karl wished to further expand his psychoanalytic faculty. Menninger's decision to hire refugee analysts resulted from numerous motivations. A study of Karl Menninger's unique experiences with these émigrés illustrates the many rich and varied local experiences oftentimes obscured by general appraisals of the Americanization of psychoanalysis.

*With Menninger: The Family and the Clinic* (1990), Lawrence J. Friedman detailed Menninger's experi-

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iences with these psychoanalytic émigrés. Menninger is in part an example of a local-level treatment of psychoanalysis’ movement from Europe to the New World. Nonetheless, Friedman’s discussion of Menninger’s recruitment of the émigrés is incomplete. Although he creates a plausible explanation for Menninger’s decision to hire the émigrés, additional factors also motivated the Kansan to pursue the refugees.3

Friedman cites Menninger’s personal visit with Sigmund Freud in 1934 as the genesis of the Kansan’s decision to hire European refugees at the clinic. Menninger met Freud through Franz Alexander, Menninger’s own analyst and one of Freud’s more able pupils. During a trip to the International Congress of Psychoanalysis in Lucerne, Menninger and Alexander made a side journey to Vienna. For Menninger this visit was the culmination of more than a decade’s work: he had professed psychoanalytic beliefs at a time when such enthusiasm could have been dangerous to his young career, had undergone a training analysis with Alexander, and by 1934 had made analysis the cornerstone of his practice in Topeka. Why then did Menninger come to view this meeting with the founder of psychoanalysis as a negative experience?

When Menninger and Alexander arrived at Freud’s home, Alexander spoke with Freud while Menninger waited in the garden with Ernest Jones and Anna Freud. Menninger spent more than an hour waiting for his invitation into Freud’s office, during which Jones upbraided the Kansan for deficiencies in analytic theory in the United States. The prolonged delay concerned Menninger: “I had been told Freud was very punctual, so I was considerably nettled by the long wait.” Apparently the delay was caused by Freud’s angry discussion with Alexander regarding recent developments in American psychoanalysis. Menninger has also suggested, however, that Alexander was preparing Freud for the Kansan, whom Alexander considered vain and narcissistic.7

Alexander requested that Freud limit his praise of Menninger. When Menninger finally gained access to Freud, matters went from bad to worse.

Upon being introduced to Freud, Menninger explained that he was a physician from “the hinterlands of America” who used analysis within a psychiatric hospital setting.8 Believing that analysis was of limited use with hospitalized, severely ill patients, Freud muttered indifferently, “I’ve never had much experience or success with doing so. But one can try.” Menninger was especially upset, however, that he was unable to relate to Freud his research in support of the professor’s much-maligned theory of the death instinct, which Freud had introduced in 1920 in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Menninger was one of the few American analysts to accept and publicly support Freud’s dual-instinct theory. This theory held that people are driven both by sexual and aggressive instincts. The sexual instinct has as its goal the preservation of the individual as well as the species. The destructive instinct, on the other hand, sought to return the individual to inorganic matter—death. Freud explained that in the course of the individual’s life the aggressive instinct could be directed inward or toward an external object or person. Menninger adapted Freud’s theory to explain why in certain individuals the death instinct is directed inward, resulting in suicide or suicidal behaviors.

Menninger felt that his support of the dual-instinct theory surely set him apart from the analytic developments in the United States in which so upset Freud and Jones. Unfortunately, Alexander, claiming that Freud was tired, ended the interview before Menninger raised the topic. Believing that Alexander had, in his private conversation with Freud, mentioned the Kansan’s research into the dual-instinct theory, Menninger was hurt by what he perceived to be Freud’s oversight. Menninger wrote, “My narcissism was also slightly injured . . . that Freud made no reference to my published efforts to support his great but not popular death-instinct theory.”9

Menninger’s interpretations of the meeting are contradictory. Clearly he was upset by his conversa-

5. Friedman, Menninger, 108-10.
9. Menninger, Sparks, 100.
10. Ibid., 100.
Having specialized in psychiatry, Karl Menninger proposed that this field be the focus of the Menninger family practice. Pictured here in 1930 is Karl (right) with his brother Will (left) and father, C.F.

Determined to move the Menninger Clinic toward a psychoanalytic orientation, Karl Menninger and members of his senior staff completed psychoanalytic training.
One theory suggests that the decision to invite European analysts to the Menninger Clinic can be attributed to Karl Menninger's disappointing 1934 interview with Sigmund Freud (pictured here in 1936).

12. Friedman, Menninger, 108.
15. Menninger, Sparks, 100.
ing to this theory, left Menninger feeling that his understanding of psychoanalysis was inadequate. Therefore, Menninger decided to attract European refugees to Topeka in order to more fully understand the "European intellectual culture" with which analysis was born. Menninger's "primary motivation" in bringing émigrés to Topeka was to "secure personal instruction" in those elements of psychanalytic understanding which, as a result of his interview with Freud, he believed he lacked. Accordingly, the refugee analysts were the linchpins in Menninger's attempt to gain the respect denied by Freud and thereby truly understand psychoanalysis. 16

This thesis is not without foundation. Menninger's first psychoanalytic mentor, Smith Ely Jelliffe, instilled in his young protege an interest in international medical developments. Jelliffe traveled to Europe every two years to renew scientific and medical acquaintances. As book review editor of the Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, Jelliffe evaluated texts from all over the world. He did so largely because many American physicians did not read foreign languages and, in the early twentieth century, many European psychiatric volumes were not translated into English. 17 Menninger asked Jelliffe to keep him informed of "the latest news and trends" in psychoanalysis developing outside the United States. 18 Due at least in part to Jelliffe's influence, Menninger realized early in his analytic career that American and European versions of psychoanalysis were not identical.

Still, this assertion that Menninger's visit with Freud sent the Kansan on a quest to rectify his own deficiencies in psychoanalytic understanding via the refugees is problematic. It is true that some of the émigrés perceived in Menninger a sense of inadequacy. Viennese refugee psychiatrist Frederick Hacker identified a "feeling of mild inferiority... that he was just an American doctor, and here we are all these European intellectuals." 19 It may be argued that by inviting refugee analysts to Topeka, Menninger was to some degree striving to understand analysis in the European tradition. Given his penchant for acting on whims, it would not be unlike Menninger to suddenly divert his energy to indulge an intellectual query. But this single theory does not adequately explain the time and money that Menninger and his colleagues spent to attract the refugee analysts.

If not due solely to his brief interview with Freud, what other factors explain Menninger's employment of the European psychoanalysts? Aside from an interest in international medical developments that Jelliffe instilled in him, there were a number of practical reasons for doing so.

It is important to understand that when Menninger began hiring the émigré analysts in the 1930s the psychiatric facility that he built with his father and brother during the preceding decade was financially troubled. 20 During the "depression era" the Menninger Clinic was rarely filled to capacity. The Menningers did all they could to conserve money. When the patient census fell to thirty or fewer, for instance, Karl Menninger would order the grounds crew to cultivate vegetable gardens in an effort to make the clinic more self-sufficient by cutting back on food costs. Once the patient census rose again, the vegetables were torn up and replaced with flowers. 21 The clinic's financial problems were very real.

Menninger hoped that hiring the émigré analysts would help to alleviate financial pressures in numerous ways. American psychoanalysts were few in number in the 1930s and early 1940s, and they tended to establish private practices on the East Coast. By employing prominent European psychoanalysts, the Menninger Clinic would be the only facility outside the American analytic centers of New York, Washington, and Baltimore that could boast such a distinguished psychoanalytic faculty, which the leaders of the clinic hoped would attract more patients to Topeka. 22 Secondly, the addition of such esteemed analysts would further raise the clinic's income since patients paid higher fees for psychoanalytic treatment than for other forms of psychiatric

20. Friedman, Menninger, 105-7.
22. Ibid.
treatment. In addition to these benefits, Menninger was hoping to attract income from other sources. The Medical Science Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, eager to fund psychiatric education programs, seemed like a potential source of much needed revenues. Staff psychiatrist Norman Reider stated that although on one level the Menningers invited the refugees to help alleviate more patients' suffering, the most pressing reason was the need for income.  

Another advantage of employing the émigrés was that they could train American physicians psychoanalytically. By attracting physicians to Topeka for training analyses, which routinely took two to three years to complete, the Menningers could increase the size of their psychiatric faculty. The men and women in psychoanalytic training at the clinic could be expected to remain in Topeka at least throughout their training analyses. Due to their trainee status, these employees could be paid relatively low salaries, which would also help stabilize the clinic's financial situation. The training analysts among the émigrés became especially critical between 1943-1945. With many American physicians serving in the armed forces, the Menningers worried about maintaining their staff numbers. With their supply of refugee training analysts, however, the Menninger organization was able to attract psychiatrists at a time when wartime manpower shortages left many medical facilities with more positions than applicants.

A final financial advantage involved the refugee analysts' wages. Whereas American analysts on the East Coast commanded substantial salaries, the Menningers believed they could pay the émigrés salaries that were only a fraction of what an American might demand. As newcomers to a country that offered them refuge from Nazism, the Europeans accepted their situation in Topeka, if only for a few years. Their gratitude toward Menninger and the United States did not, however, quell the anger over what the refugees perceived to be inadequate salaries. Rudolf Ekstein, an Austrian refugee who came to Topeka in the 1940s, earned $15,000 a year at the City College of New York for training psychoanalytic candidates. His salary in 1950 at the Menninger Clinic as a training analyst was $9,500. Ekstein explained that the Menningers paid "immensely little." The sentiment behind Ekstein's mixed metaphor is echoed by Martin Grajahn, one of the first refugee analysts recruited by the Menningers in the mid-1930s. Grajahn felt that he earned for the Menninger Clinic in a week what he was paid for a month's work. Êmigré analyst Frederick Hacker, who came to Topeka in 1943, recalled that the immigrants "felt that they were used ... as cheap labor." Hacker noted that "Dr. [Karl] Menninger at that time thought very widely ... that he could get these people cheaply because they were unsettled." It has been suggested, however, that refugee analysts on the East and West coasts found earning a living difficult, and that the Topeka refugees were excessive in their salary demands. Irrespective of the condition of the analytic marketplace during the 1930s, the Topeka émigrés sincerely believed they were underpaid.

The squabbling over salaries between the émigrés and the Menninger leadership continued well beyond the 1930s. During the postwar period the Menninger Clinic was inundated by requests for training analyses from junior staff psychiatrists. Virtually all training analysts on staff were refugees—most of whom felt severely underpaid. In 1951, when some of these émigrés discovered that their salaries were less than those of staff psychiatrists who had been their analysts, the refugees went on strike demanding a raise in pay. Faced with the loss of virtually their entire staff of training analysts, the Menningers acquiesced to the émigrés' demands. Their salaries increased from ten thousand to roughly fourteen thousand dollars.

To what extent the refugees actually were underpaid remains unclear. Jeanetta Lyle Menninger, Menninger's second wife and editor of the Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic, believed that the émigrés did not understand the financial intricacies of the

25. Hacker interview.
26. Friedman, Menninger, 392 n.29.
27. Ibid., 133-35, 396 n.61 for information relating to the strike by the émigré analysts over what they felt were inadequate salaries.
Menninger Clinic. In 1939 Lyle wrote that the refugees "felt that their patients brought in much more than the analysts received ... they are so used to practicing in their own homes abroad that the concept of overhead and research and promotion, etc., just doesn't register." Jeanetta Lyle's comments notwithstanding, it seems clear that the Menninger Clinic's objectives in attracting the émigrés to Topeka in the 1930s and 1940s were to a substantial degree financially motivated.

In 1939, three years after the arrival of the first two émigré analysts, Menninger and other senior associates at the clinic wondered if recruiting the refugees had been a mistake. The émigrés were accustomed to small private psychoanalytic practices in Europe; most of their patients suffered from neuroses, relatively minor mental disturbances. Many of the refugees had difficulty adjusting to the Menninger's more severely disturbed patient population.

In addition to the problems arising from the Menninger clientele, many refugees found it difficult to accept Karl Menninger's paternal approach to patients and staff alike. The refugees did not, for the most part, fit into the "family spirit" of the Menninger organization. Bernard Kamm, one of the earliest émigrés to arrive in Topeka, recalled that "there was paternalism all over the place." To Menninger, it must have seemed clear that the refugees, to whom he offered a safe living environment and professional positions, were in his debt. Insisting on loyalty, he viewed individuals as either for or against him, and he often kept people on "his side" by making them dependent upon him. The refugees quickly learned that Karl Menninger was their boss and that they, and most other employees, were considered underlings. Menninger, according to Kamm, "did not tolerate" face-to-face criticism.

Berliner Martin Grotjahn remembered Menninger correcting his imperfect English at case conferences. Grotjahn found Menninger's rectifications "disastrous" since they emasculated him and belittled the information he was trying to convey to his colleagues.³²

³⁰ Jeanetta Lyle to Karl A. Menninger, April 30, 1939, Menninger Collection.
³¹ Bernard Kamm, interview by Lawrence J. Friedman, Chicago, February 4, 1984, Archival Collections.
³² Grotjahn interview.

In 1937 at the Menninger Clinic, Karl Menninger poses with European analysts Dr. Norman Reider (center) and Dr. Bernard Kamm (right).
Menninger’s erratic nature was another element of his personality that further complicated this situation. Viennese analyst Frederick Hacker referred to Menninger as “immensely persuasive. He was . . . also quite arrogant and immensely abrasive.” This inconsistency made lasting relationships difficult for Menninger to maintain. Hacker noted that Menninger displayed “respect and hostility at the same time.”33 In doing so, recalled another former Menninger psychiatrist, the Kansan “created a situation in which people had to go.”34

Indeed the émigrés tended to stay in Topeka only a few years before establishing private practices on the East or West coasts. The exodus of refugee analysts after only brief tenures on staff greatly disturbed Menninger. He had, after all, rescued the émigrés and their families from dire situations; many of them were Jews and their very survival in Nazi-dominated Europe was in doubt. Each refugee left Topeka for a unique set of reasons—the lure of private practice and the desire to live in more cosmopolitan surroundings are mentioned frequently. It is evident, however, that Karl Menninger’s paternalism and erratic personality was a significant factor in most of the decisions.

As a result of these frequent departures, Menninger felt compelled to recruit still more psychoanalytically-oriented refugees. Writing to his father, Menninger explained why the émigrés were critical to the continued functioning of the clinic: “Will and I agree with you fully about the difficulties of absorbing the foreign doctors. The trouble is that there are so few American doctors who have had adequate training, or for that matter, any training along these [psychoanalytic] lines.” Menninger noted that he was trying to locate analytically-trained American physicians, “but it is very difficult.”35 The Kansan realized that to maintain the clinic’s psychoanalytic orientation while keeping the patient census high, he would have to hire still more émigré analysts.

In questioning the clinic’s ability to assimilate the European analysts, Karl Menninger was not

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33. Hacker interview.
34. Seymour Friedman, former Menninger Clinic staff psychiatrist, interview by Lawrence J. Friedman, Los Angeles, December 25, 1983, Archival Collections.
35. Karl A. Menninger to C. F. Menninger, April 26, 1939, Historical Notebook, Menninger Archives.
alone. Other members of the clinic leadership, including C. F. Menninger who evidently was willing to sacrifice income to be rid of the émigrés, doubted the decision to hire the refugees. "I feel it would be better," C. F. wrote, "for our Clinic and Sanitarium to get rid of these foreigners as soon as we can train some one or more of our best interns as understudies... in this [psychoanalytic] work so to supplant them [the refugees]." C. F. saw no use in retaining the refugees if they could not be acclimated to the clinic and its surroundings. The elder Menninger thought that it would be more appropriate to "train our own men as far as is possible because they can [and] will be assimilated and become one with our own group but that these older men [i.e., the émigrés] never will become assimilated."

C. F.'s comments suggest that he may not have thoroughly understood the problem; there were relatively few licensed training analysts in the United States, and among those only a small minority were willing to work in Topeka when practices on the East Coast and Chicago were more lucrative.

C. F.'s impatience with the refugees was in part rooted in their failure to become integrated into the family spirit of the clinic. The Jewish background of many of the émigrés troubled the Menningers, and their separatist behavior did not endear them to some members of the clinic staff. Jeanetta Lyle wrote to Menninger in 1939 that "I know it will annoy you and make you think that my anti-Semitism is rearing its ugly head, but I am more and more convinced of the fraternity of Jews, being thicker than anything opposed to it." Menninger evidently agreed with Lyle. In 1940 he instituted a rule whereby no more than one Jew would be accepted into each new class of psychiatric residents.

The Menningers' attitudes toward their Jewish colleagues was ambivalent. Although Karl Menninger could author an essay entitled "The Genius of the Jew in American Psychiatry," he nonetheless found the Jewish refugees difficult to understand. Maimon Leavitt, a student in the psychiatric residency program from 1945 to 1950, referred to Menninger's inconsistent relationships with Jewish staff as an "inner ambivalence." As early as 1938 Karl Menninger ascribed the difficulties that he was experiencing with some of the refugees to their Jewish backgrounds: "I don't think you can begin to assimilate the Jews by putting a European Jewish psychoanalyst in the midst of a native-born population who will regard him as a cross between Rasputin and Morris Fishbein."

It is evident that Karl Menninger's recruitment of European refugee analysts was problematic and pragmatic. But the financial and staffing advantages derived from hiring refugees does not preclude the possibility that on another level Menninger was pursuing an intellectual quest to understand the European vision of psychoanalysis. Nonetheless, by the mid-1940s Menninger's desire to comprehend the secrets of European analysis was flagging. By that time Menninger continued to hire émigré analysts, although he did so somewhat grudgingly. Rather than guide for the Kansan's intellectual quest, the refugees had become an expedient solution to the Menninger Clinic's need for analysts.

Clearly a number of factors led to the Menningers' decreased enthusiasm for the refugee analysts. In addition, Menninger's own analysis must be considered as a contributing factor. In the mid-1920s Menninger considered Otto Rank and Sandor Ferenczi as possible analysts. Both men were Freud's analysands, and Menninger obviously wanted an analyst with direct ties to the professor. By 1935, when he could afford analysis, Rank and Ferenczi had fallen out of Freud's favor. As a result, Menninger chose Franz Alexander, the director of the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. The decision for Alexander was due in part to geographic proximity: Menninger could see Alexander

36. C. F. Menninger to Karl A. Menninger, November 18, 1939, Historical Notebook, Menninger Archives.
37. C. F. Menninger to Karl A. Menninger, May 1, 1939, Menninger Collection.
39. Friedman, Menninger, 119, 392-93 n.31. To be sure, this quota was short-lived, and by the mid-1950s Jewish staff members had become an integral part of the clinic's staff.
41. Karl A. Menninger to Franz Alexander, April 1, 1938, Menninger Collection. Rasputin was the mystical-spiritualist healer so closely identified with Russia's last royal family, and Dr. Fishbein was the current executive secretary of the American Medical Association.
42. Karl A. Menninger to Belinda Dobson Jelliffe, November 20, 1926, Menninger Collection.
in Chicago, an overnight train trip from Topeka, without abandoning his responsibilities at the clinic. Equally important was Alexander’s standing in the international analytic community. Trained at the Berlin Institute for Psychoanalysis, Alexander was considered one of the most brilliant of Freud’s second-generation students. The Kansan clearly wanted analysis with one of Freud’s intimates—a member of the professor’s inner circle.

Shortly before beginning the analysis, Menninger wrote Alexander, “I am sure I shall be much better for the experience, to say nothing of the advantages accruing to my patients.” But the analysis was not successful. Menninger later felt that Alexander imposed his own values on his analysand. When, for example, Menninger complained of problems with his marriage, Alexander encouraged him to have affairs. More importantly, the analysis failed to deal with fundamental issues, particularly Menninger’s relationship with his mother. The two-year analysis ended in 1932 with Menninger consciously hiding memories from Alexander—a troubling sign in a therapy that depends upon complete candor between analyst and analysand.43

By 1938 Menninger desired a second analyst to deal with issues left unresolved by his work with Alexander. Specifically he sought finally to break from his mother’s emotional control and settle his marital difficulties. Again Menninger chose an intimate of Freud. Ruth Mack Brunswick was unusual among Freud’s later followers. She enjoyed personal access to Freud which was almost unequaled among analysts during Freud’s later years. Brunswick, who lived in Vienna for most of the period 1922-1938, was also unique in that she was “one of the few Americans not stigmatized as an American in Freud’s eyes.”44 Brunswick’s emphasis on the mother’s role in the child’s personality development in addition to her recent divorce and remarriage mirrored Menninger’s own predicament: he realized his failure in his first analysis to resolve issues relating to his mother and was seriously contemplating a divorce from his first wife. Once again, however, Menninger’s analysis was less than satisfactory. Menninger may have been aware of Brunswick’s addiction to morphine and sleeping pills which was, by 1937, severe. During Menninger’s analytic hours, Brunswick sometimes fell asleep, accepted telephone calls, and complained of her own physical ailments.45 Menninger felt that for a second time his analyst was more concerned with her own problems than with those of her patient.

The effects of Menninger’s analyses under two of Freud’s intimates are significant. The benefits of the analysis under Alexander are debatable given that the Kansan sought help from Brunswick six years later for many of the same problems. That Menninger’s analysis under Brunswick resulted in some success seems clear: Menninger was able to divorce his wife despite his mother’s warnings that the divorce would result in dragging “the Menninger name into nothingness and believe me my dear boy you will take us all with you.”46 Menninger’s ability to break emotionally from his mother’s control was a significant step for him, and some of the credit must be attributed to his work with Brunswick.

But Menninger’s analyses had other less positive effects. Given Alexander’s tendency to impose his own values upon him and Brunswick’s proclivity to interrupt and fall asleep during the analytic hours, Menninger’s view of an analytic practice was affected. Friedman writes that Menninger felt “abused and betrayed” by his analysts.47 Indeed, Menninger’s own analyses impacted on his later utilization of analysis as a political tool at the Menninger Clinic. According to Friedman, Karl Menninger would sometimes breach psychoanalytic confidentiality to gain political advantages within the Menninger Foundation.48 This is not to imply that Menninger’s own analyses were solely responsible for his decision to utilize what should have been confidential information for his own ends. Nonetheless, it seems likely that Menninger’s experiences with Alexander

44. Friedman, Menninger, 84-86.
46. Friedman, Menninger, 86, 143-45; see also Steven Marcus, Freud and the Culture of Psychoanalysis (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 214.
47. Quoted in Friedman, Menninger, 145.
48. Ibid., 394 n.67.
49. Ibid., 298-96.
and Brunswick did not instill in him a deep appreciation for the ethical issues inherent in psychoanalysis.

It has been suggested that Menninger chose Brunswick in part to "the opportunity to learn the mysteries of European psychoanalytic culture." By 1938, however, when his analysis under Brunswick commenced, Menninger already had a fair amount of exposure to the "European psychoanalytic culture." Menninger had been introduced to European analytic writings through his first analytic mentor, Smith Ely Jelliffe. He had been analyzed by one of Freud’s best students, Franz Alexander. Menninger had even met the founder of psychoanalysis. One may well ask how these experiences impacted on his relationships with the European émigrés analysts recruited during the 1930s and 1940s.

Certainly after his unsatisfying interview with Freud, Menninger sought a deeper, European view of psychoanalysis. It is clear, however, that nearly every attempt he made to do so resulted in disappointment. Menninger’s analysis under Alexander failed to address fundamental questions troubling the Kansan. His second analysis under Brunswick, if therapeutically more helpful than his first analysis, served to further instill in Menninger a jaundiced view of the ends to which analysis could be used. The émigrés whom Menninger attracted to Topeka on the whole gave him little pleasure; although useful to the clinic as therapists, their employment appears to have done little to teach Menninger about European analysis.

Virtually all of Menninger’s personal experiences with representatives of the European analytic community left the Kansan feeling cold. It seems reasonable that Menninger’s meeting with Freud, his analyses with two of Freud’s intimates, and the peculiarities of his own personality promoted difficult relationships between him and the refugees. It is impossible to attribute the problems experienced by Menninger and the refugees to a single individual or event. Still, it is difficult to imagine that Menninger’s less than flattering interview with Freud did not contribute to a lack of give-and-take with the émigrés—the very people who were supposed to introduce Menninger to the secrets of European analysis.

The claim that Menninger’s brief meeting with Freud sent the younger man on a quest to understand

Although considered one of Freud’s most brilliant students, Franz Alexander proved unsuccessful as Karl Menninger’s personal analyst. During a 1934 visit to the Menninger Clinic, Alexander (center) was photographed with C.F. (left) and Karl.

50. Ibid., 144.
psychoanalysis on a deeper, European level is an interesting one. While a great deal of specific evidence to support the thesis is lacking, circumstantial factors make the theory appealing. The assertion that the brief and unflattering visit with Freud left Menninger believing that his grasp of psychoanalytic understanding was faulty is consistent with the Kansan's chronic personal insecurities. And perhaps Menninger's feelings of being underappreciated were not entirely out of place. He may have overestimated his own importance, but his belief that Freud was unaware of the depth of his support seems justified.

If we assume that Menninger's interview with Freud left the Kansan feeling that his grasp of psychoanalytic understanding was inadequate, and that this, in addition to the financial and staffing factors, contributed to his decision to recruit European refugee analysts to Topeka, one final irony must be noted. When he and Alexander arrived in Vienna, Freud was still angry with Alexander's decision to practice in the United States. Alexander had gone to America without Freud's approval. While Menninger sat in Freud's garden listening to Ernest Jones 'slicing me to ribbons' regarding analytic developments in the United States, Alexander was receiving a similar treatment from Freud. Freud's dislike of America and things American—including many American analysts—is legendary. This predisposition coupled with his chiding of Alexander must have left Freud less than anxious to converse with Menninger.

But to understand Freud's icy reception of the Kansan, a further component of this meeting must be taken into account. It was Alexander who informed Freud that Menninger was vain and narcissistic. Accordingly, Alexander requested that Freud limit his praise of Menninger. Menninger did not know that Alexander had told Freud of the narcissism until decades after the meeting took place. At the time of the meeting (1934), Menninger had been out of analysis with Alexander for two years. Thus, Alexander's advice to Freud was certainly out of place.

51. Rozen, Freud and His Followers, 509.
52. Friedman, Menninger, 108.
53. See, for example, Peter Gay, Freud: A Life For Our Times (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 210-11, 562-70 for an overview of Freud's attitude toward the United States.
54. Friedman, Menninger, 390 n.2.
It seems clear that Alexander's indiscretion had significant implications for Menninger. Is it not possible that the insecurity Menninger felt after the interview with Freud was due, in large measure, to Alexander's warnings to Freud? If this is true, another question requires an answer. If not for this interview with Freud, would Menninger have spent considerable time and money attracting the refugee analysts to Topeka? It does seem plausible that Menninger would have hired the refugees regardless of the interview. He was building the Menninger Clinic around psychoanalytic understanding and treatment, and American analysts were in short supply. Still, Menninger's bruised ego after the interview was also responsible for his desire to learn about analysis from Freud's own pupils. Although practical considerations were involved in Menninger's decision to hire the émigrés as well as his choice of Brunswick as his second analyst, so too were the feelings of insecurity that resulted from the Freud interview.

Clearly Karl Menninger's experiences with the émigrés do not fit neatly into the broad histories of the Americanization of psychoanalysis. In traditional national-level studies of analysis in the United States, great emphasis is placed on the medicalization of Freud's science. The culture and intellectual excitement of analysis seems to have remained in Europe when analysts crossed the Atlantic Ocean. American analysis was, according to this approach, peopled by medical scientists in contrast to the broadly educated and more humanistic Europeans. However, one of Menninger's goals in attracting the refugees was to try to understand the very European analytic tradition that is supposed to have vanished in the New World. Even the argument that American analysts together with the émigrés "completed the medicalization of psychoanalysis as a profession" does not apply in its entirety to Topeka. Lay analysis, for example, a tradition in Europe, was banned in the United States. Menninger, as a young member of the American analytic establishment, felt it necessary to publicly repudiate lay analysts. Nonetheless, he quietly allowed lay analysts to serve as training analysts at the Menninger Clinic. In this instance Menninger was actually preserving analysis in the European tradition.

The uniqueness of the situation in Topeka in the 1930s and 1940s suggests that historians of psychoanalysis must begin to take into account localized case studies to broaden the scope of their data. Menninger's dual motivation behind hiring the émigrés, the need for income as well as his quest to understand European analysis, is peculiar to this specific locality. The difficulties inherent in outsiders like the refugees attempting to fit into a rigidly controlled family practice are significant as well as unusual in the history of American psychoanalysis. Certainly the web of emotional threads that ran through the relationships among Menninger, his two analysts, and the émigrés—all complicated by Menninger's personal insecurities and his unfortunate interview with Freud—have not been accounted for in general histories of psychoanalysis in the United States. Only by exploring such idiosyncratic developments as those occurring at the Menninger Clinic can the development of psychoanalysis in the United States be understood in the richness and varieties of detail that it deserves.