Ambassador Henry Morgenthau arrived at the port of New York on February 22, 1916, and the following day visited Washington for conferences with President Wilson, Secretary of State Robert Lansing, and Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels. In preparation for the presidential elections of that year, Morgenthau expressed the desire to work for the president’s reelection campaign. Wilson complained that “some members of the Congress were indifferent to the fate of democracy as long as their reelection was assured.” In matters pertaining to the Armenian situation, according to Morgenthau, Wilson discussed “at some length about the Armenian matters, and said that if necessary Americans should go to war for humanity’s sake.” The conversation quickly turned to the appointment of a successor to Constantinople, and Morgenthau recommended Samuel Untermyer, a New York lawyer with expertise in finance, or Abram Elkus, a mutual friend and a judge in the state of New York. Whether or not Wilson had ever seriously contemplated to take Americans “to war for humanity’s sake” to protect the Armenians, he must have been aware of its implications. The power to maintain international peace and to punish violators of international law in times of war necessitated direct military engagement to prevent human catastrophes as experienced by the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. In the end, however, humanitarian instincts had to be checked by short-term and long-term political and economic considerations. Morgenthau had not returned to the United States to mobilize public support for a war but for Wilson’s reelection. There is no evidence that Wilson and Morgenthau further pursued this option during their meeting or thereafter, their humanitarian pronouncements notwithstanding.
The upcoming presidential elections made the administration—particularly Lansing—anxious about public opinion. On February 9, Lansing and Third Assistant Secretary of State William Phillips had discussed whether greater publicity should be given to the atrocities committed against the Armenians. Although the result of their conversation was not recorded, Secretary Lansing discouraged public appearances on the subject. He had expressed concerns regarding public opinion before Morgenthau had arrived in the United States. In a letter to the ambassador, Lansing had noted:

While I realize that a large number of our fellow citizens will wish to offer you testimonials as a recognition of the splendid work which you are doing, it would seem to me that, in view of the international situation a public meeting, however carefully arranged, might have unhappy results.

Please pardon me for this suggestion, and also in giving you a word of warning in regard to newspaper reporters, who may misrepresent you and whom it is well to avoid as far as possible. I am looking forward greatly to the pleasure of meeting you when you come to Washington.

Morgenthau too was at first cautious in this regard. When the renowned geographer Herbert Adams Gibbons returned to the United States bearing the felicitations of the Armenian catholics to the U.S. government and to thank the ambassador for his assistance to the Armenian people, Morgenthau “urged him not to do so publicly,” and Gibbons agreed. Soon thereafter, however, as the political alliance between Wilson and the missionaries could not be neglected in an election year, in cooperation with James L. Barton, secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, on the one hand, and in support of Wilson’s reelection campaign, on the other, Morgenthau began to make public appearances. He had decided not to return to his post in Constantinople; in his letter of resignation he stated that while he had not considered resignation, now he believed that he could best serve his country in the United States. He proposed his resignation to Lansing on March 8, 1916, and formally submitted his resignation to Wilson on March 23. Wilson accepted it immediately. When criticized for this sudden change, Morgenthau responded that he was “convinced that my assisting the President, when known in Turkey, will be of great help to my proteges out there.” He thus became heavily involved in Wilson’s reelection campaign, and, if his diary is any guide, for the rest of the