

L E T T E R S

**Mack & the U.S. Cabinet**

The Henry Mack to whom Jonathan D. Sarna refers in his interesting article “The Redemption of Ulysses S. Grant” (Spring 2012) is remembered for his role in the notorious Grant-Mack cotton deal that triggered General Orders No. 11.

What has been forgotten is that Mack also became a very influential Jewish leader. His prominence in Jewish circles was made evident during the 1888 U.S. presidential election. In courting Ohio’s Jewish vote, candidate Benjamin Harrison recruited Mack, then an Ohio state senator representing Cincinnati, to stump on his behalf, intimating that, should he make it to the White House, Mack would follow him as a cabinet appointee. Mack helped Harrison take Ohio, but the president-elect did not give Mack the distinction of becoming America’s first Jewish cabinet member. Eighteen years later, Oscar Solomon Straus, U.S. Secretary of Commerce

and Labor under President Theodore Roosevelt, would take that honor.

*Michael W. Rich  
Hudson, Ohio*

**Reciting Blessings from the *Bimah***

I fully agree with Rabbi Elliot Strom’s decision (“Debatable: May Non-Jews Recite Any Blessing from the *Bimah*?,” Summer 2012) to grant his congregant Anthony’s request to recite any blessing from the *bimah*. Even though Anthony has not converted to Judaism, he has committed himself to living a Jewish life, proven his love and respect for Judaism, and is eager to share Jewish teachings with others. That should be enough proof of his bond with Judaism.

*Betty Moses  
Toronto, Ontario*

If we were to adhere to Rabbi Arnold Gluck’s argument as to why a non-

Jew should not be able to recite any blessing from the *bimah*—because “an untrue statement compromises the person and the prayer”—then non-Jews would be excluded from reciting much of the liturgy in the *siddur*. Any blessing with the phrase “*asher kidshanu bemitzvotav*” (who makes us holy with *mitzvot*) would be out. No *Aleinu*, no *Shema*, no *Amida*. Moreover, if the criterion for uttering a prayer is belief in its literal truth, many of us would be silent during much of our services.

To be more in keeping with our values, let’s adopt the philosophy of Isaiah (56:7): “For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.”

*Jonathan Levine  
Ann Arbor, Michigan*

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