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CONTEMPORARY
JEWRY
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Public Religion and Private Faith in America and Israel

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Preface

Studies in Contemporary Jewry presents here its 17th volume, in which the leading topic is a discussion of religion: “Who Owns Judaism? Public Religion and Private Faith in America and Israel.” Only one of our previous symposia (in volume 2) was expressly devoted to religion—to Orthodoxy, in particular. While essays on religious subjects have appeared in many of our volumes since then, this is the first time that we have devoted a symposium to a wide-ranging consideration of religion’s impact on contemporary Jewish life.

The Jewish world has been troubled periodically over the past few decades by debates over the question “who is a Jew?” The question has been raised most often with regard to Israel’s Law of Return—that basic (constitutional) law that permits any Jew (or spouse, children and grandchildren, and other first-degree relations) to immigrate to the state of Israel and become Israeli citizens. Disagreements have erupted over the fact that the Law of Return applies to a wider population than does the halakhic (religious) definition of Jewishness: converts to Judaism, for example, who converted to Judaism outside Israel and outside the framework of the Orthodox rabbinate. Some have argued that the real question at stake in the case of converts is not “who is a Jew?” but “who is a rabbi?” (that is, who has the authority to confer legitimacy upon conversions performed abroad?), and the efforts made to resolve the issue at the political level (following the report of the Neeman Commission in 1998) have indeed focused on establishing mechanisms for cooperation between Orthodox and non-Orthodox rabbis in Israel.

The high profile given to these matters and the political-legal nature of the “who is a Jew?” question have masked what may be a far more interesting issue with longer-term implications. While there are narrow issues, such as inclusion under Israel’s Law of Return, that prompt the “who” question, there is a broader “why” question that we raise here: Why is Judaism the “hot property” that it seems to be, giving rise to so many claims of “ownership”? The answer to that question is not at all simple, given the overall impression that the 20th century was a period of long-term trends of secularization, in the Jewish world as well as in the West in general. Indeed, statistics on assimilation and intermarriage appear to indicate that apathy toward Judaism is a growing rather than a diminishing trend. Why, then, the seeming alacrity with which claims are put forward for religious legitimacy by disparate groups of Jews?

Moreover, the question “who owns Judaism?” appears to be valid only in light of the fact that a previous answer to that question (namely, “all the Jews”) seems no longer to elicit much support. That previous answer, typical of Jewish discourse from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, assumed that secular Jews were as intensively engaged as were their religious brothers and sisters in the venture of Jewish continuity. In a word, secularization was not incompatible with Jewishness, understood as an
ethnic culture. Generations of secular Zionists, for example, were raised on this idea. In the discourse of our own day, however, the secular Jewish enterprise is not a recognized factor. How did it happen that “religion” has come to be asserted in its own right, rather than as an adjunct to ethnicity?

These questions, in turn, lead to further probes into the changing character of the religious life of contemporary Jews. I relate to these matters and to the specific angles of inquiry included in our symposium in my introductory essay. Here, I would like to thank the participants in this volume, whose original essays take us a considerable distance toward framing the relevant questions. There is clearly much work to be done in this area—we have only scratched the surface. Further, while we indicate in the symposium that current religious trends in Jewish life transcend local issues (such as the Law of Return, on the one hand, or intermarriage patterns in the United States, on the other), we have barely begun to limn the broadly international nature of the problem of Judaism today. Readers are invited to view our symposium as a challenge to further study.

In addition to the symposium, this volume follows its predecessors in offering readers a taste of new scholarly work in the field of contemporary Jewry, in the form of essays and reviews. Purely by chance, Felix Frankfurter makes an appearance twice in our volume—once, in the essay by David Ellenson, and again, in a more sustained way, in Michael Alexander’s reconsideration of Frankfurter’s role in the celebrated Sacco and Vanzetti case. Long review essays published here cover recent scholarship on Jews, Germans, and antisemitism; Jews and blacks in American culture; the Israel-Arab conflict; and the cultural history of the Dreyfus affair.

Although one editor bears responsibility for each volume, Studies in Contemporary Jewry is a team effort. My co-editors—Jonathan Frankel, Peter Y. Medding, and Ezra Mendelsohn—have been more than just a sounding board for ideas; our editorial meetings are, to a large extent, the source of whatever inspiration, innovation, and balance is reflected in these pages. My dependence upon managing editors Laurie Fialkoff and Hannah Levinsky-Koery is evident in these pages as well, in terms of their excellence in editing and skillfulness in producing order out of chaos.

I express our collective gratitude, as well, to the Stroum Foundation for its continued financial support, and to the Littauer Foundation of New York, and the Federman Fund of the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University for their generous grants. Last but by no means least, we owe a great vote of thanks to the editorial and production team at Oxford University Press.

On a more personal note, I would like to add that I feel a sense of personal gratification at having the opportunity to present my first volume of Studies as one of its co-editors. I served as managing editor of the annual from its inception in 1981 until 1989. During that time, I formed close relationships with the wonderful group of people involved in this ambitious venture. I could also not fail to be impressed by the high standards of excellence that the editors of the annual had achieved over the course of the years. When invited to rejoin the group two years ago, I did so with certain foreknowledge of the large responsibility it entailed, but also with the assurance that the collegial support I would receive would make this job one of the least lonely in the world.

E.L.
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Introduction:
The “Problem of Judaism” Today—Beyond Assimilation and Nationalism

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Ahad Ha’am (Asher Ginsberg), who is ranked among the most incisive analysts of the Jewish predicament in the previous fin de siècle, often insisted that the most pressing problem facing Jews was not physical survival, but rather collective cultural survival; or, to use his phrase, not the problems of the Jews, but the problem of Judaism. The Jewish fate, he contended, depended less upon the amelioration of the Jews’ material existence or civil status than upon the resolution of issues related to culture, assimilation, and national identity in the modern world.

For all his reputation as a prophet of Jewish modernism, however, it would appear that Ahad Ha’am’s sense of history—or at least his scale of priorities—was idiosyncratic if not distorted. Even while he argued his case, the mass emigration of Jews from Eastern Europe gave clear indication that, as far as most of them were concerned, the most pressing imperative in their lives as Jews was an early and decisive improvement of their political and economic lot. The primacy of political and physical survival at the beginning of the 20th century was further underlined by the outbreak of the First World War, which brought in its wake a number of related issues, such as the resettlement and rehabilitation of Jewish refugees from war, revolution, and mass pogroms. Needless to say, in the period from 1933 to 1945, survival in the most basic sense became the only national Jewish crisis that mattered, and this perception certainly lasted for some years thereafter, at least through the first decade following the establishment of the Jewish state. It is anachronistic, no doubt, to fault Ahad Ha’am’s vision with regard to the Jewish situation after 1927 (the year of his death), but the sweep of events form a backdrop against which, in retrospect, his focus on Kultur smacked of parlor games on the Titanic.

Yet Ahad Ha’am’s agenda was perhaps not so much perverse as it was ill timed: it would become increasingly relevant and even urgent in the post-1948 Jewish world, and especially in the final part of the 20th century, once the issues of physical Jewish survival had largely been resolved. In the 40 years from 1950 to 1990, wherever oppressive conditions obtained (in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as well as in the Arab world and in parts of Latin America), the bulk of Jews emigrated to find new
homes in politically secure and economically more promising surroundings, either in Israel or in the diaspora. Moreover, the Jewries of the English-speaking world—taken together, they comprise the largest single cohort of Jewish population in the post-Holocaust world and the only diaspora sector to experience growth in the decades since 1945—have never had to regard physical survival as a primary concern. If a latter-day renewal of religious discourse has taken root among Jews, this ought to be seen in direct relation to the fact that despite the catastrophic losses of the Holocaust, a majority of the Jewish people has outlived the threats to its physical survival. Cultural or spiritual quality of life acquires in this situation the paramountcy that Ahad Ha’am had assigned to it, albeit in ways that he did not foresee.

The symposium offered in this volume of *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* seeks to illuminate the change that has taken place in the way that the “problem of Judaism” is framed today, as compared to the way in which Ahad Ha’am framed it. To put it in somewhat oversimplified terms, that change has taken place along two interrelated axes. What was once discussed as a problem of the Jewish collective is increasingly discussed as a matter of individuals’ consciousness. In today’s parlance, religion appears to be legitimized through such intrinsic categories as belief, practice, and metaphysical sensitivity; only by virtue of the religious impulse and existential needs of individuals is it also seen as a matter with extrinsic ramifications for the Jewish collective. Second, the Judaic tradition that was once considered on the verge of becoming a relic of the past tends to be discussed today as a positive religious asset over which there is little consensus except that it is worth (re)claiming.

By referring to the problem of Judaism as pertaining to *group survival* rather than, for example, individual metaphysical exploration, Ahad Ha’am exemplified the atmosphere of crisis that enveloped 19th-century Judaism, and he placed that crisis on a collective plane. At the time, post-traditionalists as well as the staunchest Orthodox rabbinical leadership were of one accord in regarding Judaism as such as enfeebled, embattled, and in need of defense. The difference between them lay in their respective diagnoses of the sources of the disease and their respective prescriptions for re-dress. Orthodox traditionalists, believing that the blandishments of assimilation and the entrapments of apostasy lapped at Judaism’s door, held that the threshold of Judaism’s exposure to modernity needed to be raised. Post-traditionalists, in contrast, believed that the danger lay within old-style Judaism itself, which they saw as moribund, even retrograde, having outlived its purpose. It appeared to lack self-renewing persuasive powers in the face of modernity. No longer an “asset,” Judaism as traditionally conceived would rapidly become a source of existential harm unless it could be reformulated: in the present condition, they believed that the Jewish people were being exposed to the winds of nihilism and self-hatred. That is what prompted Ahad Ha’am to place the crisis of Judaism ahead of other problems facing Jews. To him, the problem of Judaism was the problem of Jewish survival.

Such views were derived from the advanced western social philosophy of the day, which took religion seriously but not literally—that is, it made the distinction between religions as integrative human constructs and religions as truth-statements about the universe. Religions, understood relativistically as products of different human societies, were the distillation of the entire experience of specific cultures, a symbolic language that enshrined the products of the national genius in transcendental
terms. In that sense, religion was central to any culture’s self-understanding. It was not only indispensable but also virtually synonymous with a culture’s vitality. The collective, living myth—not ontological truth—was the crux of the matter.

Ahad Ha’am, for example, professed not to be interested in what he termed the “archaeological truth” regarding the existence of a historical Moses, because the Moses-idea had been incorporated into layer upon layer of Jewish culture for several thousand years. That Moses was quite real enough for Ahad Ha’am because, historical or not, his role in human affairs could be easily documented. “Even if you succeeded in demonstrating conclusively that the man Moses never existed, or that he was not such a man as we supposed,” Ahad Ha’am wrote, “you would not thereby detract one jot from the historical reality of the ideal Moses—the Moses who has been our leader not only for 40 years in the wilderness of Sinai, but for thousands of years in all the wildernesses in which we have wandered since the Exodus.”

In making his case for a revitalized Jewish national culture that would incorporate such a mythic view of the Judaic heritage, Ahad Ha’am, like other post-traditionalist thinkers, reversed the direction of the core relationship embedded in the premodern, Jewish worldview. Classical Jewish theology had maintained that Jews existed for the sake of Judaism. The collective existence of the Jews, understood in classical terms, was a means to an end, namely the perpetuation of Judaism and, through it, of Torah as a divinely revealed path to human enlightenment and salvation. Torah was primordial; the Jews were instrumental: it was in order to bring the Law into the world that God had created the cosmos, and within it, the Jews.

In post-traditional terms, however, precisely the reverse proposition was argued: Judaism was a means to ensure the survival of the Jews, an endangered species. “More than the Jews kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept the Jews,” was Ahad Ha’am’s famous dictum of religious instrumentalism. But to continue serving this function in the modern world, Judaism would first have to be rescued by being reconstrued in the form of national culture.

Seen in this light, the Jews’ national way of life was by definition the collective possession of all Jews, regardless of their individual capacity for or attitude toward religious belief and observance. Indeed, irrespective of personal behavior, it was the collective “ownership” of Judaism that was to determine a positive posture toward tradition. The possibility of reforming outdated practices or beliefs was not the real issue (here is where Reform Judaism erred, according to this school of thought). Rather, Judaism was to be removed from the hands of its hapless custodians—those who, whatever their particular sect or denomination, practiced Judaism as a “mere” set of rules—and handed back to “the people.”

The crucial first step in this process was that those Jews who had lost touch with their heritage had to be enabled to repossess it in a manner compelling enough to ensure the future existence of the Jewish collective. The ethnos was the true “owner” and sponsor of its mythic culture. Although already estranged from its patrimony, it could, by a process of repossession, make good its existential claim to authentic survival. In this way, relativist and secular worldviews not only coexisted with a “religionist” agenda that prioritized inner folk spirit over external political circumstances; they actually constituted the very foundations of that agenda.

Much of the prodigious religiocultural work undertaken by leading Jewish post-
traditional figures during the first half of the 20th century was directed toward these ends. Chaim Nachman Bialik’s project to “restore” the cultural treasury of Judaism through anthologizing the aggadic canon; Martin Buber’s reweaving of hasidic tales into a Jewish version of Central European existentialism; Gershom Scholem’s efforts to reclaim Judaism’s turbulent gnostic traditions in the name of a modern Jewish nationalism that deprecated Age-of-Reason-style religious universalism; and Franz Rosenzweig’s collaborations with Buber, both in their work on a new Jewish translation of the Bible into German and in the Frankfurt Jewish *Lehrhaus* (a celebrated “free school” for adult Judaic learning) all fall under this heading.

Across the Atlantic in America, Mordecai M. Kaplan labored along parallel lines in explaining to a religiously apathetic younger Jewish generation that only by reconstituting an effective Jewish public sphere (a “community”) could a Jewish ethnos, properly speaking, arise—within which Jews might repossess the redemptive energy of what he termed their “civilization.” The all-embracing community that he envisaged would be the sponsor of all spiritual and social needs, for the fundamental role of a religious community was to enfold its adherents within an integrative whole. A community of this type would be far superior, in survivalist terms, to the typical congregational units prevalent in the United States. In Kaplan’s view, congregational-denominational Judaism was bound to be defeated by its own narrow limitations of function, since such critical human spheres as culture, the arts, and social welfare lay outside its purview. By contrast, an organic community that projected an aura of revitalized energy would enable the Jewish people to revalue those religious “sancta” by which it symbolized its quest for self-fulfillment.

The discourse on Jewish religion that culminated in the pre-1940 generation, then, had two polar tensions: the polarity along a collective axis between religion and ethnicity (or nationalism) on the one hand, and the force of attraction exerted on Jews by other cultural influences (assimilation) on the other. In Ahad Ha’am’s unified theory (as in Kaplan’s and, in some form, throughout the Jewish revival discourse of that period), the resolution of the one was also the resolution of the second. By reclaiming Judaism for the folk, not in intrinsically religious terms but as its group raison d’être and cultural essence, the problem of assimilation to other cultures would also be eliminated. Thus, in the repossession of Judaism by the Jews lay a modern, secular, instrumentalist salvation. By owning and thus sponsoring its native religious culture collectively, the ethnos could leave the issue of personal belief and observance aside.

The concrete expression of this ethnic solution of the religion issue has essentially given American Jewish life, on the one hand, and Israeli Judaism, on the other, their characteristic forms. In America, despite Kaplan’s efforts at sponsoring “organic” all-encompassing Jewish communities, the most enduring form of Jewish affiliation has remained the synagogue. But the synagogue (especially in its suburban guise) undertook a more central role than originally anticipated in Jewish social activities, as well as in the sponsorship of Jewish educational activities for children and adults. In the process, the synagogue (rather than ethnic languages, urban neighborhoods, associations, or political movements) became the residual, primary repository of Jewish ethnicity. In this common American Jewish pattern, the ultimate mark of ethnic commitment became synagogue affiliation, even as the intensity of religious consciousness grew more attenuated among synagogue members. As the primary instrument of
Jewish ethnicity, the synagogue served as a proxy for the folk “ownership” of Judaism, and the promotion of synagogue membership became a proxy for religious behavior.\(^5\)

Anecdotal support for this point of view is provided by one Conservative rabbi in America who wrote, in the immediate aftermath of the Six-Day War: “I would hope that people would realize that Jewish peoplehood and Jewish existence ‘turn people on’ more readily than mitzvot or [worship] services.”\(^6\)

As this dynamic has played itself out in recent years, this has meant that there is virtually no other public venue for Jewishness in America but the synagogue. Even Jewish philanthropic organizations, long considered the bastion of the deracinated, upper-class Jew, have in recent years subordinated social welfare to “identity” and “continuity” concerns, and thus in effect have redefined their role vis-à-vis religious Judaism as a subordinate and enabling one.

In Israel, in contrast, the state itself was invested with the custodial stewardship of public Judaism. As the product and exponent of Jewish national survival, the state was also the patron of Jewish national culture, inclusive of its religious traditions. Under state aegis, what is known in Israel as the “religious” community established a “chief” rabbinate (which is not, however, deemed authoritative by ultra-Orthodox subcommunities), local rabbinical courts, charitable institutions, public religious schools, municipal religious councils (lay boards), and a yeshiva-track for Orthodox youngsters inducted into the army—all of this without altering the fact that everyday religious practices are avoided by the majority of Israeli Jews.

Whereas in American Judaism religion “compromised” with secular lifestyles by equating “tradition” not only with the congregation-qua-ethnic organization but also with family-based sentimentalism (consecrating in the process “the family,” holiday meals, and bar-mitzvah celebrations), in Israeli Judaism the organized religious establishment “compromises” with the state by acknowledging (at least tacitly) the normative supremacy of such state institutions as the army, the Knesset, and the courts. It was, of course, partly to exert political, social, and budgetary control over religion that the Israeli state undertook its concordat with the rabbinic establishment in 1948. It is a mark of dissidence and even volatile danger when Israeli groups or individuals challenge the legitimacy of military, parliamentary, or judicial authority in the name of religious supremacy, as witnessed in the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and as we may see further adumbrated in Motti Inbari’s essay on the Mishkan Ohalim sect. Indeed, given the way in which religion tends to be privileged as an absolute and independent source of authority in the Middle East (as was true of most of the societies from which Jews have emigrated to Israel in the past), it may have been a sign of political astuteness on the part of Israel’s founders that they sought to subject the religious sphere (like the military one) to “civilian” oversight. That arrangement, however, would inevitably leave both secular and religious Israelis chafing under the restraints.

Despite the obvious differences, then, in both the American Jewish and the Israeli cases, the normative solutions for the problem of Judaism during the latter part of the 20th century appeared to hark back to Ahad Ha’amian notions of collectivism. Judaism was “owned” by the Jewish public through that institution that, in each setting, best exemplified or represented the “community” at large.
The weakness of this post–Second World War resolution, however, lay in the fact that it merely swept the intrinsic questions about religion (the plausibility of Judaism as a system of truth-statements about the universe) under the collective ethnic rug. “There is a paradox,” wrote Nathan Glazer, “about religion’s instrumental value: Religion has to be believed in for its own sake for it to serve instrumentally. If it is not believed in it loses even that value.”

Moreover, those institutions vested with the custodial care of the “people’s Judaism”—the American synagogue and the state of Israel—were never really properly equipped to bear that dual ethno-religious burden. American synagogues, because of their geographic and denominational parochialism (in the nonpejorative sense), could not serve with any great success as stand-ins for a common ethnic supercommunity. For its part, the Israeli state cannot in any true sense act as religious proxy for its Jewish citizens; it can ordain certain ritualistic, educational, or bureaucratic forms as normative for civic purposes (as in the case of kashruth observance in army kitchens or no-smoking regulations in army mess halls on the Sabbath), but it cannot enter into the subjective realm of belief or apathy.

Perhaps because of these inherent problems, remarkable changes have percolated to the surface over the course of the last decades. The extent to which the sentiment expressed by that American rabbi in 1967 seems dated by present-day standards is the burden of the essays in our symposium—in particular, those by Steven M. Cohen, David Ellenson, Neil Gillman, and Shalom Ratzabi—which challenge the premise cited earlier, namely, that ethnic affiliation rather than personally compelling religious attitudes and behaviors is the bedrock of America’s synagogal Judaism. Ratzabi and Gillman focus on the role played by theologians in postwar American Judaism in the revival of the discussion of religion in its own right—a process that now appears to have penetrated beyond academic discourse after a generation of new theological writing. Ratzabi neatly outlines a scheme of what he calls “third-generation” theology in American Judaism, whose chief tendency has been to move the center of gravity away from collective issues of Jewish national survival and toward the spiritual life of the individual within a faith community. It is fitting, therefore, that a veteran “Herbergean” thinker such as Gillman should take up the discussion at the most personal juncture of all the religious questions to be dealt with in recent American Jewish theology—namely, the envisioning of a supernatural Jewish faith community via the re-importation of a doctrine of personal resurrection.

Cohen and Ellenson, for their part, wrestle with the conflicting indications, on the one hand, of an apparent ground swell of interest on the part of Jewish adults in a more personal engagement with Judaism and, on the other hand, of widespread religious neglect. They conclude, despite the ambiguous evidence, that the trend to watch is the new and perhaps unexpected one of spiritual renewal. Thus, they subject the ideas of the theologians to the tests of the sociologist of religion: How many foot soldiers are actually engaged in replacing one form of Judaism with another?

To cite once again an anecdotal barometer of the tenor of debate in this regard, consider the following statement made recently by Leon Wieseltier, literary editor of New Republic magazine:

A non-believer like me feels perfectly at home at the [Orthodox] synagogue because that’s exactly the place where the issues closest to my heart are debated. . . . Beyond all the non-
sense and superficiality that also exist in religion, the basic questions are still being asked there: life and death, the meaning of God, the world. . . . The metaphysical questions which the academic world now finally recognizes as well, have always been on the front burner there.  

The essays presented here by Ezra Kopelowitz, Alan Silverstein, and Sylvia Barack Fishman further calibrate the shift from a collectively sanctioned but personally non-engaged “ownership” of public Judaism to a sharply contested field of claims and counterclaims predicated on a politics of personal authenticity. Kopelowitz argues that the impulse on the part of modern Jewish religious leaders to assert a fractional, as opposed to a pan-Jewish, orientation is rooted in an underlying trend toward individuation in religious authority and legitimacy. Picking up from this point, though with a different view of the situation, Alan Silverstein charts the tug-of-war within the Conservative movement in recent years between modernists and traditionalists. He suggests that the Conservative group has, on the whole, emerged from these internal battles with a stronger sense of itself as a separate religious movement.  

Silverstein’s report runs directly counter to pre–Second World War religious assumptions in that it demonstrates in a concrete fashion how certain groups (feminists and homosexuals, for example), which in previous generations were for the most part situated squarely within the hard-core secularist sphere, have in our time become contenders for a place within religious legitimacy and religious institutions. If nothing else, this seems to prove that secular alternatives have ceased to appear natural or even attractive in the public culture of American Jewry (as distinguished from the personal secularism that informs the lives of so many American Jews).

As we may infer from Silverstein, it is precisely this sort of contentiousness and demand for co-ownership that indicates just how far (religious) Judaism’s stock has risen. In a similar vein, Fishman supports the view that contention over the reapportionment of gender roles within Jewish life has played an important role in sparking religious renewal and bringing issues of religious consciousness to the fore. Thus, in a postmodern twist to Ahad Ha’am’s thesis, Jewish revival appears once again in the guise of demands to hand Judaism over to claimants from the grassroots.

The “twist” I refer to, of course, lies in the fact that, whereas Ahad Ha’am envisioned the revived, modern Jewish culture of the future as a morally homogeneous, Hebraic, secularly oriented, Palestinocentric, worldwide organic or mythic national community, what appears to be happening in American Judaism—as virtually all the essays in our symposium argue—is an evolution toward a sectorally or denominationally pluralistic, diaspora-centered, non-Hebraic, antisecularist, highly personal, and localistic model.

Further analysis than these few essays afford is required before we attempt to articulate an integrated view of both American and Israeli Judaism at the beginning of the 21st century. But even the hints contained here (in the essays by Fishman and Inbari) indicate that some Israeli Jews are more apt today to view Judaism as being rather inadequately represented by the state and its allied religious establishment—evidence of the “chafing” alluded to earlier. While Fishman notes examples of a quiet revolution in Israeli Orthodoxy on the gender front, Inbari’s example of a messianic sect born at the disenfranchised fringe of Israeli society indicates a much more extreme case that, precisely in its extremity, can be said to mark the outer limits of so-
cioreligious contentiousness in Israeli Judaism. The point is that, whether the rum-
blings are quiet or explosive, whether they make their appearance in the guise of sec-
ular Israeli Jews seeking to repossess what has been termed the classical “Jewish
bookshelf” or in the bizarre behavior of new sectarians, it appears that the entente
once established between the state and “official Judaism” has not satisfactorily re-
solved the underlying issues of religion and modernity.

There is an uncanny likeness between the fundamental insistence upon the reality
of spiritual exile—inside Israel itself—preached by the Uzi Meshulam sect, on the
one hand, and the parallel insistence by American Jewish theologians (both Reform
and neo-Orthodox) that “exile” remains—indeed, must remain—the essential Jewish
religious idea in a world unredeemed. This unexpected common trajectory of postlib-
eral American Jewish theology and a fringe messianic sect in Israel requires further
elucidation. At this preliminary stage, the most that can be said is that both cases ap-
pear to be anchored in a common denial (with but few dissenters, as Ratzabi men-
tions, such as David Hartman) that national solutions to the Jewish problem bear any
religious or moral relevance to the problem of Judaism.

It is instructive, however, that in the American Jewish case this denial of religious-
moral significance to the Israeli political realm is not accompanied by a similar de-
nial with relation to public life in the United States. While it may be more often ac-
cepted among postliberal Reform thinkers than among those of the neo-Orthodox
school (and here, I think, Heschel straddles both types), there is a subtext to American
Jewish theology that resembles Hartman’s position vis-à-vis the state of Israel: that
is, it upholds the notion that active involvement by Jews in the social reality of
the American context is religiously fructifying for Judaism. Moreover, even “neo-
Orthodox” thinkers (from Will Herberg to Arthur Green) take for granted those con-
ditions offered to a postmodern, post-integrationist Judaism by the decentralized, plu-
ralist structure of the American polity—conditions that, first of all, entail the elevation
of the individual to a quasi-sacred autonomy—and construct their theological ideas
accordingly. It is because these American elements are so often assumed, rather than
explicitly acknowledged, that we can see how deeply embedded they have become in
the theological discourse on Judaism in the United States.

On the non-philosophical plane, the essay by Steven M. Cohen reinforces the idea
that the American Jewish religious establishment has not been much affected by (or
even much offended by) the drift away from corporate, ethnic values, for reasons best
explained by the strength of American individual autonomism. Alan Silverstein’s es-
say shows, further, that elements of American social politics that grow out of indi-
vidual autonomism influence, in turn, the parameters of intracommunal conflict in
American Judaism—and, in the process, give shape to American Judaism itself. What
may be inferred, therefore, is that despite the apparent anti-political posture adopted
in recent American Jewish discourse in relation to the national dimensions of Judaism,
there is at least a tacit, proactive political posture embedded in that discourse where-
ever American social and political values are concerned.

It might be further suggested, again in the American Jewish case, that the insistence
by theologians on placing the reality of a world unredeemed at the religious core of
Judaism is in the final analysis another way of saying that Judaism is a form of
counter-Christianity. This religious stance simultaneously reflects the need of Jews in
a Christian environment to reject the majority faith and, ironically, also reveals the way in which Christianity prompts diaspora Judaism’s theological agenda.

In defining the problem of Judaism in today’s terms, the older paradigm (in which, as we have seen, relativist, instrumentalist, and secular worldviews constituted the basis for the discourse on the “problem of Judaism”) appears to have been superseded. In place of the polarity between nationalism and assimilation that defined a spectrum of possible collectivist strategies, all of which assumed a priori that modernity constituted a crisis for Judaism, we now see a polarity on the personal level between spiritual complacency and self-transcendence, in which modernity is seen not as a challenge but as an opportunity. Judaism, as Gillman and Ratzabi both argue, is more compellingly discussed today in terms of a religion that can encompass the modern without endangering the fruits of modernism, and also without being endangered by them. It seems that without the element of belief and practice as understood in relation to people’s actual lives, the idea of public Judaism can hardly be credited or sustained.

Such contemporary issues as individuation, personal engagement, denominationalism, and a “post-naive” concern for the mysteries of life (within which the notion of a personal afterlife appears as a signifier of a wider post-positivist point of view) move us well beyond the instrumentalism of religion in the service of a monistic national culture. Indeed, such questions appear to avoid the national dimension altogether, as Ratzabi so forcefully demonstrates. They are operative on a plane that barely intersects at all with the older, collectivist propositions. It is likely, then, that the more “spiritual,” postmodern Judaic discourse evades the ethno-national dilemma as irrelevant to religion proper, quite as much as the older crisis-of-Judaism national-culturalists were evasive when it came to the truth-questions of religion. Post-traditionalists of the Ahad Ha’am school have been succeeded by religionists who re-emphasize the issue of personal observance; but in so doing, they have unbound “religion” from the problems of collective identity and national assimilation, which nevertheless remain unresolved. At the very least, one must conclude that the new, post-positivist religionism is ambiguous with regard to “assimilation.”

It seems undeniable, for example, that the accentuated denominationalism in today’s American Judaism reflects the ongoing “normalization” of Judaism according to American (especially Protestant) criteria and paradigms—something that Ahad Ha’am would undoubtedly have identified as “assimilationist”; yet it is precisely those in the forefront of this trend, those who speak for increased personal authenticity within denominational subgroups, who exemplify the very opposite of what is meant by assimilation in common parlance. As Ezra Kopelowitz puts it in his essay, “The continual experience of [ideological] schism is at the same time a process of ideological specification.” Specification is not and logically cannot be the same thing as “assimilation.”

The “specification” that, according to Kopelowitz, constitutes a problem for those who would seek an ethno-religious synthesis is, at the same time, the only conceivable source of a solution for others who seek what they see as authentic religious experience. That antinomy appears to explain, at least in part, the conundrum of a religious revival in the midst of widespread religious apathy and ethnic disengagement.
Notes


3. See Rashi’s commentary on Gen. 1:1.


5. This point has been made on numerous occasions. One recent reiteration appears in Sergio DellaPergola’s essay, “Arthur Ruppin Revisited: The Jews of Today, 1904–1994,” in *National Variations in Jewish Identity*, ed. Steven M. Cohen and Gabriel Horenczyk (Albany: 1999), in which he writes:

Attachment to Judaism through a sense of shared *ethnicity* typically consists of maintaining patterns of association that include a far greater amount of spontaneous and nonspecific contents than would be the case with religion. . . . Jewish ethnic/communal identification may often involve the persistence of some element of religiosity, as shown by the diffuse though inconsistent presence of traditional observances. . . . That is why it seems justifiable to include in the *ethnicity/community* type of identification many Jews whose main attachment to Judaism is through a religious congregation. . . . [T]he presence of organized religion in Jewish community life tends to be greater in the United States than in . . . other Diaspora communities, although this does not necessarily imply a particularly high frequency of religious behaviors. (pp. 66, 75–76)


Who Has the Right to Change Tradition? 
Evolving Conceptions of Religious Authority and Their Implications for the Jewish People

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How does the reality of secular society affect the role of the rabbinate vis-à-vis the Jewish people? As Mark Chaves has argued, the most important feature of the secularization process is the loss of religious authority. Individuals have the option of rejecting organized religion and in some cases are able to create competing religious institutions. To whom, then, is a rabbi responsible: to the individual who joins his or her synagogue and denomination, or to the wider Jewish community? Unable to take for granted a community bound by a uniform set of religious norms, the rabbinate is torn between an obligation to all the Jews living in a given community and the individuals who join their religious movements.

The contemporary rabbinic dilemma is rooted in two innovative forms of rabbinic authority that developed in 19th-century Europe. Central European Reform Judaism developed an egalitarian conception of authority, while East European Orthodox Judaism created a hierarchical framework. In the egalitarian model, rabbis gather at rabbinical conventions and vote as equals to change tradition. In the hierarchical model, authority to change tradition rests in the hands of a charismatic rabbinical figure whose followers grant him absolute authority. Despite their differences, Reform and Orthodox models of religious authority share a common attribute that undermines the traditional concept of Jewish peoplehood: both create a conception of religious authenticity that begins with the practices and beliefs of individuals rather than with the wider community of Jews. The individual, not the group, determines legitimate religious behavior.

Against this background, the Conservative movement represents a contrasting attempt to develop a conception of religious authority that balances an orientation to the practices of individuals, on the one hand, and the Jewish people, on the other. This attempt to create a centrist conception of religion, and the resulting tensions between egalitarian and hierarchical conceptions of authority within Conservative Judaism, provides a useful case study for understanding the changing role of the rabbinate vis-à-vis the Jewish people.

Conservative rabbis in the first part of the 20th century attempted to steer an
“ethno-religious” path between the increasingly “religious” sectarianism of Reform and Orthodox Judaism, seeking to create an institutional framework that could include the entire spectrum of American Judaism. However, over the course of the past few decades, the ethno-religious ideology weakened. Within today’s Conservative rabbinate, there are growing calls for clear ideological statements of what the movement stands for with respect to the other streams of contemporary Judaism. In this move toward ideological specification of “legitimate Jewish practice,” there is a corresponding move away from an orientation to the Jewish people and toward the individual members of the movement.

The Changing Relationship between the Individual and the Group

Scholarly consensus exists with regard to the basic features of the transition to post-traditional society. The move is from religious mores sewn into the fabric of group life to a situation in which “religion” is a distinct institution and lifestyle. There were no “religious individuals” in traditional society. Some places had more religion or less, and one could speak of individuals who were more pious or less so. However, it was impossible to speak of an everyday experience that was not embedded within institutions that were in some way affected by, or contrasted to, what we now refer to as “religion.” One lived in a Christian, Jewish, or Islamic society, the social hierarchies of which were intricately intertwined with religious doctrines and mores. “Religion” simply did not stand as a category differentiated from the rest of society; in one way or another, the “religious” identity of an individual was synonymous with identity as such: that is, with belonging to a particular social group within a larger social hierarchy.

In contrast, the situation today is that we need to enter a church, a “religious person’s” home, or a religious school to find “religion.” The differentiation of religion as a distinct social institution transforms the relationship between the individual Jew and the Jewish people. In traditional society, religion is embedded in the life of the social group, whereas in post-traditional society, religion is a form of practice and institutional affiliation that individuals choose. Group-oriented religion does not disappear in post-traditional society—it continues to be found in the life of congregations, religious movements, denominations and even, according to Robert Bellah and others, as “civil religion” that encompasses an entire society. The basic difference between traditional and post-traditional forms of group-oriented religion is the rise of a competing conception of religious authority based on an “individual-orientation.” In this conception, the world is divided between individuals who are more religious and those who are either less religious, religiously deviant, or anti-religious. The goal of the religious organization is to provide its members with the conditions necessary for maintaining maximum levels of practice and belief, while protecting them from the influence of others. It no longer matters that an individual is born a Jew. What matters is the type and amount of religious ritual and belief adopted by a given individual. In the traditional society, the group-orientation encompasses the individual-orientation. But in the post-traditional society, the individual-orientation gains a degree of autonomy that results in a dialectical tension.
between individual and group—the nature and consequences of which are the topic of this essay.

The group-oriented religion of the traditional European Jew is commonly referred to as “ethno-religion.” As defined earlier, ethno-religion is a variant of group-oriented religion in that individual piety gains significance through its effect on the ethnic group, and doctrinal belief and ritual practice gain their meaning as vessels that carry with them the larger ethnic-collective group identity. Ethno-religious rituals maintain ascribed group boundaries and ensure intergenerational continuity. For example, marriage and divorce rituals govern the ascriptive status given to a child upon birth to a Jewish mother, and ritual conversion is a process by which a Gentile enters the “Jewish people.” The failure of the individual to “correctly” practice ritual in daily life is not usually considered grounds to deny the Jewishness of another Jew. As Jakob J. Petuchowski noted: “Once one is a Jew, he may turn out to be a good Jew, or a bad Jew, or a sinful Jew; but his ‘Jewishness’ itself cannot be called into question.” The group, rather than the individual, serves as the primary point of religious orientation. Correct practice of religious ritual determines the status of the individual within the Jewish community, rather than distinguishing insider from outsider. The rabbi or yeshiva student might typically practice more ritual, while the merchant who travels between cities practices less. However, all are full members of the Jewish community.

The breakup of traditional European Jewish communities over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the corresponding mass emigrations, transformed the ethno-religious tradition by introducing religious institutions that were oriented toward the practices and beliefs of their individual members rather than those of the entire community. The egalitarian conception of religious authority developed in the German states beginning in the first quarter of the 19th century. The roots of the hierarchical model of religious authority lay in the Russian empire of the same period. In both areas of Europe, the modern centralized regime radically changed the conditions of Jewish communal life.

Premodern regimes divided society into “estates” in which Jews and most other social groups were regarded as corporate entities rather than as sovereign citizens. Ethno-religious groups such as the Jews, professional associations (guilds), and the landed estates of nobility all received a fair degree of political and legal autonomy: the regime delegated authority to local representatives of each estate, with whom the affairs of governance were coordinated. The most widespread form of Jewish communal organization was known as the kehilla. By law, an individual received his or her political, welfare, and other social rights through the Jewish community. Since state law prevented the revocation of “Jewishness,” such Jewishness was a predetermined fact.

Within the kehilla, the nature of religious authority was very different from what we are familiar with today. From the perspective of the state, formal legal responsibility for the operation of the kehilla was in the hands of the appointed representatives (known as parnasim), who acted as intermediaries between the community and external authorities. These men were responsible for everyday law and order, and to this effect legislated the by-laws of the community, served as judges in local disputes, coordinated the payment of taxes and the transfer of criminals, and carried out any
other required duties imposed upon them by the regional and state authorities. In turn, the state granted the kehilla autonomy to take care of its own affairs—including the hiring and financing of a rabbi who was granted responsibility for overseeing religious education, and who had formal legal authority over, and responsibility to, all the Jews in the geographic area.\(^7\)

The officers of the community were laymen with varying degrees of religious education and familiarity with halakhah, or Jewish law.\(^8\) In legislating community by-laws (\textit{takanot}) or in rendering legal judgment, these communal officers sometimes contradicted existing precedent. Yet while the kehilla granted its rabbi the authority to affirm or nullify a particular change or judgment, he would more often than not accept the innovations of the communal leaders and legitimate the changes.\(^9\) A primary motivation for accepting informal legal change was the rabbi’s need to consider the implications of his decisions for the local Jewish community.

While one can make a distinction between formal religious institutions (that is, the synagogue and the yeshiva) and other spheres of traditional communal life, that distinction is an arbitrary one, as religious norms pervaded the entire Jewish life-world. The traditional synthesis of religion and community enabled the rabbinate to adopt a relatively moderate strategy toward the religious practices of the laity.\(^10\) The compulsory framework of communal life allowed the rabbinate to take the integrity of the community as an “ethno-religious body” for granted. The threat came not from the rejection of religion (known today as secularism), but rather from those individuals who wished to take religious principles to the extreme. Thus, the rabbinate did not define religion vis-à-vis the anti-religious, but rather vis-à-vis the “super-religious,” whose demands for extra stringency could lead to the splitting of the community.\(^11\) The rabbinate’s need to account for variation of ritual practices within the traditional community militated against the creation of a religious ideology that would favor a particular pattern of ritual practice by certain “individuals.”\(^12\)

The transition from traditional to post-traditional Jewish society occurred in the context of the emancipation process, in which European states granted Jews citizenship rights as individuals that were not dependent on their affiliation with the corporate Jewish community.\(^13\) A major catalyst for emancipation were the increasingly successful attempts of European regimes to consolidate their power using large-scale, rationalized bureaucracies. Under this new form of governance, the autonomous estates gradually lost their self-governing status when rulers assigned legal status to individuals, while at the same time transferring the affairs of each estate to state institutions.\(^14\) From the first quarter of the 18th century, the absolute state interfered directly in the affairs of the kehilla, taking functions such as law enforcement, property registration, tax collection, and other aspects of legal autonomy out of the kehilla’s control and thus beyond the influence of religious institutions.\(^15\)

The centralization process transferred authority for the organization of communal life from the local to the national level, giving the individual an alternative path to social and political rights. As the institutions of the kehilla lost their coercive grip, so commitment to the religious basis of local communal life became a voluntary act—unleashing the wide-scale individualization process that continues to transform the Jewish religion. The voluntary nature of post-traditional religion, politically speaking, is a function of the state’s withdrawal from the religious organization of society.
This type of state-society relationship is often labeled “civil society” in the literature. The term “civil” connotes the ability of individuals to voluntarily join with “like-minded” others to create or maintain social movements closest to their ideal notions of what constitutes religion.

The organization of Judaism into “religious movements” represents a sharp contrast to the preemancipation kehilla, in which the rabbi and the communal board were responsible for the religious welfare of all Jews within a defined geographical area. The kehilla rabbi worked under contract to the community that paid his salary and supplied him with students. In contrast, the rabbinical leaders of the modern religious movement are only partly dependent on the local ethnic Jewish community in which they live for their salaries, students, and followers, instead relying on institutional support from outside their local communities. The changing institutional location of the religious leadership raises the following question: How should religious leaders relate to Jews who, by the criteria of ethno-religious tradition are members of their community, but who have chosen not to accept the ideology or authority of their religious movement?

Focusing on Orthodoxy, Menachem Friedman has shown how the weakening of the corporate Jewish community changed the once cooperative relationship between the nonrabbinic communal leadership and the local rabbi. The displacement of religious institutions out of the local community and into trans-local institutions such as the hasidic sect or regional yeshiva created a new type of rabbinic personality who was independent of any one community for finances and authority. The local rabbi was now expected to transmit the decisions taken by his superiors, with the local community regarded as a passive receiver of the law. This phenomenon is captured by the concept of da’at torah, which has gained increasing currency among Orthodox Jews since emancipation.

In this model of authority, transmission of the sacred occurs within the autonomous legal system of halakhah. Significantly, the Orthodox argue that halakhah is divorced from the secular considerations of everyday communal life. The most learned of rabbis, or the rabbi who by dint of spiritual/family lineage is deemed to hold charismatic powers, is granted complete authority to determine change within the legal system, with all authority removed from the hands of the local community. The effect of this conception of religious authority is to regard “religion” as different and distinct from the larger group of Jews, who might be born to Jewish parents but who do not practice “religion” as such. An individual who abides by “the law” is religious, while those who do not abide by the law are simply not an integral consideration in the process of changing and adapting “religion” to the wider society.

If the Orthodox model represents a hierarchical conception of authority in that “the law” is transmitted down to the community, the Reform model takes the traditional relationship between community and rabbinate in the opposite, egalitarian direction. The egalitarian model of authority grants the local rabbi, as the representative of a synagogue community, the power to enact change in the tradition. The rabbi, in other words, represents the community and not the legal system. Whereas (within defined groups) the Orthodox shift authority over to a single rabbinic personality and strengthen his hand vis-à-vis the lay leadership and the communal rabbi, Reform Jews grant power to constituent assemblies of community rabbis (representing individual
synagogues) who decide on changes in tradition by means of a democratic vote. Only those who are directly represented at the assembly are considered whenever doctrinal standards are created.

Recent changes introduced by the Reform movement, such as the recognition of Jews by patrilineal descent and the right of women and homosexuals to be ordained as rabbis, are carried out in the name of Reform Judaism’s egalitarian ideology, which is supported by a plurality of the movement’s rabbis. As with the Orthodox movement, consideration of the possible deleterious effect of such changes on relations between the movement and the rest of the Jewish people is not an integral part of the decision-making process.

From European Movements to American Denominations: The Difference between Public and Private Religious Orientations

What happens to the egalitarian and hierarchical models of rabbinic authority on American soil? We begin with Reform Judaism, as it was the first American Jewish religious movement, and because it was in direct reaction to the Reform movement that Conservative Judaism was also created.

The American Reform movement was historically more radical than its German counterpart. Reform communities in 19th-century Germany, while free to innovate in terms of religion, were nonetheless constrained by the state to affiliate with the kehilla. The forced orientation toward a communal political arena meant that those wishing to innovate had to take over existing communal-religious institutions or create new ones within the existing communal framework. As Judith Bleich notes, “frequently, the very threat of [Orthodox] secession appears to have had a significant effect in prompting the Reform oriented leaders of a kehilla to accommodate the concerns of the Orthodox and curb radical reform tendencies.” An example of this tendency was the effort on the part of the early reformers in Germany to focus on questions of Jewish law in order to prove that the new norms of conduct could be justified on the basis of halakhic sources.

That public orientation is very different from the private religious orientation that developed in the American Reform movement. The difference between the “public” and “private” orientations is crucial for understanding the development of a strong sectarian posture, or what was labeled above as a “religious” rather than an “ethno-religious” orientation, among American Reform Jews. In the United States, there are no mandatory, communal, public institutions. The classic form of the privatized religious organization is the denomination—an organization that is generally uninterested in using state institutions to influence the religious behavior of other population groups. Instead, the denomination’s leadership creates an ideological niche in civil society with the hope of attracting individuals to affiliate with the organization. Religious groups compete against one another in a consumer market in which individuals find the form of religion that best suits their inclinations. This orientation toward the individual holds true for the entire spectrum of American religion, from the mystical new religions to Protestant fundamentalism. All cater to the expressive needs of the individual.
The behavior of the contemporary American Jewish religious “movements” fits the
description of the Protestant denominations given by Andrew M. Greeley and Martin
Marty. Each denomination attempts to carve an ideological niche in civil society
that will attract membership. In the attempt at self-definition, the denominations ex-
perience repeated schism as different factions argue over the relation of doctrine to
the day-to-day religious practices of the individual. In American Judaism, exam-
pies of this process of ideological differentiation include disputes over the obligatory
nature of rabbinic Jewish law in Reform Judaism (which led to the creation of
Conservative Judaism); the refusal of Conservative Judaism to institute radical
changes in the prayer liturgy (which led to the creation of Reconstructionist Judaism);
and the introduction of gender-egalitarian ritual in Conservative Judaism (which led
to the creation of the Union for Traditional Judaism). The important point is that the
continual experience of schism is at the same time a process of ideological specifi-
cation. Over time, denominations become increasingly concerned with “religious
standards” that apply to an individual’s religious behavior and thus orient themselves
away from an ideological concern with the larger ethnic group.

On the rhetorical level, the Jews who created each of the American Jewish de-
nominations did not intend to privatize Judaism and weaken the traditional ethno-re-
ligious group orientation. At least in the case of Reform and Conservative Judaism,
the early leaders of the movements stated their mission as that of a movement in-
tending to influence the larger American Jewish community. Hence the term “move-
ment” rather than “denomination.”

In the mid-19th century, German Jewish immigrant rabbis brought with them the
major organizational innovation of the German Reformers—the rabbinic conference.
Reform rabbinic conferences began on a small scale in the United States in the 1850s
in a series of meetings between rabbis of the different Reform-oriented synagogues.
They created the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) in 1873, which,
two years later, created the Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Cincinnati to train rab-
bis for the American Jewish community.

The Reform movement of this period divided between radical and moderate fac-
tions, distinguished by the extent of reform they wished to introduce in the normative
rabbinic tradition. Changes that enjoyed universal acceptance touched on the aes-
thetics of the synagogue service—a sermon in English or German, greater decorum
and, in some cases, a choir singing nontraditional synagogue music. More radical re-
formers advocated more sweeping change in the legal framework of rabbinic law,
starting with the manner of Sabbath observance and the application of dietary regu-
lations. Despite the activities of the radicals, the “traditionalists” supported the cre-
ation of the Reform synagogue association and the rabbinical school in the hope that
they might manage to control the direction of the movement.

Two events signaled the break between “reformers” and “traditionalists” within the
Reform movement. At the first graduation exercise of the Hebrew Union College in
1883, nonkosher food was served. The violation of a basic component of rabbinic law
incensed the traditionalists and led them to call for the creation of a rabbinical semi-
nary devoted to classical Jewish patterns of observance. The second event occurred
at the meeting of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in Pittsburgh in 1885,
when a statement of doctrinal principles that rejected the obligatory nature of rabbinic
law was adopted. Other declarations adopted at the conference defined Judaism as a universal religion based on belief in a monotheistic God without noting its traditional national component.31

Ten weeks after the Pittsburgh conference, on January 31, 1886, a small group of men met in New York City to announce the founding of a rabbinical seminary, “in conservative Jewish principles.” A year later, on January 3, 1887, eight students began their rabbinical studies at this new school, which was named the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS).32

The early Conservative movement attempted a middle path between the egalitarian and hierarchical models of religious authority that developed in Europe and later in the United States. Its leadership resisted the idea that an assembly of rabbis—through democratic votes, without distinction between levels of knowledge—could implement religious change. Like the Orthodox, Conservative Jews preferred to grant authority to central rabbinic personalities. However, Conservative Jews also believed that accepting social change was part of the rabbinic tradition. As the Orthodox shifted authority to central rabbinic personalities in order to combat the secularizing influences occurring in the local Jewish communities, so Conservative Jews aspired to hold non-Reform Jews in the fold and return Reform Jews to the “traditional” way.

Although the Reform movement and Orthodoxy built relatively sharp ideological boundaries, the early Conservative stance avoided specifying clear ideological standards for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate change in the religious tradition. Since the specification of a religious ideology implies a willingness to alienate a segment of the ethnic community that does not agree with the movement’s doctrine, the early Conservative leadership chose to avoid ideological specificity.

The Conflict between Ethno-Religious, Hierarchical, and Egalitarian Models of Religious Authority in Conservative Judaism

Thus, Conservative Judaism of the first decades of the 20th century was a loose ethno-religious coalition rather than a religious movement. A contrast of the two American rabbinical seminaries illustrates this point. Founded by the Reform movement, HUC had from the start an institutional obligation to a clearly defined movement. In contrast, JTS was established before the emergence of a Conservative movement. The movement itself formed over the course of several decades around a core of synagogues that hired JTS graduates; other synagogues that joined the association of Conservative synagogues (United Synagogue of America—founded 1913); and the rabbinical association of JTS graduates (the Rabbinic Assembly—established as the alumni association of JTS in 1901 and then reorganized as the Rabbinical Assembly of the Jewish Theological Seminary [RA] in 1919).

As part of its ethno-religious agenda, the leadership of Conservative Judaism eschewed any clear theological platform in order to attract as wide a spectrum as possible from the ranks of the East European Jewish immigration.33 The strongest common tie among Conservative leaders was their opposition to the Reform movement, on the one hand, and an aspiration to influence the religious life of the entire ethnic Jewish community, on the other. According to Moshe Davis, “they were prepared to
accept the principle of the legitimacy of differences within the all-inclusive idea of historical Judaism, as embodied in the Jewish people. The concept of Klal Yisrael was expressed frequently in the presentations and plans of the spokesman of the School."

Given the lack of a clear institutional constituency, the founders of the movement successfully avoided specification of the ideological basis and corresponding institutional mechanisms for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate change. The lack of specification allowed for competing conceptions of religious authority—from the nearly Reform to the essentially Orthodox—to coexist within one religious movement. However, as the institutional basis of the movement coalesced, the dilemma of whose interest the movement was to serve became ever sharper: Did Conservative Judaism represent the membership of the movement or the larger Jewish community? Along with this dilemma came the question of defining a model of rabbinical authority for distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate change within the religious tradition.

From the moment of their founding, the United Synagogue, the Rabbinical Assembly, and allied lay organizations such as the Women’s League of Conservative Judaism (1916), the United Synagogue Young People’s League (1921), and the National Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs of the United Synagogue of America (late 1920s) urged JTS to focus on denominational concerns. In particular, they urged that emphasis be placed on the training of rabbis, and later, other educational and administrative personnel, for Conservative synagogues. In contrast, the administration and faculty of JTS viewed the mission of the institution as serving the entire American Jewish community.

The rabbinic dilemma was most apparent in the tension between the Rabbinical Assembly and the JTS faculty. Being concerned with the everyday problems of communal rabbis, the RA wanted to clarify the ideological basis for instituting necessary changes. In contrast, the JTS faculty continued to hold to a hierarchical notion (drawn from the East European Orthodox experience) that the role of the congregational (communal) rabbi was to transmit the law as interpreted by his teachers.

At several points in the history of the Rabbinical Assembly, unsuccessful attempts were made to bridge the diversity of its members in order to formulate a clear statement of principles. In 1919, for example, several alumni and younger faculty members addressed a letter to Louis Ginzberg, the leading talmudist on the Seminary faculty, in which they urged him to formulate a clear statement on what Conservative Judaism stood for. In their words: “We have failed as a group to exert an influence on Jewish life in any way commensurate with the truth and strength of our position, and that, primarily, because we have never made our position clear to the rest of the world.”

In 1931, the RA passed a resolution urging the organization to “define [its] attitude toward the fundamental problems of Judaism.” In 1948, it devoted an entire session of its annual convention to the topic “Towards a Philosophy of Conservative Judaism.” In 1956, it appointed a committee known as the Continuing Conference on Conservative Ideology. All of these efforts at defining the movement’s ideology ended in failure because of the ideological distance between the liberal and conservative members of the Rabbinical Assembly, and the consequent fear of engendering schism.
Jack Wertheimer points to the contradictions inherent in the approach of JTS toward the congregational rabbi. On the one hand, JTS alumni were urged to implement a hierarchical model of religious authority in which they were expected to follow the example of their teachers. On the other hand, whenever the rabbis had to deal with actual questions of the day, JTS as an institution chose a path of avoidance. The nitty-gritty task of attuning rabbinic law to American congregational life was first left to the United Synagogue, and then, from 1927 onwards, to the Committee on Jewish Law of the Rabbinical Assembly.38

Until Gerson D. Cohen became chancellor of JTS in 1972, the mainstream leadership maintained a traditionalist ethno-religious perspective. The following statement from Louis Finkelstein, an influential figure at JTS from the 1930s (and president of JTS from 1940 to 1972) provides a good example: “If the shifting of values and the introduction of new devices will actually bring Jews back to God, to the Torah and to the synagogue, they will then doubtless be accepted. . . . But pending such proof of the value of these changes, and pending their acceptance by all Israel, some of us prefer to stand aside and watch.”39

This conservative (with a small “c”) approach tried to manage the tension between the hierarchical Orthodox model and the Conservative commitment to modernizing the tradition by arguing that change was not a problem so long as it occurred slowly. The halakhic legal system was held to be a framework for guaranteeing the unity of the Jewish people; one could not introduce major change into the system unless such changes were accepted by all segments of the Jewish people.

To ensure a slow pace of change, the founders of JTS through Louis Finkelstein and his traditionalist colleagues created an institutional authority structure that granted the most senior talmudists, such as Louis Ginzberg, Boas Cohen, and Saul Lieberman, effective veto over any proposed changes in the curriculum and policies of the institution.40 These men viewed themselves as belonging to the mainstream of traditionally oriented Judaism. Hence, they resisted “radical” innovations in the liturgy or in other areas of ritual observance, on the grounds that these would destroy any tie between Conservative Judaism and the more traditional elements of the Jewish community. According to their point of view, the legal system gained its autonomous status from the Jewish people; the legal expert, who understood the system better than anyone else, had the power to introduce or reject changes in religious practice; and the role of the Seminary was to train rabbinical scholars who themselves would be competent in the halakhic issues and able to apply the legal interpretations rendered by their teachers in the congregational environment.41

The problem was to create a means for preserving the hierarchical structure of authority at JTS within the larger Conservative movement. The first attempt to create such a mechanism for issuing practical interpretations of rabbinic law for use by congregational rabbis was the “Committee on the Interpretation of Jewish Law” of the United Synagogue of America, authorized in 1917. Significantly, the senior talmudist at JTS at that time, Louis Ginzberg, founded the committee; he seems to have written all the responsa (halakhic rulings) himself, although there were four other committee members.42

The subsequent history of the law committee points to the growing independence of the Rabbinical Assembly and its shift away from the hierarchical model held by
JTS, together with an increasing competition between the two institutions over control of the Conservative movement. A major actor in the battle was Mordecai M. Kaplan, Louis Ginzberg’s chief rival on the JTS faculty. A lone wolf at JTS, Kaplan developed a theology that presented a strong egalitarian challenge to the hierarchical model employed by his contemporaries. Kaplan argued that the people of Israel defined the context in which Jewish law was created:

First comes the Jewish people. The people then creates its sacred literature, that body of teaching which traces its origins and its unique destiny, which records the people’s sense of its distinctiveness from other peoples and, pre-eminently, which articulates the people’s sense of salvation and how this vision is to be actualized.43

Kaplan pushed for major changes in the prayer service and institutional structure of American Judaism. One of his controversial efforts was to promote radical changes in the liturgy, but these were rebuffed by the mainstream of the Conservative movement in general and the faculty at JTS in particular. (Kaplan eventually gave up his attempt to win over the mainstream of the Conservative movement to his radically egalitarian agenda. Instead, he created the first major schism in the Conservative movement when, after retiring from the Seminary in 1963 at the age of 82, he and his supporters created the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia and the Reconstructionist movement.)44

One of Kaplan’s greatest successes among the various battles he waged in the Conservative movement was to dislodge the talmudists at JTS from the hegemonic position they had enjoyed in determining the pace of change in rabbinic law within movement institutions. Kaplan’s primary influence came not through JTS itself, but through the seminary graduates whom he influenced. With increasing support in the Rabbinical Assembly, Kaplan opposed the creation of Ginzberg’s law committee in 1918, and in 1927, he spearheaded the effort to transfer the committee from the Seminary’s aegis to the Rabbinical Assembly. His success illustrates the collision of hierarchical and egalitarian models of authority and the first major success of the latter within the Conservative movement. The new committee consisted of ten members—four traditional, four liberal, and two “neutral” rabbis—and with it, Ginzberg was removed from his de facto position as chief rabbinic arbiter (posek) of the Conservative movement.45

The changing relationship between JTS and the Rabbinical Assembly illustrates the weakening of the hierarchical model of religious authority promoted by the former in favor of an egalitarian model increasingly promoted by the latter. Through 1948, Seminary Talmud professors managed to retain key positions on the Committee on Jewish Law. By dint of their prestige and their ability to muster majorities in the Rabbinical Assembly, these seminarians were able to block what they considered to be radical changes in Jewish legal tradition. The peak of the conflict came at the 1948 RA convention, when Kaplan’s followers engineered another reorganization of the Committee on Jewish Law, now to be called the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. JTS faculty members were banned from “acting as voting members of the Committee on Jewish Law of the RA,”46 and a liberal member of the Rabbinical Assembly replaced Boas Cohen, the traditionalist younger contemporary of Louis Ginzberg in the Seminary’s Talmud department.
Although a change in policy allowed JTS members to rejoin it shortly after its reorganization, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards shifted its focus to the needs of the movement membership, thereby embarking on a series of significant rulings. In consequence, a clear Conservative doctrinal position and religious strategy emerged, which distinguished the denomination from the modern Orthodox segment of American Jewry. The best known of the law committee rulings touched on Sabbath observance—driving was now permitted in order to enable members to attend synagogue services, and the use of electricity was sanctioned—and new guidelines regarding women’s participation in the prayer service, such as their being allowed to chant the haftorah and lead responsive readings.

In the egalitarian model as it developed in Conservative Judaism, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, comprised primarily of congregational rabbis, was to play a mediating role between “the law” and “the community.” No longer was it the rabbis’ role to transmit the law in its “pure state” to the community. Rather, the needs of the synagogue community, served by the communal rabbi, now shaped religious “standards.” Congregational rabbis became essential agents in the legal system: sitting as a majority on a committee with the central rabbinic personalities of JTS, they enjoyed equal status as rabbinic arbiters.

An unintended consequence of the new Conservative egalitarian model was a shift in religious orientation away from the larger ethnic group and toward an increasingly exclusive focus on the membership (and institutions) of the Conservative movement. Although the ethno-religious rhetoric that places the Jewish people at the focus of Conservative Judaism remains strong, it is in the body of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards that the dilemma between ethnic group and religious movement is most clearly embodied.

The Denominalization of Conservative Judaism

With the creation of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards in 1948, the gap in institutional cultures between JTS and the Rabbinical Assembly widened. The faculty and administration of JTS in general, and the Talmud department in particular, increasingly disdained attempts by the Rabbinical Assembly to define a clear ideological position for Conservative Judaism on cardinal issues in Jewish law. The RA changes ranged from liturgical innovations introduced with the publication of a Conservative Jewish prayer book to the various rulings of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards.

A telling example of the JTS leadership’s attitude appears in a letter written in 1951 by President Louis Finkelstein to Prof. Saul Lieberman regarding the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. The disdain that the seminarians had for the legal activities of congregational rabbis is apparent, as is the clash between the “religious-denominational” tendency of the Rabbinical Assembly and the conservative ethno-religious approach of the JTS leadership. According to Finkelstein:

I was able to persuade the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Law and Standards to agree to a joint conference sponsored by the Faculty of the Seminary and the Rabbinical Assembly. . . . If we cannot find someone within our Faculty group, or if we cannot dis-
cover someone who will make the application of Jewish Law his life’s interest, nothing that I or anyone else can say or do will prevent incompetent people from undertaking this responsibility. . . . The Rabbinical Assembly will be confirmed in its view that nobody is interested in the subject but itself. This may in fact be true; it may also be true that a number of us see the issue raised by the Rabbinical Assembly as secondary to other vital matters such as the future orientation of the Jews in America and the building of Torah generally. However, the rabbis who are in congregations cannot take this view and will certainly resent it in the future as they have resented it in the past.47

The newly developed RA model of religious authority began to significantly influence the operation of the Seminary only after Louis Finkelstein stepped down and Gerson D. Cohen became chancellor in 1972. For the first time, the chancellor saw the “movement” and the congregational rabbi, rather than the Jewish people and the Talmud scholar, as the primary points of religious orientation for JTS. Consider the following correspondence between Cohen and the chairman of the JTS board of trustees in 1979:

We can no longer stand aloof from the Conservative movement as a whole, nor can we ignore the burning issues that confront these ambassadors [the congregational rabbis] and our movement daily. The Seminary cannot afford to maintain a neutral position, which in the final analysis is a euphemism for the Orthodox position, while the Conservative movement goes its own way. If the Seminary is to be the fountainhead of Conservative Judaism, it must be in contact with the Movement and give it guidance.48

As the creation of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards shifted the model of rabbinical authority from rabbi as transmitter of the law to rabbi as mediator, so too Cohen instituted similar changes in the rabbinical school curriculum—from an emphasis on acquiring mastery of the rabbinic literature and Jewish law to an ability to critically analyze the rabbinic legal literature and make it accessible, understandable, and meaningful to the Conservative Jewish congregant.49

In light of these changes, Conservative rabbis are no longer responsible for transmitting an ideal-positivistic conception of rabbinic law to their constituents. Rather than serving as a prototype of the law, they have become mediators between the law (interpreted and/or formulated from above) and individual congregants who compose their synagogue communities. Rabbinic education has moved away from the hierarchical model and toward the egalitarian conception, a process that has become even more explicit under Cohen’s successor, Ismar Schorsch. In a 1986 speech, for example, Schorsch observed that there is “almost no common denominator between the profession of the modern rabbi . . . and the religious leadership of the Middle Ages. . . . If earlier the rabbi served as halakhic decisor, judge, and teacher of Talmud for advanced students, today he is a member of a profession dedicated to addressing the needs of the individual.”50

Both the revised structure of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards and the accompanying conception of rabbinic authority in the JTS curriculum are part of a gradual move toward an egalitarian relationship between the rabbinate and the Jewish community. However, unlike the model created by the Reform movement at the turn of the 20th century, the newly emerging Conservative egalitarian model does not do away with the centrality of rabbinic law. An obligation to Jewish law remains a central tenet of Conservative Judaism.51 However, as the rabbi now mediates between
the law and the changing ethical norms of communal life, congregational rabbis, rather than a central rabbinic authority, have become the determining voice in regulating the pace of change.

The shift from a hierarchical to an egalitarian conception of the rabbinate at JTS allowed for greater cooperation with the Rabbinical Assembly and the intertwining of institutional interests to create a clearer denominational posture. A significant outcome of the denominalization process was the ability for the first time to construct a single set of doctrinal statements in the name of the Conservative movement. Neil Gillman writes:

Cohen did not have Finkelstein’s stake in *halakhic* traditionalism, and he was much more concerned with the fate and direction of the movement. Cohen’s relationships with Rabbinical Assembly presidents were generally marked by a shared concern for the problems facing the congregational rabbi. It was in this context that Cohen and Rabbi Alexander Shapiro, President of the Assembly from 1984 to 1986, evolved the notion of forming a Joint Commission to write a statement of Principles for Conservative Judaism.52

In 1988, the commission published a 40-page statement of principles titled *Emet Ve-Emunah*. Significantly, the commission that produced the statement of principles was composed of congregational rabbis and laity, without any right of veto on the part of a central rabbinic authority.

**Somewhere between Individual and Group**

Without a clear statement of religious mission, the Conservative rabbinate seems to have felt that it cannot transmit a set of reasons to its laity as to why people should belong to the Conservative movement rather than to the alternatives offered by Reform or Orthodoxy. The creation of a Conservative egalitarian model of religious authority is part of the boundary-sharpening process. Given the trend toward denominalization, leading Conservative figures viewed the historical lack of a clear Conservative ideology as a serious problem. For example, Gillman, a professor of Jewish philosophy at JTS and the former dean of the rabbinical school, argued that a religious movement must have a clearly stated ideology. Likewise, Marshall Sklare, the author of the only major sociological treatise on the Conservative movement, noted that “because of its obvious shortcomings and contrived nature, the Conservative ‘ideology’ hardly serves as a guide to present day dilemmas. It does not endow the functionaries with confidence in their decisions.”53 A more recent example of the perspective expressed by Sklare is given by Nancy Ammerman, who notes with appreciation the “increasing strength and clarity of Conservative Judaism’s ‘denominational’ identity.” “Increasingly,” she concludes, “that position in the middle is more a choice than a ‘default,’ more a distinct way of being Jewish than a compromise between more seemingly coherent alternatives.”54

The argument here is that the policies of the early Conservative movement were not merely a default position or a weaker form of Judaism than Reform and Orthodoxy. Rather, the Conservative movement actively built an ethno-religious organization whose very nature required ambivalent rather than sharp ideological boundaries.
In this it was similar to the premodern kehilla, in which the communal rabbinate viewed overly strict ideological standards for determining correct religious practice as inimical to the unity of the ethno-religious group.

On the one hand, the view of religious authority employed by the early leadership of Conservative Judaism was by no means traditional. Both the hierarchical model of religious authority that they adopted (along with the Orthodox) and their embrace of an irreligious public (as with the Reform) are modern phenomena. On the other hand, the Conservative leadership promoted an ethno-religious orientation in which they viewed themselves as inheriting the traditional responsibility of preserving the unity of the Jewish people. Thus, the lack of a clear ideology in the early days of the Conservative movement may be seen as an ethno-religious response to postemancipation society. In these terms, the specification rather than the ambiguity of Conservative Jewish ideology is the “problem.” For with the process of ideological specification comes an enhanced orientation toward the individual member of the religious denomination, with the resulting weakened commitment to preserving the unity of the Jewish people.

What prevents a wholesale embrace of the individual orientation is the leadership of the Conservative movement, which continues to negotiate between the ethno-religious and strictly denominational postures. Indeed, within each of the other contemporary Jewish religious movements, significant factions continue to argue for an ethno-religious strategy in which the value of religion is derived from a “group orientation.” For these Jews, legitimate religious practice is not judged by the ability of an individual to correctly practice a given set of commandments, but rather by the effect of that religious practice on the life of the Jewish people. A traditionalist will argue against change, a liberal for change—but they will both justify their argument in terms of the “good of the Jews.” If a certain type of practice produces schism in the religious movement, division in a synagogue, or strife within the larger ethnic group, then it must not be introduced; or alternatively, if the practice already exists, it must be changed.

The tension between an orientation toward the group, on the one hand, and individual members of the movement, on the other, appeared in a number of interviews that I conducted with the rabbinical and academic leadership of Israeli and American Conservatism. An example of this kind of tension is the issue of accepting female witnesses at divorce, conversion, or wedding ceremonies. According to a ruling of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards in 1974, the Conservative movement allows women to serve as legal witnesses. However, according to Orthodox interpretations of Jewish law, a female witness invalidates the ceremony. Thus, allowing women to serve as legal witnesses effectively means the construction of a sharp religious boundary between Conservative and Orthodox Judaism, in an area where a boundary did not previously exist. Some of those I interviewed strongly favored allowing women witnesses, others strongly rejected the move, and many were torn. A good summary of the competing pull of the individual and group religious strategies was expressed by Judith Hauptman, a professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary and a leading supporter of gender equality in the Conservative movement:

This is a tough one for me. For a long time, let’s say until two or three years ago, I was adamantly opposed to a woman witnessing. . . . This is where the Conservative move-
Hauptman is torn between the ethno-religious group orientation and a pull toward the individual members of the Conservative movement. Should her concern be “where the Conservative movement interfaces with other movements” or with the “young women who say that they want to sit on the rabbinic panel for a conversion?”

Within each of the Jewish religious movements, most of the leadership continues to experience this tension between the group and individual orientations. For example, the leadership of the Reform movement remains divided over the recognition of individuals born of a Jewish father and a Gentile mother. The different factions of Orthodoxy continue to argue over the wisdom of demanding stricter standards of conversion, kashruth, and other ritual observances that raise the threshold for acceptance into the Orthodox Jewish community. On the one hand, there is a desire for sharpened religious boundaries, a clear statement of what the religious movement stands for and expects of its membership; but on the other, there is a need to remain faithful to the ethno-religious orientation.

Notes

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2. For the classic appraisals of the consequence of “choice” in post-traditional religion, see


9. See Rosman, “Social Conflicts in Miedzyboz,” 59–60, for an illustration of the decentralized nature of religious power (a situation in which the kehilla leadership challenged a lenient ruling of the local rabbi). Ben-David, “Beginning of Modern Jewish Society in Hungary,” focuses on the high level of contact between religious and economic elites in the traditional kehilla, and their parting of ways with emancipation.


12. This idea, and the manner in which it is developed in the following pages, is heavily influenced by Dumont’s Homo Heirarchicus and From Mandelville to Marx, and by the elaboration of his work in B. Kapferer’s Legends of People: Myths of State (Washington, D.C.: 1988) and Don Handelman’s Toward an Anthropology of Public Events (Cambridge: 1990).

13. For an overview of the paths of emancipation in different areas of Europe, see Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship (Princeton: 1995). In North Africa and Asia, there were communities that did not experience emancipation until the breakup of traditional communal life after the Second World War, with the mass postwar immigrations to France and to Israel.


17. The historical picture is more complex, but can be simplified for the framing purposes that this presentation requires. The source of the complexity is that the rabbi’s position as a salaried employee of a community developed relatively late in the medieval period. On the professionalization of the rabbinate, see Yisrael Yuval, Hakhmon haredim: hamanhigut ha’arit shel yehudei germaniyah beshalhei yemei habeinayim (Jerusalem: 1988).


19. Ibid.

20. On da’at torah, see Gershon C. Bacon, The Politics of Tradition: Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916–1939 (Jerusalem: 1996), 47–69; Friedman, Haavevrah haharedith, 104–107; and Lawrence Kaplan, “Daas Torah: A Modern Conception of Rabbinic Authority,” in Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy, ed. Moshe Z. Sokol (Northvale, N.J.: 1992), 1–60. Da’at means knowledge; thus da’at torah means the knowledge of Torah or, more broadly, knowledge of God’s true intentions as these are transmitted in the Torah. In addition to the above sources, there are only a handful of sociologists who devote any significant theoretical attention to the subject of changes introduced by Orthodoxy into the religious tradition. See Lieberman, “Extremism as a Religious Norm”; Jonathan Sacks, “Creativity and Innovation in Halakhah,” in Sokol (ed.), Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy, 123–168; idem, One People?; Chaim Waxman, “Toward a Sociology of Pesak,” in Sokol (ed.), Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy, 217–238; idem, “Dilemmas of Modern Orthodoxy: Sociological and Philosophical,” Judaism 42 (1993), 59–70. In comparison, there is a voluminous historical literature, examples of which are cited in this essay. For works written by philosophers, see Sagi and Zohar, “The Halakhic Ritual of Giyyur” and Kaplan, “Daas Torah.” Two collections—Sokol (ed.), Rabbinic Authority and Individual Autonomy, and Avi Sagi and Zeev Safrai (eds.), Bein samkhet leotonomiyah bemosoret yisrael (Tel Aviv: 1997)—have a philosophical bent, but contain as well contributions from historians and sociologists that focus on changes in Orthodoxy.

21. The reader should be aware that I am using the terms “egalitarian” and “hierarchical” as analytical concepts, and not as terms that people use to describe themselves. In terms of the Conservative movement, which is the primary focus of this essay, the actual use of the term “egalitarian” did not appear in the Conservative Jewish lexicon until some point in the mid-1980s, when it was used as a catch-all phrase covering any ritual changes equivocating male
and female roles. I am referring to a conception of religious authority that may or may not be in line with a particular form of ritual practice. I wish to thank David Golinkin of the Schechter Institute of Judaic Studies for pointing out the development of the use of the term “egalitarian.”


29. Here a comparative study of Israeli religious movements is useful. Israeli religious movements also experience schism, but it is due to a public rather than private orientation. They divide over differences in ideological approaches to the state, rather than over disagreements concerning the practice of religious ritual. See Ezra Kopelowitz, “Shifting Boundaries of Religious Authority: A Comparative Historical Study of the Role of Religious Movements in the Conflict between Jews in Israel and the United States” (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University, 2000), chs. 5 and 6.


32. Ibid., 28.

33. On the ambiguous nature of Conservative Jewish ideology, see Neil Gillman, “Mordecai

34. Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism*, 16.
36. Quoted in ibid., 411.
38. See Wertheimer, “JTS and the Conservative Movement.”
40. Ginzberg was born in Lithuania in 1873; his early studies were in yeshivot. He served on the staff at JTS from 1903 until his death in 1953. Boaz Cohen was American-born (Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1899) and ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1924, where he stayed on as a faculty member. Saul Lieberman was born in 1898 in Byelorussia and, like Ginzberg, studied in Orthodox yeshivot. He served on the faculty of JTS from 1940 through his death in 1983.
41. In general, there was an attempt to create an intellectual environment that combined religious conservatism with intellectual openness. Finkelstein viewed the ideal scholar as one who had directly experienced a European rabbinic education, but who was capable of combining the “Old World” religious ethos with “western” university training. Saul Lieberman represented this ideal. Harvey Goldberg provides a list of others in his overview of the faculty culture at JTS from the early 1940s through the late 1960s. See Goldberg, “Becoming History: Perspectives on the Seminary Faculty at Mid-Century,” in Wertheimer (ed.), *Tradition Renewed*, 355–423.
43. Quoted in Gillman, *The New Century*, 82.
44. Ibid.
47. Quoted in Goldberg, “Perspectives on the Seminary Faculty at Mid-Century,” 370.
50. Ibid., 575.
51. On what fidelity to Jewish law means for the subcultures of the movement, see Kopelowitz, “Three Sub-Cultures of Conservative Judaism and the Issue of Ordaining Women.”
55. See Kopelowitz, “Shifting Boundaries of Religious Authority.”
56. Quoted in ibid., 43.
57. See Bleich, “Rabbinic Responses to Nonobservance in the Modern Era,” 72–73, for a detailed analysis of the ambivalence of the 19th-century Orthodox leadership, generated by their simultaneous desire to ban Reformers and at the same time to avoid the specter of for-
mal schism. An interesting accommodation is the example of a ruling that allows Sabbath des-
ecrators to be counted in as members of a prayer quorum, a practice unthinkable in earlier
times. Also see Jeffrey Gurock, “The Orthodox Synagogue,” in The American Synagogue: A
Sanctuary Transformed, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Hanover, N.H.: 1987), 37–84. In contrast, most
of the same 19th-century Orthodox rabbis ruled it impermissible to pray in synagogues in which
the bimah (prayer leader’s podium) is moved from the center to the front of the synagogue (see
Bleich, 68).
Assessments of contemporary Conservative Judaism have been colored by memories of strife regarding women’s ritual participation within the movement during the 1970s and early 1980s. Rabbis and ritual committees, men and women, the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) and its alumni—all were often at odds. Describing that period of time, the provost of JTS, Jack Wertheimer, posited that, “far more than the other denominations, Conservative Judaism experienced severe turbulence and even demoralization.”

Ought this assessment be extended as well to the final decades of the 20th century? During the 1980s and 1990s, virtually all denominations within America’s religious landscape experienced turmoil in which “modernists” and “traditionalists” were pitted against one another. The modernists claimed that religious belief and practice ought to change in accordance with evolving mores, whereas traditionalists asserted that religion offered timeless truths that were meant to withstand the ever-changing tide of moral relativism.

Modernist defenders of “classic” Reform Judaism, for example, struggled with the traditionalists in their ranks who sought a greater adherence to mitzvot. Gunther Plaut, past president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and editor of the Reform movement’s one-volume Torah commentary, reflected that, over the past generation, “Reform Judaism has been harboring two sharply differing views of itself. One . . . believes Reform means individual freedom. The other, of which I have been a staunch advocate, holds that Reform without communal boundaries is bound for dissolution and oblivion.”

A similar tug-of-war has occurred within what was once known as Modern Orthodoxy, with its modernists attempting to stem a noticeable shift to the right by the traditionalists in its ranks. In a highly acclaimed article appearing in Tradition magazine in 1994, Haym Soloveitchik lamented that “the Orthodoxy in which I and other people my age were raised scarcely exists anymore,” and noted further “the
swing to the right’ . . . [with] the new rigor in religious observance now current among the younger community . . . .” Discussion of this turmoil resumed some time later in a summer supplement of *Tradition* titled “The Sea Change in American Orthodox Judaism.”

And yet, rather than being “demoralized” by the recent interplay between its competing modernist and traditionalist elements, Conservative Judaism has been revitalized during the past 20 years. This essay will examine the ways in which the healthy interaction between Conservative Judaism’s left and right has enabled the movement to navigate challenges posed not only by feminism (which have resulted in the most wide-ranging changes), but also regarding homosexuality, theology, intermarriage, and ritual observance. Dissent has reflected neither contentiousness nor decline. Instead, it has indicated the movement’s willingness and confidence to acculturate desirable aspects of modernity while opposing what it has considered to be negative societal trends.

**Women as Conservative Rabbis: A Major Victory for Modernists**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, America’s mainline Protestant denominations, along with Judaism’s Reform and Reconstructionist movements, voted to allow women to be trained as clergy. The lengthy and ultimately successful struggle to ordain women as Conservative rabbis has been well documented. Women’s ordination marked a major victory for modernists in the path toward full egalitarianism. Nonetheless, the implementation of equal treatment of Jewish rabbis has faced residual obstacles.

As women entered the Conservative rabbinate, opposition by traditionalist laity lingered in the form of job discrimination. Many synagogues refused to interview female rabbis; others offered rabbinic posts, but at a lower salary. Even after being hired, female rabbis found attitudes in the pews difficult to change. As Naomi Levy recalls: “I wasn’t sure that synagogues were ready to embrace women rabbis. . . . I worried that my congregants would never take me seriously.” Some female rabbis found that male lay leaders were reluctant to involve them in the fiscal affairs of the congregation, relegating them instead to education and youth activities. Still others noted the resistance of men to women rabbis’ less authoritarian and less hierarchical style of leadership.

Gradually, women rabbis did become part of Conservative Judaism’s mainstream. They also emerged as catalysts for change—for example, in championing “gender neutral” translations of Hebrew prayers. In the words of Amy Eilberg (the first female Conservative rabbi), “to imagine God as male is nothing less than idolatrous in Jewish terms.” Reference to God as “He” was accordingly replaced by the Hebrew term “Adonai.” As noted by the editors of the revised (1998) *Siddur Sim Shalom*, since the prayer book reflected “our sensitivity to critiques of gender-specific language in prayer, the use of ‘Lord’ and ‘King’ referring to God is avoided.” Moreover, the prayer book also offered the option of amending part of the text of the Amidah prayer (“God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob”) to include the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah.
Significant albeit minority opposition was expressed against these changes. For instance, Jules Harlow, the editor of the original version of Siddur Sim Shalom (1983), wrote an extensive defense of a more literal translation of traditional liturgy. Nonetheless, Harlow acknowledged: “It is doubtful that any argument presented here will lead to a change of mind or revision of [gender-neutral] texts.”\(^{15}\) In a related episode, the Canadian members of the Rabbinical Assembly (RA) requested the publication of their own version of the siddur in which mention of the matriarchs would be omitted. This plea was rejected by the RA leadership, which did not want to create the impression that Conservative Judaism was “moving backward” in matters regarding women’s equality.\(^{16}\)

By the fall of 1999, Joel Meyers, the RA’s executive vice president, confidently asserted that Conservative Judaism was becoming overwhelmingly egalitarian.\(^{17}\) For instance, full equality in ritual practices had become the norm in virtually all Conservative services conducted on U.S. college or university campuses,\(^{18}\) and nearly all of the 70 Solomon Schechter day schools and Ramah summer camps structured prayer in an egalitarian manner.\(^{19}\) Furthermore, a National Women’s League survey conducted in the mid-1990s affirmed the conclusions of a report issued in 1995 by the Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism (affiliated with JTS) that egalitarian practices had been implemented by most American Conservative synagogues.\(^{20}\) Joel Roth, who had authored the original halakhic responsum enabling women to enter the JTS rabbinical school, lamented the movement’s “loss of pluralism” as nonegalitarian options disappeared.\(^{21}\) In response, Nina Cardin, a modernist rabbi, argued that “the coupling of egalitarianism and pluralism within the movement is a strained co-habitation. [How] can we accept that which violates our principles, that which denies us?”\(^{22}\)

Subtle resistance by traditionalists to women’s participation remains evident in the day-to-day operations of many Conservative synagogues\(^ {23}\) and was noted in a recent analysis of the Ratner Center data that was authored by Steven M. Cohen and Tova Halbertal. In particular, Halbertal noted that whereas “in one or two generations, a lot of differences have been erased,” most senior rabbis and officials at large synagogues remain male, a fact that “filters down to every aspect of the shul” and causes women to be reticent about seeking out leadership roles in the areas of worship or synagogue management.\(^ {24}\)

Beyond the attainment of equality in matters of Jewish ritual, the feminist modernist agenda includes a broader reassessment of sacred texts and of halakhah. Benjamin Scolnic pressed this point back in 1986 when he wrote: “Now that Jewish feminism has won its legal victories, it is time to seek the legitimacy which can only be granted through commentary on the Bible.”\(^ {25}\) In a related development, members of the movement’s Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) wrote a series of responsa that offered pioneering views on such matters as miscarriage and observance of the laws connected with the mikveh.\(^ {26}\) Modernist rabbis were also active in creating and promoting new ritual ceremonies (published in the 1998 edition of Moreh Derech, the rabbi’s manual put out by the RA) that included the simhat bat (celebrating the birth of a daughter); a memorial ceremony for neonatal death and burial; a grieving ritual following a miscarriage; and sensitization toward those coping with infertility.
Reflecting the view of feminist advocates, Eilberg notes that “the more profound work is yet to come, as the underlying ideological and theological issues come to the fore. . . .” Feminist theologian Judith Plaskow suggests that Conservative Judaism has moved through its “first stage” in a process leading “from egalitarianism to feminism or genuine equality.” Indeed, modernists among the Conservative Jewish leadership, such as Elliot Dorff and Judith Hauptman, have welcomed the discussion launched by Rachel Adler’s provocative monograph, *Engendering Judaism* (1998). Effusive praise by Dorff and Hauptman appears on the book’s jacket cover, even though the author characterizes halakhic Judaism as “a legal tradition that privileges men and disadvantages women; historical and textual materials that foreground the experiences and achievements of men and obscure those of women; a spiritual tradition that impedes women from seeing themselves as part of the divine image while impeding men from seeing their partial reflection of the divine.”

The full implementation of feminist goals may face obstacles. Mainstream “equity feminism,” which sought to achieve nondiscriminatory treatment of women, relied on grassroots support among committed Conservative Jews both in cities and among the movement’s suburban stronghold. Female members of suburban Conservative synagogues have demanded total access to ritual and leadership roles for themselves and for their daughters. At the same time, most of these suburbanites tend to be socially conservative with regard to Jewish family values. In many intact households, for example, the husband is still the primary breadwinner while the wife provides care for the children. Commenting upon similar middle-class American women, Christina Hoff Sommers asserts: “They believe they have made an autonomous choice; they also believe their way of life offers them basic advantages [such as] community.” It remains to be seen whether these congregational grassroots opinion-makers will be receptive to a new “gender feminist” critique that calls into question the fundamental underpinnings of religion and society. Will the mass of Conservative Jews be receptive to viewing their Judaism as “a male religion” based upon “patriarchal texts”? For, if so, the “correction” is both a radical alteration and a strident challenge to their own present lifestyle.

**Homosexuality: Significant Progress for Modernists**

Early in the 1970s, mainline Protestant denominations began to shift their position on homosexuality. By 1975, the National Council of Churches, the Quakers, the United Church of Christ, and the Unitarians had adopted civil rights planks defending the rights of gays and lesbians, albeit without any discussion concerning whether homosexual acts were still to be considered sinful. In 1983, the United Church of Christ officially endorsed the ordaining of homosexual ministers. Support for revising religious views toward homosexuality gradually gained momentum among other mainline Protestant groups. Similarly, in 1987 and 1989, the institutions of Reform Judaism adopted resolutions extending full equality to homosexuals in all aspects of temple life, and Reconstructionist rabbis followed suit in 1992. The Conservative movement confronted the issue of homosexuality in 1989, when the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards considered two related questions: Could
a homosexual serve in a position of synagogue leadership as an executive director? And could an RA-affiliated rabbi serve as the spiritual leader of a gay congregation? Pressure by gay rights advocates led to a resolution adopted by the RA convention of May 1990 that “supported full civic equality for gays and lesbians in our society” and urged “synagogues and arms of our movement to increase our awareness, understanding and concern for our fellow Jews who are gay and lesbian.” Significantly, this resolution tackled civic rights but avoided confronting the biblically ordained religious view of the homosexual act being a to’evah (abomination). That same year, however, halakhic discussion concerning the issue of to’evah was initiated in a responsuum proposed by Bradley Artson, who advocated the viewing of gay and lesbian lifestyles among caring and monogamous adults as normative rather than deviant behavior. This proposal was not accepted by the movement’s halakhic authorities. The resulting stalemate highlighted the emerging traditionalist and modernist positions. One official Law Committee responsuum, authored by Roth, reasserted the traditional prohibition, while a counter-responsuum written by Dorff called for further study. Following the 1992 RA convention, the movement set up a commission to study the issue of homosexuality.

During the ensuing year, pressure emanated from B’tzalmaynu (lit., “In Our Image”), an alliance of gay activists within the ranks of Conservative Judaism. Impassioned debate marked the next RA convention. In a keynote address, Harold Schulweis advocated change in Conservative Judaism’s opposition both to homosexuality and toward defining Jewishness by patrilineal descent. Schulweis insisted that “morality cannot be pushed aside as an extra-legal datum. Morality is the essential attribute of halakhah. . . . [And] the moralization of halakhah requires courage.” Discarding his prepared speech the following day, JTS Chancellor Ismar Schorsch delivered a forceful rebuttal:

Homosexuality is not the all-absorbing issue of Conservative laity. They did not rise in protest when the CJLS last year refused to redefine the basic Jewish institutions of marriage, the Jewish family and the rabbinate. They appear ready to heed the compassionate resolutions of both the USCJ [United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the movement’s lay organization] and the RA to fully welcome gays and lesbians into the local synagogue without sanctioning their lifestyle as equally normative. Conservative laity did not call on the RA to create a commission on human sexuality, and the USCJ, along with the Seminary, served notice that it would not participate. …

Ultimately, the commission on sexuality, whose members included Joel Roth and Elliot Dorff, issued a series of position papers. Roth, whose 1984 responsuum on behalf of the ordination of female rabbis had delighted the modernists, this time provided an exhaustive study of classic texts that frustrated gay advocates. Roth reasserted the view of traditionalists that loving and caring relationships by two consenting homosexual adults were nonetheless a to’evah. In the words of the commission’s “Pastoral Letter on Human Sexuality,” Roth’s views were shared by other members of the CJLS who openly worried about the future viability of the Jewish family if homosexual relations are condoned. They also asserted that a change of this magnitude in Jewish law would establish a slippery slope which would make it impossible for us as a movement to affirm
Jewish sexual values of any sort. Some within this group also argued that changing moral perceptions are . . . not sufficient reason for changing long-standing law.\textsuperscript{41}

Dorff’s paper, in contrast, asserted that “new scientific findings, and more importantly, the testimony of homosexuals themselves, provide us with ample evidence that those who are clearly homosexual do not choose to be so.” Since no moral choice was involved, “homosexuality should no longer be considered an abomination, and all halakhic disabilities should be removed.”\textsuperscript{42} In practical terms, the rabbinical school at JTS sided with Roth and continued to forbid the entry of openly homosexual students. Reflecting the less definitive stance within both the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards and the committee on sexuality, the RA adopted a posture of intentional ambiguity when faced by members who revealed their homosexual orientation. For example, Gerald Zelizer, the president of the RA between 1992 and 1994, formulated a compromise response when an RA member (ordained by JTS), after divorcing his wife, revealed his homosexuality and sought the services of the RA’s placement commission in obtaining a new position.\textsuperscript{43} A slightly different case involving a homosexual Conservative rabbi occurred four years later. This time, the RA leadership adopted a definitive policy of refusing to delve into the private sexual practices of RA members in good standing.\textsuperscript{44}

Much greater ferment occurred at JTS, where students supportive of gays and lesbians agitated for change. Despite mounting student/faculty pressure, Schorsch upheld the halakhic position of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards in rejecting homosexual applicants to the rabbinical school. In Schorsch’s view, to act on the basis of individual autonomy, in the name of “inclusivity within Jewish life,” was to risk blurring the distinction between Conservative Judaism and non-halakhic (Reform and Reconstructionist) Judaism.\textsuperscript{45} At a time of historic polarization between Judaism’s religious right and left, Schorsch insisted that his movement maintain a mediating role as the principled center.\textsuperscript{46}

Although the traditionalists within Conservative Judaism have held firm, the future regarding the attitude toward homosexuality remains uncertain. If six of the 25 members of the CJLS become persuaded of the halakhic validity of Dorff’s published views,\textsuperscript{47} a responsum will be approved that both declares gay and lesbian lifestyles to be normative and advocates rabbinic officiation at homosexual commitment ceremonies. Although such a responsum would represent merely one “valid approach” within a diverse movement, the momentum for change might prove inexorable, particularly given the presumed high levels of support it would garner in campus communities and in urban settings. Indeed, Dorff has predicted that “there will be an increasing number of Conservative rabbis who will look forward to affirming same-sex unions.”\textsuperscript{48} In this situation, many Conservative rabbis might find themselves facing the dilemma currently confronting traditionalist mainline Protestant ministers, who, in the words of journalist Peter Steinfels, “find they dare not speak their names, lest they be defined by simplification of their views on gays in the churches.”\textsuperscript{49}

Notwithstanding—and in contrast to overwhelming support for the practical elements of egalitarianism—the mass of Conservative Jews may not be willing to accept homosexual lifestyles as normative. Are suburban, middle-aged Conservative Jews emotionally ready to employ a homosexual rabbi, cantor, educator, or youth director? Are they prepared to publicly congratulate gay and lesbian couples’ anniversaries in the synagogue bulletin and from the \textit{bimah}? Will they be content to have the
movement change its traditional boundaries regarding the modest numbers of subur-
ban homosexuals while at the same time retaining limitations placed on the far larger
group of intermarried families? Substantial resistance might arise, at least until the
generation of recent college graduates becomes old enough to serve as lay leaders in
mainstream Conservative synagogues.

Theology: A Subtle Victory for the Modernists

In recent years, U.S. Jews, as most Americans, have become more modernist in their
personal theology. In 1963, prior to the challenges posed to societal norms in the late
1960s, fully 65 percent of Americans believed the Bible to be the literal word of God.
Within 15 years, however, this number had dropped dramatically to 38 percent, and
among the subgroup of white Americans, the overall tally had fallen even further to
29 percent. Growing skepticism toward biblical literalism has been particularly
marked among college graduates, a subset of the population in which Jews are dis-
proportionately represented. Nevertheless, belief in God has remained strong—ac-
cording to a poll conducted in 1989, nearly half of all college-educated Americans
viewed the Bible as “the inspired word of God,” even if not all the verses were to be
taken literally.

This shift toward nonliteralist beliefs has had consequences for Conservative
Judaism’s ideology. Contemporary theologians of the movement have sought to har-
monize their philosophy with the views of educated laity. A modernist approach, how-
ever, stands in contrast to Conservative Judaism’s founding ideology: accepting be-
lief in the commanding voice of God from Mt. Sinai, Solomon Schechter and other
luminaries acknowledged halakhic change only begrudgingly. These founders es-
poused what Elliot Dorff has categorized as “Conservative Judaism 1” (“CJ1”), as
opposed to “CJ2” (which viewed the Torah as the human record of encounters with
God); “CJ3” (the Torah seen as the product of divinely inspired authors); and “CJ4”
(representing Mordecai Kaplan’s view of Torah as being exclusively the product of
man).

CJ1, the most traditional of several formulations of revelation prevalent within the
movement, posited the following assumptions:

1. God dictated His will at Sinai and at other times.
2. These revelations were written down by human beings—hence the diverse
   sources of biblical literature.
3. Since the revelation to Moses was by far the clearest and most public, it is the
   most authentic recording of God’s will.
4. From Sinai on, Jewish law and theology belong to an interpretive framework in
   which the rabbis of each generation expound and apply the laws of the Torah.
5. Thus, the authority of Jewish law is based upon the fact that it is God’s will, as
   stated first in the Torah and then by the rabbis of each generation. Rabbis are
   authorized to modify the law for their time, but only with extreme caution.

In 1977, Dorff offered a contemporary exemplar of CJ1—the revered Abraham
Joshua Heschel, whose writings he quoted extensively:
“God spoke” is not a symbol. . . . The speech of God is not less but more than literally real!

It is as if God took these Hebrew words and breathed into them of His power, and the words became a live wire charged with His spirit. To this day, they are hyphens between heaven and earth.

If God is alive, then the Bible is His voice. No other work is worthy of being considered as a manifestation of His will.56

This traditionalist formulation was still prominent in the mid-1980s, when the Conservative movement’s historic ideology commission was formed. In its report, Emet Ve-Emunah, the commission sought to articulate those theological principles held in common by the movement’s left, right, and center.57 Accordingly, the section on “belief in God” reflected CJ1 as being within the range of views on the matter of revelation:

Some of us conceive of revelation as the personal encounter between God and human beings. Among them there are those who believe that this personal encounter has propositional content, that God communicated with us in actual words. For them, revelation’s content is immediately normative, as defined by rabbinic interpretation. The commandments of Torah issue directly from God.58

From 1984 on, some of the most vocal proponents of CJ1 withdrew from the give and take within the movement. In 1984, a number of rabbis seceded from the RA and formed a new group, the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism (UTCJ), which later became known simply as the Union for Traditional Judaism (UTJ).59 Filling the gap, modernist theologians moved to center stage within Conservative Judaism, seeking to harmonize theological views with the liberal beliefs of their students and of growing numbers of other American Jewish adults.

As early as 1983, the principal advocate of this effort, Neil Gillman, made his case to the movement at large. “Our long-standing reluctance to articulate our explicit theology for Conservative Judaism has, in our day, become counterproductive,” he wrote. “Our laity has become increasingly interested in [theological issues] and increasingly impatient with our reluctance and/or inability to place the central issues of Jewish theology on the agenda of our preaching and teaching.”60 Two years later, Gillman succeeded in introducing a course at JTS on Conservative Jewish theology. His passion for imparting the modernist theology subsequently led to the publication of two influential volumes: Sacred Fragments (1990), which focused on the implications of a modernist view of revelation at Sinai; and Conservative Judaism: The New Century (1996), which included a modernist assessment of the “founding ideology.”61

In Gillman’s teaching and writing, Heschel was reinterpreted in light of Gillman’s own denial of any “propositional content” in the revelation at Sinai.62 Moving away from the numerous citations provided by Dorff, Gillman stressed a different Heschel statement, “the Bible itself is a midrash.” According to Gillman, “the cardinal sin for Heschel is literal mindedness.”63 Heschel, he argued, did not accept Torah as God’s words. Rather, “what reached the ear of man was not identical with what has come out of the spirit of the eternal God. . . . [T]he source of authority is not the word given in the text, but Israel’s understanding of the text.”64

Heschel’s nonliteral-mindedness came close to Gillman’s central claim of Torah’s
being “myth”—in the anthropologist’s sense of “a structure through which a community organizes and makes sense of its experience.” In particular, Gillman viewed Torah as a myth shattered by the onslaught of modern critical scholarship, whose fragments and halakhic imperatives nonetheless remained both sacred and relevant to contemporary Jews.

A revised version of Dorff’s *Conservative Judaism: Our Ancestors to Our Descendants* (1996) manifested the movement’s theological shift toward the modernists. The views of primary traditionalist theologians, such as Schechter and other founders, were presented as matters of historical interest without current ideological consequence. (As early as 1991, a survey essay by Dorff on key Conservative thinkers omitted Schechter, Alexander Kohut, Sabato Morais, and Zacharias Frankel from consideration.) Unlike the founders, however, Heschel remained crucial to Conservative Judaism as a voice for social justice and spiritual pursuits. Following the reinterpretation of Heschel as presented in Gillman’s *Sacred Fragments*, in Lawrence Perlman’s *Abraham Heschel’s Idea of Revelation* (1989), and in Gordon Tucker’s re-examination of Heschel’s *Torah min hashamayim* (1962), Dorff moved Heschel out of the column CJ1 and into CJ2.

According to Dorff, Joel Roth is the only currently identifiable CJ1 advocate. Since his affirmation of the halakhic opposition to gay and lesbian rights, Roth’s approach to Jewish law has been stigmatized by many modernists. Tucker, for example, rejects Roth’s “positivism,” which rejects the possibility that there might be “anything outside the [halakhic] system to which the rule of the system might be required to conform.” Reflecting the view of other modernists, Tucker insists instead on “the option of acting [beyond the halakah] under the mandate of principle [‘the good’].”

Listing Roth as the lone advocate of CJ1 subtly implies that his theological views are isolated and marginal. It is noteworthy that Roth has never articulated in writing whether or not he subscribes to CJ1. Instead, he has insisted that all theories regarding Sinai are irrelevant to the task of authentic Jewish leaders. In Roth’s view, the aim of classical theologians was to reformulate Jewish thought to be consistent to the extent possible with the new trends in philosophical thought, but without requiring surrender of central Jewish tenets [for example, the internal interpretative procedures of halakhah through which “God’s will is ultimately reflected.”] That must be the goal of modern Jewish thinkers, too.

In the absence of “mainstream” traditionalist theologians, the RA/USCJ Torah commentary, *Humash ez hayim*, discusses revelation in the weekly Torah portion “Yitro” (ex. 18) without mentioning CJ1 as a representative view within the movement. Hailing this liturgical accomplishment in 1999, Tucker urged the Leadership Council of Conservative Judaism to use this opportunity to “make our congregants aware of how integral the historical approach is to the very essence of Conservative Judaism.” Similarly, in Solomon Schechter schools and in other educational institutions training future Conservative Jewish elites, CJ1 is not presented as an option. Instead, students are taught to regard the Torah as a cultural document in the context of ancient Near Eastern texts, the product of human hands seeking contact with the divine. When youngsters ask about the connection of God to the Torah narratives,
they are offered modernist answers similar to the following statement in *Emet Ve-Emunah*:

> Revelation is the continuing discovery, through nature and history, of truths about God and the world. These truths, although always culturally conditioned, are nevertheless seen as God’s ultimate purpose for creation. . . . Revelation is an on-going process rather than a specific event.  

Such an understanding of Torah has halakhic consequences for the movement’s future, offering a comfortable context for advocating a modernist stance in areas beyond the confines of theology. As noted by Gillman in an article written for the USCJ laity:

> If Halakhah [is the will of God] . . . then the system as a whole and its internal procedures are rigidly determined, the parameters within which we can expand or contract the system are intrinsic, set by God. Human freedom of interpretation is correspondingly limited. . . . If the authority for halakhah is rooted in human communities, our own community can then reshape the system in terms of our faith commitments, and the parameters within which we do this work are extrinsic, set by an individual community of Jews, wherever this community wants to set them.  

Ironically, the move toward a modernist consensus (that is, Dorff’s categories of CJ2 and CJ3, given the diminishing ranks of those following Mordecai Kaplan’s CJ4) has occurred without a significant outcry from traditionalists. Although a number of them, notably Daniel Gordis and Ira Stone, have published recent books dealing with Jewish theology, they have avoided a head-on confrontation with modernist views of revelation. Modernism has also been well received among the laity, which is generally persuaded by biblical criticism’s debunking of scriptural literalism, yet at the same time thirsts for modes of spiritual nourishment, personal meaning, and “God-talk.” Accordingly, Harold Kushner’s modernist explanation of theodicy (*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*), joined by the writings of Dorff, Gillman, Schulweis, and David Wolpe, now constitute the core of a modernist theological literature for the Conservative Jewish laity.

### Intermarriage: Traditionalists Hold Their Ground

Intermarriage became a Jewish communal concern in the early 1970s. For the first time, significant percentages of the descendants of America’s East European Jewish immigration of 1870–1924 were marrying non-Jews. Social boundaries among young Americans on campus and at work were loosened, as were the norms against interfaith matrimony. One by one, mainline Protestants, the Reform, and the Reconstructionist movements in Judaism, and even Roman Catholic clergy became reluctant to speak out against exogamy. Becoming modernists in so many other arenas, Conservative Judaism could easily have followed the same path. In the words of Avis Miller, author of the 1995 statement on intermarriage put out by the Leadership Council of Conservative Judaism (LCCJ), “it would be easy for us to open our doors
The American climate rejects the notion of boundaries that separate people into groups, and endorses policies of inclusivity.” And yet, swimming against this tide of acceptance, the movement maintained its traditionalist commitment to advocating marriage within the faith. To this end, the executive vice president of the USCJ, Jerome Epstein, authored and championed a booklet titled “The Mitzvah of Endogamy” in which he noted:

Among many American Jews, the growing response to this current crisis is to throw up our hands and say “We cannot stop it!” Instead, many urge that we simply “adapt” to this “new reality.” To this capitulation, Conservative Judaism says “No!” We must restore the Jewish communal will to promote the mitzvah of endogamy.

Significant opposition to the traditional stance against intermarriage was never expressed within the movement. Nor did modernists challenge the Law Committee’s rabbinic standard that prohibited rabbinic officiation or even attendance at intermarriage ceremonies. The competing groups within the Conservative movement accepted the wisdom of those in the Jewish communal world, notably Steven Bayme of the American Jewish Committee, who cautioned members attending the RA and USCJ conventions about the peril posed by exogamy. Conversely, Conservative rabbis and lay leaders rejected claims by Egon Mayer of the Jewish Outreach Institute and by other “optimists” that intermarriage was both inevitable and a blessing to American Jewry. Representing all arms of the movement, the LCCJ issued a statement in March 1995: “We are determined and committed to challenge intermarriage, rather than accept it.”

As part of the effort to force Conservative Judaism to define its stance regarding intermarriage, some modernists questioned whether the decision made by the Reform movement in 1983—to accept as a Jew anyone reared Jewishly and whose mother or father was Jewish—should be adopted as well by the Conservatives. This led to a counterattack by traditionalists and subsequent discussion in the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. The committee’s deliberations eventually led to the elevation of the requirement of matrilineal descent to a standard of rabbinic practice, as such prohibiting “ascription of Jewish lineage through a legal instrument or ceremonial act on the basis of anything other than matrilineal descent.”

Conservative modernists did not openly challenge the classical rabbinic requirements regarding conversion; no sizable cluster of modernists sought to match the leniency practiced by Reform rabbis. Choosing to convert out of one’s religion of birth had been unusual in American life until the 1970s. But this social pattern changed rapidly during the ensuing decades. By 1993, demographers Barry Kosmin and Seymour Lachman noted: “Various polls suggest that somewhere in the range of 25% to 30% of the American public switch denominations in their lifetime. . . . Most changes to achieve religious consensus in the home occur at the time of marriage, at the birth of the first child or when children become school age.” As early as 1979, Harold Stern’s national survey among the Conservative Jewish rabbinate estimated that some 4,800 persons were converting under Conservative Jewish auspices each year.

In yet another victory for traditionalists, rabbinic requirements for conversion were raised by the RA plenum to the status of a standard rabbinic practice (within the afore-
mentioned matrilineal resolution). Thereafter, RA rabbis were prohibited from the “supervision of a conversion which omits tevilah [immersion in the mikveh] in the case of females, or tevilah and brit milah [circumcision] in the case of males.”

One modernist, Harold Schulweis, did attempt to launch proselytizing outreach to unchurched Gentiles. “Why not open our arms to those who seek a spiritual way of life?” he asked in an article published in *Moment* magazine in 1997. “Are we not told in the classic text of *Avoth DeRebbe Nathan* . . . that Jews are urged to bring people beneath the wings of the divine presence exactly as Abraham and Sarah had done?”

In this realm, however, most RA members agreed with Ismar Schorsch’s assertion that priorities for conversion ought to focus upon non-Jews married to Jews rather than the world at large.

The sole arena of major internal rivalry with regard to Conservative Judaism’s approach to intermarriage has been the role of intermarried families within Jewish religious life. Responding to the Reform call for “outreach to the intermarried” in 1979, Conservative modernists brought the issue of outreach to the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. Three years later, the committee published a booklet that reflected a range of opinions on what was termed “the mitzvah of keruv”—that is, what ought to be the role of intermarried Jews and their spouses in the life of the Conservative synagogue.

Traditionalists on the committee, represented by Joel Roth and Daniel Gordis, argued that strict boundaries had to limit the involvement of intermarried couples. They stressed that a “non-Jewish parent should have no role whatsoever in a Jewish life cycle event” and “no participation in any aspect of synagogue function.” Roth urged as well limitations on the Jewish partner, suggesting that an intermarried Jew not be called up to the Torah unless the day marked a yahrzeit. Further, he noted, “allowing an intermarried Jew to hold office in the synagogue . . . suffuses intermarriage with an aura of legitimacy that is counter-productive.” In sum,

These restrictions will undoubtedly appear harsh. They are intended to be so. As much as the principle of keruv is one which must be emphasized, it must never supersede the traditional distinction the halachah makes between Jew and non-Jew. . . . Jewish society and tradition look askance upon intermarriage, and our practices regarding these families should reflect that.

In contrast, modernists led by Kassel Abelson sought to soften previous strictures in the hope that a more welcoming stance would encourage conversion of the non-Jewish partner in intermarriages. Abelson insisted that non-Jewish parents be given a role in life-cycle events involving their children and not be hindered either in attending services or in participating in educational programs or social events.

An alternative to the Roth position regarding the Jewish partner in intermarriages was approved by eight members of the committee, primarily pulpit rabbis, who affirmed that “individual rabbis must have the maximum possible latitude in formulating strategies for preventing and treating intermarriage.” Over time, this latter view emerged as the reigning position within the movement. Nonetheless, a CJLS responsum that opposed the hiring of intermarried Jews as professional role models (rabbis, cantors, youth leaders, or educational directors) was affirmed by Jerome Epstein of the United Synagogue; and both Ismar Schorsch of JTS and the National Ramah
Commission reasserted their insistence that only matrilineal Jewish or halakhically converted children be enrolled in the movement’s educational summer camps.

It is unclear how long such positions will be maintained within the movement. Given the growing number of patrilineal Reform Jews who are reaching adulthood and becoming engaged to Conservative Jewish peers, how long will RA members continue to resist the pressure to recognize these individuals as Jewish without the requirement of symbolic acts of conversion? As the number of intermarried households inside Conservative synagogues increases, will the demands for greater acknowledgment of the non-Jewish partner force the establishment of a “quasi-member” status? With ever greater numbers of intermarrieds in their midst, how comfortable will RA members be in continuing to publicly promote endogamy? The modernist position may eventually prevail regarding such issues—although it is also possible that committed Conservative lay leaders and their rabbis, viewing with concern the blurring of boundaries between Gentile and Jew in neighboring Reform temples, may side even more firmly with the traditionalists in their fight against making concessions.

**Implications for Personal Practice**

An atmosphere of passionate internal competition has not resulted in Conservative Judaism’s frustration or decline, but rather in an intensification of religious practices among grassroots core groups of younger members. Return to observance is part of a thirst for spirituality among Americans in general. In many instances, this search has led to a reexamination of traditional forms of religious practices. Some Catholic parishes, for instance, have noted that young people searching for mystery and transcendence are drawn to the idea of reinstituting masses in Latin. Certain mainline Protestant denominations have attracted younger members by reintroducing observances of “historic Christianity” such as frequent “communion services” and the “historic church calendar.” Reform and Modern Orthodox Judaism have also responded to this trend by reincorporating traditional observances, as evident in their respective prayer books, *Gates of Prayer* and the *Artscroll Siddur*. It is within this atmosphere of religious experimentation that modernist and traditionalist Conservative Jews have promoted higher levels of observance among the laity.

As Chancellor Schorsch, a traditionalist, noted to the RA convention in 1993, “the voice of our laity . . . is telling us that they want more Judaism, not less. . . . They want a larger dose of religious intensity. They want to study deeply and daily.” Similarly, RA President David Lieber, a modernist, called the attention of rabbinic colleagues to the growing numbers among the laity “who are willing to accept a religious discipline to control the chaos both within and without.” In examining national survey data culled by the Ratner Center in 1995, social scientists such as Steven M. Cohen acknowledged a shift to the right in the movement, “a more committed, more involved Conservative membership . . . opting for increasing levels of intensive Jewish education both for themselves and for their children.”

Among Jews as well as among Catholics and Protestants, resurgent interest in religious practices has been most noticeable among younger members. Notably, 51 percent of Conservative synagogue members aged 35–44 are attending services at least
once a month, in contrast to 31 percent of the members aged 55–64. Questioned about the young urban professionals in his Washington, D.C. congregation’s alternative “traditional service,” Jeffrey Wolberg noted: “The fact that our service is more demanding does not scare them away; on the contrary, that is what they want. Their attitude is, ‘If I am going to do this, I might as well really do it.’”

Symptomatic of a return to tradition, Conservative synagogues have shifted the focus of Sabbath observance from late Friday night to Saturday morning. The liturgy has become more Hebraic at the expense of the responsive English readings found in older prayer books. Certain former practices have been restored, notably the placement of the bimah (the reader’s table) in the midst of the congregation, and the similar positioning of the shaliah zibur, who leads the prayers, away from the assemblage and toward Jerusalem. As Schorsch noted: “For the cantor to face the congregation violates the concept and integrity of that role. . . . [O]ne can hardly pray for God facing a full house or even an empty one, nor is anything more distracting for the congregants.” Once guided by decorum, the “high church” format of the 1950s and 1960s has yielded to a more informal experience in which sermons have been deemphasized. Reflecting a consensus among colleagues, Robert Kirschner concluded that “worshippers today speak of the need for ‘warmth’ and ‘sharing.’ They yearn for intimacy, openness and dialogue.”

In part, the blossoming of Sabbath morning attendance is a function of the growing number of members whose children attend Conservative day schools. Parents attending regular services often send their children to parallel “Tot Shabbat” or junior congregation services. Moreover, inspired by their children’s growing Hebraic skills (acquired either in day schools or at supplementary schools), greater numbers of Conservative Jews are learning how to read the Torah, chant the haftorah, and lead prayer services. This trend toward fluency has been enhanced by Hebrew literacy courses, basic Judaism courses, adult bar- and bat mitzvah classes, and “learners’ minyanim.” The increasingly common “sit-down” kiddush offered after services has also forged a sense of Sabbath community among members who are far apart geographically during the rest of the week.

On the movement level, programs and publications have sought to enhance Conservative Jews’ personal observance. In 1995, for example, the Rabbinical Assembly—United Synagogue Commission on Commitment and Observance adopted a “shake the lulav” campaign, which not only spurred the purchase of sets of lulavim and etrogim by thousands of Conservative Jews, but also reinforced the growing popularity of building family sukkot. Currently, a CD-rom is being developed as part of a campaign to encourage congregants both to “kasher” their residences and to keep kosher outside of the home. The Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs sponsored a series of books and workshops by Ron Wolfson of the University of Judaism on “The Art of Jewish Living,” as well as operating a campaign to encourage the daily laying on of tefillin (“The World-Wide Wrap”) and a daily minyan project focused on the evening (ma’ariv) prayer service. A similar theme of increased religious observance was evident in the RA publication and distribution of Shavit Artson’s It’s a Mitzvah (1995).

Conservative Jewish institutions furthered this process by advocating a return to the study of traditional texts. For instance, JTS instituted hevruta Talmud study, in
which partners study a talmudic text together before attending a scholarly lesson
given on the text. Dozens of congregations followed suit, and in 1995, the RA and
JTS expanded this experimental collaboration by establishing Talmud study circles
numbering thousands of members. Equally encouraging has been the enthusiastic re-
ception accorded to Schorsch’s weekly e-mail commentary on the Torah portion and
the popularity of JTS on-line courses in sacred texts. In September 1999, Jerome
Epstein of the United Synagogue launched “Perek Yomi,” in which Conservative
Jews were asked to sign up to study a chapter of Bible each day; more than 10,000
individuals answered the call.\textsuperscript{105}

Forging of a Centrist Movement

Today’s interaction among diverse advocates for “tradition and change” was precisely
the type of vital dynamic envisioned by Conservative Judaism’s founders. Solomon
Schechter and his peers insisted that a stagnant and unchanging Judaism would grad-
ually slip into oblivion, whereas gradual change (in harmony with the past) would as-
sure the continuity of the Jewish tradition. The wisdom of this perspective has been
vindicatated as the ferment of the past two decades has seen the forging of a new level
of self-assuredness among Conservative Jews.

Earlier leaders of JTS, from Schechter (1905–1915) through Louis Finkelstein
(1940–1972), had resisted denominational labels. As Schechter told leaders of the
United Synagogue nearly 80 years ago, “I have always resisted any adjectives to my
Judaism . . . Orthodox, Conservative, Reform. I am a Jewish man, and not a party
man.”\textsuperscript{106} Gerson Cohen (1972–1985) became the first chancellor who “dispensed
with any hesitancy over the use of the word Conservative as a denominational label,”
calling upon his constituents to forge a “militant center” for American Jewish life.\textsuperscript{107}
In harmony with Cohen, Benjamin Kreitman, the executive vice president of the
United Synagogue of America, insisted (in an address given at the 1976 RA conven-
tion) that Conservative Judaism mature from a “tendency” into a “movement”\textsuperscript{108} and
accordingly spearheaded the organization’s changing its name to the United Syna-
gogue of Conservative Judaism.

A distinct liturgical flavor for Conservative Judaism was evident in the publication
of \textit{Siddur Sim Shalom} in the mid-1980s, and even more so in its 1988 edition.\textsuperscript{109}
Assertion of a unique ideology and approach to practical halakhah was furthered with
the publication of \textit{Emet Ve-Emunah} in 1988 and by Isaac Klein’s \textit{A Guide to Religious
Practice} (1989). That year, the RA began to publish its responsa in English transla-
tion, proudly portraying Conservative Judaism’s practices to the public at large. In
1990, Chancellor Ismar Schorsch was comfortable in asserting that “a synagogue of
excellence must be imbued with a robust sense of \textit{movement consciousness}. Ideology
and orientation . . . are a function of national affiliation.”\textsuperscript{110}

Some observers have posited that “movement consciousness” and modernist ini-
tiatives are not internally driven, but rather reflect a sense of no longer looking over
Conservative Judaism’s right [Orthodox] shoulder. Agreeing with this assessment
was Robert Gordis, chairman of the ideology commission and editor of \textit{Emet Ve-
Emunah}, who observed in the late 1980s that “one important by-product of women’s
ordination will be the beginning of the end of the psychological reign of terror exerted by contemporary Orthodoxy over some rabbis and laymen in the Conservative movement.”

Other observers view these trends in a less sanguine manner. Seeing the tilt of Reform Judaism in the 1990s toward tradition—alongside the modernist shift in various aspects of Conservative Judaism—some predicted a blending of American Judaism’s left and center. Thus, David Novak, a disgruntled former member of the RA, warned that “the convergence of Reform and Conservative—which basically means that Conservatives are becoming Reform Jews—is very apparent.” Ironically joining with the ultratraditionalist Novak in this prognosis is ultramodernist Irwin Kula, who forsees “post-denominationalism,” with a gradual demise of the religious movements.

Yet a third perspective envisages the forging of a uniquely centrist path in Conservative Judaism’s response to American social and intellectual trends. In the words of Arnold Eisen, “Conservatism . . . has staked its claim to the center in the last two decades, more forcefully than ever before, arguing its middle position on grounds of halakhic flexibility and aggadic pluralism.” On issues of theology, women’s equality, and civic rights for Jewish gays and lesbians, Conservative Judaism has exhibited similarities with other modernist movements within American Judaism. Yet in moving toward tradition in matters of liturgy and observance, Conservative synagogues have much more in common with the “davening” life of traditionalists, notably those in Modern Orthodox congregations. As Schorsch indicated to the 1987 RA convention, following the admission of women into the Conservative rabbinate:

It cannot be stressed too forcefully, that the kind of religious services resulting from our decisions . . . are both traditional and egalitarian. We have not discarded Hebrew, truncated prayers, or abandoned the Torah reading. . . . I am convinced that in time the blend of egalitarianism with traditionalism will become a distinctive mark of the Conservative synagogue.

Also in harmony with traditionalists is the RA’s maintenance of “standards of religious practice” rather than the adoption of total rabbinic autonomy. Conservative rabbis are not permitted to participate in interfaith marriage ceremonies; to accept patrilineal descent; to conduct remarriages without the issuance of a Jewish bill of divorce; or to accept converts lacking the requisites of immersion in a mikveh or circumcision. Moreover, like other traditionalist rabbinical schools, the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Ziegler Rabbinical School of the University of Judaism remain unwilling to admit homosexual applicants. As Neil Gillman recently surmised, this “is our boundary issue, where we have chosen to place our limits.”

Thus, the most recent interplay of modernist and traditionalist tendencies has maintained a balance between left and right. Today, core groups of Conservative Jewry increasingly fulfill a role that Jack Wertheimer has dubbed “Jews of the center,” a mediating force between Orthodoxy and Reform. Paraphrasing the words of well-traveled scholar-in-residence Steven Bayme, one who enters a Conservative shul on Shabbat morning encounters a distinctively egalitarian yet undeniably traditional ambiance. And as the Ratner Center survey concluded: “Most members of Conservative synagogues today . . . are genuinely attracted to Conservatism; they unabashedly reject Orthodoxy and Reform; and as a group, they demonstrate a clear affinity for . . .
elements of the Conservative movement’s ideology.”

In a more recent assessment of these encouraging data, Nancy Ammerman concluded that “the picture that emerges is of a religious community that has created ways of gathering together, educating its youth and adults, and holding out models of observance that are helping to sustain that community in spite of ‘acids of modernity’ that might erode belief and practice.”

To a great extent, the transition from the turmoil reminiscent of the 1970s and early 1980s to today’s relative tranquility can be attributed to the strong leadership displayed by the heads of JTS, the RA, and the United Synagogue. These leaders have effectively balanced internal pressure from modernists, traditionalists, and post-halakhists within their grassroots constituencies. Will their successors be motivated to follow suit, thus preserving Conservative Judaism’s distinctiveness? Or will they tilt the movement to the right, joining forces with the liberal-Orthodox Edah and other modernist elements of Orthodoxy, thereby pushing their Conservative modernist rivals into an alliance with the Reform? Alternatively, will they become partisan modernist advocates in Conservative Judaism’s approach toward feminism, homosexuality, intermarriage, and theology, in this way blurring the movement’s boundaries with “liberal Judaism”?

In sum, will Conservative Judaism in the U.S. continue to steer a unique course at the center?

Notes

1. See Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America (New York: 1993), 137. Others, however, feel that the internal life of the Conservative movement remained uniquely cohesive. In the words of Abraham Karp: “The extremes in beliefs and life-style in Conservative Judaism are much closer than the extremes in Orthodoxy” and “much more similar in ideology and practice than their counterparts in the Reform movement.” See Karp, Jewish Continuity in America (Tuscaloosa: 1998).


3. For discussion about Jewish modernists and traditionalists, see Milton Steinberg, Basic Judaism (New York: 1955), 23–30.


7. See, for example, Pamela S. Nadell, They Would Be Rabbis (New York: 1999).


9. Naomi Levy, To Begin Again (New York: 1998), 10–11. Also see Susan Grossman, who notes the discomfort of congregants with a female rabbi who is at the same time the mother of small children—a discomfort that is felt all the more when the rabbi is either pregnant or on maternity leave. See her article, “The Dual Nature of Rabbinic Leadership,” Conservative Judaism 43, no. 1 (Fall 1995), 45.


14. This liturgical change was also adopted in the primary minyan at JTS in 1998.


17. Ibid.


19. The exception is Camp Ramah in Canada, which remains nonegalitarian; Camp Ramah in the Berkshires, N.Y. offers both egalitarian and nonegalitarian *minyanim*, as do certain Solomon Schechter day schools such as the one in West Orange, New Jersey.


23. For example, sessions on “men’s spirituality” were offered at the 1998 and 1999 conventions of the Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs, as a remedy for the perceived erosion of “sacred male space” in Conservative congregations. The primary ideologue for “men’s spirituality” is Seymour Rosenblum, who has advocated the creation of Sabbath afternoon “Anshei Emet Men’s Spiritual Groups.”


32. Ibid.


34. See Wertheimer, *A People Divided*, 156.

35. Wertheimer notes that, at about the same time, the Central Conference of Reform Rabbis discussed a resolution that would reaffirm heterosexual marriage as the sole path to covenantal “kiddushin” while still defending the civic rights of homosexuals (ibid., 106).

40. Ismar Schorsch, “Marching to the Wrong Drummer,” ibid., 16.
42. Ibid., 39. Dorff argues against Roth’s assertion that “halakhic behavior” on the part of an observant homosexual would be the adoption of celibacy. According to Dorff, this is “not in accord with the classical Jewish views of the body and sexuality as God’s gifts, whose legitimate pleasures it is a sin to deny” (ibid., 38).
43. In the compromise worked out by the placement commission, the rabbi was allowed to submit his own applications to the synagogues of his choice. Normally the placement office forwards all applications.
44. In this instance, the placement commission forwarded the rabbi’s applications as it would those of any other rabbi in good standing.
46. Schorsch’s defense of the need for a viable “center” mediating between left and right has also applied to his support for religious pluralism; see his address at the installation of the World Council of Masorti/Conservative Synagogues, Caldwell, N.J., 19 Dec. 1999.
47. Dorff’s views are articulated in his *Matters of Life and Death*, 139–151.
52. Recent annual surveys conducted by the American Jewish Committee indicate a surge in theism among Jews. In 1997, for example, 65 percent affirmed that “there definitely is a God,” 22 percent responded “probably,” and only 3 percent stated “definitely no.”
53. Gallup, Jr. and Castelli, *The People’s Religion*, 61. In this regard, it should be noted that former JTS Chancellor Gerson D. Cohen departed from the policy of his predecessors back in the 1970s, when he permitted members of the Bible faculty to teach the Pentateuch in a critical scholarly manner—something that was previously limited to the teaching of the Prophets and the Writings.
56. Ibid., 120. Also see Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Moment at Sinai,” in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: 1996), 13–16, in which he states: “Biblical revelation must be understood as an event, not a process. The belief in revelation claims explicitly that there is a voice of God in the world. The decisive event in the spiritual history of our people was the event that occurred at Sinai—God gave His word to the people, and the people gave its word of honor to God.”
57. See Robert Gordis’ introduction to *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (New York: 1988), 3. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the commission included two traditionalists, David Novak and Miriam Klein Shapiro, who were leaders of the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism (UTCJ). Shortly thereafter, Novak left the RA, as did several of his UTCJ colleagues.
58. Ibid., 20.
59. See Tucker, “The Ordination of Women,” in which he notes that UTCJ ideologues identified their CJ1 views with those of the founders, including Schechter, Morais, and Frankel.


63. Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments*, 24. In contrast, Eugene Borowitz delivered a lecture at the JTS Lehrhaus symposium in 1993 in which he stressed that, for Heschel, the cardinal sin was to deny the authenticity of Sinai. A similar traditionalist interpretation of Heschel was offered by Samuel Dresner in the same lecture series. Another concurring view is that of Alexander Even-Chen, “The Torah, Revelation and Scientific Critique of Abraham Joshua Heschel,” *Conservative Judaism* 50, nos. 2–3 (Winter/Spring 1998), 71.


65. Gillman, *Sacred Fragments*, 26. Elsewhere, Gillman wrote: “No God I believe in goes up and down, or speaks words. When applied to God, these statements must be understood as metaphorical, not literal, and however well these metaphors reflect my ancestors’ experience of God, these metaphors remain the creation of human beings” (“For Heaven’s Sake,” *United Synagogue Review* [Fall 1999], 14).

66. See Elliot N. Dorff, “The Concept of God in Conservative Judaism” *Judaism* 44, no. 1 (Fall 1991), 429–441. In *Conservative Judaism*, 51, Gillman also omits the founders’ view of revelation, presenting Schechter and others as the forerunners of the view that the Jewish community needed to bring about changes in religious practice in harmony with changing religious needs.

67. Similarly, Ismar Schorsch, who is not mentioned in the earlier edition of Dorff’s *Our Ancestors to Our Descendants*, is now categorized as a CJ2 thinker. Schorsch has stressed on numerous occasions that the uniqueness of Conservative Judaism is tied to “sensing divinity both in the Torah and in the Oral Law,” but not in a literalist manner. Similarly, Seymour Siegel identifies Gerson Cohen in the CJ2 category—see his “A Revealed Law,” in *Conservative Judaism and Jewish Law*, ed. Seymour Siegel (New York: 1977), 181.

68. Gordon Tucker, “God, the Good, and Halakhah,” *Judaism* 38, no. 3 (Summer 1989), 365–376.

69. See Dorff, *Our Ancestors to Our Descendants*, 107ff, for a discussion of Roth’s views.


71. See *Humash etz hayim* (New York: 2001), Parshat Yitro.


77. A similar search for spirituality is also evidenced at JTS; see Gustav Niebuhr, “Seminarians Shift from Intellect to Soul,” *New York Times*, 12 April 1997.


80. Similarly, in preparation for my term as president of the RA, I authored a series of pamphlets on interdating and intermarriage, plus a book titled *It All Begins with a Date: Jewish Concerns about Intermarriage* (Northvale, N.J.: 1994). I also embarked on a 20-city speaking tour that featured talks with rabbis as well as talks and interviews with individuals at Jewish community centers, Jewish federations, and Jewish newspapers. For further details regarding the effort to promote endogamy, see Alan Silverstein, “RA/USCJ Joint Committee Responding to Intermarriage,” in *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* (New York: 1997), 223–224.


84. On the rationale behind this decision, see Alexander Schindler, “Facing the Realities of Intermarriage,” *Judaism* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1985), 85–88. For Conservative arguments against patrilineal descent, see the articles by Joel Roth, Robert Gordis, and Arnold Goodman in ibid.

85. In order to be adopted as a standard of rabbinic practice, a proposal must receive a near unanimous vote of approval (20 of 25 votes) from the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, followed by approval by three-quarters of those voting at the RA convention.


87. See Harold Stern’s entry in “Gerut and the Conservative Movement: A Symposium,” *Conservative Judaism* 33, no. 1 (Fall 1979), 28–31. Currently the national rate of conversion into Judaism has fallen significantly both because of wider acceptance of intermarriage and because of the “solution” provided by the criterion of patrilineal descent.

88. This “fine tuning” was necessary since, in the 1960s, a letter of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards had established that omitting *hatafat dam* (the symbolic bloodletting performed on a male who had previously undergone a non-Jewish circumcision) was not necessarily forbidden.


90. For discussion of the booklet, see Samuel Weintraub, “Project Link: Sensitive, Conservative Outreach,” *Conservative Judaism* 43, no. 1 (Fall 1990), 39–49.


95. See Wertheimer, *A People Divided*, 98, 128.

96. On the return to traditional practices, see Michael Panitz, “Completing a Century,” in Fierstein (ed.), *A Century of Commitment*, 145ff.


100. Wertheimer (ed.), *Conservative Synagogues and Their Members*, 26.


103. Robert Kirschner, “Is There Still a Place for the Sermon?,” ibid. 48, no. 3 (Spring 1996), 15.


105. In 1996, Epstein had written an ambitious platform titled “The Ideal Conservative Jew: Eight Behavioral Expectations,” intended for synagogue leaders and committed members. More recently, in a speech at the November 1999 USCJ convention, he called upon leaders to shift their focus from group activities to “mentoring” the spiritual growth of individual Jews.


114. This was noted by Ismar Schorsch during a debate he had with Shlomo Riskin at the Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York. The subject of the debate between the two rabbis (Conservative and Orthodox) was religious pluralism in Israel.


Judaism, Exile, and the State of Israel in Postwar American Jewish Theological Discourse

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From many points of view, the Second World War represents a watershed in Jewish thinking in the United States. Together with writings by theologians and thinkers of the previous generation such as Mordecai M. Kaplan, theological and philosophical works began to be published by rabbis, writers, and thinkers who had come of age between the two world wars—some of whom belonged to a “third generation” of American Jews. In philosophical inclination, way of thinking, and methodology, their work differed from that of their predecessors. For example, the religious thought of the prewar generation has a marked sociological leaning, which makes it difficult to define this work as theological in the strict sense of the term. Such was not the case with Jewish theological discourse beginning in the second half of the 1940s, one of whose outstanding characteristics was its manifest theological content.

Among the outstanding molders of the postwar discourse focusing on such issues as God, revelation, and theodicy were Joseph Dov Soloveitchik (1903–1993) and Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972). In many respects, their books and articles blazed the trail for Jewish religious discussion in the United States from the 1940s onward. In addition to these two (who, of course, were immigrants and thus not really part of the “new” generation of American Jewry), there were other, younger (and American-born) figures to be considered, among them, Milton Steinberg, Will Herberg, and Ira Eisenstein. What all of these thinkers had in common was their writing of religious-philosophical works beginning in the years around the Second World War: that event and everything connected to it had a marked influence on what they thought and what they wrote.

The postwar Jewish theological discourse had two faces. It drew both its inspiration and its criteria, directly or indirectly, from the age-old traditional sources of Judaism. Moreover, there is evident a detectable resistance to the pragmatic-theological (or liberal-rational) thought of the previous generation. In a number of respects, these thinkers, rabbis, and theologians can be identified with a “neo-Orthodox” stream of thought. The term “neo-Orthodoxy” as it functions in this essay is not my own application. Will Herberg used the term when stressing why it was necessary
to remold a theology that would stand equidistant from Orthodox fundamentalism, on the one hand, and from what he saw as the frozen sterility of Reform Judaism, on the other. In our context, this label applies to those individuals who believed that contemporary Jewish theology must confront positively the challenges posed by modern life. That is, they were prepared to appropriate certain aspects of modernity that appeared to bear the potential for religious or moral meaning—although only after a careful examination of the ways in which modern ideas could be shown to have roots in (or at least a connection with) the classical literary sources of Judaism.

For this reason, this neo-Orthodox school of thought should be seen as a branch of Jewish thought that, like traditional thought, holds that the Written Law (torah she-bikhtav) is the word of God as given to Moses at Sinai—with, moreover, unwritten commentaries and a method of interpretation, the first and clearest expression of which was the Oral Law (torah shebe'al peh), and the continuation of which is found in traditional Jewish religious, halakhic, philosophical, and mystical literature. At the same time, in contrast to other Orthodox streams, this neo-Orthodox current did not absolutely reject the modern, secular way of life. Hence, unlike traditional Orthodoxy, which demanded that the Jew decide between absolute divine authority as the basis of traditional Judaism and against autonomy as a principle underlying modern humanism; between technological culture and a culture based on historical consciousness; between spontaneity and restraint, this new, postwar stream in Judaic thought offered diverse models for a reality in which one might bring contrasting worlds together, the traditional with the modern.

Thus, the postwar religious discourse is primarily unique in that it is neither a continuation of Reform-liberal thought nor a simple reiteration of Orthodox thought in the ordinary sense. In the view of the thinkers that associated with this new trend, both the Oral Law and the Written Law are obligatory sources of halakhah and the Jewish way of life, although perhaps not their exclusive sources. Derived from this basic conception is the attempt of the new theologians to reexamine and reappraise Judaism from the standpoint of its traditional sources, at the same time divesting themselves of rational, phenomenological, and even existentialist approaches that come to understand and evaluate Judaism on the basis of universal criteria such as morality. Likewise, the new religious discourse demands a serious attitude toward both the halakhah and the midrash as reflecting Jewish religious experience.

Contemporary Protestant theology in the United States in the years under consideration had a significant influence on this new discourse and was used by Herberg when he defined the third current (neither Reform nor fundamentalist Orthodox) as “neo-Orthodoxy.” In fact, the thought of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, who had many followers in American theological circles, was also labeled “neo-Orthodoxy.” In the Protestant context, the term was mainly derived from Barth’s recognition that one should not define theological concepts on extratheological foundations—that is, on scientific or philosophical sources outside religion. Whereas “naturalistic theology” (identified with, among others, Thomas Aquinas, Bishop Anselm of Canterbury, René Descartes, and Wilhelm Leibniz) strove to explain the principles of religion and to prove religion’s veracity in the light of reason, Barth totally rejected this conception. In his view, one should not explain or formulate the concepts of religion by
means of reason. Rather, one should do so only within the setting of religious discourse. Similarly, postwar American Jewish theologians were not primarily interested in harmonizing religious truth with reason and rational thought. On the contrary, the new theological discourse was in many respects a kind of “return to religion”—if not to a traditional way of life, then to the more “traditional” ways of thinking about religion.

It is in this context that we should understand Herberg’s argument concerning the postmodern character of the “third generation” of Jewish religious thought: disassociating itself, on the one hand, from modern thought and, on the other hand, seeking to reappropriate religious traditions that earlier generations had bequeathed, which had been rejected by the rationalism of the modern age.

Hence, the basis of this discourse is a protest against the previous generation of Jewish thought. From a thematic viewpoint, this protest translated into an abandonment of the pragmatic theology based on sociological conceptions (exemplified, for example, by John Dewey) in favor of theological thinking in the stricter sense. Instead of viewing Judaism as a culture, with a focus on the Jewish people and Jewish society as creators of that culture, the new theology emphasized such concepts as God, religious experience, and theodicy.

From here derives the significance of the new Jewish religious discourse vis-à-vis the land and state of Israel. In our times, the state of Israel as a collective enterprise of the Jewish people is an undisputed fact, yet the problem of the religious meaning of Israel as a Jewish state—and even the question of whether it has such a meaning—emerged most acutely in the new Jewish theological discourse, alongside such related issues as the meaning and limits of Jewish solidarity. Indeed, I would argue that, as a result of the “return” of postwar religious thought to many of the premises of traditional Jewish theology, the concept of Judaism underwent a process of spiritualization. One consequence of this was the transformation of Judaism into a religion of universal redemption, similar in this sense to Christianity and the Eastern religions. This process finds expression in the contention of some of the new theologians that the uniqueness of Judaism lies not in its specific content but in its use of a unique religious language that draws its metaphors and similes from traditional Judaism and the traditional Jewish historical experience. From the vantage point of this conception of Judaism, national components embedded in Judaism would either be deemphasized or transformed into universal spiritual symbols. Thus, the ties of postwar (and later) Jewish theologians to the state of Israel were marked by ambiguity.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, who may be seen as a harbinger of the new religious discourse in American Judaism, was not indifferent to Jewish nationalism in its Zionist form. He saw Zionism as an idea embracing both the land and the people of Israel. At the same time, he recognized that Zionism had not emerged from the halakhah. Rather, it derived from an outburst “from the soul, out of the love of Israel, out of the Aggadah.” This he was prepared to accept; however—and here we arrive at the core of his theological conception—he refused to embrace any atavistic nationalist conceptions, according to which the secret of the Jewish people’s survival was its will to live. “The will to live,” Heschel stated, “is preserved only if there is a meaning to
life.” This meant, he continued, that “men need not only a will to live, but meaning as well.”

Thus, at the height of the Second World War, he, too (like Soloveitchik), addressed the concept of covenant as being central for the existence of the Jewish people as a collectivity. In his words, the people of Israel were once again faced by a fateful choice: either be crushed by the mountain, as was the case (according to the midrash) when they stood at Mount Sinai; or else undertake to accept the covenant. If Nazism was a manifestation of pagan revolt against the God of Israel, then the meaning of the covenant must be a renewed commitment and dedication to realizing the vision of the prophets regarding the kingdom of God. After all, Heschel stressed, the disaster that had come upon the Jewish people in particular and upon mankind in general was, in the final analysis, a clear proof of the danger inherent in man’s rejection of God’s command, which calls for establishing a just society. For that reason, although Heschel was ready to recognize the strength and positive qualities of Zionism, it was clear to him that neither the state of Israel as it was, nor the Zionist idea in itself, could have the power to impart supreme meaning to life. As he noted:

The land of Israel is holy and precious. Our people live there in honor and security. But the question that perturbs the young here and in America is: What is the supreme meaning of a life of honor and security? Which direction should we give to our lives? What are the values and what are the traits that we are commanded to cultivate?

Heschel did not doubt that the direction in which to seek this supreme meaning was that of religious (rather than ethnic or national) uniqueness. In this context, he asserted: “As to us, the supreme meaning of existence, of our existence as Jews, is being religious witnesses.”

In those cases in which Heschel grants religious meaning to the state of Israel in particular or the Zionist enterprise in general, he does so only out of their connection to the fate of the Jewish people. That is, the state of Israel in itself is not suited to take on a dimension of holiness. Neither is it a form of answer to the Holocaust, since nothing is dearer than human life. From Heschel’s point of view, the Holocaust remains without a response. There is no meaningful link between it and the state of Israel. Interestingly, in the wake of the Six-Day War of 1967, Heschel was prepared to acknowledge that the state of Israel had a certain dimension of holiness. Yet this, he argued, was not a holiness derived from the land (let alone the state). Rather, it originated in the fact that the state of Israel was capable of maintaining the survival of the Jewish people and of saving Jews in distress. In other words, its holiness was bound up with the “covenant of fate,” to use Soloveitchik’s term, which formed a foundation for the religious covenant of mission of the people of Israel.

These perceptions and beliefs became common among Heschel’s younger followers. However, their thought took on other emphases and centers of gravity. In order to comprehend this transformation, let us examine the thought of one of the central spokesmen of the new theological discourse in America, Arthur Green, who has pronounced Heschel’s religious position and has even taken it to an extreme. With regard to Jewish ethnicity and the central place of ethnic belonging in Judaism, he once asserted: “For me, the difference from the Gentile is not the positive principle of
Judaism. Not at all.”17 If we read this remark in the context of how Heschel defined the character of the Jewish people as a religious rather than an ethnic and national collectivity, then Green was affirming Heschel’s view that the Jews constitute an entity that must ultimately be evaluated only on the basis of its intent to fulfill religious and spiritual values. There is no doubt that the roots of Green’s uncompromising spiritu-
alist position, as expressed in his book Bakshu panai, kiru beshmi (Seek My Face, Speak My Name),18 are to be found in Heschel’s understanding of the nature and character of the Jewish people as being determined, above all, by religious and spiritual values. Nevertheless, as will become clear, Green has gone beyond his master in a number of ways.

In contrast to other branches of knowledge, Green believes, theology is a very personal matter. While it is necessary not only for the individual ego (the “I”) but also for the collective ego (the “we”), the latter is no more than a function of the conscious-
ness and will of the individual ego, which determines and defines the “we” to which it binds itself. Whenever the theologian tries to express some “we,” thus af-
firming a worldview that he or she hopes the community underlying the “we” can share, the “I” is still to be found. Every such theological utterance becomes what Green calls “a drawing of others into sharing the activities of the author’s life in the world and into the latter’s will to express his experiences in the language and symbols of a community possessing a common spiritual tradition.”19 In the Jewish case, this community is kneset yisrael, the assembly of Israel as a whole, and in a more limited sense the havurah—a group of peers who can converse with one another and pray as one body. Each such group exists within other groups, which are concentric and overlapping, until they encompass and embrace the whole House of Israel, and perhaps even beyond it.20

The theologian, according to Green, does not deal in objective research or with the mere domain of knowledge. Nor is theology the search for truth. Rather, it is an act of translating the world of the individual’s—the theologian’s—intimate experiences into the religious language and symbols proper to a certain cultural field. By commu-
nicating his or her personal experience through words, metaphors, and symbols, the theologian essentially turns readers into partners in shaping his or her individual world.

Green’s task as a Jewish theologian is first and foremost to translate the religious-
mystical experience—universally human in its nature—into the symbols, language, and traditions of Judaism. Naturally, the religious experience comes first. It is only afterwards that the communicative stage arrives, in which the person undergoing a religious experience turns to Jewish culture as a storehouse of profound symbols, or more precisely, as a language of faith. In other words, the language of Jewish faith and symbols becomes adapted to the experience of the Jewish individual. This oc-
curs, however, only after the need has awakened as a result of a religious experience: and this alone is the proper subject matter of theology. Indeed, like Heschel and Soloveitchik, Green declares that religion does not begin with doctrine (Green would add, not even with the tradition), but with the yearning for prayer. Theology can come only afterwards. After all, theology is but contemplation of knowledge that the heart already knows.21

In the case of the Jew, one who experiences “religion” turns toward the age-old
treasures of Jewish tradition and conducts a kind of transaction with Judaism, saying basically, “I will adopt its language”—by performing commandments, saying prayers, and so forth. In addition, such an individual turns toward the Jewish community, binding his or her own personal experience into the wider historical narrative of the Jewish people. In this way, the individual both adapts to and becomes part of the chain of Jewish tradition.

Green’s theological discourse is essentially an attempt to indicate the ways in which the individual may adopt and adapt “the language of faith” of Judaism for the purpose of expressing religious experience. To accomplish this, Green resorts to the world of mysticism. In contrast to halakhic Judaism—that is, the halakhah that determines the formulas of prayer in the most formal sense—the Kabbalah and mysticism generally derive their potency from spiritualizing not just everyday reality but also the Torah and its commandments, such that these are transformed into symbols with religious content. According to Green, this is the purpose of Jewish theology: in and of itself, theology as a religious contemplative and experiential activity has nothing in common with Judaism or any other religion. Likewise, religious experience—the object of theology—has no specific religious identification.

Turning back to Heschel assists us in comprehending the conceptual basis of Green’s approach. Heschel, who coined the term “depth theology,” viewed this theology as a method of contemplation that is not forced into rational categories of subject and object. Moreover, the subject matter of theology, according to this approach, is first of all the religious experience before it has been translated into words and symbols, which are cultural products. The religious impulse is the individual’s intimate experience in facing the firing kiln of existence. Only later, when resorting to language and its symbols, does the individual consider Judaism as a means of providing expression to personal religious experience. That is to say, the turning toward Judaism begins with prayer, or more accurately, with an impulse that the individual feels after having been aroused by the power of the religious experience.

Therefore, the pivotal point of departure for this theology is not the occasion of the giving of the Torah at Sinai or the story of the creation of the world, or the story of the Patriarchs. Modern Jews (and this applies first of all to American Jews), cannot approach Judaism via an objective platform of national identity or collective truth. Rather, Judaism can be encountered only as a source of symbols that are capable of giving expression to, and confirmation of, religious experience. The choice of Judaism as a language through which the individual relates to his or her most subjective and intimate experience is in itself an extremely subjective choice, and as such is not devoid of a certain arbitrariness. In sum, the adoption (and adaptation) of Judaism is founded on the assumption that, over the generations, the Jewish “language of faith” has accumulated great experience in expressing the universal contents of the religious experience.

This conception of Jewish existence as essentially a religious existence founded on the individual’s experiences and reactions helps us to fathom the full implications of Heschel’s remarks concerning the existence or nonexistence of the exile in our times. The fact that the state of Israel cannot exist without an army, he argues, teaches us that the homeland itself is still caught up in a situation of exile. We are living in an evil world, Heschel concludes, hence it is quite apparent that Israel has not yet been
redeemed. The concept of exile embodied in the subjective, universal tendencies of
the new theological discourse among American Jewry does not characterize or de-
scribe only the exile of the Jewish people, and it is certainly not meant to be under-
stood exclusively in the earthly, historical sense. Exile—that is, a situation of ban-
ishment—is a concept that indicates a general existential situation: that is, the
unredeemed status of modern man in general. Man’s alienation from the world; the
situation of society; a human race that has lost its bearings—all describe a situation
of exile. The symbol of this situation, however, is the exile of the Jewish people.

This line of theological argument in American Judaism began in the second half of
the 1940s. With Judaism viewed from a more spiritual point of view, the key to the
concept of exile lay in man’s existence with God, not in the national-historical expe-
rience of the Jewish people. According to this conception, the community and the peo-
ple are not the purpose of the religious faith experience. Not just in Heschel’s depth
theology, but in Soloveitchik’s teachings, too, the fellowship and the covenantal com-
nunity exist only by virtue of, and for the sake of, the struggle against existential
loneliness by the man of faith. As Gerald Blidstein puts it: “The location of the indi-
vidual in the community does not flow from biology or citizenship. Rather it derives
from his link to the community’s values—and these values obtain illustration through
personal spiritual achievements.”

We may learn similar things from Milton Steinberg’s turn, late in life, toward a the-
ological reappraisal. Steinberg (1903–1950) was one of the most influential figures
in the early Reconstructionist movement and was counted among the outstanding
young religious philosophers of the second generation. He was also a prolific au-
thor whose many books and articles impressively expressed the basic conceptions of
liberal Judaism as embracing an optimistic faith both in progress and in the healing,
perfecting power of reason. His writings contributed a great deal to the popularity of
the Reconstructionist movement.

Nevertheless, as a sensitive thinker, Steinberg was alert to the intellectual, cultural,
and social transformations that began to make themselves felt from the 1930s. He un-
derstood that Jewish philosophy could not afford to ignore these transformations if it
aspired to respond to the concrete needs of the Jew. Although most of his philosop-
ical and theological conceptions were shaped in the 1920s, years that were charac-
terized by pragmatism and optimistic liberalism, he felt—before most of his con-
temporaries—the incapacity of the old “truth” to answer the religious needs of the
new generation. Moreover, it seems that he was one of the first to aspire to shed
the pragmatic sociological concepts that Reconstructionism had adopted, while at the
same time remaining true to that portion of the movement’s ideology that centered on
the aspiration to ensure the survival of the Jewish people as a religious-cultural or eth-
ic collectivity in the modern world.

An examination of his “novelized” work of religious philosophy, As a Driven
Leaf, demonstrates that despite Steinberg’s great esteem for Mordecai Kaplan and
his identification with the Reconstructionist movement, he should not be viewed pri-
marily as a Reconstructionist thinker. In As a Driven Leaf, the motif that drives the
plot does not fit in with Reconstructionist ideology. After all, Reconstructionism lo-
cated the main problem of Judaism neither in the theological field nor in the some-
what abstract field of beliefs and doctrines, but in the issue of the possibility of Jewish
collective survival in modern times. In Steinberg’s novel, whose protagonist is the Talmud’s archetypal heretic, Elisha ben-Abuya (also known as Ah. er, “the Other”), the central theme is the problem of preserving the moral, intellectual, and religious integrity of the individual. Likewise, in his later book, *A Partisan Guide to the Jewish Problem*, Steinberg reiterates that one of the chief flaws of contemporary Jewish thought is the absence of the traditional definition of Judaism’s essence as a religion, plain and simple.

One might fairly say that it was only in the last stages of his thinking that Steinberg clearly expressed religious reasoning, according to which a person’s directing himself or herself toward God is no more than a way in which to realize the aspiration imprinted on the human spirit to transcend itself. In fact, this conception formed an underpinning (albeit not always explicitly articulated) of Steinberg’s religious thought from the very beginning, whose roots should be sought in what he terms “the metaphysical hunger” that distinguishes the human race. Steinberg saw man primarily as a spiritual seeker and wanderer. Man’s distinguishing trait is not reason. In fact, Steinberg argued, we can find reason among other living creatures as well; hence, from this standpoint, there are only relative differences of degree between man and beast. What does distinguish man, in Steinberg’s view, is his interest in those questions that reason cannot deal with: that is, metaphysical questions such as man’s place in the universe, man’s fate, and man’s purpose, as well as man’s nexus to his Creator, the Creator of the universe.

It is on the basis of Steinberg’s faith in “the metaphysical hunger” that we can understand his early rejection of the notion that sociology could ever become a substitute for theology. In contrast to the pragmatic, sociological character that typified the thought of his contemporaries and that of his teacher, Mordecai Kaplan, Steinberg’s theological thinking had from its beginnings a noticeable theological-philosophical character in the ordinary sense, as well as a metaphysical tendency.

Hence, the apparent duality that typifies Steinberg: Reconstructionism on the one hand, and metaphysical religious thought, on the other. It seems that he explained, or at least aspired to explain, the importance, meaning, and relevance of Judaism mainly in subjective theological terms, striving to show how Judaism fostered and perfected ways of contending with all of those questions originating in man’s “metaphysical hunger.”

The apparent duality in Steinberg’s thought can be resolved by distinguishing between his ideology and his theology. At the level of ideology, a Jew must be concerned with the survival of Jewish society, which fulfills the role of maintaining and passing on the traditions and metaphysical-religious teachings of Judaism. That is to say, Steinberg saw Reconstructionism essentially as an ideology dealing with the survival of Judaism, whereas he saw Jewish theology as the field in which the thinker searches for the answers that Judaism is capable of giving to existential philosophical questions. The Reconstructionist ideology, as Steinberg understood it, did not conflict with his effort to conceive a Jewish theology. Thus, there is not necessarily any inconsistency in the fact that, despite his loyalty to Reconstructionist ideology, Steinberg did not accept Kaplan’s basic assumptions, which saw Judaism as a “civilization” rather than a religion in the strict sense.

Motivated by these insights, Steinberg strove to exchange the questions and the so-
ciological modes of thinking that Reconstructionism had adopted for classical philosophical methods. In this context, he believed that it was the duty of the Jewish theologian to find the point of equilibrium between the norms, the moral values, that Judaism posited, and the logical ways of thinking that Greek philosophy had developed. Steinberg saw Judaism as mainly a religion that, by virtue of its moral and personal concept of God, had ordained moral norms (such as equality and mercy) that Greek culture and society were not aware of. At the same time, Hellenism had developed and passed on to Judeo-Christian culture the rational method of proof and demonstration. Steinberg attempted to mold a metaphysical concept of God that would respond both to man’s “metaphysical hunger” and to issues of morality facing the modern Jew. Although Steinberg’s depiction of God fitted in more closely with “the God of the philosophers” (to use Pascal’s phrase) rather than with “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” it should nonetheless be regarded as a seriously thought-out religious concept.

Given the drift of his thought, Steinberg quite naturally found a great deal to interest him in modern European theology, which was quicker than its American counterpart to respond to the challenges posed by modern life. Steinberg was influenced by Barth, Paul Tillich, and the American Reinhold Niebuhr, and, of course, by Buber and Rosenzweig. During the late 1940s, he included a good deal of material with a speculative, theological character in his articles and sermons. Existential theological problems, which until then had not found their place in his liberal thought, became more central. For example, he turned to such issues as the existence of evil as well as to the problem of how to define God. Unfortunately, since he died soon thereafter (in 1950), it is difficult to discern any essential change with regard to his overall conception of Judaism. It is therefore hard to speak in terms of a new theological system in Steinberg’s later writings. We may point, however, to one fundamental change in the deep structure of his thought. If the sign of liberal thought is confidence in inevitable progress and in the power of reason, then Steinberg’s thinking from the second half of the 1940s is not “liberal” in the strict sense of the word. The significance of this development lies essentially in the fact that his newly critical approach—particularly his attempt to redefine the subjects and issues with which Jewish theological discourse in America had to contend—also informs the work of younger critics such as Will Herberg (1902–1977). In anticipating the critical arguments of the third generation, Steinberg helped to have their thought accepted and placed at the focus of the intellectual agenda.

Indeed, in a sharp critique of another of Steinberg’s books, Basic Judaism, Irving Kristol called on Steinberg to reshape Jewish religious thought into theology proper: that is, into a coherent philosophical system focusing on issues such as the nature of God, His will, and the question of the existence of evil. Kristol argued that the optimistic, non-Orthodox Jewish philosophy of Steinberg’s generation had nothing to offer to him or to anyone of the new generation who had experienced the horrors of war. Liberal, non-Orthodox Jewish thought, Kristol claimed, was superficial, and only this optimistic superficiality could explain its stubborn avoidance of the spiritual problems troubling his generation.

For his part, Herberg claimed, in an essay written in May 1949, that the historical situation in which postwar Jews found themselves—American Jewry in particular,
and modern Jewry in general—resembled in its basic lines the situation of German Jewry after the First World War. A cultural awakening had taken place in German Jewry in the wake of that war. Herberg argued, which was expressed first and foremost in the religious thought of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. This thought, he continued, was principally a challenge to the optimistic liberal, non-Orthodox thought that had characterized Jewish thinking since the struggle for emancipation. A similar development needed to take place in the religious thought of American Jewry, Herberg contended.\(^40\)

In an earlier article, Herberg had called for the creation of a neo-Orthodox theology that would be different both from the theology of traditional Orthodoxy—which hesitated to be compromised by issues of the contemporary world—and from the optimism of modern secularism that Stalinism and the Second World War had refuted. Such a theology, he believed, should be based on modern Jewish thought similar to that of Buber and Rosenzweig, on the one hand, and on non-Jewish theological discourse, such as that of Barth, Tillich, and Niebuhr, on the other.\(^41\) Moreover, this new theology should turn its gaze toward God—that is, the God who acts in history as a moral personage.\(^42\) (Two decades later, this mood was given wide currency by Eugene Borowitz, the leading theologian in the Reform movement.\(^43\) Unlike Steinberg, Herberg did not see man as a spiritual wanderer who was moved by spiritual hunger. Rather, he viewed man first of all as a living creature seeking balm for his most concrete distress. In that sense, religion sprang from real life.\(^44\)

From the mid-1940s on, one of the basic arguments deployed by younger theologians such as Herberg was that the sources of the religious concepts and norms prevailing in the preceding generation could be located not in Judaism itself, but in Greek and general philosophy; as such, they were foreign to authentic Judaism. The younger theologians saw themselves as committed to recovering the Jewish concept of God—or, in their words, the biblical God—that is, the personal and eternal God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This self-perception was well expressed by the young Steven Schwarzschild when he stated unambiguously that, unlike the members of the second generation, the members of the generation that followed aspired to find a way to “God Who does not let man get off easily, Who disturbs the thinking, and the peace and tranquillity in the existing social order, the God Who calls for revolt and dissatisfaction with existing reality.”\(^45\) The striving for a reshaping of the traditional concept of God characterized all stages of development of the new Jewish theological discourse in the United States. As early as one of Will Herberg’s first essays, he explained that the idea of God as a cosmic principle, or as an existential abstraction and an ethical principle alone (in the manner that western philosophical traditions had molded the God-idea), could neither furnish the basis of a religion nor answer the individual’s religious needs. Still less was this western God applicable to the Hebrew concept of God as crystallized in the Bible and in the literature of traditional Judaism.\(^46\)

The younger theologians, in sum, sought to base their religious conceptions on premodern ways of thinking, such as the Bible and Hasidism, on the one hand, and postmodernism, existentialism, and phenomenology, on the other. In a recent interview, Arthur Green stated unambiguously: “I am a postmodern man who thinks that we have reached the end of the rational-scientific age, which did not accept that there was
wisdom in the ancient tradition of the religions.” It was on the basis of this premise that he explained his delving into traditional Jewish texts. In a similar vein, Harold Kushner noted that “Jewish ethnicity” of the sort preached by his mentor, Mordecai Kaplan, was not capable of providing a response to the religious needs of his generation. “Consensus and folkways,” he declared, “are too thin a gruel to satisfy the spiritual hunger of today’s American Jew.” And the Conservative religious thinker Seymour Siegel essentially wrote the epitaph of naturalism in American Judaism:

Whenever there is religious fervor among American Jews today, there is a thirst for transcendence. . . . Even the Columbia University campus, where John Dewey taught, does not want Deweyan religion; it prefers the Baal Shem Tov. If young Jews cannot find God in Judaism, they will look for Him in strange places. Kaplan taught a God who is totally understood. It turns out that such a God is irrelevant.

The God that young Jews search for, Siegel continued, “is real and concrete only when, contrary to the concept of God which was taught by Kaplan, He is beyond one’s grasp and understanding.”

The separation of the new Jewish theological discourse from the notion of Jewish identity as conceived in the conceptual framework of collective nationalism was clearly expressed in the religious thought of Arthur A. Cohen (1923–1990). In his seminal book, The Natural and the Supernatural Jew (1967), Cohen claimed that the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world, and the consequent situation of “foreignness” that so often accompanied them, had always been basic facts of Jewish existence. However, he argued, we should not relate to these data as to mere historical facts. Instead, they pointed to a deeply rooted and essential truth about Jewish belonging and identity, and about Judaism itself: exile, from the geographic standpoint, completes and parallels foreignness in its religious, metaphysical significance. For that reason, Cohen stressed, the “foreignness” that was decreed upon the Jews (or, to use a religious term, the galut) is first of all a theological concept. Moreover, in his view (similar to that of Rosenzweig), the concept of exile was aimed from the beginning at removing the Jews from the boundaries of natural, human history. True, the destruction of the Temple, the expulsion from the land of Israel, and the formation of the Jewish diaspora were all historic events that can be understood in the framework of rational, causal, and historical contexts. But not so the exile. According to Cohen, “exile” emerged only in connection with the concept of God and a metahistorical interpretation of Jewish history.

Thus, Cohen’s conception of exile has two faces. On the one hand, it transforms “exile” from being a concept describing a historical reality into a metaphysical concept. On the other, it fixes this metaphysical concept as the axis around which Jewish history itself revolves—and on the grounds of which we are to interpret Judaism itself.

Such a conception has extremely far-reaching ramifications. For if the concept of exile does not signify the outward, concrete historical reality (as does the concept of diaspora), then changing the outward historical reality cannot in itself change the metaphysical condition of exile. If “being in exile” really defines the Jew, then it is not an outward condition that can be described and appraised in rational, empirical
terms. Rather, as noted, it is a metaphysical axis around which Jewish history revolves on its way to redemption. Thus, whereas the state of Israel is located within the setting of history, as is the Zionist enterprise of “ingathering the exiles”—which is seemingly the essential ingredient of messianic redemption—Jews are (metaphysically) still “in exile” and as such still have a religious role in the context of the messianic process. Indeed, according to Cohen, every individual Jew, in addition to the Jews collectively, has the status of a witness to the metaphysical condition of the world. The exile of the Jews, their being in foreign lands, emphasizes and essentially signifies the cosmic exile both of the world and of man. “Exile,” in other words, attests to a fundamental and still uncorrected flaw in the ordering of the universe.

In Cohen’s theological conception, the destiny of man is to diverge from the bounds of historical reality by virtue of religious adherence to God. But this destiny cannot be fulfilled by “the natural Jew,” that is, the Jew connected by ties of rational causality to a concrete social and national existence. It is precisely the “supernatural” Jew, who is cut off from historical reality via adherence to God, who is capable of fulfilling man’s destiny. And since the purpose of Judaism as a religion is establishing “a supernatural community” that forces its patterns on reality, only those Jews who have succeeded in transcending the bonds of historical reality are capable of founding this society.  

In accordance with Cohen’s theological view, the state of Israel may have brought to an end the historical reality of the Jewish people’s being dispersed against its will. However, since the state of Israel exists on the historical plane, its establishment and existence should not be seen as any kind of response to the galut, which is a timeless, theological category indicating a metaphysical, cosmic phenomenon. That is to say, from a theological standpoint, exile of the Jewish people actually relates to the world as an unredeemed world and to the Jewish people as a messianic people.

There is no doubt that, according to Cohen’s approach, it is proper to accept and even to welcome the sovereign existence of the state of Israel. From the historical standpoint, Israel’s establishment ought to be seen as an essentially positive phenomenon not only because it is capable of serving as a kind of sanctuary for Jews who needed a refuge, but mainly because it had freed the Jew from the condition of historical exile. The establishment of the Jewish state had liberated the Jews in the sense that, henceforth, each individual was able to make a choice between life in the homeland and life in the diaspora. However, from a Jewish religious viewpoint—which views the condition of the Jews as that of a people still in exile, as a people unredeemed in an unredeemed world, destined to found a supernatural community that would diverge from the confines of history—Israeli statehood is irrelevant. Moreover, a Jew’s religious affirmation of exile is essentially an uncompromising demand for the act of redemption. The exile of the Jew, Cohen asserts, is a symbol of the world’s sin: indeed, in a sense, one may see the Jewish concept of exile as a Jewish doctrine of original sin.  

Cohen goes so far as to claim that since the concept of exile does not relate to Jewish history exclusively, we must transfer it from the interpretive historical plane and project it onto a plane that renders judgment on history. Put somewhat differently, so long as there is history, there is exile.

Ten years before the appearance of Cohen’s book, Herberg had defined Jewish existence as supernatural in nature, that is, fraught with the destiny of serving God’s
eternal intentions in the world. Expressed in terms of biblical and rabbinical theology, it is the covenant between Israel and God that defines Judaism. Although every individual Jew can be said to belong to the temporal nation within which he or she resides, the Jews in a deeper sense are not connected to (or, perhaps more accurately, not limited to) any country or any state—not even to the Holy Land or to the state of Israel. Herberg, however, notes that “Zion is the land of Israel, not its native but its promised land,” and adds that this is because the destiny of the Jewish people “begins and ends with Zion.” In effect, between the starting point and the messianic ending, Jewish history is oscillating, as it were, between two poles: the land of Israel and the diaspora. The tension of this existential duality is part of the essence of Judaism and of the Jew.

On this basis, one may formulate a defined place for the state of Israel. In potential, it is capable of fulfilling the singular destiny of the Jewish people—that is, of setting up an independent society based on the laws of the Torah and justice. Indeed, Herberg explained, Martin Buber had read and supported Zionism in this spirit, and he, too, approached Zionism in much the same manner.

These attitudes regarding exile, redemption, and the state of Israel as the national enterprise of the Jewish collectivity are essentially no different from the stance toward Zionism as expressed by thinkers such as Heschel and Soloveitchik (although in their operative translation there may be essential differences). Both Cohen and Herberg believed that the establishment of the state of Israel was a historical achievement of significance for every Jew. At the same time, both Cohen and Herberg viewed as false messianism any attempt to interpret the establishment of the Jewish state, in the context of an unredeemed world, as the “beginning of redemption” or as the start of the messianic process of ingathering the exiles.

Such views on the symbolic essence of exile are not the exclusive province of neo-Orthodox thinkers. Jakob Petuchowski, the Reform theologian (and Herberg and Cohen’s contemporary), shared them. Like Herberg and Cohen, he rejected the centrality of the state of Israel from a religious standpoint. Petuchowski based his argument both on the concept of exile as a religious concept and on a historiographical conception that rejected nationalism as one of the components of Judaism. In his view, the history of the Jewish people is that of a religious church. Jewish history, he believed, teaches us that the path of Judaism is from the family to the tribe, from the tribe to the people, and from the people to the universalistic religious community.

The skeptical attitude of these postwar thinkers toward the state of Israel is partly illuminated by the influence exerted upon them by the new Protestant theology. In line with that thinking, the state as a rational institution is no more than a temporal device aimed at preserving man’s honor and rights, in large part by placing a shield against the aggressive instincts of the stronger. From the Jewish and Christian standpoints, the state is not the result of a necessary welling forth from man’s nature or from the essence and nature of the universe. The opposite is true: every state is in fact the outcome of man’s limitations. It follows, therefore, that the state can never be conceived as possessing authentic religious value. At most, it can attain temporary historical significance in terms of the functions that it fulfills. These propositions are as valid when applied to the state of Israel as they are in general.

Both Herberg and Cohen stressed repeatedly that the Jew in fact is situated within
the world, acting within it, and being acted upon. At the same time, they insisted that the Jew, by the nature of his or her fate as a Jew, is destined not to fully belong to the world. In other words, the Jew qua Jew has never completely adapted to the historical world.

Probably influenced by Protestant theologians such as Tillich and Niebuhr, the center of gravity of the new Jewish theology was the individual. Its subject matter was limited to the individual’s existential reality: the “I,” the “here,” and the “now.” Pointing beyond the concrete “now” and the specific “here,” metaphysical constructs such as “redemption” and “exile” are not easily fitted into this conceptual framework. Therefore, whenever the postwar theological discourse concerns itself with exile and redemption, the context is that of something beyond an individual’s objective or subjective reality, with no reference made to the factual political situation of the Jews. Petuchowski, for example, did not accept the concepts of redemption and exile in the ordinary, traditional sense. He argued that if exile reflects the reality of a world not yet redeemed, then no one corner on earth is essentially different from another.

In sum, the exile, according to the approaches sketched above, is not a condition peculiar to the Jewish people. Instead, it should be seen as either a cosmic phenomenon or as a social and cultural phenomenon identical to alienation. And as such, “exile,” in the final analysis, does not even refer to a specific people. After all, when we speak of feelings of alienation or a sense of something flawed, it is clear that we are considering the individual and not the religious collectivity, still less the national collectivity. According to these conceptions, the Jew, as Herberg acutely formulated it, is always located “on the way.” As someone who has been doomed to live in a world marked by alienation, the Jewish individual can never find rest and wholeness in the unredeemed domain of history—not even in Zion.

Here it should be noted that, regarding both exile and redemption and the place and status of the land of Israel, the conceptions formulated by Herberg, Cohen, and others do not stand in a vacuum. Rather, they should be read within the broader perspective of three main trends in modern Jewish thought.

The first trend is that which bestows religious-messianic meaning to Zionism. The outstanding representative of this trend is R. Avraham Yitzhak Kook, who viewed the Zionist movement, despite its secular (and sometimes even antireligious) manifestations, as part of the messianic process. According to Kook’s conception of a dialectical framework for the development of the messianic idea, even the forces underlying Zionism in its most secular forms would push it toward another revolution that would combine Zionism with Torah and halakhah.

Alongside this trend, we find another that does not view Zionism (or the state of Israel) as an expression of the messianic process. It is, however, inclined to see the Jewish state as an overt expression of divine providence. Soloveitchik was a leading proponent of this trend. In his essay “Kol dodi dofek” (“The Voice of My Beloved Knocks . . .”), he poetically links the establishment of the state of Israel with one of “the Lover’s knocks” (as described in the Song of Songs) that calls on the Jews to deepen their connection to God. Similarly, those who identify with Soloveitchik’s school of thought tend to appraise the Jewish state according to chiefly religious criteria.

The third trend is an extension of the second one. Reading Jewish history as reli-
gious history, it determines its attitude toward the state of Israel on the basis of principled religious criteria. It will be recalled that, according to Arthur Green’s viewpoint, the Jewish national state and Judaism do not have much in common, since Judaism is simply one of many religious tongues with a universal, apolitical content. In contrast, the “humanist” variant of this third school of thought—represented most prominently by David Hartman, a student of Joseph Soloveitchik—measures both the state of Israel and the Zionist enterprise as a whole by religious yardsticks. However, as Hartman argues, “the religious meaning that a man imparts to events does not relate to their divine origin, but to their possible influence on the life of Torah.” Hence, the issue facing the religious individual is not whether the state of Israel is the outcome of deeds of divine providence in history (as Soloveitchik holds); rather, the religiously relevant question is to what extent the state of Israel makes it possible to fulfill the world of the commandments in its entirety. The religious significance of Israel lies in the field of possibilities and developments that it opens for Judaism in general and for the halakhah in particular.

Hartman’s thought does not end with these insights. He argues that nowadays, a qualitative—if not antithetical—gap is taking shape between Judaism in Eretz Israel and Judaism in the diaspora. In fact, what creates this gap is the very existence of a Jewish state. For a sovereign Jewish society poses a new Judaic challenge: a demand that Judaism relate to and encompass not only the life of the individual, but also—the life of the state, the society, and its institutions. In contrast to Judaism in the diaspora, Judaism in the land of Israel cannot be satisfied with finding a solution to the problem of individual alienation. True, Israel already responds to one aspect of the problem by supplying a physical home. However, Hartman argues, if Judaism is to preserve both its meaning and its creative power, it must act to spiritualize the world. Of course, in undertaking that task, halakhah and traditional Judaic learning have to acquire and appropriate new territories, chiefly those that derive from the domain of political philosophy. In any event, what is most relevant to the present discussion is that Hartman’s approach confers on the Jewish state a religious, halakhic meaning. According to this view, the existence of Israel opens a skylight to widening the world of halakhah. Therefore, the value of the Jewish state is not linked particularly to the messianic idea. Rather it is tied to the halakhic, spiritual, and intellectual possibilities that the state has opened up for Judaism. Clearly, to the extent that halakhah’s importance and uniqueness remain central in this conception, it closely resembles Soloveitchik’s views. Notwithstanding, Hartman’s approach opens up the halakhah by seeking to apply it to a reality in which politics plays a central role.

Apart from Hartman’s historical-humanistic variant, the approach of most American neo-Orthodox thinkers whom we have considered in this essay is clearly ahistorical. As Salo Baron once argued in considering the trends of neo-Orthodox thinkers in general, theologians are not inclined to believe in any advantage that might emerge for modern theological discourse from the mere clarification of historical facts. Instead, they prefer to ponder and to seek absolute truths in the classic sources of Judaism.

In fact, this preference is not a new phenomenon in the history of Jewish religious thought in recent centuries. Because of the extremely complex historical connection between Jews and their religion (that is, Judaism as a religious world outlook and a
way of life), two trends have molded the history of modern Jewish thought. On the one hand, there were those thinkers (among the most prominent were the neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig, the existentialist) who focused their attention on Judaism—in particular, the issue of Judaism’s survival as a world outlook and way of life in a modern world with its humanistic, secular culture. On the other hand, there were thinkers (such as Leo Pinsker, Theodor Herzl, and other leading Jewish nationalists), whose thought was focused on the problem of the Jewish people and its fate, not specifically on the issue of Judaism as one or another sort of world outlook. The latter saw before them the fate of the Jewish people and tried to contend with “the problem of the existence and continuity of Jewish creativity [within] the economic, social, and political conditions that took shape in the western world in modern times.”

It is conceivable that these approaches could complement each other. However, in practice, both schools of thought made certain assumptions about the nature of the Jewish people versus the nature and sources of Judaism. These assumptions rarely fit together. In any event, it is clear that the trend that focused on Judaism as a religious worldview either knowingly or unwittingly strove to disregard—or, at the very least, to deemphasize—the concrete conditions of the existence of the Jewish community. Indeed, as we can discern from the characteristic traits of the new theological discourse in the United States, its creators preferred to focus their thought precisely on the issue of the essence of Judaism as a religious worldview and the problem of its continuing existence against a background of intellectual and cultural currents in the western world in general and in the United States in particular. It is natural, therefore, that study of the classic sources of Judaism, on the one hand, and their reinterpretation in the light of western religious philosophy, on the other, would form a keystone of the religious works produced by these thinkers. The force motivating them is the aspiration to discover the metaphysical and universal truths contained within the sources of Judaism.

Notes

This article was translated by Eliyahu Green.

1. For the terms “second generation” and “third generation,” see Robert G. Goldy, The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America (Bloomington: 1990), 2–3. Also see Arnold M. Eisen, The Chosen People in America (Bloomington: 1983), 7–12.
2. Although Heschel’s great theological work, Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion, was published in 1951 in New York, he had been involved in theological controversies from the mid-1940s. Soloveitchik began his intellectual activity in 1941, when he took his father’s place as professor of Talmud at the Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University.
3. See Goldy, The Emergence of Jewish Theology, 4 ff.
5. See Aviezer Ravitsky, “Hadash min hatorah? ’Al ortodoksiyah ve’al hamodernah,” in


12. Ibid., 31–32.


15. Ibid.


19. Ibid., 14.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 18.

22. Ibid.


27. Ibid., 219–220.

28. Milton Steinberg, As a Driven Leaf (Indianapolis: 1940).


30. See, for example, ibid., 184.


35. Ibid., 131. During this time, Steinberg published articles on the thought of Protestant theologians such as Kierkegaard and Niebuhr. As early as 1946, he published in the journal of the Reconstructionist movement an article dealing with Niebuhr’s theology; in 1949, he published an article titled “Kierkegaard and Judaism” in the Menorah Journal.


37. See Eisen, Chosen People in America, 118.
39. Ibid., 32.
41. See Will Herberg, “From Marxism to Judaism,” *Commentary* (Jan. 1947), 32; also see idem, “Theological Problems of the Hour,” 426.
42. Ibid., 409–410.
47. Katzman, “Hapardes hapostmoderni.”
49. Seymour Siegel, “Mordecai Kaplan in Retrospect,” *Commentary* 74 (July 1982), 81.
51. Ibid., 180–181.
52. Ibid., 182, 187.
53. Ibid., 6–7, 184–188.
54. Ibid., 291–313.
55. Ibid., 187.
56. Ibid., 188.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. See, for example, Herberg’s remarks concerning the tie to the land of Israel, its nature, and its limits in ibid., 278 ff.
61. See, for example, Jakob Petuchowski, *Zion Reconsidered* (New York: 1966), 131–133.
64. See Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man*, 278.
68. Ibid.
70. Ibid., 20, 262; also see idem, *Israelis and the Jewish Tradition* (New Haven: 2000).
73. Ibid., 10.
The phenomenon of recurrent and active messianism has been part of Jewish history for 2,000 years. Appearing first among the Dead Sea sects before the destruction of the Second Temple, it continued through the Bar-Kokhba revolt, the Middle Ages, the aftermath of the expulsion from Spain, the Sabbatai Zevi episode, and up to the present day, with the emergence of a number of apocalyptic messianic cults in the modern state of Israel.

Given the incessant failures, disappointments, and chagrin over erroneous calculations of the End, what accounts for the resilience of active messianism is the utopian vision it affords to its believers, most of whom have low material or spiritual status. The cycles of war, destruction, and persecution that were endured by the Jewish people resulted in yearning for the homeland and anticipation of a messiah who would redeem them from their travails. It is particularly during times of crisis that active messianic expectations undergo intensification, usually taking on radical, revolutionary, or apocalyptic forms. Such active messianism is distinct from the utopian expectation of redemption. Whereas active messianism’s redemptive scenario is predetermined—that is, offering a clear time scheme for the End of Days, which in turn leads people into atypical and often violent behavior—“normal” messianism, despite its belief and expectation of the coming of the Messiah, does not generally alter everyday behavior.

It is noteworthy that following the Holocaust, a traumatic event without parallel in Jewish history, almost no active “religious” messianic consciousness developed; instead, the expectation of a radical, utopian transformation was directed toward the “national” utopia of a reestablished state of Israel. Yet it is precisely in the state of Israel that active Jewish messianism has reemerged.

Although Israeli forms of active messianism stem from various causes, they can be characterized in general as manifestations of frustration and protest. In this sense, they demonstrate a continuity with past expressions of messianism, which almost always emerged against a background of persecution and deprivation. Here, too, in keeping
with historical patterns, active messianism takes the form of radical changes in its adherents’ way of life.

Religious-messianic discourse in Israel was renewed in 1974 with the establishment of Gush Emunim, which equated “redemption” with full Jewish sovereignty over the land. This movement, however, remained largely within the boundaries of practical realism and did not venture into the cultism and chiliastic calculations that usually characterize active messianism. Although Gush Emunim included messianic motifs in its rhetoric and terminology, its substantive activity should actually be viewed in the framework of nationalist political activism.¹ This said, it should be noted that some leading figures in Gush Emunim were also involved in the so-called Jewish “underground,” which in 1980 planned to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount. The premise behind that idea, based on kabbalistic teachings, was that such an action would ignite a comprehensive war against Israel—and at that point, when the Jewish nation would be on the brink of destruction, God would intervene on behalf of His chosen people (the process of redemption having already begun) and usher in the End of Days. The Jewish underground constituted the first link in this projected chain of events, and its members actually carried out a series of attacks against Arabs.

Other, smaller messianic cults have emerged in Israel, whose main focus was the issue of secularization. Each group has had its own calculations of the End; all have agreed that only religious repentance could ensure the Jewish people’s survival during the upcoming apocalyptic war of Gog and Magog.² For example, Rabbi Meir Kahane, leader of the Jewish Defense League in America and later the Kach movement in Israel, played an important role in generating this sort of religious-messianic discourse. In his book *Forty Years*, written in the early 1980s, Kahane set forth an apocalyptic vision according to which the End ofDays would arrive within a span of 40 years from the establishment of the state of Israel. If the Jews did not acknowledge this reality, undertake religious repentance, and begin to rebuild the Temple, he warned, redemption would come only in the aftermath of terrible catastrophes known collectively as the “birth pangs of the Messiah” (*hevlei mashiah*). Kahane, certain that the great majority of Jews would not in fact heed his words, fulminated against the faithless “Hellenizers” whom he held responsible for the upcoming calamities.

What radical messianic groups in Israel have in common is a tension between the group and the secular framework of the surrounding society, which refuses to acknowledge the messianic option. Thus, any given messianic group is a manifestation of extreme spiritual distress amid the reality of secularization and the power of the secular establishment.

Messianic believers in Israel direct a special animus against the Orthodox religious establishment that refuses to accept them and their faith. Deemed especially loathsome is the compromise that the Israeli Orthodox establishment has made with the secular-democratic state. Thus, the Jewish underground in its day rejected the religious establishment’s failure to consider the notion of rebuilding the Temple, which in its view effectively arrested the messianic momentum. Kahane, too, rejected this policy and excoriated the phenomenon of secularism. “End of the Millennium” cults in Israel have warned of the imminent destruction of the secular world and have simultaneously attacked the religious establishment.

In the case of Uzi Meshulam and the Mishkan Ohalim (“Tent Encampment”) move-
ment, kabbalistic beliefs were used to demarcate the “rabble”—defined as Gentiles and their secular Jewish cohorts who cunningly manipulated the people of Israel with the aim of preventing the redemption, and who therefore had to be eliminated. Going beyond this, however, the group also viewed the religious establishment in Israel as part of the same “rabble.” Meshulam’s group thus represented a radical protest against both the secular Ashkenazic establishment and those religious bodies that worked hand in hand with it. In addition, Mishkan Ohalim offers an interesting case study of how, under certain conditions, “normal” messianic faith can become more activist and even violent.

The Judaism associated with Meshulam and his followers is a messianic and esoteric kabbalistic religion. Their ways are not “ways of pleasantness” and their paths are not “paths of peace.” Rather, the enormity of protest that is bound up with their faith represents the antithesis of public Judaism in Israel, whose established nature is grounded both in the compromises it has forged with the surrounding society and its dissociation from fanatical beliefs.

In March 1994, what began as a simple dispute between Meshulam and one of his neighbors escalated into a violent protest involving Mishkan Ohalim and the police. As the dispute grew more heated—among other things, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at police—approximately 100 members of Mishkan Ohalim fenced off the compound surrounding Meshulam’s house and synagogue in the town of Yehud. Police put the compound under siege; Meshulam, taking advantage of the wide media coverage, pressed his demand for the establishment of a government committee to investigate the fate of the “missing Yemenite children,” who, he charged, had been snatched from their parents in immigrant camps during the early days of Israeli statehood. After 47 days of violent protest, police charged into the cordoned-off area—in the process killing Shlomi Asulin, one of the movement’s activists. Eleven of the active participants in the gathering eventually received extended prison sentences; Meshulam was sentenced to eight years in jail.

Despite its high profile at the time, very little was reported about Mishkan Ohalim’s worldview and beliefs. Like other activist messianic groups, it combined a radical messianic vision and powerful feelings of frustration. What made it distinctive was its additional element of ethnic resentment against Israel’s Ashkenazic establishment. Although it was numerically small (a police report of 1996 estimated that there were about 40 hard-core supporters out of a total of some 300 registered members), Mishkan Ohalim’s potential for violence was significant, given its belief in conspiracy theories, its application of messianic doctrines from the world of Jewish mysticism, and its resentment over the disdain shown to Meshulam by the Israeli rabbinical establishment. According to eyewitness testimony about the events, members of the group had threatened collective suicide as a means of sanctifying the name of God (kidush hashem)—an act that had been carried out by other contemporary radical messianic groups, notably James Jones’ People’s Temple Group in Jonestown, Guyana, and the Branch Davidians led by Vernon Howell (a.k.a. David Koresh) at Waco, Texas.

Meshulam’s apocalyptic vision was remarkably similar to the historical patterns of spiritual revolt that are described so well in Norman Cohn’s The Pursuit of the Millennium. In his role of preacher, Meshulam incited his followers against state
institutions. These, he claimed, had perpetuated horrendous injustice, particularly against Jewish immigrants from Islamic countries. Although the “siege of Yehud” was a violent high point, the true struggle, in Meshulam’s preaching, would culminate only after the rooting out of the Jewish people’s hidden internal enemies.

What follows is a more detailed depiction of Meshulam’s beliefs, as documented in a series of sermons recorded on audiocassettes.

The central motif of Meshulam’s worldview is that of the rabble, or “mixed multitude,” known in Hebrew as the ’erev rav. The phrase, taken from Exodus 12:38 (“And a mixed multitude went up also with them . . .”), is traditionally understood to refer to non-Jewish Egyptians who joined the children of Israel in the exodus, and who were later held responsible for much of the “murmuring” and acts of incitement against Moses and God. Meshulam, however, referred to the rabble in a nonbiblical context, basing himself on interpretations to be found in kabbalistic works such as the Ra’ya mehemna and the Tikunei hazohar.7

“...I do not know if there is another generation like this in Israel whose teachers deserve the imprecations that these deserve”—thus historian Yitzhak Be’er recounts what is written in the Zohar about the rabble. Both Be’er and Yeshayahu Tishbi argue that the “’erev rav” cited in the Zohar and in works of commentary on the Zohar refers to the 13th-century leaders of the Jewish community in Spain, who are identified in these antiestablishment texts as corrupters of religion and morality.8 Indeed, they are said to have been accomplices in a Gentile plot to destroy Israel: their corrupt leadership and “idolatrous” practices had caused the removal of divine providence from the Jewish people. With the redemption would come the eradication of this rabble from the world. Apparently, the author of Ra’ya mehemna awaited the imminent fulfillment of his eschatological vision and hoped that he would witness the downfall of the rabble and the rewarding of the “proper ones” (hakesherim) of Israel.9

Meshulam’s apocalyptic redemptive vision, similarly derived from the Zohar, involved a struggle in the divine world between good and evil forces. This struggle would end with a) the fall of Samael (the personification of evil), whom he likened to the rabble; b) revenge against the rabble; and c) the redemption of Israel. In the meantime, Meshulam regarded himself as a warrior in a cosmic struggle in which all means, including violence, were legitimate. In fact, the use of violence against those perceived to belong to the rabble was a religious imperative.

Meshulam also made reference to kabbalistic terms such as “emanations” and “core.” According to the world of images in the Lurianic kabbalah, one must descend to the impure elements in order to rescue the “sparks” and emanations of the divine.10 For example, as Nathan of Gaza interpreted the conversion of Sabbetai Zevi to Islam, he had thereby penetrated the corrupt world so as to dissolve it from within and rescue its divinity.11 In similar fashion, Meshulam declared that one must destroy the corrupt world of the rabble by descending into it and dissolving it from within. This penetration of the realm of the impure is achieved by adopting some of its ways. Specifically—although he did not advocate violating any halakhic norms—Meshulam claimed (falsely) to have done military service in the celebrated Israel Defense Forces general staff commando unit (sayeret matkal) and to have made a “daring” foray into the state archives. In his hands, he told his followers, were the sparks whose revelation would demolish the corrupt Zionist world.
The rabble, according to Meshulam, are low and satanic individuals who are nonetheless difficult to identify because they are concealed among the people of Israel. Their purpose is to lead the people astray and thereby destroy them. In the messianic era, Meshulam claimed, a composite of Mashiah ben-Yosef and Mashiah ben-David would emerge to lead the redemption. The goal of the rabble, he explained, was to try to divide this composite Messiah. At this point in his analysis, current events came into play:

The Gaon of Vilna says that the rabble’s main goal is to pair Esau and Ishmael [the impure emanations] and to separate the two Messiahs by means of agitation. We see this in practice today: whatever the Esau-Gentile does not demand, the rabble incites him to do. . . .

Those who incite the Ishmaelites and Esau to demand that Jerusalem be internationalized—they are the rabble. The rabble will demand that the Americans insist on the Israeli government’s holding elections. The Americans will say that they . . . will withhold budgets [if the Israeli government does not comply]. The rabble will . . . advise the Ishmaelites—the Palestinians—to raise a fuss in the United States with their backing. The borderline that divides West and East Jerusalem disturbs them; they do not want the people of Israel to have West Jerusalem. They want all of Jerusalem to be “international.” International, that is, for the entire world except for Israel. . . .

The ostensible attempt to internationalize Jerusalem was a particularly grave matter in Meshulam’s eyes, since he believed that the Messiah would arrive precisely at the border between the two parts of Jerusalem. Thus, the purported attempt to erase the line was seen as a deliberate attempt to delay the Messiah’s coming. In his words, “the two Messiahs [Mashiah ben-Yosef and Mashiah ben-David] preserve Jerusalem. Their place is at the borderline, at the Western Wall. Dominion, according to the Gaon of Vilna, is in the hands of the composite of the two Messiahs, with Mashiaḥ ben-David at the head.”

Because the rabble delayed the coming of the Messiah, Meshulam called for an active struggle against it, preaching violent resistance against the state:

The Gaon [of Vilna] says that the main purpose of our war is to shatter the power of the rabble and eradicate it from Israel. The rabble is our greatest enemy. . . . The Gaon says that the war against the rabble is the most difficult and bitter war, and that we must prevail with all our might in this war. Whoever does not actively participate in the war against the rabble becomes an accomplice of the emanation of the rabble. The rabble must be fought. If you see the leadership of the rabble, you must fight them. Whoever does not actively participate in the war against the rabble becomes an accomplice of the rabble’s emanation, and would better have not been created.

In another recorded sermon, Meshulam enumerated five categories of the rabble as these appear in the Zohar:

1. Amalekites: The Amalekites are the head that harms the Jewish people. They are the head of the impure emanation. That is to say, the heads of the people; and their sign is their apparatus of power, the Mapai [Labor party] establishment. An organized mafia, child-snatchers, a corrupt mafia.
2. The fallen (nefilsim; cf. Gen. 6:4): The fornicators. The souls of the rabble who continue to whore after good women. They are those who want free prostitution, who run
stores that sell sex items, and who want to show [sex education] on television to children. . . .

3. Strongmen (giborim): These are the generation of the Tower of Babel [dor hape-lagah], the ones who dress themselves up and call themselves haredi [ultra-Orthodox] or religious—but they are not genuinely religious. They build synagogues and houses of study, not for the sake of God [leshem Hashem] but rather for their own aggrandizement [la’asot shem le’aznam]. They mislead the generation in worship of God; their waters are not the waters of Torah but waters of the Flood. They are devastating the land and making barren the study of the Torah; their students are fleeing their yeshivas\(^{17}\) to learn in a different place. . . .

4. Ghosts (refaim): This is what is today defined as Samael. [Reading from the Zohar]: “These are the rabble that infiltrate Israel. If they see the people of Israel in time of distress, they ignore them. And when they have the power to save Israel, they do not come. They are lax with the Torah, keeping their distance from it and from all those who are occupied with it in order to do business with idolaters . . . .” They demonstrate in favor of opening movie houses on the Sabbath, and demonstrate against religious coercion. . . .

5. Giants (’anakim): They scorn those who uphold the Torah, and mock them. They are the ones who return the world to chaos. They and the ghosts cause[d] the destruction of the Temple. . . .\(^{18}\)

Meshulam’s scale of severity, it should be noted, was in descending order. Hence, the Amalekites—the Mapai establishment—were the worst. In his sermons, Meshulam reminded his disciples of the biblical commandment to blot out the seed of Amalek (Deut. 25:19) and noted that “there is a generation of Jews that is always proper in its ways—and then there is the rabble, which is an impure emanation, and which is the majority here [in Israel].”\(^{19}\)

In Meshulam’s view, the state has been set up deliberately to uproot and undermine Jewish practice. “This state does not take care of the Jewish people . . . [There was a deliberate effort made by the state] to remove people from Sabbath observance, and every aspect of holiness and Torah was vilified. A Jew is a son of Torah [ben-Torah]. But they belittle those who devote themselves to the Torah, they think that an academic is more important than a ben-Torah. This is Gentile thinking. This is the thinking of the Russian tsar.”\(^{20}\)

**Doctrine and Group Dynamics of Mishkan Ohalim**

How did members of Mishkan Ohalim try to apply their leader’s teachings?

Meshulam espoused a literal apocalyptic message that was associated with violence. In this respect, Mishkan Ohalim was similar to other apocalyptic movements, including Christian movements such as the Branch Davidians and James Jones’ People’s Temple group in California and later in Guyana. These movements preached a literal messianic faith announcing the impending End of Days, and they were pursued by anticult movements and by the authorities. As noted, they ultimately ended in acts of collective suicide.

Although Meshulam’s disciples say that there are no motifs dealing with personal redemption or even the coming of the Messiah in their religious doctrine or public
struggle, one can, in fact, distinguish conspicuous motifs of apocalyptic prophecy. For instance, disciples speak of the cruel war of Gog and Magog that will bring the world as we know it to an end. According to Ora Shifris, a spokeswoman for Mishkan Ohalim, “we are facing terrible times. A world war and dire catastrophes in the near future. The war of Gog and Magog. This is written in the Zohar, and these are things that come true.”

According to a special police report, Meshulam and his followers were heard to assert that “one should encourage the war of Gog and Magog among the rabble, since the redemption will come after this war and only the believers will survive.” The report also noted that Meshulam had instructed his followers to prepare for a third world war by hoarding food and necessities. Police believe that a statement by Meshulam that “this week will be a week of the plagues of Egypt on all of the rabble” was connected with an act of arson carried out against the telephone exchange in Petah Tikvah in October 1994.

One of the characteristics of apocalyptic movements is totalism: they do not envisage an improvement of the current situation but rather a total transformation that will usher in a world of perfect harmony, social justice, and peace. The passage from the corrupt present to the eternal future is to be accompanied by great calamities, which are, as noted, the birth pangs of the redemption. Apocalyptic triumph goes hand in hand with the ultimate, bloody war, which serves to destroy the agents of corruption and purify the sinful world. Justice will prevail, and the corrupt past will be replaced by a perfect future. But the paradigm of vengeful redemption is also conspicuous in this vision. Oppressed Oriental Jewish communities—the mizrahím—were to gain superior status over the Ashkenazim and the secularists; the supremacy of the Jewish tradition would be recognized, whereas the culture of the rabble would be eradicated. In brief, the redemptive future would feature a role reversal: mizrahím once again receiving the honor that was due to them while the Ashkenazic rabble would be destroyed.

Indications of this philosophy of vengeful redemption can be seen in an open letter written by Meshulam’s disciples that was published in the movement’s bulletin in March 1995. The letter was headed “And It Was Reversed” (“V enahafokh hu”), an allusion not only to the upcoming Purim holiday (cf. Esther 9:1) but also to the anticipated reversal of roles that would come about when “the government of wickedness” that had “imprisoned a great saint of the world” would be replaced by “the humble ones” who would “inherit the earth and delight in the abundance of peace” (Ps. 37:11).

Millenarian-apocalyptic movements anticipate redemption as coming about at the juncture of the perfect time and the perfect place. In the case of Meshulam’s group, the time was imminent and the place was the land of Israel, whose inhabitants were to receive an eternal blessing of spiritual well-being. Yet only some of the inhabitants would be around to enjoy this blessing. There is a basic dualism in apocalyptic movements regarding believers and nonbelievers. Only the former (the “sons of light”) will enjoy redemption, whereas nonbelievers (the “sons of darkness”) will perish. This dualism energizes members of the movement, adding as it does a meaningful eschatological dimension to current sociopolitical divisions. Whatever their current status, believers see themselves as future survivors, destined to be saved by God’s grace when the rest of the corrupt world undergoes destruction.
It follows that apocalyptic messages often have inherent antinormative implications. The violence immediately preceding the End of Days, for example, is anticipated as being directed initially against the “chosen ones,” since these form the spiritual vanguard struggling against the forces of corruption. Hence the willingness to relinquish normal constraints regarding the use of violence: the chosen ones must be allowed to defend themselves against the forces arrayed against them.\(^{28}\)

The literature on apocalyptic movements often speaks of group “enthusiasm.” Enthusiastic believers expect tangible results from God. They believe that their faith will convey them from this world into a higher and more exalted one. The leader of an apocalyptic movement convinces his followers that they will be saved from destruction. At the same time, however, it is incumbent upon them to live a pure, modest, and even ascetic life. What usually occurs is an oscillation between excessive rigor and antinomianism. The enthusiasm does not necessarily take a violent form. Enthusiastic believers can behave in two different ways: their belief can uphold them and unite them with others in faith; yet it can also arouse paranoia, fear, and the dehumanization of those of whom God does not approve. The movement’s activism may also be reinforced by external factors such as the persecution of its members.\(^{29}\)

Millenarian movements tend to be ecstatic, with the sense of redemption accompanied by emotional release. Rituals are often intensely enthusiastic, involving the externalization of feelings. At the same time, violent antinomian tendencies may be manifested, among other things, by the destruction of objects or mass suicide.\(^{30}\)

The faith of Meshulam’s followers in the imminent coming of the Messiah was intensified by a sense of persecution at the hands of the authorities. Mishkan Ohalim’s paranoiac nature was pronounced. Believing themselves to be persecuted and menaced by the authorities, its believers behaved violently, which in turn called forth punitive measures from the authorities. The result was a closed circle of self-fulfilling prophecy: Meshulam’s followers felt threatened and thus took steps to defend themselves. Meshulam himself stressed to his followers that they should return fire only if attacked. Yet because of their sense of persecution, everything in their eyes became a deliberate provocation. Moreover, as noted, the sense of persecution strengthened their belief that they were the elect and that the government was trying to silence them. Meshulam, for his part, often emphasized that the General Security Services were pursuing him because of his struggle to expose the fate of the lost Yemenite children. He claimed that security investigators told him that he would be eliminated unless he ceased his activities.\(^{31}\)

During the group’s gathering at Yehud, paranoia was combined with an atmosphere of ecstatic joy. Each evening, the participants burst into loud song accompanied by trumpet and organ. As a writer for the daily *Ha’aretz* noted: “It appeared that they were in a sort of ecstasy as they moved about, singing songs accompanied by the trumpet, egging themselves on with shouts and hymns, and gesturing in every direction with firearms and other weapons as if they were eager to provoke the police.”\(^{32}\)

Similarly, the audiocassette recordings of Meshulam’s sermons also feature his disciples’ fervent praying. Meshulam’s words are accompanied by loud cries of approval, and each sermon ends with the lusty singing of hasidic songs.

As with other messianic-apocalyptic groups, Mishkan Ohalim also displayed a suicidal tendency. During the siege at Yehud, there was concern, both among the police
and among movement members, that the climax could be an act of collective suicide. *Kidush hashem* would have been the justification of such an act. Although martyrdom traditionally is mandated only when a Jew is faced with the demand to transgress one of three cardinal prohibitions—idolatry, incest, or murder—the grounds have often been interpreted more broadly. According to historian Yisrael Yuval, the Jewish millenarian tradition also draws a direct link between martyrdom and vengeful redemption. That is, redemption is regarded as an expression of revenge against the Gentiles: martyrdom is a means of extorting God to bring about the redemption, since it necessitates a blood revenge for those who have died in the sanctification of His name.

It appears that Meshulam’s followers did link the possibility of violent martyrdom with the coming of the messianic era. One of his disciples at Yehud, for instance, said in a newspaper interview:

Rabbi Uzi says to us that if we do not return fire, it’s as if we are committing suicide, and that’s like Christianity, where you turn the other cheek. I am not afraid of dying, because my fate is whatever God has allotted to me. The main thing is to die as a Jew. For me, death is part of life, and the world to come is not really death, because for us there is no end, only a passage. It is here, in this situation, that I am perfected. This is *kidush hashem*, and it’s also connected to the transmigration of souls, as the Rabbi explained, and the nearness of redemption, for which the Rabbi wishes to make us, his disciples, worthy.

Martyrdom, then, is a manner of death that expresses revenge, which in turn makes the disciple worthy in the coming messianic age (when, according to tradition, the righteous will be resurrected).

Group members often referred to the fate of those in the David Koresh cult who had committed mass suicide a year earlier, and threatened that much blood would be shed in the event that the police entered the demarcated area. Meshulam declared: “Take your positions. Whoever wants to can leave and whoever doesn’t can stay here, to kill or be killed.” He announced to the police that “no one will come out of here alive. . . . If our demands are not met, there will be a massacre here a hundred times larger than the massacre at Hebron.” A leaflet distributed near the house echoed this theme: “How can we prevent a recurrence of events like the massacre in Hebron . . . this time in a version many times worse?”

In the end, police intervention prevented mass fatalities. Yet two years after the Yehud siege, Meshulam’s followers still implied their willingness to commit acts of violent martyrdom. An article in their newspaper *Ohalei Ya’akov* asked: “What sort of miserable establishment is it that is prepared to let its citizens martyr themselves . . . ? Are the lives of Jews in Israel so cheap??? Let no one say ‘we didn’t know.’”

At the time of the siege, Mishkan Ohalim seems to have been in an intermediate stage between passivity and activism. On the one hand, group members were estranged from the state of Israel and its institutions, explicitly refraining from involvement in politics. On the other hand, Meshulam had no objections to his followers’ serving in the army (although it was reported that Shlomi Asulin, who was killed during the police intervention, was an army deserter). In his words, “the members of the organization serve in the IDF in all its units, in the standing army and in the reserves, not for the sake of the state, which we do not recognize, but for the sake of the people of Israel, the Torah of Israel, and the sanctification of the Name.”
further instructed his followers to go out and work rather than spending all of their
time in Torah studies; movement activities were to be carried out during their free
time. This, then, was a movement whose members did not behave in a totally cultic
manner. Following the siege at Yehud, those who were not arrested continued to con-
duct their lives as usual.

Once some of the activists had been released from jail, Mishkan Ohalim showed a
return to messianic anticipation. Members launched extensive propaganda activity re-
garding the issue of the missing Yemenite children that included public gatherings,
political lobbying, and the recruitment of supporters from the academic and cultural
worlds. Such activity can be seen as a means of evading the cognitive dissonance re-
sulting from the failure of Meshulam’s apocalyptic predictions. Indeed, members of
messianic movements are often undaunted by prophecies that fail to come true. On
the contrary, their religious faith may be intensified as they go about reinterpreting
the signs and attempting to recruit new members.41 Thus in August 1997, some three
years after the events at Yehud, Mishkan Ohalim members delivered a videocassette
to the government television network that depicted the opening of four graves in
which Yemenite children, according to official records, were buried. Three of the
graves appeared to be empty. In the aftermath of continuing public discussion con-
cerning the fate of the missing Yemenite children,42 some members of the movement
appear to have reverted to violent activity.43 The impression gained in a conversa-
tion that I conducted with movement members at that time was that they were anticipat-
ing a miraculous event to occur within the next two months, to coincide with the
Sukkot holiday.44 If in fact movement members were responsible for acts of violence
during this time, these would appear to have been connected to their belief in the ne-
cessity to “hasten the End” in the period just before redemption.

Apocalyptic movements have a more marked tendency toward violence when they
are headed by a charismatic and “messianic” leader. Given the danger that faith in
them may weaken if, for example, their prophecy fails to come true (although, as
pointed out, the opposite often occurs), such leaders often intensify their oratory to
increase followers’ enthusiasm and anxiety.45 Believers, for their part, accept their
leader’s behavior no matter how strange, irresponsible, egotistical, or even destruc-
tive.

Meshulam was a charismatic religious leader who made his pronouncements with
great fervor, in the form of prophecy about the imminent future. His movement was
based on his exclusive leadership, and his believers were prepared for self-abnega-
tion and even self-sacrifice in his service. For example, in demanding improvement
of Meshulam’s conditions in prison, his supporters were willing to launch an extended
hunger strike.46 Meshulam’s disciples also believe that their rabbi is blessed with su-
pernatural powers, with prophetic and healing capabilities.47 Following his dictate,
one of his most prominent supporters, Yaakov Seville, refused to let his wife, who
was ill with breast cancer, receive chemotherapy treatments; she subsequently died
of her illness.48 This loss did not weaken Seville’s faith in Meshulam. On the con-
trary, he became one of Mishkan Ohalim’s main spokespeople.

Meshulam did all that he could to actualize and glorify his leadership. He spoke
and wrote of himself in the third person; even in prison he went about dressed in a
robe, holding a royal staff in his hand. He boasted of the “divisions”—an alleged
quarter of a million supporters—that would be at his disposal on the Day of Judgment, and he spoke many times of his extensive ties both abroad and within the domestic security services. In a newspaper interview given during the gathering at Yehud, he remarked: “There is no need to tell me who you are. I know everything about you. Trust me; I see like an X-ray machine.” According to Ora Shifris:

He knows everything, even what will happen when the Messiah comes. Word for word. He knew that there would be a miracle during the Gulf War. He said in advance that missiles would fall, but that nothing would happen. There are many other things that the Rabbi says, but one may not talk about them with people who are not within the fold, because it is mystical and it may harm them.

Another admirer, by the name of Gadi, says of him:

Rabbi Uzi is more than a father to me. My father brought me into this world—Rabbi Uzi will bring me into the next. I go about all the time with my eyes cast downward so that, God forbid, I won’t dare look at him. I’m not capable of understanding everything that he does, because what he does is higher than we are capable of understanding. . . . I am nothing, I’m nullified before him. I negate all of my will before him. First I do, without understanding—after that I strive to understand.

As previously noted, millenarian-apocalyptic movements emerge during periods of discontent and political helplessness. In the search for a coherent value system, a new cultural identity, and a renewed sense of self-respect, such movements set themselves against the ruling or alien powers. Their antiauthoritarian attitude is manifested not only in opposition to the regime but also in the rejection of its ideology, whether normative, philosophical, or religious. It follows that, in many instances, their ideology becomes violent and leads to a struggle between the rulers and the ruled.

Among Meshulam’s disciples, it appears that frustration caused by a low social status, combined with gaps in modernization among different strata in Israel, produced feelings of inferiority. It is important to note that, among all of the people that I spoke with, what is recalled most of all is the deep frustration felt by those who underwent what is described as a forced separation from the Jewish religion—the reference here is to the early days of the state—which included the “cutting of [their] sidelocks” and the alleged kidnapping of children from immigrant camps. These experiences gave rise to an explicit hatred toward the establishment, and may have been what originally drew Meshulam’s supporters to a messianic fantasy in which the prevailing order would be reversed.

Resentment against the ruling order can also develop as the result of newly formed desires and the perceived inability to fulfill them. The gap between “haves” and “have-nots” becomes a major source of anger, compounded by the fact that the have-nots are essentially compelled to act according to rules that they would like to reject.

The campaign to free Meshulam from prison—which included a number of violent acts, such as the attempted murder of a prison warden—can best be understood in this light. Members of Mishkan Ohalim felt frustrated by the fact that, whereas their public struggle was supposed to earn them an exalted status, they were in fact persecuted, thrown in jail, and isolated from the rest of the world. To obtain a pardon from prison or good conditions while incarcerated, for example, they had to behave in accordance with Israeli law, which they did not recognize.
A further source of frustration was Mishkan Ohalim’s alienation from the religious establishment. Uzi Meshulam, who was taught by his grandfather (a well-known kabbalist in Yemen), was never officially ordained, and he and his disciples were ostracized by major figures in the national-religious establishment.\(^{55}\)

In July 1999, Meshulam was released from prison after receiving a pardon for health reasons. This pardon was granted on condition that he severely limit his public activities. Meanwhile, during the course of his imprisonment, Mishkan Ohalim had partially disintegrated. The Shifris family, who were leading spokespeople and ideologues for the movement, came under suspicion of being undercover agents and were expelled. And in April 1999, a statement was released to the media in which it was announced that the struggle on behalf of the missing Yemenite children had been discontinued.\(^{56}\)

Initially fueled by resentment of the state and the religious establishment, Mishkan Ohalim is in many ways similar to other millenarian-apocalyptic movements. Unlike others, it did not spin out of control (despite some violent episodes) to end in an act of mass suicide. The future of this movement, however, is still an open question.

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**Notes**


3. During the course of “Operation Magic Carpet,” approximately 50,000 immigrants from Yemen were brought to Israel and housed in temporary camps (*ma’abarot*). Conditions in these camps were primitive, and infants and young children were often taken from their parents either when they fell ill or when (as the parents were told) they had to undergo medical tests. All accounts agree that at least several hundred infants and children “disappeared” during the early years of Israeli statehood: the charge made by Meshulam and others is that these children were sent for adoption, either in Israel or abroad. For an account of the issue and Meshulam’s involvement with it, see Felice Maranz, “The Jews Who Slipped Off the Magic Carpet,” *Jerusalem Report* 5, no. 2 (2 June 1994), 16–17.


7. See Yitzhak Be’er, “Hareka’ hahistori shel haRa’ya mehemna,” *Zion* 5, no. 1 (1940), 1–44.

8. Ibid. See also Yishayahu Tishbi, *Mishnat hazzohar*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: 1949), 686–692.

9. Ibid., 692.

11. Gershom Scholem claimed that this was the explanation offered by Sabbetai Zevi himself. See Scholem’s *Mekkarim umekorot letoledot hashabtaut vegilguleha* (Jerusalem: 1974), 9–67. Yehuda Liebes disagrees with Scholem and argues that this concept is attributable to Nathan of Gaza, not Sabbetai Zevi. See his *Sod haemunah hashabtaut* (Jerusalem: 1995), 27.


14. Meshulam, “Musar ’erev rav,” cassette 937. These words were spoken in 1991 and relate to actual events of that time.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. The reference here is to the “hesder” yeshivas of the religious Zionist establishment, which combine yeshiva study with service in the Israeli Defense Forces.


19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.


22. See “Do’h mishtarti.”


24. The letter appeared in *Ohalei Ya’akov* 2 (Adar II/March 1995), 10. Gershom Scholem points out that the Book of Psalms is often used as a source in apocalyptic writings; see *Devarim bego* 262–269.


26. Ibid.


28. Ibid., 240.

29. Ibid., 242.


31. See *Even maasu habonim* 1 (April 1994), 1. This subject is reiterated in all of Mishkan Ohalim’s publications.


35. See Yedioth Ahronoth, magazine supplement (29 April 1994), 13.


37. On February 25, 1994, Baruch Goldstein, a physician from the settlement of Kiryat Arba, murdered 29 Arabs who had been reciting Ramadan prayers in the Cave of the Prophets in Hebron. This massacre occurred about a month before the events at Yehud. On the massacre, see Ehud Sprinzak, *Bein meh . aah huz . -parlimentarit leteror: alimut politit beyisrael* (Jerusalem: 1995), 101–103.


39. This was reported by Itamar Eichner in *Maariv* (11 May 1994), 15.


42. Following a lengthy investigation, an Israeli court released an interim report in August 1997, in which it was stated that most of the missing children had in fact died of malnutrition or disease. Many refused to accept these findings. For instance, Moshe Katzav, then serving as minister of tourism (and today Israel’s president) stated:
The families of the children must know all the details of what occurred in those dark days, when things happened in Israel that are fitting for regimes of the darkest kind and not for a newly revived state that is taking its first steps. . . . I have no doubt that children were illegally handed over for adoption and that infants were illegally hidden. Things happened out of simple malice and a sense of superiority and superciliousness (quoted in Ha’aretz [18 Aug. 1997], A-1).

43. Suspicions were raised that members of Mishkan Ohalim were responsible for burning down a gas station (see Ha’aretz, 4 Aug. 1997), for damaging traffic lights around the country (Maariv, 6 Aug. 1997), and for placing an explosive charge in the Petah Tikva courthouse (Yedioth Ahronoth, 19 Aug. 1997).

44. The date was probably not coincidental: the Haftorah portion read on the intermediate Sabbath of Sukkot (Ez. 38:18–39:16) features a prophetic description of the war between Gog and Magog.

46. See Kol ha’ir (12 April 1996), 23.
47. See “Do’h mishtarti.”
49. See “Do’h mishtarti.”

50. Quoted in Yedioth Ahronoth, magazine supplement (29 April 1994), 11.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., 13.


54. Ibid., 247.

55. See ’Al hamishmar magazine supplement (8 April 1994), 2.

56. According to the Israel Wire (19 April 1999), a “close associate” of Meshulam said that “Meshulam feels betrayed by the families of the missing children, and he therefore is no longer able to endure the hardships of the struggle and the consequences of his continued struggle” (www.israelwire.com/w/990419/99041915.html).
Beyond *Wissenschaft*: The Resurrection of Resurrection in Jewish Thought Since 1950

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In *The Death of Death*, my book on the subject of resurrection and immortality in Jewish thought, I summarized the historical development of these ideas in Judaism as follows:

With the exception of three brief passages (Isaiah 25:8, 26:19, and Daniel 12)—all relatively late in the biblical corpus—the Bible denies any form of life after death other than some form of shadowy persistence in what is termed *sheol*.

In the early postbiblical period, two doctrines of the afterlife become progressively more prominent in rabbinic and apocryphal texts: the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul. These two doctrines are soon conflated in rabbinic texts, which describe how the soul separates from the body at death and journeys to God, while the body disintegrates in the earth. At the End of Days, according to the rabbis, the body and its soul will be reunited and the individual human being, reconstituted as during life on earth, will come before God in judgment.

With some prominent exceptions (for example, in the writings of Maimonides), this conflated doctrine, in one form or another, becomes canonical until the early 19th century, when bodily resurrection is dismissed by all but the more traditionalist wings of the religious community—leaving spiritual immortality as the sole acceptable doctrine for modern Jews. The clearest indication of this change is found in the liturgy of the early and later Reformers, German and American, where the phrase *mehaye hametim* (“Who gives life to the dead”) is removed from the *gevurot* blessing in the Amidah in favor of some alternative formula (currently, *mehaye hakol* [“source of life”]).

During the second half of the 20th century, this trend begins to be reversed. Quite suddenly, bodily resurrection is not only reconsidered in liberal theological circles but there are those who even claim it to be preferable to spiritual immortality, although that reconsideration has not as yet found its way into American Reform liturgy.

What accounts for this recent and rather unexpected reversal in the fate of the doctrines of resurrection and immortality?

As noted, the most explicit rejection of bodily resurrection can be traced in the platforms, programmatic statements, theological writings, and liturgies of classical Re-
form Judaism, first in Europe and later in America. It was echoed in the thinking of Mordecai Kaplan and in the liturgies he created for the Reconstructionist movement; in a much more muted form, it can also be discerned in the theological writings (though not in the liturgies) of America’s middle-of-the-road Conservative Judaism. In the 150 years separating the dawn of the Jewish Enlightenment and the middle of the 20th century, there was no serious consideration of the notion of bodily resurrection by thinkers from the liberal wing of the Jewish community. Since 1950, however, that doctrine has returned to the liberal theological agenda, as advocated in the writings of a number of eminent American Jewish theologians.

The first of these is Will Herberg, whose *Judaism and Modern Man* was widely read at the time of its publication in 1951. What may be the richest chapter in the entire book is Herberg’s discussion of eschatology, in which he reviews the doctrines of the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul. Herberg terms the former “outrageous”—but indispensable—while dismissing the latter as rooted in the antihistorical and otherworldly outlook of Greek and Eastern thought.

Resurrection is indispensable, Herberg claims, first, because it teaches that man’s ultimate destiny “comes to him solely by the grace and mercy of God,” not by virtue of his possessing an immortal soul; second, because it teaches that what is destined to be fulfilled is the “whole man—body, soul, and spirit”; and third, because the whole point of the doctrine is that “the life we live now, the life of the body, the life of empirical existence in society, has some measure of permanent worth in the eyes of God.” This doctrine, then, is an affirmation of the value to God of history and society and of the only life human beings can know, that of embodied individuals. Finally, for Herberg, the doctrine is a “symbol,” not the “literalistic pseudo-biological” fantasy either of the traditionalists who accept it, or of the reformers who reject it.

Arthur A. Cohen, who (like Herberg) was strongly influenced by the writings of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, also concedes that the doctrine of resurrection is “unpersuasive,” “alogical,” and “antirational.” Yet it is precisely because of its unpersuasive nature that the doctrine must be accepted, he argues, because it is a “miracle that God works for the individual . . . .” More specifically: “What fails within nature and dies is restored in the kingdom, transformed, strained of the agitation of the flesh, and purified by miraculous grace.” In short, it is a statement about God’s ultimate power: “God bestows upon the dead a unity analogous to that which he has won for himself.” A God who is truly God must be able to work such paradoxes.

Richard Levy, a representative of the more traditionalist wing of Reform, argues that Reform should reconsider the doctrine for three reasons: “It is faithful to the nature of our being as creations of God; it is compatible with the basic covenantal promise that has bound our people with God . . . ; and by its connection with the messianic promise, it binds us to *Eretz Yisrael* in a manner that political and cultural Zionism fails to do.” In a more general way, Levy argues that Reform should reaffirm the doctrines of Judaism as they were known by Jews who lived prior to the Enlightenment.

Steven Schwarzschild, also of the Reform movement, argues as well for bodily resurrection because it asserts “what is nowadays called the psychosomatic unity, or the embodied soul [sic]/ensouled-body, of the human individual and the infinite ethical tasks incumbent upon him or her.” Herschel Matt, a close friend and disciple of Will
Herberg, echoes all of Herberg’s arguments. Belief in resurrection is required because “to believe in the Creator-God . . . is to trust in a fulfillment of our life that is beyond history.” He believes in resurrection because the doctrine affirms that the body is no less God’s creation, because the notion of a bodiless soul runs counter to one’s experience of oneself, and because it affirms the significance of one’s existence within society. Finally, echoing Herberg’s reference to the doctrine as a “symbol,” Matt calls it a “myth.”

Before turning to Eugene Borowitz, arguably the reigning theologian of American Reform, it is worth considering another recent reaffirmation of resurrection, this one an article written in 1992 by Michael Wyschogrod, a prominent Orthodox theologian. It is not surprising that an Orthodox theologian should reaffirm a traditional Jewish doctrine. What is significant about Wyschogrod’s article is that he submits this traditional doctrine to a systematic and rigorous theological defense. Moreover, this defense echoes many of the arguments provided by the more liberal thinkers considered thus far—mainly, that belief in resurrection is demanded by the Jewish concept of God. Wyschogrod insists, in brief, that “because God is a redeeming God, it follows that death cannot be the last word. . . . Either death wins or God saves.”

It is in the writings of Borowitz, however, that we find perhaps the most dramatic example of the recent turnabout in the fate of the two doctrines of resurrection and immortality. A prolific author and teacher of generations of Reform rabbis, Borowitz was a moving force in the composition of the 1976 Centenary Perspective, the third of American Reform’s historic platforms. Within this platform is a statement on the afterlife that reflects a slight change in emphasis from a parallel statement in the earlier Columbus Platform of 1937. In the words of the 1937 statement: “Judaism affirms that man is created in the Divine image. His spirit is immortal.” The 1976 statement removes the advocacy of spiritual immortality in favor of some more ambiguous form of eternal life: “Amid the mystery we call life, we affirm that human beings, created in God’s image, share in God’s eternity despite the mystery we call death.” In two extended elaborations of that 1976 statement, one a separate book-length commentary on the Centenary Perspective published in 1982 and the other contained in his Liberal Judaism, a comprehensive statement of his personal theology published a year later, Borowitz confesses that while he has no knowledge of what awaits him after his death, he is yet “inclined to think that my hope is better spoken of as resurrection than immortality for I do not know myself as a soul without a body but only as a psychosomatic self.”

Unlike Reform Judaism, throughout its entire history the Conservative movement has published only one statement of principles. Titled Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism, the document was composed in 1988 by a joint commission of academicians, rabbis, and laypeople who represented all streams of thought within the movement. Though originally presented at a conference of the movement’s Rabbinical Assembly, Emet Ve-Emunah has never achieved the canonical standing of Reform’s platforms: it was never subjected to a movement-wide discussion, nor was it ever formally voted on. Nonetheless, it reflects the consensus of a representative body of Conservative Jews. As a member of the commission, I authored the draft text on eschatology that appears in Emet Ve-Emunah as “Eschatology: Our Vision of the Future,” where it is noted that the two doctrines of resurrection and
immortality of the soul have been understood in a widely varying manner, by some as literal truths, by others “in a more figurative way.”\textsuperscript{15}

Finally, we should note two full-length books, one stemming from Reform and the other from the Jewish Renewal movement. The first, *What Happens After I Die? Jewish Views of Life After Death*, edited by two Reform rabbis, begins with a brief overview of traditional Jewish teachings on the issue and concludes with eight cautiously agnostic, personal statements.\textsuperscript{16} The second, Simcha Paull Raphael’s *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, draws heavily from the Jewish mystical tradition, contemporary thanatology, Buddhist and Hindu teachings, the transpersonal school of psychology, and the writings of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross. It includes a thorough summary of traditional teachings on the afterlife, including the doctrine of resurrection, but places a greater emphasis on the spiritual dimensions of life after death.\textsuperscript{17}

To summarize, the principal arguments for the recent reaffirmation of the doctrine of bodily resurrection are both theological and anthropological. The theological argument suggests that God, in order to be really God, must be stronger than death. If death wins out, then death is God and we should worship death—which is inconceivable. Although this appears to be a broadly based argument for some form of life after death, it is more an argument for bodily resurrection than for the immortality of the soul. In the latter case, God does not have to do anything; the soul is immortal because of its very nature. It simply never dies. But resurrection demands an aggressive expression of divine power. That is precisely why it appears liturgically in the second blessing of the Amidah, appropriately called gevurot, or power.

The anthropological argument is more directly related to resurrection. It insists that we are intrinsically related to our bodies, that in fact we are our bodies, that without our bodies we simply would not be. Therefore, whatever God has in store for us after our death must also affect our bodies. This argument affirms our psychosomatic identity; it is a deliberate refutation of any dualistic view of the human person. At the same time, it also affirms the significance of history and society, in which our embodied selves are located.

Finally, throughout this material, we find references to the fact that the doctrine should not be interpreted as a biological statement but rather as a symbolic or mythic statement—where “myth” is understood in its more academic sense as a complex pattern of meaning that lends coherence to a body of experience.\textsuperscript{18}

In attempting to account for the recent reconsideration of the doctrine of bodily resurrection, the place to begin is the American Reform movement, which has experienced a rather remarkable change in rhetoric over the past several decades. That movement’s transformation is but one dimension of a much broader phenomenon affecting the forms of Jewish religious expression in America over the past half century, as will soon be discussed.

**Beyond Classical Reform Judaism**

American Reform Judaism today is very different from what it was half a century ago. That change is manifest, inter alia, in its affirmation of Zionism, its acknowledgment of the indispensability of Hebrew as the authentic language of religious Jewish ex-
pression, its eagerness to embrace traditional forms of Jewish learning, and its advocating the introduction of traditional Jewish rituals in Reform homes and synagogues.

On a programmatic level, evidence of Reform’s internal transformation can be discerned by comparing the founding document of American Reform, the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, with a proposed new platform that came under discussion in 1998—1999.

The 1885 platform recognizes in the “Mosaic legislation” a “system of training the Jewish people for its national life in Palestine.” However, it accepts as binding “only the moral laws . . . and such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives”—refusing to accept those laws that are not adapted “to the views and habits of modern civilization.” It also rejects “all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress, originating in ages . . . altogether foreign to our mental and spiritual state.” It affirms that “we consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron.” Finally, it asserts that “the soul of man is immortal,” but it rejects “as ideas not rooted in Judaism the beliefs both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden (Hell and Paradise) as abodes for everlasting punishment and reward.”

As noted earlier, between 1885 and 1999, American Reform produced two further statements of principles, the Columbus Platform of 1937 and the Centenary Perspective of 1976—each marked by a progressive attenuation of the more stridently liberal claims of the Pittsburgh Platform. For example, the 1976 statement advocates “creating a Jewish home centered on family devotion . . . private prayer and daily worship, daily religious observance, keeping the Sabbath and the holy days, celebrating the major events of life. . . .” The Columbus Platform echoes the 1885 platform in affirming spiritual immortality, but in contrast with its predecessor (and in common with the Centenary Perspective), it is silent on bodily resurrection.

In 1998, Richard Levy, the president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) proposed the formulation of a new platform for Reform Judaism. In preparation, he wrote “Ten Principles,” which he expounded at length in an interview appearing in the Winter 1998 issue of Reform Judaism. From the outset, these principles provoked intense discussion. Indeed, an editorial comment in the magazine warned readers that much of what Levy suggested constituted a “radical departure from the earlier platforms” in calling “for the reclaiming of some traditional practices rejected by our Reform forefathers and for embracing new pathways to holiness and social justice.”

In the interview, Levy deplored the continuing influence of the 1885 platform. He advocated that Reform Jews “listen to the call of mitzvot” (he noted that even the Centenary Perspective used the term “obligation” instead of the Hebrew term). Moreover, they should acknowledge the authority not only of “our individual understanding of what is holy”—a reference to Reform’s classical insistence on individual autonomy in determining belief and practice—but also of “the ever-growing body of interpretations by Kenesset Yisrael, the eternal community of the Jewish people.” In his new guidelines, Levy explained, “Jewish life-cycle, ritual, and holiday observances are emphasized more than ever before. We are encouraged to observe Shabbat. . . .” (not, as previously, “the Sabbath”). Levy also enjoined his fellow
Reform Jews to “to read, pray, study and speak in Hebrew.” Referring to Leviticus 19, he noted that the text “shows us the way to kedushah . . . through mitzvot.” And in what may be the most radical departure from previous statements of principles, he called as well for a serious consideration of kashruth, both as an expression of “the spiritual dimension of what we consume,” and because “a kosher diet . . . can also respond to ethical injunctions.”

These are but snippets of a much more extended discussion that touches upon theological issues (the authority of Torah), divisive issues in the American Jewish community (patrilineal descent; the status of the gay and lesbian community), and the traditional Reform emphasis on social action. Toward the end of the interview, Levy is asked if his “right-of-center” positions might estrange him from the majority of Reform rabbis. His response is that, whereas the original Pittsburgh Platform essentially told Reform Jews what “you don’t have permission” to do (for example, kiss the zizit [ritual fringes] during the recitation of the Shema prayer), the fact that more Reform rabbis are now doing so is liberating their congregants to “experience more ways of living a holy life.”

Countering Levy in the same issue is Robert Seltzer, a rabbi and professor of Jewish history at Hunter College and at the City University of New York Graduate School. The title of his response, “This Is Not The Way,” forecasts what is to follow. Seltzer begins by alerting Reform Jews that they must “guard against turning Reform Judaism into Conservative Judaism.” An increase in piety and traditionalism may obscure the essence of Reform Judaism, which is that Reform beliefs and practices ought to be “rationally consistent, intellectually coherent, and subject to critical inquiry.” The 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, Seltzer claims, “is not as outdated as Rabbi Levy contends,” even though it clings to a faith in the essential goodness of human beings and inexorable progress in a way that “appears naive in light of the horrors of the twentieth century.” Levy’s draft document, in contrast, “errs in the opposite direction, expressing a certain cultural pessimism.” Moreover, Seltzer continues, any new statement of principles must guard against the “tendency to turn the hands of the clock backward instead of forward.” As evidence of this proclivity, Seltzer attacks Levy’s endorsement of kashruth, which for most Reform Jews, “is no litmus test of Jewish identity or spirituality. . . .”

The debate over Levy’s proposals raged within the movement both before and during the CCAR convention of 1999. An editorial comment in the following (Spring 1999) issue of Reform Judaism described various reactions, some of them published and others appearing on the movement’s web pages (a rough survey indicates that those opposing Levy’s proposals outnumbered those supporting them by a ratio of at least two to one). Among the views appearing in Reform Judaism was that of Eric Yoffe—the current president of the UAHC and arguably the preeminent spokesman for American Reform—who “questioned the creation of a new set of principles at this time.” Over time, Levy’s “Ten Principles” were revised six times before being adopted, in significantly attenuated form, at the 1999 convention.

In its final version, Levy’s original 10 principles have been expanded to 30 principles that are divided into 3 broad topics: God, Torah, and Israel. They include a number of references to the performance of the “mitzvot (sacred obligations)” as a way of responding to God, some of which “demand renewed attention as the result of the
unique context of our own times” (for example, “Shabbat . . . calls us to culminate the workweek with kedushah, menuchah, and oneg”). Significantly, there is no reference to the dietary laws, perhaps the most controversial of Levy’s suggestions. Regarding immortality, the section on God concludes with the following statement: “We trust in our tradition’s promise that, although God created us as finite human beings, the spirit within us is eternal”—a curious amalgam of the previous statements of 1937 and 1976.21

Although a considerable divide separates Levy’s original principles from the ones that were finally adopted, the fact that a prominent Reform rabbi even considered proposals of this kind is significant, as is the fact that they were given serious consideration and received a certain amount of support. Even the rhetoric of the final, drastically toned down text shows how far American Reform has strayed from its origins.

Similar indications of change are evident at the annual summer study kalot (retreats) sponsored by the UAHC Commission on Jewish Growth. Meeting in various locations around the country, these four- to five-day retreats attract several hundred lay members of the Reform movement. Participants worship twice daily and kipot and talitot are omnipresent on men and women; as a guest participant, I have been asked several times to instruct men and women on how to don tefillin. Although the Reform liturgy is used, services are conducted almost exclusively in Hebrew. The meals are not kosher, but pork products and shellfish are avoided and vegetarian alternatives are always available. Shabbat is spent in worship, study, singing, and rest and is always concluded with the havdalah ceremony. On one occasion when the retreat coincided with Tisha B’av, a number of participants joined me in breaking the fast at day’s end. Particularly interesting is the rhetoric employed at such retreats, which indicates that both the lay and rabbinic leadership of the kalot consider the retreats’ participants to be the model Reform Jews for the movement’s future. Although the number of participants is not large in proportion to the size of the movement, I have observed similar patterns of religious observance in many Reform congregations where I have visited as a weekend guest.

**Beyond Wissenschaft**

As noted, the transformation of American Reform is but one instance of a much broader change in the character of American Jewry as a whole. Although noted by many scholars, that broader transformation is more elusive, since it is not reflected in formal programmatic statements. Nonetheless, what is inescapable to any serious observer of American Jewish life today is the continuing and growing search for specifically Jewish forms of what has come to be called “spirituality.”

The modern spiritual impulse finds various means of expression in Jewish society. There is the emergence of the Jewish Renewal and havurah movements; the striking liturgical and ritual creativity among Jewish feminists; and flourishing synagogues on the model of Manhattan’s B’nai Jeshurun, where more than a thousand worshippers sing and dance their way through a kabalat shabat service. There is the oft-noted concern for what Judaism has to say about environmental and ecological issues and the flowering of Jewish Lights Publishing, whose motto is “words for the soul made
in Vermont.” There is also the renewed popularity of the neo-hasidic writings of Martin Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel alongside the writings of Reform’s Lawrence Kushner and the late Arye Kaplan—and, more generally, the fascination with popular forms of Jewish mysticism and hasidism. In its more extreme form, the search for spirituality is marked by a tendency to syncretize Judaism with Eastern religions such as Buddhism. All of this, of course, reflects a much broader cross-cultural phenomenon that perhaps can best be captured by the following anecdote. Visiting one of Manhattan’s “super-bookstores,” I asked to be directed to the section containing books on religion. I was shown to two shelves marked “Religion.” But immediately next to them, I found five floor-to-ceiling shelves labeled “Spirituality,” which contained a generous selection of writings not only by Buber and Heschel, but also by Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel.

The new worldview may be regarded as a Jewish expression of what has come to be called “postmodernism” (although that term is even more elusive than “spirituality”). It is marked by a religious romanticism, a suspicion of rationalist models of theological inquiry, and an emphasis on the emotional, affective dimension of the individual’s relationship with God over the more rational or structured expression of that relationship—to use traditional polarities, the stress is on kavanah rather than keva'; 22 aggadah rather than halakhah. In consequence, the dominant scientific/technological/rationalistic outlook of the past century is now viewed as inadequate for dealing with what might be broadly called “meaning of life” issues.

A similar spirit has begun to transform the academic study of Judaism. Since the dawn of the Enlightenment, the reigning paradigm for the study of Judaism was Wissenschaft des Judentums, literally the “science of Judaism,” identified in the eponymous school that emerged in 19th-century German Jewish academic circles. Wissenschaft emphasized the critical, dispassionate, or “scientific” approach to the study of Jewish texts and institutions, subjecting Judaism to the same scholarly criteria that were applied to other ancient cultures or bodies of literature. The more personal, subjective, faith-oriented stance of the academician was to be ignored; for the purposes of scholarly inquiry, the goal was to discover the scholarly “truth” concerning the issue at hand, whatever its source or its implications. In the study of ancient texts, for example, Wissenschaft’s goal was to come as close as possible to the peshat, or literal meaning of the text—the original intent of its author or authors, as opposed to its accumulated homiletical or midrashic layers. Finally, the enterprise as a whole was thoroughly imbued with historicism: the assumption that everything Jewish had a history; the attempt to trace the historical evolution of any given Jewish text or institution through the ages; and the religious and historical impact of Judaism’s encounter with successive surrounding cultures. Wissenschaft, in short, was a thoroughly relativizing and inherently secularizing enterprise. 23

In fairness to the generations of scholars who pursued that enterprise, their approach to the study of Torah served a noble purpose. They were convinced that the scientific study of Judaism was indispensable in order for Judaism to be perceived (both by Jews and non-Jews) as congenial with the temper of modernity. The yeshiva style of Jewish learning was an impediment to this broader goal: for Judaism to adapt successfully to the modern age, it had to be open to the clear light of western, scholarly methodologies.
By the end of the 19th century, Wissenschaft had come to be enthroned in the first centers for advanced Jewish learning in America, namely, the Reform movement’s Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati (founded in 1875) and the Conservative movement’s Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York (founded in 1887). Both the founding faculties and the curricula of these early rabbinical schools were exemplars of Wissenschaft principles, which in turn suggested an implicit model of the American rabbinate. In effect, these seminaries were superb graduate schools. Their stated purpose was to create rabbis; after all, what other forms of religious leadership did the American Jewish community require at that time, and what other goal could induce the community to fund these schools? Nor were there academic positions awaiting their graduates. Nonetheless, these rabbis were meant to be miniature versions of their teachers, who themselves were appointed because of their academic qualifications. Very few faculty members had served as rabbis of American congregations.

In hindsight, it is easy to characterize this enterprise as totally dysfunctional. But in its historical and cultural context, it was quite appropriate; the schools and their faculties were doing what they did best. Early leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements were also convinced that their seminaries would serve as the next link in the long chain of Torah centers originating in Jerusalem and Yavneh and continuing in the academies of Babylonia (and later, in Western and Eastern Europe). They sensed that no great Jewish community had ever survived without a significant center for the study of Torah, and they had begun to realize that the great European academies were, for one reason or another, soon to become extinct. The future lay in America. Consciously or not, they assumed that neither East European Orthodox Judaism nor its yeshiva-style of learning would make a successful transition to the New World. Of course, we now know that they were wrong on both counts. Nonetheless, this model of rabbinic education persisted until the 1950s.

Together with many other factors, preeminently the move to suburbia and the growing acculturation of American Jewry, this academic model of the rabbinate played a decisive role in shaping the prevailing model of American Jewish congregational life. It was embodied in the classical “cathedral synagogue”—a large sanctuary, seats arranged in theater-like rows, a high, frontal bimah, and a formal, highly choreographed service led by the rabbi and cantor accompanied by choir and organ, with the congregants relegated to the largely passive role of spectators. My own observations, confirmed by anecdotal reports of adult Jews who were raised in these settings, suggest that the sermons delivered by these “cathedral synagogue” rabbis studiously avoided topics that might be called “religious.” Instead they were devoted to general topics such as antisemitism, Zionism, Jewish education, or current affairs (and especially, from the 1960s onward, such matters as the Holocaust, Soviet Jewry, and the Israeli-Arab conflict). Far less in evidence was any discussion of God, Torah, mitzvot, prayer, Jewish ritual life or, more generally, “meaning of life” issues such as alienation, illness and death, the dissolution of marriage and the family, sexuality, or the ambiguities of the moral life. Few rabbis could teach what they had not been taught in their years of training, namely, what Judaism had to say about all of these issues. Their education had emphasized what the classical texts had meant to their authors, not what they could mean to them or to their congregants.
It is clear that the new search for spirituality on the part of American Jews represents a vigorous and explicit rejection of the cathedral synagogue model. “Old-style” rabbis and their synagogues have been forced to reach some measure of accommodation with new forms of expression; the alternative is that their congregants will simply go elsewhere. The transformations in American Reform Judaism as outlined earlier are but one indication of this broader transformation in American Jewish religious life.

More directly related to the agenda of this article is the impact of all of these changes on recent developments in the enterprise of American Jewish theology. In accordance with the Wissenschaft model, theology was taught as merely one dimension of Jewish intellectual history. To the extent that rabbinical students were taught theology at all—the curriculum was heavily weighted in favor of the study of biblical and rabbinic texts—the emphasis was on what the great Jewish thinkers of past centuries had to say. The new model, in contrast, encourages students to evolve their own working theology, informed not only by historical Jewish philosophers but by modern thinkers such as Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Mordecai Kaplan, and Abraham Joshua Heschel, along with younger disciples such as Emil Fackenheim, Will Herberg, Eugene Borowitz, and Harold Schulweis. It has also led to an appropriation of the language of myth and symbol as a way of characterizing theological thinking and language.

It is specifically the last of these matters that touches upon the issue of resurrection. Reformers of the 19th century rejected the notion of bodily resurrection because it offended the rationalist, critical temper of their time. The only way they could understand it was as “the literalistic pseudo-biological” fantasy dismissed by Will Herberg—which of course was the way it had been understood and accepted by traditionalist thinkers throughout the ages. Yet as we have seen, it is precisely the “un-persuasive,” “outrageous,” “antirational,” “alogycal,” “paradoxical,” “symbolic,” or “mythic” character of the doctrine that recommends it to the new generation of theologians discussed above.

The doctrine of bodily resurrection is one dimension of the broader Jewish eschatological myth. Both eschatology and the doctrines of creation deal with eons that lie beyond direct human apprehension. They provide the widest framework of meaning through which Jews try to make sense of their own historical experience, which lies in between these two “beyonds.” Put somewhat differently, they help Jews understand “where they are now” in history, and thus lend a measure of integrity to the vastly larger canvas of human experience. Although the doctrine of resurrection may seem to describe events that will take place at the end of time, it speaks just as clearly to how we can make sense of our lives in the here-and-now. But none of this can be captured literally. To attempt a literal explanation is inevitably to trivialize.

According to the technical terminology employed by Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, all of eschatology (including the doctrine of bodily resurrection) should be understood as a “broken” myth—“broken” in the sense that its mythic character is acknowledged. Yet this broken myth can remain very much “alive” and functioning.27 To borrow a term coined by Paul Ricoeur, accepting or even welcoming this myth is to step into a state of “second” or “willed naïveté.” Through it, we recapture an almost childlike awareness of how the entire world coheres. At the same time, it is a
“willed” naïveté because it follows upon the awareness that this picture of the world is not literally or objectively “true,” and because believers “will” themselves into taking this next step in their personal faith journeys.\textsuperscript{28}

The history of Jewish philosophy and theology has amply demonstrated the influence of intellectual developments in the world at large. Hence it is not surprising that the issue of the afterlife is also high on the agenda of contemporary Christianity. To cite but one example, in 1994, John Hick (arguably the most accomplished of American Protestant philosophers of religion) published his \textit{Death and Eternal Life}. Hick’s claim that without some belief in immortality, “any religious understanding of human existence . . . would be radically incoherent” has apparently struck a chord among his Jewish readers.\textsuperscript{29}

\section*{The Impact of the Holocaust}

Finally, the transformation in Jewish religious and theological consciousness in the past few decades can also be seen as a consequence of the growing impact of the Holocaust. More than any other event, the Holocaust has taught us to be humble about human powers and impulses, to be skeptical about the imperialism of reason and science. None of these, we now realize, is competent to deal with the most significant dimensions of human existence. The Holocaust, precipitated by a culture that embodied the highest achievements of modernity, has led to a profound disillusionment with the perceived accomplishments of the past two centuries.

We have also become aware that mathematical systems rest on axioms that are themselves improvable; that physics must acknowledge a dimension of indeterminacy in trying to understand the material world; that astronomy also deals with entities and events that elude direct human perception and verification. I recall a recent conversation with a noted astronomer. When I asked him if the “big bang” had been loud, he smiled and responded, “Of course not! There was no air, so there was no sound.” When he learned that my field was theology, he added:

\begin{quote}
The big bang belongs to your field. It is pure poetry, pure myth. I can tell you what happened one nanosecond after the big bang, but nothing about what happened a nanosecond before it. There was no “before” to the big bang, because before that event, there was no time.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

I also cannot but believe that the sight of the emaciated bodies in the liberated concentration camps, alongside the mound of ashes in the crematoria, contributed to a renewed appreciation of the reality and finality of death, specifically our own inevitable death. One cannot be detached about death. Here, more than ever, the entire body of assumptions that underlie the Wissenschaft approach to the study of religion must declare itself impotent. We must contemplate death. Unless we deal with our death, we cannot even begin to deal with our life. And if theology does not deal with the significance of human life in the face of death, it has avoided its central issue.

The Holocaust, moreover, has taught us something about the preciousness of the human body. We may not be \textit{only} our bodies, there may be dimensions to our selves that are not reducible to bodily existence, and we may choose to call that dimension
of our selves “soul.” But we are clearly incarnate beings, and our experience of our bodies is very much integral to our experience of our selves. We may want to insist that something of us persists after the death of our bodies. But the doctrine of bodily resurrection can become one way of acknowledging the simple truth that when our bodies die, we die, and that if God is to affect our destiny even after we have died, God must deal with our bodies as well.

The recent reconsideration of Jewish teachings on the afterlife that I have traced here is clearly a work in progress. Predicting its eventual outcome is precarious, since it is very much a product of broader cultural changes whose trajectory is unpredictable. But it is also quite clear that the devaluation of this entire body of Jewish thinking over the past two centuries has come to an end. That in itself is a major statement about the current state of private faith in American Jewry.

Notes

1. For a detailed documentation of this process, see Neil Gillman, The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought (Woodstock, Ver.: 1997), ch. 8.
2. See, for example, the Reconstructionist Sabbath Prayer Book (New York: 1945), xxvii–xxviii. Although this introduction is signed “the Editors,” it was probably written by Kaplan himself, and it surely reflects his thinking.
3. See, for example, Robert Gordis, A Faith for Moderns (New York: 1960), 250–252. Gordis was a noted rabbi, theologian, and ideologue of the Conservative movement.
4. For an overview, see Gillman, Death of Death, ch. 9.
5. Will Herberg, Judaism and Modern Man (New York: 1951, rpt. 1997). The citations that follow are taken from chs. 15 and 16; see esp. 229ff.
7. Probably a reference to the vision of the “dry bones” in Ez. 37:1–14.
12. A useful comparison of the Pittsburgh and Columbus Platforms and the Centenary Platform is found in the supplement to Eugene Borowitz’s Reform Judaism Today (New York: 1983).
13. Ibid., Book 2, 42–49.
18. For a more detailed version of these three arguments, see Gillman, Death of Death, ch. 10.
19. For the complete text of the Pittsburgh Platform, see, inter alia, Borowitz, Reform Judaism Today (supplement). For an illuminating discussion of the historical context of the platform, together with the proceedings of the 1885 Conference, see Walter Jacobs (ed.), The

20. Editorial note, Reform Judaism 27, no. 2 (Winter 1998). The cover of the issue featured a photograph of a bearded Rabbi Levy garbed in a traditional long, black and white striped talit, with ziziz pressed to his lips.

21. It should also be noted that a committee of Reform rabbis and lay representatives is currently engaged in putting together a new Reform prayer book. In informal conversation, I have been told that the formulation of the gevurot benediction is being reconsidered. The traditional formulation is retained in the eighth of ten versions of the Sabbath Evening Service found in Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook (New York: 1975), 255, as well as in the minhah service for Yom Kippur in Gates of Repentance: The New Union Prayerbook for the Days of Awe (New York: 1978), 399.

22. Kavanah is the inward dimension of the life of religion; keva’ is its more external or structured dimension.

23. On the dynamics of the Wissenschaft school, see Ismar Schorsch, From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism (Waltham: 1994).


25. To the best of my recollection, among my teachers at the Jewish Theological Seminary, only Mordecai Kaplan and Robert Gordis served as congregational rabbis during their teaching years, although Louis Finkelstein and Moshe Zucker did serve in this role before joining the faculty. Max Arzt and Simon Greenberg also served as rabbis for many years before joining the faculty. However, their positions at the Seminary were more closely tied to administration, their teaching being limited to “practical” courses such as homiletics and education. One priceless anecdote illustrates Finkelstein’s priorities with regard to the school that he headed. He once told me that I had no idea how much money he could have raised if only Mordecai Kaplan had not served on the JTS faculty. (Originally appointed by Solomon Schechter in 1909, Kaplan retired in 1962.) When I asked why he had not fired Kaplan, he explained that he had spent his entire career insuring the Seminary’s reputation in American academic circles. All he had to do was fire one member of the faculty because he disagreed with what he was teaching, and he would have destroyed everything he had created. Finkelstein was prepared to allow Kaplan to teach what he clearly regarded as a heretical theology to hundreds of future rabbis in order to preserve the Seminary’s academic reputation.

26. For an extensive study of this model of rabbinic education as embodied in rabbinical studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary, see Neil Gillman, “On the Religious Education of American Rabbis,” in Caring for the Commonweal: Education for Religious and Public Life, ed. Parker J. Palmer, Barbara G. Wheeler, and James W. Fowler (Macon: 1990). There is abundant anecdotal evidence on the way the model was reflected in classroom instruction. My most vivid recollection was the comment of an eminent Talmud professor to a student who was struggling to interpret a talmudic passage: “That was a great sermon. Now what does the text really mean?” His denigration of the congregational rabbi’s main format for teaching his congregants was obvious. In retrospect, it is clear that the Seminary’s expectation for the brightest students in the school was a scholarly career; the rest of the students could become congregational rabbis. To be fair, however, certain of my teachers had a profound religious impact on us: Abraham Heschel, Mordecai Kaplan, and Shalom Spiegel managed to free themselves from the model of instruction that dominated the school.

27. Tillich’s classical and seminal definition of these terms is found in his Dynamics of Faith (New York: 1957), 41ff.


29. Quoted in ibid., 15.

Religiosity and Ethnicity: Jewish Identity Trends in the United States

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Historically, the religious and ethnic dimensions of Jewish identity have been closely interwoven. In fact, so closely bound are they, that the traditional Jewish lexicon hardly distinguishes between the two concepts. Jewish religious practice, by definition, was observed exclusively by the Jewish people, and notions of Jewish peoplehood, nation, and community were suffused with faith in the Jewish God, the practice of Jewish (religious) law, and the study of ancient religious texts. Indeed, the Bible enjoins Jews to be a “holy people,” fusing, in one succinct phrase, the modern western concepts of religion and ethnicity.

Yet the Jews’ encounter with modernity occasioned a rift between Jewish ethnicity and Jewish religion. With their incorporation into larger national societies, they were obligated to adjust their group identity to the social constructs prevailing among the majority groups among which they dwelled. In the West, where Jews entered more as equals than elsewhere, more overtly religious formulations took precedence, giving rise to Reform, Orthodoxy, and Conservatism. In Russia and in other parts of Eastern Europe, national, cultural, or ethnic conceptions were given primacy, as expressed in such movements as Zionism and Bundism.

Since their arrival in the United States, consistent with the expectations of the surrounding society, American Jews have publicly defined themselves as a religious group. The tendency has been so pronounced that the religious definition of “Jewish” seems to have more legitimacy, if not more currency, than the ethnic definition. The title of Will Herberg’s book Protestant-Catholic-Jew (1955) reflects popular linguistic usage that, in turn, reflects the religious framing of being Jewish. So, too, do numerous public references to the “Judeo-Christian” ethic, as well as organized inter-religious encounters exemplified in such organizations as the National Conference of Christians and Jews. While some social scientists have readily classified Jews with other ethnic groups (Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan’s Beyond the Melting Pot [1964] may be the best-known illustration), Jewish communal leaders and the Jewish public at large seem more apt to regard being Jewish as an expression of one more legitimate American religious faith.

Patterns of linguistic usage, of course, reflect the relative prestige assigned to religious and ethnic statuses in the United States. Since its inception, American society
has accorded a special place to religious belief, idiom, and leaders, even as it struggled to preserve a separation between church and state. At the same time, American society has been ambivalent about ethnicity. While seeming to welcome immigrants, American society and its leaders have been decidedly uncomfortable with the persistence of strong ethnic identities among the generations that succeeded the immigrants. Today, almost all groups expressing strong ethnic ties are nonwhite, recently arrived, or socioeconomically deprived. In this environment, it is not at all surprising that Jews have largely refrained from defining themselves outwardly as ethnic, even as they have established and supported institutions that are seemingly both ethnic and religious in character.

With this said, we should not dismiss the idea that putatively “religious” schools and even synagogues have also served as venues for expressing and perpetuating what must be seen as primarily ethnic attachments and activities. Acting like many other American ethnic groups, Jews have disproportionately married other Jews, maintained friendships with one another, lived near one another, and concentrated in certain industries, professions, and companies. All of these patterns of in-group interaction constitute the fundamental and necessary social bases for cohesive ethnicity.

The community’s ethnic character is also manifest in its highly developed organized group life outside of the synagogue. Most notable in this regard are the Jewish community centers, philanthropic agencies, pro-Israel support groups, fraternal associations, and cultural institutions. American Jews also maintain an identifiable ethnic style in culture, the arts, intellectual life, and politics. Thus, despite the Jews’ demonstrable preference for American (religious) nomenclature, there are equally strong foundations for regarding Jewishness as a form of ethnicity.

The sociologist Stephen Sharot offers a particularly insightful formulation of the intertwining of American Jewish religion and ethnicity:

Among American Jews, ethnicity and religion are in a relationship of symbiosis. Ethnicity is strong with respect to identity and feeling of belonging to a group of purported common ancestry and history, but weak with respect to a structural basis. Religion is weak in the sense that feelings of belonging to a community of shared religious beliefs and practices are declining, but strong in that it provides a firm structural basis. Ethnicity . . . provides the “real” reasons for joining synagogues and carrying out religious practice. . . . Religious institutions . . . make possible the persistence of a relatively strongly-held ethnicity.

To be clear, “ethnicity” is used in this study to refer not to such everyday stereotypical matters as bagels-and-lox, comedians, and material ostentation. Rather, ethnicity in this context refers to the more comprehensive way in which social scientists use the word (social networking, formal association, cultural differentiation, and more). In a manner of speaking, ethnicity refers to everything that distinguishes Jews from other American religious groups. It connotes common ancestry, shared circumstance and culture, and common destiny. It underlies all the decidedly nonreligious institutions that distinguish Jews from, say, Episcopalians and Methodists.

If the ethnic dimension has been so crucial in defining American Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness, it behooves social scientists to examine the phenomenon closely, especially since several pieces of evidence point to its recent decline. Among these are the rise in intermarriage, a decline in in-group friendship, and the geographic dis-
persal of the Jewish population, both within metropolitan regions and across the
United States. Jewish membership organizations report aging and declining con-
stituencies, and centralized Jewish philanthropies (federations) grapple with a shrink-
ing, albeit more individually generous, donor base. Moreover, informed observers
sense weakening enthusiasm for Israel. Jewish involvement in leftist politics (so-
cialist at one time, liberal more recently) and social justice causes seems to have
waned, as recent studies point to a partial Jewish shift toward the American political
center. Even if Jewish political views remain as far to the left of the shifting American
center as they always have been, Jews apparently attach less significance to politics
as an expression of their Jewishness.

This apparent decline in ethnicity does not, as some have claimed, come amid a
wholesale decline in all manner of Jewish identification. At the same time as Jewish
ethnicity seems to be in slow retreat, indicators of specifically religious involvement
seem to be holding their own, and in some cases rising. Among these indicators are
membership in synagogues, enrollment in Jewish day schools, and adult study of clas-

At the same time as these indicators are rising, the decline of specific ethnic markers appears to be more pronounced. Among these, the decline of pro-Israel and Zionist activities, liberal political mobilization, and dense Jewish neighborhoods (and the Jewish community centers that thrived within them) stands out. Struggles against antisemitic discrimination in housing, employment, resorts, and higher education; and the declining though still living Yiddish culture of the East European immigrant generation (now, of course, vastly reduced in number and influence).

Insofar as American Jewish group identity may be assuming a relatively more re-
ligious and less ethnic character, such a turn would be consistent with (and probably
influenced by) several larger trends in American society. Among these are the near-
evaporation, among all major European ethnic groups, of the social bases for ethnic-
ity (for example, neighborhoods, friendship networks, in-marriage)—a phenomenon
that sociologist Richard Alba labels “the twilight of ethnicity.” Similarly, Herbert
Gans writes of the widespread emergence of a very superficial identity he calls “sym-
bolic ethnicity.”

The decline of white ethnic communities is perhaps a piece in the larger picture of
decay of community of all sorts, a phenomenon given contemporary expression by
Robert Putnam’s “bowling alone” thesis. Putnam’s work joins a literature that charts
a shift from a more communitarian to a more individualist American society.

Another potentially influential trend entails the privatization of religion. Consistent
with the culturally and numerically dominant Protestant model in America, it seems
that religion has become a matter of personal, voluntaristic faith rather than commu-
nal, obligatory action. But beyond these society-wide factors lies a specific major
development within the Jewish group that seems likely to further intensify the decay
of the ethnic aspect of American Jewish identity: the rise in intermarriage. The pro-
portion of Jews marrying nonconverting non-Jews rose sharply during the 1960s and
Although the rate has plateaued since then, a significant minority of Jews marrying today (perhaps 40–43 percent rather than the 52 percent figure widely reported) marry non-Jews.

Intermarriage weakens Jewish ethnic bonds in several ways. Inherently, it means that Jews form immediate families with non-Jews, thus acquiring non-Jewish in-laws and friends. One consequence is that Jews can less readily maintain in-group and out-group stereotypes, be they grounded in reality or not. Higher rates of intermarriage almost automatically bring about an acceptance of intermarriage and a weakened preference for endogamy, a norm that is central to historic Jewish ethnicity (and crucial for most other groups’ ethnic identity as well). The practice of Judaism loses its ethnic or group character in mixed-faith households. Even if the Jewish partner observes religious customs, he or she does so more as an isolated individual and less as a participant in shared family observance—anecdotal examples to the contrary notwithstanding.

Out-marriage influences the practice of Judaism even where the formerly non-Jewish partner has converted to Judaism, thereby turning a potential mixed marriage into an in-marriage. Such families do exhibit relatively high rates of Jewish religious involvement, far higher than that manifested by mixed-faith households. However, converts score low on many ethnic measures of Jewish involvement, which include maintaining ties with Jewish friends, opposition to children’s out-marriage, attachment to Israel, and organizational involvement. Some evidence points to very high rates of intermarriage among the children of conversionary marriages. Historian Jonathan Sarna has referred to those who convert because of their marriage to a Jew as the only known phenomenon of one-generation Jews: neither their parents nor, he suspects, many of their children, are Jewish.

If expressions of Jewish ethnicity have indeed declined, we would expect to see evidence of this trend manifested in age-related differences. That is, younger Jews should score lower than older Jews on relevant measures of ethnicity. If this is the case, does Jewish religious commitment and involvement also decline along with Jewish ethnicity? Are American social trends and rising Jewish intermarriage weakening Jewish religiosity along with Jewish ethnicity?

A related question concerns the impact of intermarriage per se as opposed to larger social forces. To what extent does the decline in ethnicity characterize the entire Jewish population, and to what extent is it confined to the mixed married and thus strictly attributable to intermarriage? Is intermarriage the main reason for the decline in Jewish ethnicity, or does Jewish ethnic commitment decline even among non-intermarried Jews? Here one needs to examine non-intermarried younger Jews. Differences in Jewish ethnicity between older and younger Jews who are not intermarried would support the notion that forces outside of intermarriage are also working to depress ethnic aspects of Jewish identity in the United States.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following questions:

1. Are the religious and ethnic dimensions of Jewish identity in America today indeed distinguishable dimensions? If so, what is their respective content, and what are the observable markers of American Jewish religiosity and ethnicity?
2. What is the relative strength of American Jewish religiosity and ethnicity? Is it
still largely accurate to portray American Jews as harboring strong ethnic attachments, albeit under the cover of a religious rubric?

3. In what ways have religiosity and ethnicity been changing among American Jews? Are both dimensions in decline? Alternatively, is only the ethnic dimension in decline, as much of the argumentation previously might suggest? Or are there some other patterns that distinguish older from younger Jews and, by inference, Jews of the previous time and generation from Jews of the current period?

To further our understanding of these complicated issues, this essay draws upon a nationwide survey of attitudes and behavior of American Jews that is described immediately hereafter. In addition, I utilize insights and qualitative depth interviews that were conducted with dozens of “moderately affiliated” American Jews as part of the recently published study, *The Jew Within: Self, Family and Community in America.*

**The Data**

The survey data derive from a mail-back questionnaire completed by 1,005 Jewish respondents throughout the United States. Commissioned by the Florence G. Heller/JCC Association Research Center, the survey was fielded in June–July 1997 by the Washington, D.C., office of Market Facts.

The respondents belong to the company’s consumer mail panel, consisting of about 368,000 Americans in as many households who have agreed to be surveyed from time to time on a variety of concerns. Of those, about 8,400 were potentially eligible for sampling for this study in that at least one of the adults in the household was Jewish; in the end, questionnaires were sent to 1,400 potential respondents. Market Facts drew the sample so as to approximate distributions on several sociodemographic measures as calculated from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) data. These included household size, age, education, and number of Jewish adults (which usually assumed the value of two in the case of in-marriages and one in the case of mixed marriages or unmarried individuals).

Almost 72 percent of the 1,400 individuals who received the questionnaire returned them. One reason for this high rate of return is that those who repeatedly refrain from returning questionnaires are eventually dropped from the panel. Another reason may be that a survey on Jewish identity bears more inherent interest for the potential respondents than do the more common surveys on consumer issues.

As noted, the eligible households contained at least one Jewish adult (as previously reported in responses to questions concerning religious identity that appear on an annual screening questionnaire). The 1990 NJPS determined that approximately 80 percent of adults who are Jewish also reported that their religion is Judaism. Jews who do not identify as Jewish for purposes of religion (so-called “secular” or “ethnic” Jews) report lower levels of Jewish involvement (for example, observance, affiliation, and in-marriage). The Market Facts survey thus underrepresents the less Jewishly involved and, as a consequence, slightly overestimates the overall population’s levels of Jewish identification.
Respondents were restricted to those aged 25 or older, since previous surveys of panel members demonstrated a severe underrepresentation of Jewish adults under the age of 25. (The relative inaccessibility of young adult Jews may be largely due to their widespread attendance at institutions of higher learning.)

**Measuring Religiosity and Ethnicity: Discerning the Structure of Jewish Identity**

Individual survey questions on diverse features of Jewish identity take on meaning and usefulness when joined to form indices with other items that tap common underlying concepts. Both the ways in which these items are structured and the manner in which they cluster are substantially meaningful. Such clusterings (as determined by factor analysis) reveal the structure of Jewish identity in general, and address as well the very basic question as to whether we can discern separate religious and ethnic dimensions of Jewishness.

The factor analysis of almost all Jewish identity-related items in the survey resulted in 11 indices that are outlined hereafter. Arguably, these indices measure some of the major dimensions of American Jewish identity. The structure here is consistent with (and actually not all that distinctive from) what has been described in the social science literature during the past 30 years. Significantly, the 11 indices do seem to tap clearly religious or clearly ethnic substance. Of the 11 indices, 3 fall within the religious domain. These are:

- **Religious commitment**—attitudes toward holiday celebration, kashruth, Jewish law, and the synagogue. (A complete list of items for this and the other indices appears in the first section of findings.)
- **Faith in God**—certainty about God’s existence and nature; importance of belief.
- **Religious observance and affiliation**—synagogue service attendance and religious practices.

The remaining eight scales, which pertain to the ethnic dimension of Jewish identity, are as follows:

- **Jewish peoplehood**—the sense of belonging to the Jewish people; the belief in Jewish victimization.
- **Tribalism**—the sense of having a special relationship with and responsibility for other Jews.
- **Marginality**—the sense of feeling apart from American society and respondent’s perception of antisemitism.
- **Commitment to endogamy**—that is, opposition to intermarriage.
- **Attachment to Israel**—positive views of Israel and its centrality (expressed, among other ways, in visits to the country).
- **Attachment to Jewish institutions**.
- **Affiliation with Jewish institutions**.
- **Judaism and social justice**—degree of political liberalism; the perception of Jewishness both as being identified with the powerless and as being compassionate.
Notably, all 11 scales are positively correlated with each other, albeit with varying degrees of magnitude. Three groups of scales have particularly high levels of inter-scale correlation. One cluster consisted of the three factors most closely related to religious involvement: religious commitment, faith in God, and ritual observance. A second cluster consisted of three factors related to what might be called “ethnic familism”: tribalism, perceived marginality, and commitment to endogamy. The third cluster consisted of the five other indices—Jewish peoplehood, attachment to Israel, the two Jewish institutional measures, and social justice. Perhaps we may best term this cluster “ethnic communalism.”

Religious involvement, ethnic familism, and ethnic communalism, then, constitute three superscales, suggesting an even more simplified construction of American Jewish identity than the 11 indexes. However, in partial answer to the first question posed earlier, Jewish religiosity and (the two aspects of) Jewish ethnicity are indeed separate dimensions. Religiosity embraces faith in God, religious commitment, and the practice of rituals and ceremonies sanctified by the religious tradition. Ethnicity embraces attachment and commitment to various aspects of the Jewish collective from the most intimate and concrete to the most remote and abstract: marriage and family, friends, local institutions, Israel, and Jewish peoplehood.

Each of the 11 indices will now be described in greater detail.

**Religious Commitment**

A majority of the respondents expressed positive sentiments about various aspects of Jewish religious life (see table 1). Most respondents reported that they feel competent praying in synagogue (62 percent), regard themselves as spiritual (63 percent), and find religious services interesting (62 percent). Half of them look forward to going to services, and 47 percent try to make the Sabbath a special day. The survey asked respondents to evaluate the significance of various symbols and concepts—religious, ethnic or otherwise. Those items garnering the most widespread support included the High Holidays, the Torah, and Passover (regarded as either “very” or “extremely” important by 82 percent, 76 percent, and 76 percent, respectively), while the Sabbath and Jewish law were viewed as less important. In terms of their concept of a “good Jew,” respondents ranked two relevant items rather high: giving one’s children a Jewish education, and attending services on the High Holidays. Far less important to their conception of a good Jew were celebrating the Sabbath, studying Jewish texts, and having a kosher home.

Thus, while a cursory glance at some of the findings may suggest a positive attachment to the religious conception of Judaism, several factors indicate a much weaker—or perhaps more narrowly based—religious commitment. For example, the survey points to widespread indifference to several elements of Jewish religious life that are more “traditional.” These include the Sabbath, Jewish law, keeping a kosher home, and the study of religious texts. When compared with other items (for example, the High Holidays, Passover, giving one’s children a Jewish education), these more traditional items elicit relatively little enthusiasm.

Another sign of relatively weak religious commitment (that is, relative to American Jews’ ethnic commitment) comes in answer to the question on the importance of re-
Table 1. Religious Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important would you say religion is in your own life?</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly important</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I really don’t feel competent praying in synagogue
Most synagogue services are not interesting to me
I look forward to going to synagogue
Even if I don’t observe every aspect of the Sabbath,
    I do try to make it a special day
I am a spiritual person

| In thinking about your sense of being Jewish, how important is each of the following? | Extremely important | Very important | Somewhat important | Not important | Not sure |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur)                             | 50    | 32       | 15     | 3     | 1 |
| The Torah                                                                  | 45    | 31       | 18     | 6     | 1 |
| Passover                                                                   | 39    | 37       | 21     | 4     | 0 |
| The Sabbath                                                                | 22    | 26       | 31     | 20    | 1 |
| Jewish law                                                                 | 21    | 24       | 38     | 14    | 3 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your opinion, for a person to be a good Jew, which of the following items are essential, which are desirable, which do not matter, and which are undesirable (better not to do)?</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
<th>Does not matter</th>
<th>Undesirable</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Give one’s children a Jewish education</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend services on High Holidays</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate oneself about Judaism and Jewish history</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong to a synagogue</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate the Sabbath in some way</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Jewish texts</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a kosher home</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent do you feel attached to each of the following local Jewish groups and organizations?</th>
<th>Extremely attached</th>
<th>Very attached</th>
<th>Somewhat attached</th>
<th>Not attached</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A synagogue or temple</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All responses are percentages.

Religion in the respondents’ lives. Just a quarter claimed that it was very important, about half of those who said that “being Jewish” was very important in their lives. Almost all of the former group are contained within the latter group. If we assume (with some license and some justification) that the question of the importance of religion is a rough proxy for religious commitment—and further, that the question concerning the importance of being Jewish is a proxy for Jewish ethnic commitment—then we can infer, albeit loosely, that almost all Jews who feel religiously very committed also feel ethnically committed. But the reverse is not the case: many Jews who feel ethnically committed do not also see themselves as very religiously committed.
The answers to other questions suggest that American Jews are not as religious as they may first appear. For example, it is instructive to compare the percent of those who look forward to going to the synagogue with the number who claim to attend. Fully half of the respondents (50 percent) said that they look forward to attending religious services, and an even greater number (62 percent) denied that services are uninteresting (in other words, most said that they find services interesting). Yet only 16 percent said that they attend services more than once monthly, and just another 10 percent attend about once a month (see table 3). Assuming no exaggeration regarding actual attendance (an unlikely assumption, especially in light of evidence pointing to exaggerated reports of religious service attendance by American Christians), the results indicate that most of those who look forward to going to religious services, as well as most of those who find them interesting, fail to attend them even once a month. This apparent contradiction calls into question the veracity of the respondents’ claims about the importance of religious aspects of being Jewish.

Indeed, the interviews Arnold Eisen and I conducted in The Jew Within, our recently published monograph on “moderately affiliated” American Jews, further support the notion that American Jews are not a particularly religious lot, at least in the way that “religious” is normally understood. The sample of American Jews that we interviewed in depth (generally individually, for two sessions, lasting about an hour to an hour-and-a-half each) were almost always married individuals who were affiliated with a Conservative or a Reform congregation. Few were intermarried. For these and related reasons, they were probably more involved in conventional Jewish life than the statistical median (fanciful as that notion might be), but not so involved as to qualify them as members of American Jewry’s elite of committed leaders and activists.

Regular participants at services, we learned, were drawn there for several reasons apart from the purely religious. Some even explicitly denied the religious motivations for praying. Among the motivations cited most frequently were the opportunity to spend time with the family (either for or with one’s parents, spouse, or children); the opportunity for personal reflection; the sense of feeling part of the Jewish community; and enjoyment of the music and melodies associated with religious services.

With these considerations in mind, about a quarter of the respondents do, in fact, appear to be genuinely committed to Judaism as a religion, and an even larger number express at least some sympathy for religious aspects of being Jewish.

Faith in God

Just above half the sample (56 percent) reported a definite belief in the existence of God (see table 2). A bit more than a third (36 percent) were definite that God watches over them in times of danger; a quarter (25 percent) were positive that God has a special relationship with the Jewish people. When those answering “probably yes” are combined with those answering “definitely yes,” the proportions affirming these views climb substantially. Overall, the answers to these questions suggest that about a third to a half of American Jews are firm believers (depending upon one’s criteria), and as many as four fifths or more believe in God in some way. The answers point to no substantial number of confirmed atheists or those overtly hostile to the notion of God.
At the same time, from the in-depth interviews for The Jew Within, we learned that the God in whom believing American Jews have faith is a universal God, both very distant from traditional Jewish conceptions and very much in keeping with images shared by other Americans: “For many of our subjects, Jewish notions were simply unavailable. For others, however, they were of no interest, or even repellent.”

Moreover, in drawing a connection between conceptions of God and attendance at synagogue, we discovered that the interviewees:

- do not come to synagogue expecting to find God there, or [they] stay away because they do not. The words in the prayer book do not particularly interest them. The God described and invoked in those prayers is very different from the one in which they believe—too commanding . . . and . . . far too “Jewish.”

Religious Observance and Affiliation

American Jews array themselves on a spectrum of religious practice that extends fairly evenly from one end to another. The items selected for this study are a few of many available discrete practices that portray the religious life of American Jews (see table 3). Here, too, we see signs of the broad spectrum of observance patterns, with some activities widely reported (for example, lighting Hanukah candles or participating in a Passover seder), and others observed only by a small minority (for example, 18 percent use separate dishes for meat and dairy).

One of the fascinating curiosities of these frequencies is that their ordering corre-
sponds, more or less, with that found in studies of Jews around the world. Some specific practices are widely observed everywhere, whereas others are observed only by smaller minorities in numerous diaspora countries and in Israel.29

**Jewish Peoplehood**

A large majority of the respondents agreed with several positive statements concerning Jewish peoplehood that were drawn from our qualitative interviews (see table 4). They said that they were proud to be Jewish (96 percent) and proud of the Jews’ rich history (94 percent); that being Jewish connected them with their family’s past (90 percent); and that a permanent bond existed among Jews (76 percent). A number of concepts and symbols were felt to be particularly significant to the respondents’ sense of Jewishness. Among them were the Jewish family and the Jewish people, perceived to be “extremely” or “very” important by 84 percent in each case; American antisemitism (84 percent) and the Holocaust (85 percent). The relatively high correlation of responses on these latter two items with others that fall under the rubric of Jewish peoplehood is evidence that a sense of victimization and persecution are closely tied in with the larger concept of Jewish peoplehood.

As noted earlier, almost half of the respondents (47 percent) rated being Jewish as very important to them, almost twice as many (26 percent) as those who said the same about religion in their lives. As noted, this finding lends support to the inference that ethnic conceptions of Judaism are still more powerful than religious ones. In addition, statements attesting to ethnic attachment elicited more agreement than those attesting to religious commitment. Notwithstanding, such comparisons are somewhat fanciful. The questionnaire did not explicitly ask respondents to contrast their religious and ethnic commitments, nor did it (or could it) pose precisely parallel questions serving as indicators of the two dimensions. Suffice it to say that Jewish ethnicity, when expressed in terms of peoplehood, family, history, and victimization, garnered widespread endorsement—seemingly more than those items tapping a more purely religious commitment.

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**Table 3. Religious Observance and Affiliation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About how often do you personally attend any type of synagogue, temple, or organized Jewish religious service?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all or only on special occasions (e.g., a bar mitzvah, a wedding)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only on High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a year</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once a month</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times a month or more</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During Passover, do you usually attend a seder?</td>
<td>yes 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your household usually light candles on Hanukah?</td>
<td>yes 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your household use separate dishes for meat and dairy?</td>
<td>yes 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you fast on Yom Kippur?</td>
<td>yes 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your household usually light candles on Friday night?</td>
<td>yes 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you currently a member of a synagogue/temple?</td>
<td>yes 49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All responses are percentages.
American Jews have long been torn between the ethnic particularism of their ancestral past and the universalist norms of contemporary American society that regard particularism as antiquated, and at times even racist. Indeed, if only out of enlightened self-interest, American Jews have been the champions of racial tolerance and the fight against discrimination based on group differences. The urge to move the society to take less notice of group differences certainly runs counter to harboring special feelings for other Jews.

The responses to the items contained in the index of Jewish tribalism reflect ambiguity and ambivalence surrounding these issues (see table 5). A slight majority (52 percent) looked at the entire Jewish community as their extended family, and a plurality (47 percent) felt that they had a special responsibility for Jews in need around the world. Although these items touch very lightly on the notion of a special relationship with the Jewish people, it appears that as many as half of the sample could not assent to them. Only a minority agreed with more outright expressions of prefer-
ences for Jews over others. Just 35 percent said that they related easier to Jews than to non-Jews, and only a quarter felt that they could count more on their Jewish as opposed to non-Jewish friends.

Perhaps even more striking is the very small number who were willing to say that having Jewish friends is important to being a good Jew. Nearly half of the respondents reported that they do, in fact, have mostly Jewish friends (that is, among their closest friends). However, despite the fairly widespread phenomenon of having mostly Jewish friends, just 3 percent said that having mostly Jewish friends is essential for a person to be a good Jew, and only another 17 percent saw it as desirable. Apparently, expressing an outright preference for Jewish friendships takes on negative connotations for many American Jews. They may regard it as an expression of a preference for self-ghettoization, as un-modern or un-American, and in general, as contrary to the historic Jewish campaign for acceptance and integration in the larger society. It follows that, to whatever extent American Jews actually feel or act in a “tribal” fashion, they are less ready either to voice tribalism or to explicitly endow it with value.

These survey findings certainly suggest a widespread resistance to voicing unqualified preference for the company of other Jews, or for expressing special expectations of them or toward them. Similarly, the findings suggest that most American Jews see themselves as being not very different from other Americans—certainly not “outsiders.” The quantitative data also suggest that a large majority of Jews are moved as much by the plight of Gentiles as by the plight of Jews, and that they feel as comfortable with non-Jewish as with Jewish friends.

The in-person interviews for *The Jew Within* found more complexity in response and more readiness to voice a modified Jewish tribalism. In contrast with the thrust of the responses to the anonymously administered mail-back survey, the personal interviewees provided numerous examples of their special concern for fellow Jews, of their perception of Jewish distinctiveness, and of feelings of special camaraderie and presumed intimacy with other Jews. Some respondents spoke of an ability to perceive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Tribalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look at the entire Jewish community as my extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I can count more on my Jewish friends than on my non-Jewish friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I relate easier to Jews than to non-Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a special responsibility to take care of Jews in need around the world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In your opinion, for a person to be a good Jew, is the following essential, desirable, does not matter, or undesirable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
<th>Does not matter</th>
<th>Undesirable</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have mostly Jewish friends</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All responses are percentages.
(and feel greater comfort with) a Jewish intellectual style and sense of humor. One spoke of his making family-to-family friendships with his Jewish friends, as opposed to person-to-person friendships with even his closest non-Jewish ones.

The parallel use of long interviews and survey data provides instructive instances where the two modes seem to produce contradictory findings. In such circumstances, we need to avoid the simple escape route of declaring one set of results to be accurate and the other a misrepresentation. Rather, it is important to recognize the fact that people speak with different voices. More “public” voices are likely to be articulated in surveys; more “private” voices are apt to be heard in personal interviews. Moreover, the same person can hold a variety of positions, some more prominent and straightforward, others more nuanced. The truth lies neither with one voice nor the other, but with the entire complex. Hence, use of a combination of methods is necessary for fully comprehending complicated sentiments.

Substantively, the pattern of seeming discrepancy between the survey and the in-person interviews is also very instructive. Relative to the picture gleaned from the personal interviews, survey respondents seem to emphasize their religiosity while downplaying their ethnic attachment. In this, we can see evidence of the impact of American norms upon the respondents’ presentation of their Jewishness. When answering a survey administered by an anonymous research company, Jews express the part of their identities that better conforms to the expectations of the larger society—or, more precisely, to Jews’ perceptions of those expectations. But when interviewed in private by ethnically committed researchers or their assistants, the same sorts of Jews feel freer to express their ethnic commitments. They also tend to distance themselves somewhat from their religious identities, showing a side of themselves that they can share securely with insiders.

If this line of thinking is accurate, we have yet one more piece of evidence suggesting that American norms operate to undercut ethnic conceptions of being Jewish, in favor of reinforcing the Jewish religious dimension. As we shall see, these norms, among other factors, may be exerting real influences on the emerging shape of American Jewish identity.

**Marginality**

One component of a strong ethnic identity is the sense of feeling different from others in the larger society. Sometimes accompanying this perception is the view of others’ antagonism toward one’s own group, a feeling often present among members of a minority with a history of discrimination and persecution. For Jews especially, memories of victimization play a crucial role in their group identity. In fact, a small research literature remarks that despite objective signs to the contrary, American Jews through the 1980s and 1990s continued to perceive high levels of American anti-Semitism.30

Consistent with this prior research, a slight majority (52 percent) of the Market Facts sample agreed that “as a Jew, there is something about me that non-Jews could never understand”—a statement drawing upon a very individual and personal aspect of being Jewish (see table 6). But in the three other related questions, most Jews
rejected expressions of marginality. By almost a three-to-one majority they rejected
the view that “Jews are widely disliked by Gentile Americans.” Moreover, contrary
to previous research that seemed to point to widespread American Jewish con-
cerns about antisemitism, most (52 percent) rejected the proposition that “one day
American Jews will probably face severe antisemitic persecution.” The final piece of
evidence of the denial of marginality by large numbers of American Jews comes in
the four-to-one majority who reject the view that as Jews they “feel like somewhat of
an outsider in American society.”

Commitment to Endogamy

The questionnaire posed four questions directly related to attitudes toward intermar-
riage. A fifth question, concerning respondents’ attitudes toward having a Christmas
tree, is an issue connected to mixed marriage specifically and to boundary mainte-
nance between Jews and Christians generally (see table 7).

With respect to the straightforward and relatively undemanding statement that Jews
should marry Jews, 60 percent agreed (although only a quarter agreed strongly). The
sample was almost evenly split on the question of whether in-married partners expe-
rience fewer difficulties than intermarried partners. With respect to the extent to
which marrying in the group is connected to being a good Jew, just 28 percent saw it
as essential and another 39 percent viewed it as desirable. Almost all the rest (about
a third) said that it does not matter. Another question asked about the respondent’s
likely reaction should his or her child consider marrying a non-Jew. Just 27 percent
would oppose such a marriage. (Among the comparable subset of the 1990 NJPS, 22
percent answered this question in like fashion; the small difference may well be due
to the underrepresentation of least-involved Jews in the current study’s sample.) And
while 69 percent felt that having a Christmas tree would violate their sense of being
Jewish, almost a third could not agree with this statement.

Taken together, these results suggest that with respect to intermarriage, the popu-

---

Table 6. Perceived Marginality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you agree or do you disagree with each of the following statements?</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that, as a Jew, there is something about me that non-Jews could never understand</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a Jew, I feel like somewhat of an outsider in American society</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews are widely disliked by Gentile Americans</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One day, American Jews will probably face severe antisemitic persecution</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All responses are percentages.
lation divides into three camps. About a quarter oppose intermarriage quite vigorously. At the other extreme, about a third seem to accept intermarriage with few reservations. The remainder (just under half) take an intermediate position. Their opposition to intermarriage is lukewarm or qualified; while not unmoved by the arguments against mixed marriage, they are not particularly vigorous in their opposition.

**Jewish Friends**

As with marriage, maintaining ties with Jewish friends touches upon the question of Jewish ethnicity in a very profound way. It is both a reflection of ethnic involvement and an important condition for such involvement. It is hard to imagine a strong ethnic group with few in-group ties, whereas a group with many such ties is expected to have a clear sense of group identity, if not an identifiable subculture.

Just one item on the questionnaire (not shown on the tables) measures the extent of friendship with other Jews. With respect to their closest friends, just 10 percent said that all or almost all were Jewish, and another 37 percent reported that most were Jewish. More than half reported that most of their closest friends were non-Jewish.

As a rule, in-group ties are more frequent for relationships that are more intimate. Thus, the percentage of Jews with Jewish spouses exceeds those with mostly Jewish close friends, which in turn exceeds those with mostly Jewish neighbors (nowadays true of a very small minority). It is fair to assume that, had the question not specified “closest friends” but rather friends in general, even fewer respondents would have reported mostly Jews among their friends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If your child were considering marrying a non-Jewish person with no plans to convert to Judaism, would you . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly encourage them to marry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be neutral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you agree or do you disagree with each of the following statements?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a Christmas tree would violate my sense of being Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews should marry Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-marriages (between Jews and Jews) tend to have fewer difficulties than intermarriages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your opinion, for a person to be a good Jew, is the following essential, desirable, does not matter, or undesirable?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marry a Jew (or a convert to Judaism)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All responses are percentages.
For years, Israel has stood at the top of American Jewry’s public agenda. It remains the single largest recipient of charitable contributions collected through the UJA-Federation system, and it lies at the heart of collective Jewish political mobilization and lobbying.

That said, many observers have come to question whether Israel continues to concern American Jews as much as it once did. Some cite dissatisfaction with developments related to Jewish religious pluralism (specifically, the Israeli religious establishment’s opposition to Reform and Conservative Judaism) and disaffection with Israel’s stance in the Middle East peace process. On another plane, the historic relationship of American Jews with Israel has been heavily concentrated in two channels: the philanthropic and the political. At the time of the survey, Israel appeared to be more secure, both politically and economically. Accordingly, American Jews felt less needed by Israel and thus less committed.31

A more subtle and possibly more influential process may also be eroding attachment to Israel. If American Jews are in fact losing attachment to all things ethnic, and if the balance of their Jewish passion is shifting from the more ethnic sphere of organizations, politics, and philanthropy toward the more religious sphere of family-based ritual and synagogue involvement, then Israel activism (as part of the ethnic sphere) becomes less critical.

When asked about their emotional attachment to Israel, just 9 percent answered “extremely attached” (as opposed to 13 percent in the 1988 study), and only another 18 percent said “very attached” (versus 24 percent in 1988). In other words, a total of just more than a quarter (27 percent in 1997, versus 37 percent in 1988) defined themselves as at least very attached to Israel (see table 8). When asked how close they feel to Israelis, 8 percent said “to a great extent” (against 19 percent in 1988), and 41 percent answered “to some extent” (versus 54 percent in 1988). About a third do see Israel as extremely important to their sense of being Jewish. But this places Israel well down on the list of symbols and concepts that seem to resonate with American Jews. By contrast, about half of the respondents said that the Torah, the High Holidays, the Jewish family, American antisemitism, the Jewish people, and the Holocaust were extremely important to their sense of being Jewish (see tables 1 and 4).

With respect to their ideas of what constituted a good Jew, just 20 percent thought it was essential for a good Jew to support Israel, and even fewer (18 percent) had similar views regarding visiting Israel during one’s lifetime. For most respondents, these behaviors were at least desirable, but about a third, in fact, found them irrelevant to their concept of a good Jew.

Yet most respondents (52 percent) agreed that Israel is critical to sustaining American Jewish life, and 56 percent rejected the idea that Israel is a dangerous place to visit. Three quarters also rejected the view that Israel no longer really needs American Jewish charity.

Clearly, different questions elicit varying levels of engagement with Israel; some items are more personal, others more theoretical and abstract. However, with some degree of caution, it seems fair to say that Israel can be termed very important to only about a fifth to a quarter of American Jews. It is of little importance to about a third
of the population, and of intermediate importance to a bit less than half of American Jewry.

**Affiliation and Attachment to Jewish Institutions**

Embracing numerous functions, the Jewish organizational infrastructure has long been seen as a distinguishing feature of American Jewish group life. The organized community includes synagogues, Jewish community centers (JCCs), federations, fraternal organizations, community relations agencies, Zionist organizations, old-age homes and services, family and children’s agencies, vocational services, youth groups, schools, institutions of higher learning, and museums. Each functional area is serviced by both local institutions and nationwide or continental umbrella organizations. One researcher conservatively estimates the annual philanthropic contributions to this infrastructure at $4.5 billion.\textsuperscript{32} To this figure must be added fees for ser-

---

**Table 8. Attachment to Israel**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you agree or do you disagree with each of the following statements?</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israel is critical to sustaining American Jewish life</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel is a dangerous place to visit</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel doesn’t really need American Jewish charity any more</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How emotionally attached are you to Israel?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely attached</th>
<th>Very attached</th>
<th>Somewhat attached</th>
<th>Not attached</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How close do you feel to Israelis?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To a great extent</th>
<th>To some extent</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In thinking about your sense of being Jewish, how important are each of the following?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In your opinion, for a person to be a good Jew, which of the following items are essential, which are desirable, which do not matter, and which are undesirable (better not to do)?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
<th>Does not matter</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support Israel</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit Israel during one’s life</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to Jewish philanthropies</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All responses are percentages.
vices and other sources of income that further expand the size of the national Jewish political economy.

It is fair to say that no other major ethnic group in the United States supports a voluntary organizational life as elaborate, variegated, or prodigious as that of American Jewry. Today’s Jewish communal agencies derive from a long history of communal organization that characterized Jewish communities in the diaspora. Any examination of American Jewish identity needs to treat the relationship of the rank-and-file Jewish population with the Jewish institutional infrastructure. This study asked several questions on attachment and affiliation with Jewish institutions, obtaining results (on affiliation) that were not all that different from those found in the NJPS and numerous other surveys (see table 9).

Almost half of the respondents (48 percent) claimed membership in a synagogue. Jewish community centers represent another major point of affiliation (14 percent; although a somewhat higher figure of 17 percent obtained in a subsample of the 1990 NJPS is probably more accurate, given the higher numbers of elderly respondents in the Market Facts survey). A greater number of respondents (27 percent) reported that their household participated in a JCC-sponsored program in the prior year. About a third (31 percent) belonged to some other Jewish organization. As many as 42 percent of the respondents claimed to have contributed to the UJA/Federation campaign in their local communities in the prior year (as against the actual numbers of donors, this figure is undoubtedly exaggerated). A clear majority of American Jewish households (56 percent) report membership in at least one of the following: a synagogue, a JCC, or another Jewish organization. Of this number, about a third (that is, 19 percent out of the 56 percent) served as an officer or member of a board or committee during the two-year period preceding the survey.

Three questions on affiliation were asked of a similarly constructed Market Facts sample in 1988. A comparison between the two surveys shows that synagogue affiliation has held nearly steady (49 percent in 1988 versus 48 percent in 1997). However, organizational affiliation has dropped (from 46 percent to 31 percent), as have reported contributions to the UJA/Federation campaign (from 50 percent to 42 percent). These changes underscore the central theme of this study: American Jewish religious identity, as symbolized by synagogue membership, is holding steady, whereas American Jewish ethnic identity, as symbolized by organizational membership and federation campaign participation, is in decline.

To what extent do American Jews feel attached to their community’s institutions? A question on this topic elicited findings that feelings of attachment toward specific

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9. Affiliation with Jewish Institutions (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dues-paying member of a Jewish community center (JCC) or YMHA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in any program or activity at a JCC or a YMHA within the past year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dues-paying member of a synagogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong to any Jewish organizations other than a synagogue, temple, JCC, or YMHA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to the UJA/Federation in the past year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past two years, served as an officer or on the board or committee of a Jewish organization, synagogue, or temple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
institutions (synagogues, JCCs, federations, other organizations) generally paralleled reported affiliation with these institutions (see table 10). Synagogues were the object of the most widespread attachment (38 percent were either “very” or “extremely” attached), followed by other Jewish organizations (18 percent), JCCs (11 percent) and federations (11 percent). Only the synagogues could report a sizable number of respondents who felt “extremely attached” (21 percent); comparable figures for the other institutions ranged from 3 percent to 7 percent.

The small size of the activist core who are heavily committed to Jewish organizational life is further underscored by responses to the “good Jew” question. Just 10 percent regarded belonging to Jewish organizations as essential for their concept of being a good Jew, whereas another 41 percent thought it desirable to do so. These figures are down slightly from 1988 (11 percent and 43 percent, respectively). As such, the comparison with the earlier survey points, albeit weakly, to small declines in the significance of Jewish organizations to American Jewry.

Even smaller numbers of respondents viewed belonging to a Jewish community center as an important part of being a good Jew. Just 4 percent saw it as essential; another 27 percent saw it as desirable. Contributing to Jewish philanthropy was seen as essential by 11 percent of the respondents and desirable by another 47 percent. These figures, for the JCC and philanthropy, contrast sharply with those associated with synagogue membership, where 24 percent answered “essential” and another 43 percent thought it “desirable.” The figures for synagogues, philanthropy, and organizations nearly replicate those obtained in 1988 (a parallel question on Jewish community centers was not asked then). The synagogue again emerges as the institution with by far the most widespread import, salience, significance, and emotional appeal.

Indeed, of the four forms of organized Jewish life queried in this survey, the syna-

### Table 10. Attachments to Jewish Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent do you feel attached to each of the following local Jewish groups and organizations?</th>
<th>Extremely attached</th>
<th>Very attached</th>
<th>Somewhat attached</th>
<th>Not attached</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A synagogue or temple</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Jewish organization</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Jewish community center (or YMHA)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local Jewish federation/UJA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In your opinion, for a person to be a good Jew, which of the following items are essential, which are desirable, which do not matter, and which are undesirable (better not to do)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does not</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
<th>Does not</th>
<th>Undesirable</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belong to Jewish organizations</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong to a Jewish community center</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to Jewish philanthropies</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong to a synagogue</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All responses are percentages.
gogue is the only one to show signs of either stability or growth in support since the last comparable survey. Organizational belonging and philanthropic contributions, in contrast, elicited somewhat less support than they did in 1988.

Social Justice

American Jews’ association with social activism, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, has assumed mythic proportions. Indeed, Jews figured prominently in all mass-based left-of-center American social movements in the mid- and late 20th century. American Jews’ involvement in social justice causes has been so widespread that it must be regarded as a constituent, distinctive element in American Jewish ethnicity. The social justice index devised in this study correlates with other measures of Jewish ethnicity, suggesting that social justice-as-a-Jewish-value constitutes part of the conceptual domain of Jewish ethnic identity. Notably, some prominent figures have advocated reinvigorating social justice activities—under Jewish auspices—as a strategy of Jewish identity building.

Notwithstanding its history and its promise, social activism seems to influence American Jewry less than it once did. Social justice activities certainly seem less visible and powerful than they were in the heyday of the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s; the agendas of Jewish organizations seem to be less overtly liberal in their orientation; and indeed, culturally and politically conservative voices seem more numerous and articulate now than they were two or three decades ago. Jews who are still liberal on some issues may not be any more liberal than what would be expected on the basis of their educational achievement and geographic location. The survey asked three questions on some key underlying premises of Jewish commitment to social justice activities—indeed, responses to these questions correlated with the four “good Jew” questions that related most closely to social justice (see table 11). Significantly, the sample rejected each of the three pertinent items. Most disagreed with the notion that “because I’m Jewish, I identify with the powerless, the vulnerable, and the underdog” (only 35 percent agreed, 57 percent disagreed). They also rejected the idea that “being Jewish means being especially compassionate” (41 percent versus 48 percent). A plurality also rejected a statement of an empirical observation that has normative implications: “Generally, Jews are more charitable than other Americans” (41 percent agreed; 45 percent disagreed).

Other results point to the limited appeal of social activism. The “good Jew” question focused directly on the importance of working for social justice causes, and three other items turned out to be moderately correlated with that question. To “lead an ethical and moral life” garnered the most support of any item on the “good Jew” list, with 67 percent seeing it as essential and 29 percent as desirable (figures that almost exactly replicated those found in 1988). However, on three questions that seemingly translate Jewish ethics and morality into action, hardly any respondents found such behavior essential to their concept of the good Jew. Working for social justice was seen as essential by 9 percent and desirable by 41 percent (down from 14 percent and 46 percent, respectively, in 1988). For contributing to nonsectarian charities, the respective figures were 6 percent and 38 percent (very slightly lower than in 1988). And
with respect to taking a liberal position on political issues, just 3 percent saw it as essential, while a mere 18 percent viewed it as desirable, somewhat lower in both cases than in the 1988 survey (6 percent and 21 percent, respectively).

**Age-Related Variations: Religious Stability and Ethnic Decline**

Contrasts between younger and older adult Jews point, at least loosely, to recent historical trends. We know, for example, that, in keeping with the rise in intermarriage in recent years, younger Jews are more often intermarried than are older Jews. Inferring population trends from age-related variations relies on the concept of “cohort effects”—the assumption that people born and raised at a certain time bear certain tendencies that distinguish them from those born earlier or later. Of course, not all age-related data allow for simple extrapolation to historical trends. The principal complicating factor entails family life-cycle effects: older and younger people express different attitudes in part because they find themselves in different relationships to the family life course. For example, the views of older adults may differ from those of younger adults because they have completed child-rearing, are approaching retirement, or have more vivid thoughts of their mortality.

Data collected at one point in time, such as in the single survey under discussion, cannot satisfactorily address these complications. We cannot totally disentangle cohort effects from family life-cycle effects so as to understand which findings point to genuine historical trends and which are artifacts of the aging process or of the family life cycle. However, to reduce the chances of making faulty inferences from these

---

**Table 11. Commitment to Social Justice Activities and Related Attitudes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
<th>Does not matter</th>
<th>Undesirable</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead an ethical and moral life</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work for social justice causes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to nonsectarian charities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a liberal on political issues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Do you agree or do you disagree with each of the following statements?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because I’m Jewish, I identify with the powerless, the vulnerable, and the underdog</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Jewish means being especially compassionate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally, Jews are more charitable than other Americans</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My being Jewish doesn’t make me any different from other Americans</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel as moved by the oppression of non-Jews as by the comparable oppression of Jews</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All responses are percentages.
data, we can focus on the 30-year range from age 35 to 64. Although family and career characteristics of those in their late 30s certainly differ from those in their early 60s, the differences are less dramatic and may have fewer consequences for attitudes related to Jewish identity than those that are associated with people under 35 or over 65 in age. The younger group typically finds itself in the early stages of family and career-building, a time that is associated both with rather striking changes in Jewish affiliation and ritual practice and with several more subtle signs of committed Jewish identity.\(^3\) Similarly, many individuals retire from full-time labor force participation after reaching age 65 and find that they are more able to become involved in Jewish communal activities.

One check on the veracity of inferences drawn from age-related variations is to compare data collected over a period of time. If differences between young and old are truly related to birth cohort effects, they should eventually make themselves felt in overall population trends. As noted, the only other comparable data set was collected in 1988, nine years prior to the current survey. In all instances where comparison of identically worded questions is possible, the comparisons point to movement in the directions suggested at the outset of this paper and in the analysis below.

Finally, the inferences, if accurate, ought to find theoretical support. Do they make sense? Are they consistent with everything else we know? Can they be predicted; have they been predicted?

With these concerns and approaches in mind, we can proceed to a consideration of the variations between older and younger respondents. For completeness’ sake, the tables span the entire age range. However, for the reasons explained above, the text focuses on the three intermediate ten-year age intervals of 35–44; 45–54; and 55–64.

### Age-Related Variations in Religiosity

Table 12 presents the three measures connected to religious attitudes and practice discussed earlier: religious commitment, faith in God, and ritual observance.

On all three indices, one is struck by the near-uniformity in their levels across the age spectrum. This observation is even more applicable to the critical comparisons among the three intermediate ten-year age intervals between 35 and 64. But even the youngest adults (aged 25–34)—many of whom do not enjoy the religious “benefit” of marriage and parenthood—report scores similar and certainly not much lower than their elders. In fact, they score the highest (by a slim margin) on faith in God. The implications here are clear. Despite the sharp rise in intermarriage, such that it is far more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>25–34</th>
<th>35–44</th>
<th>45–54</th>
<th>55–64</th>
<th>65+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High level of religious commitment (%)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of faith in God (%)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean ritual observance</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>1,005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
frequent among the young than among the old, younger Jews maintain their elders’ levels of religious commitment and practice. The data provide no evidence of decline in Jewish religiosity (defined in terms of the three indices), either in prospect or in retrospect.

**Age-Related Variations in Ethnicity**

Table 13 presents nine measures of Jewish ethnic involvement. Seven of the measures refer to attitudes; two of them (relating to in-group friendship and institutional affiliation) pertain to a set of behaviors. All entries refer to the proportion scoring high on the respective index.

With the exception of perceived marginality, all of the measures exhibit an age-related decline in which younger respondents score lower than older respondents. We may contrast those aged 55 to 64 with their counterparts who are 20 years younger. In so doing, the proportion of those scoring high on belief in Jewish peoplehood falls from 44 percent among the older respondents to 28 percent among the younger; on belief in tribalism, the figures are 39 and 20 percent. Those supporting endogamy fall from 73 percent to 50 percent. On attachment to Israel, the figure falls from 46 percent to 29 percent. Meanwhile, the proportion with mostly Jewish close friends drops from 60 percent to 34 percent. The number of those affiliated with at least two of four Jewish institutions (synagogue, JCC, UJA/Federation campaign, or other Jewish organization) falls from 57 percent to 34 percent. Perceived attachment to such institutions (excluding the synagogue) drops from 34 percent to 21 percent; those scoring high on the social justice index decline from 37 percent to 25 percent. In seven of nine instances, people aged 65 and over score marginally higher than those aged 55–64; and in six instances, the youngest (aged 25–34) score lower than the next older group (aged 35–44).

In sum, younger Jewish adults are essentially no different from their older counterparts in terms of their religiosity, but score substantially lower on aspects of Jewish ethnicity. This generalization holds no matter what index of ethnicity is utilized, with the exception of perceived marginality. If the age patterns reflect recent trends over time, Jewish ethnicity has in fact experienced a decline.

| Table 13. Measures of Jewish Ethnicity by Age (percentage scoring “high”) |
|---------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
|                     | 25–34 | 35–44 | 45–54 | 55–64 | 65+ | Total |
| Perceived sense of Jewish peoplehood | 29 | 28 | 33 | 44 | 42 | 35 |
| Perceived sense of Jewish tribalism | 25 | 20 | 30 | 39 | 40 | 30 |
| Perceived sense of marginality | 37 | 45 | 55 | 43 | 52 | 47 |
| Pro-endogamy | 49 | 50 | 59 | 73 | 66 | 59 |
| Most close friends are Jewish | 36 | 34 | 40 | 60 | 61 | 46 |
| Attachment to Israel | 23 | 29 | 32 | 46 | 47 | 35 |
| Belong to 2+ institutions | 25 | 34 | 43 | 57 | 58 | 43 |
| Institutional attachment | 19 | 21 | 25 | 34 | 37 | 27 |
| Social justice | 19 | 25 | 23 | 37 | 50 | 32 |
| N = | 195 | 212 | 145 | 137 | 253 | 1,005 |
The Intermarriage Effect—Only Part of the Story

Over the years, the frequency with which Jews have married non-Jews has climbed dramatically. Younger adults report far higher levels of mixed marriage than do their elders. In this sample, current intermarriage rates climb steadily as age declines: from 4 percent among those aged 65 and older; to 8 percent of those aged 55–64; to 18 percent of those aged 45–54; to 28 percent among those aged 35–44; and finally, to 39 percent among those aged 25–34. To the extent that the mixed married are less involved in Jewish life, they might account for much of the age-related variation in Jewish identity. That is, it is possible that younger Jews as a group are less Jewishly involved because so many more of them are partners in a mixed marriage. The question here is to determine the extent to which intermarriage alone accounts for the lower levels of Jewish involvement among younger adults.

The preliminary issue, of course, is to ascertain the extent to which the intermarried are in fact less Jewishly involved than their counterparts. As table 14 amply demonstrates, Jewish partners in mixed marriages in fact score lower on all measures of Jewish involvement than do the in-married. The relatively low levels of Jewish commitment on the part of the intermarried is well documented, but here we can examine aspects of Jewish identity that have not been previously explored. In particular, we can ask: With respect to which features of Jewish identity do the intermarried most lag behind the others, and where are the differences relatively smaller?

Intermarriage is associated with lower levels of Jewish identity for two basic reasons. First, it is the less Jewishly identified individuals who are more likely from the outset to enter into a mixed marriage. In addition, however, mixed marriage itself produces lower levels of Jewish involvement than would otherwise be the case. Simple cross-sectional data, the sort available here, can reflect both processes at work simultaneously, but they cannot help us disentangle the two processes. The data do

Table 14. Measures of Religiosity and Ethnicity by Mixed Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Religiosity</th>
<th>In-married</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High level of religious commitment (%)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of faith in God (%)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean ritual observance</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Ethnicity (percentage scoring “high”)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jewish peoplehood</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribalism</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived marginally</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-endogamy</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most close friends are Jewish</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment to Israel</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong to 2+ institutions</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional attachment</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social justice</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
describe those aspects of Jewish identity that are associated with mixed marriage, whether by way of having produced mixed marriage or as a result of it.

The most noteworthy finding is that, whereas mixed marriage is clearly associated with some diminished religious involvement (for example, regarding beliefs and specific practices), it is far more associated with diminished Jewish ethnic involvement (tribalism, peoplehood, Israel, friends, institutions). Two sets of figures are quite illustrative. With respect to seven religious practices (five rituals, synagogue attendance, and temple membership), the in-married reported a mean of .57 as contrasted with a mean of .32 among the mixed married. Regarding respondents’ having mostly Jewish close friends, the gap is far larger: 57 percent of the in-married made such a claim, as against less than 9 percent of the mixed married. Clearly, the gap between in-married and mixed married is far wider for friendship than for ritual practice. The patterns for these two specific measures are emblematic of those for the larger groups of measures (religious or ethnic) from which they are drawn.

This finding has two implications. The first concerns Jewish communal efforts to limit the growth of intermarriage: strengthening Jewish ethnic identity in all its manifestations may be more effective in inhibiting intermarriage than an attempt to enhance Jews’ religious identity. The second implication concerns the impact of intermarriage on the future shape of American Jewish identity—these findings suggest that intermarriage will produce more rapid and deeper declines in the ethnic rather than religious aspects of Jewish identity.

With this said, we can proceed to examine the extent to which age-related variations in Jewish identity reflect the growth in intermarriage and its generally adverse impact on Jewish involvement. Tables 15 and 16 present the religiosity and ethnicity measures by age, excluding the mixed married. Those who remain in the analysis were either in-married or nonmarried (single, divorced, or widowed).

Excluding the mixed married, we again find near-stability in all five measures of Jewish religiosity. Comparing those aged 55–64 with those aged 35–44, we find hardly any difference on any of the measures. On religious commitment, 36 percent of the older group scored high, as did a like number of those aged 35–44; on faith in God, the figures were 38 percent versus 34 percent; and on ritual practices, there was a mean of .56 for both groups. These comparisons are symptomatic of the remarkable lack of variation in religiously oriented measures across the age spectrum.

The ethnicity measures display quite different contours. Although in some cases the results are muted, we again find that for all the measures (except for perceived marginality), older respondents tend to outscore their younger counterparts. Again,
the comparisons of those aged 55–64 with those two decades their junior are instructive. On the issue of Jewish peoplehood, 44 percent scored high among the older cohort versus 31 percent for the younger group. On tribalism, 39 percent of the older group scored high, versus only 24 percent of those aged 35–44; on endogamy, the figures are 75 percent and 58 percent, respectively. The proportion of those with mostly Jewish close friends falls from 63 percent of the older group to just 39 percent of the younger cohort. Attachment to Israel falls from 47 percent to 32 percent. Affiliation with at least two Jewish institutions declines from 59 percent to 41 percent, and the conceptually related measure of institutional attachment drops from 35 percent to 24 percent. Scoring high on the social justice index are 35 percent of those aged 55–64, versus just 26 percent of those aged 35–44.

The growth in intermarriage, then, is clearly not the only factor at work here. Both with and without mixed married Jews in the analysis, we find evidence of stability in measures of Jewish religiosity alongside a decline in measures of Jewish ethnicity.

Conclusions and Implications

These findings demonstrate that although the Jewish ethnic dimension may still be stronger than its religious counterpart, Jewish ethnic attachments of all sorts seem to be in decline. Attachments to Jewish family members, friends, institutions, and (more remotely) peoplehood are higher among older than among younger cohorts, as is attachment to Israel. At the same time, the religious dimension seems to be holding its own, albeit at a level of religiosity that is open to further question. As Judaism is drawn “into the self,” it is withdrawn from politics, philanthropy, organizations, peoplehood, Israel, and Jewish-Gentile interactions.

The findings point to the power of U.S. societal expectations in shaping Jewish self-conceptions and the actual expression of Jewish group identity. Jews have good reason to believe that upper-middle-class white Americans are expected to maintain some sort of religious commitment. At the same time, as Will Herberg, Ben Halpern, Herbert Gans, and so many other commentators have long since observed, American
society looks askance at the persistence of ethnic attachment. Ethnicity may be acceptable for the poor, for nonwhites, and for immigrants. But in its most potent forms, it is unsuitable for the socially advantaged (and thoroughly Americanized) distant descendants of immigrant white forebears. Accordingly, declining ethnic attachments move Judaism in the direction of other upper-middle-class white American religious groups. The trends described here may well mean, if only for the immediate future, continued prosperity for synagogues and religious schools, and the continued purchase and study of traditional texts alongside more popular books on themes of Jewish religiosity. At the same time, taken to an extreme, the weakening of the ethnic dimension could spell trouble for those institutions that differentiate American Judaism from liberal Protestant denominations. The UJA-Federation annual campaign, the social services it supports, Jews’ connection with Israel, Jewish political mobilization, fraternal organizations, and Jewish community centers are all collective expressions of that which most clearly differentiates being Jewish in America from being a member of another religious group. Indeed, the age-related decline in Jewish ethnicity may already have been responsible for the reduction in the number and diversity of institutional expressions of Jewish ethnicity. Examples include the once vigorous and multifaceted American Zionist movement, the disproportionate involvement of Jews in liberal politics, and the prominence of centralized philanthropic agencies such as the UJA and the federation movement.

An unarrested decline in Jewish ethnicity, then, is not only of considerable academic interest to students of contemporary American Jewry. If extended, the trend will present particular difficulties for those institutions and activities that most directly draw upon Jews’ historic commitment to peoplehood, including even synagogues. That is to say, given the intertwining of Jewish ethnicity and religiosity, the continued decline of the ethnic impulse will eventually pose problems for the strictly religious sphere of American Judaism. Social scientific investigation of Jewish life in America (if not elsewhere) needs to continue to attend to the very real distinctions between religious and ethnic aspects of Jewish identity and community, as well as the dynamic relationship between them.

Notes

27. Ibid., 158.
28. Ibid., 155.
33. Ibid.
34. See Steven M. Cohen, Content or Continuity? (New York: 1989).
35. See, for example, Leonard Fein, Smashing Idols and Other Prescriptions for Jewish Continuity (New York: 1994).
37. See the study by Steven M. Cohen, Alternative Jewish Families and Their Jewish Identity (New York: 1989); see also Susan Wall, “Parents of Pre-schoolers: Their Jewish Identity and Its Implications for Jewish Education” (DHL diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 1994).
For more than three decades, activists in the United States and Israel, as well as in some small diaspora Jewish communities, have worked toward making the Jewish religion more egalitarian, with the goal of enabling women to play central roles in public Judaism. Although egalitarianism might seem inimical to the fundamental hierarchical nature of halakhic Judaism, the focus of Jewish feminists in the United States (and, to a much lesser extent, in Israel and elsewhere) has been persistently religious since shortly after the beginnings of second wave feminism in the early 1960s. This essay explores women’s transformations of public Judaism, concentrating on communal rituals and life-cycle ceremonies, synagogue life, and diverse educational settings, which are arguably the loci most meaningful to westernized, religiously affiliated Jews.

This essay begins with a consideration of the peculiarly religious nature of the American ethos and the impact of that religiosity on American Judaism—especially on Jewish feminism in the United States. I suggest that westernized Jewish feminists have coalesced, or merged, these two seemingly disparate value systems. I then discuss the tension between halakhic Judaism and egalitarianism. I document changes in public ceremonies and rituals around women’s life-cycle events, and Jewish education for girls and women, analyzing the reasons that a very broad spectrum of women find Jewish public rituals and education to be meaningful and important in their lives. This essay suggests that resistance to such changes, while articulated in the language of halakhic opposition, is actually, on a psychosocial level, evidence of the symbolic power of gender role transformations. Finally, I conclude that contemporary Judaism is in a postfeminist phase in which profound transformations have already become so mainstreamed as to appear unremarkable. Even the most traditionalist segments of Jewish society are affected by these transformations, if only in reaction.

The premise here is that the underlying issues concerning women’s new “ownership” of public Judaism are sociological in nature, and as such are usefully approached through a discussion of the symbolic nature of gender as a social construction. Although the discussion will sometimes necessarily describe particular halakhic...
issues, the frame of reference is not what is sometimes called halakhic “authenticity,” but rather the psychosocial meaning of particular developments in contemporary Jewish societies.

Religion as a Public Virtue in the United States

Avowedly secular Jewish feminists—perhaps the most common variety of Jewish feminist in Western Europe, Latin America and, to some extent, in Israel—seldom set their sights on Judaism, since religion in general is simply not interesting to many of them. In contrast, the great majority of American Jewish feminists do not describe themselves as secular Jews, and an exploration of the transformation of public Judaism that these women have effected is best understood in the dual contexts of the religious bias of American culture and the westernized nature of most American Judaism. An abiding attachment to Judaism and an attachment to feminism are juxtaposed in the lives of these individuals and the ethnic/religious groups with which they associate. This religious orientation, as will shortly be discussed, goes back almost to the beginning of their feminist involvement.

Recent Gallup polls on trends in U.S. religious beliefs show that Americans are more religious than the populations of many other western countries. According to a 1995 poll, for example, 96 percent of Americans say they believe in God, compared with 61 percent in Britain and 70 percent in Canada. Even younger Americans express this national religiosity. Ninety-five percent of American teenagers say they believe in God, and teenagers in all American religious groups are more likely to attend church or synagogue than are their parents.³

Partially as a result of this widespread cultural bias toward religiosity, public Judaism is very important to many American Jews. Not only does participating in public Judaism bolster their sense of connection to Jewishness, it also increases their positive sense of themselves as Americans. America has historically been more favorably inclined to citizens who are religiously affiliated than to those who publicly declare themselves to be atheist or secular. Wade Clark Roof comments on baby boomers and other Americans that “almost ninety percent of Americans claim an institutionally based religious identity,” and the religious communities with which Americans identify “serve as an important basis of social belonging.” He further asserts that diverse religious movements provide the broader American culture with

an ascetic morality deeply rooted in biblical tradition and Reformation theology emphasizing duty to family, church and work. Reaffirmed are the twin ordering principles so embedded with this legacy, love of God and love of neighbor, that have long shaped religious and even secular notions of purpose in life, goodness, responsibility and justice.⁴

Moreover, as American Jewish communities are increasingly composed of third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation American Jews, sheer ethnic tribalism has lost its salience as a primary defining characteristic of Jewishness, and personal religious experience has become commensurately more important in the construction of American Jewish identity. A growing American interest in spiritualism during the very decades in which
the American immigrant experience receded into history has no doubt reinforced the importance of religion as a component of Jewish identity.

Striking examples of the weak grip of true secularism on the American Jewish community were displayed at an international conference on secular humanistic Judaism that was held at the Cooper Union in New York City in September 2000. Only about 300 participants attended, despite heavy subsidization. Speakers such as Israeli liberal politician Yossi Sarid and other leaders, intellectuals, and educators from outside the United States articulated a passionate secularism that was fueled by their struggles against perceived oppressive Orthodox establishments. Similarly, for the American participants (most of whom were at the upper reaches of middle age and beyond), vestigial anger against the rigidly traditional families and societies of their childhoods comprised a salient component of their fervent devotion to secularism. However, for younger American participants, such as screenwriter and film-maker Lawrence Kasdan, secularism was seldom a principled nontheism or estrangement from organized Judaism, but rather a casual default mode produced by the thinness of their Jewish educational levels and an unimpressive level of Jewish cultural literacy.

Many Jews who live in Israel, Latin America, and Western Europe describe themselves as “secular Jews.” Some of them believe in the concept of secular Judaism—that is, a Judaism that participates fully in nonreligious aspects of Jewish history and culture, while rejecting the concept of God. Other secular Jews are simply estranged from organized religion. Some are also distant from Jewish social groups and live their lives as citizens of the world.

But for most American Jews, religion is a significant—if often vague and amorphous—part of their ethnic Jewish identity. In his essay in this volume, Steven M. Cohen describes this paradox as “religious stability and ethnic decline,” noting that whereas the American Jews he studied “affirmed their commitment to the religious conception of being Jewish,” daily or weekly religious rituals were important only to a minority of them:

Most respondents reported that they feel competent praying in synagogue (62 percent), regard themselves as spiritual (63 percent), and find religious services interesting (62 percent). Half of them look forward to going to services (50 percent) and try to make the Sabbath a special day (47 percent). . . . In terms of their concept of a “good Jew,” respondents ranked two relevant items rather high: giving one’s children a Jewish education, and attending services on the High Holidays. Far less important to their conception of a good Jew were celebrating the Sabbath, studying Jewish texts, and having a kosher home.5

American Jewish “religiosity” diverges not only from secular Jewishness in other countries but also from the all-encompassing Jewish identity of historical Jewish communities. For the vast majority of westernized Jews, the composition of Jewish religiosity departs dramatically from the “total immersion” of European Jewish communities up until the last two centuries. European Jewish communities—governed by rabbinic authority—blended ethnic, cultural, and religious particularity in a daily and densely interwoven fabric of ritual, liturgical, linguistic, and social behaviors that defined halakhic Jewish praxis. First West and then East European Ashkenazic communities pursued different paths away from a Jewish “separate and unique identity”
as they confronted emancipation and modernity. As Israel Bartal cogently summarizes: by the last decades of the 19th century, as a result of dialogue with diverse modern secular ideologies, Jews in both Western and Eastern Europe had entered into new phases of Judaic development. Non-Orthodox East European Jews often brought elements of their Judaic background into secular enterprises such as socialism, nationalism, and Zionism, on a continuum that ended, among the most radical maskilim, with the “transmutation of religious values into secular symbols and concepts,” including the revisioning of Hebrew as “a national language” with virtually no “religious value.” In contrast, along a continuum reaching from the neo-Orthodox to the reformers, 19th- and 20th-century German Jews placed religious life in a separate compartment and emphasized “civil and cultural assimilation into the German milieu.” Although most American Jews are descended from East European immigrants, today’s American Jewish life derives much from the German Jewish religious reform rather than the secularization typical of East European milieus.

Although religion is important to American Jews, contemporary modernized western Judaism—with the notable exception of Orthodox and observant Conservative communities and women’s movements within these denominations—place little emphasis on the daily praxis of halakhic Judaism. They are instead organized around weekly and/or cyclical activities in public settings such as Jewish schools, synagogues, and large familial or friendship-based ceremonial social gatherings. Observant Jewish communities incorporate aspects of both of these patterns, retaining most of rabbinic Judaism’s daily practice, albeit often contextualized within and interpreted by a distinctively modern mindset that struggles with contemporary issues and increasingly emphasizes the personal, emotional meanings of religious experience. Indeed, as Yosef Salmon comments, from the turn of the 20th century onward, only the most sequestered haredi Jewish communities can be considered relatively untouched by modernity, a division symbolized by a split among Orthodox leaders’ reaction to Zionism:

At this point [1900], traditional Jewry split into two factions. At the one extreme was the majority, which was opposed to Zionism and thus clearly defined the haredi stand (rejection of modernity in both cultural and national senses); at the other was the neo-haredi minority, which did not leave the Zionist Organization and by remaining cast its vote for modernity, although it did not give up its ideals of Torah and observance.

The scope of this essay, therefore, ranges from the modern Orthodox through the various shades of masorati, or Conservative, to the Reform and Reconstructionist religious communities. In each of these contemporary Jewish denominations, women who consider themselves to be devoted both to Judaism as a sacred culture and to feminist egalitarianism have struggled to reconcile these two frames of reference.

Egalitarianism in Modern Judaism

For the majority of westernized Jews today, egalitarianism is an accepted moral value; for some, it is a sacred or even a religious value. Egalitarianism has deep roots in western life. In some ways, it may seem inimical to traditional religions, and especially to the fundamental hierarchical nature of halakhic attitudes. New research on the rela-
relationships between egalitarianism and religious “awakenings,” however, indicates that a heightened state of moral sensitivity has linked religion and egalitarianism in four separate eras in American life. Robert William Fogel, for instance, argues that “the egalitarian creed . . . is at the core of American political culture” and that “religious and egalitarian enthusiasms have repeatedly tied political history to religion.” Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that, when working to incorporate egalitarian ideals into Jewish behaviors and environments, Conservative and Orthodox women have often phrased their requests in halakhic terms, with the responses to their requests also being articulated in terms of halakhah. However, the subtext of both the questions and the responses are often centered more around ownership of public Judaism than around narrowly defined halakhic issues. Women’s questions often imply social changes, whereas rabbinical responses reflect both the attitudes of a particular adjudicator and his interpretive community’s attitude toward the implications of these social changes.

In the hierarchical East European communities immediately preceding the incursions of modernity, boundaries around the personal lives of women as a group were closely related to their lack of ownership in decision-making, participatory, and leadership roles in public Jewish life. The other side of this coin was that femaleness as a gender came to mean lack of ownership of public Judaism. Stratified only slightly above women were those “men who are like women,” a group defined by their lack of qualities that women also lacked, such as Judaic text learning and liturgical fluency. Thus, the expansion of women’s roles has meant profound transformations in the very structure of Jewish societies.

Like most historical movements, the enterprise of changing gender hierarchies within Judaism did not commence suddenly. One might argue that the ground was prepared for contemporary changes early in the Reform movement, when reformers began to purge congregational life of the distinctions between liturgical roles for men and women, which they perceived as “Orientalism.” Nonetheless, men and women did not sit side by side in synagogues until Isaac Mayer Wise introduced family pews in 1851—almost by accident, as Jonathan D. Sarna explains. American Reform congregations and subsequently most American Conservative synagogues followed suit with regard to mixed pews. Nevertheless, religious leaders, including some Reform leaders, saw women’s roles as primarily conservative and even domestic, “to embody and sustain the Jewish past.” Women’s roles as religious leaders changed only modestly and gradually, although, as Pamela S. Nadell demonstrates, within each of the modern wings of Judaism there have always been individual women who attempted to change women’s status and take on more comprehensive, public Jewish roles.

Jewish feminist change first attracted numerous advocates as a widespread grassroots women’s movement after contemporary (second wave) feminism began to gather popular force following the establishment of John F. Kennedy’s Commission on the Status of Women in 1962 and the publication of Betty Friedan’s critique, The Feminine Mystique, in 1963. Both contemporary feminism, and specifically Jewish feminism, thrived in a milieu in which egalitarianism gained increased salience in the wake of American civil rights efforts, anti-Vietnam War protests, and feminist transformations of society. As the feminist message spread and entered mainstream bourgeois societies—often articulated by leaders with Jewish names, such as Shulamit
Firestone and Gloria Steinem—a wide variety of organizational subgroups formed, including subgroups of particular ethnic and religious groups who felt that their voices were not being heard in the broader movement. Feminism with a Jewish focus became distinguished from the generalized movement rather early; the exploration of Judaism as a culture and as a religion was encouraged by the protest movements and the youth culture of the 1960s, which advocated “doing your own thing.” This was reinforced by American Jewish feelings of ethnic pride immediately after the Six-Day War of 1967. In a parallel development, American Jewish intellectuals and artists produced extremely influential and Jewishly distinctive works, further increasing ethnic, cultural, and religious self-esteem within the greater American Jewish population.

Ironically, the ranks of Jewishly involved feminists around the world were also increased by antisemitism within the women’s movement. At a series of international conferences it became evident that anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish feeling was strong in certain segments of the women’s movement. Secular American Jewish women who embraced feminism sometimes found “that they were embraced as women but scorned as Jews.” This rejection of their Jewish ethnic, cultural, and religious identity struck at their deepest sense of self and prompted many to seek out meaningful connections to Judaism. Another strain of intellectual antisemitism was articulated in the guise of feminist spirituality that hearkened back to a (nonexistent) benign, matriarchal, and goddess-worshipping age. Even some ethnically Jewish feminists absorbed and promulgated the notion that the patriarchal “ancient Hebrew religion” had caused “the death of the Mother-Goddess.” However, for other formerly secular Jewish feminists, these charges of deicide served as a catalyst propelling them into a newly intense relationship with their own religion.

Christian feminist thinkers at this time were actively exploring what they saw as the patriarchal flaws of Christianity. But Jewish women found that the terms of this discussion did not easily apply to Jewish history, texts, and religious traditions. It became clear that Jewish women would need to educate themselves about their own religious heritage in order to make Judaism more sympathetic to women. As Conservative activist and prolific author Francine Klagsbrun later articulated the educational agenda:

We run the danger of defining women’s religiosity only in terms of feelings, mysticism, or intuition, of stereotyping women as they were stereotyped for centuries as creatures of emotion and instinct. No. I want women to be learned in law and text, to combine spirituality with intellect, and to walk with confidence in the paths of the Torah.

In an American milieu that promoted the reclamation of ethnic and religious “roots,” Jewishly focused feminism emerged among Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative activist women’s groups in the early 1970s. Orthodox feminists began to appear a few years after this: by 1973, for example. Orthodox women’s prayer groups were meeting in St. Louis, Riverdale (N.Y.), Cambridge (Mass.), and elsewhere. In diverse but overlapping ways, feminist activists within the various wings of Judaism began to work for parity. Thus, since the late 1960s, Jewish communities in the United States, and to some extent in Israel, have experienced a transformation in women’s roles in the realms of group study of sacred texts, public worship, and ceremonial life-cycle events.
Women attached to Judaism shared with non-Jewish and secular Jewish women the personal lifestyle changes of the postfeminist era: higher education, vocational opportunities, career advancement, and personal choice. Some women and men, especially in segments of the Orthodox world, were able to compartmentalize societal changes so that the disparity between gender role constructions in their secular and Jewish lives did not cause them cognitive dissonance. However, the vast majority of American Jews who affiliate with the Conservative and Reform branches of Judaism, and a significant group within the modern and centrist Orthodox worlds as well, have increasingly rejected compartmentalization and have striven to bring their secular and Jewish lives into more organic consonance. As a result, changes in the secular world are reflected in public Judaism. For women and men who choose to live in rigorous Orthodox cultures, change takes place slowly. For those with a more liberal interpretive framework, social and religious changes move more quickly, but not without their own struggle and conflict.

A straightforward catalogue of changes vis-à-vis women in public Jewish life includes many areas in which women previously played minor roles: in all but Orthodox synagogues, women share with men participatory and leadership roles in synagogue worship. Women have increasingly become congregational presidents and have taken leadership roles in communal organizations—a transformation that actually provoked far more conflict than did the ordination of women as rabbis in the Reform and Reconstructionist movements. In left-wing Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist synagogues, liturgy is transformed to make it gender-neutral or to refer specifically to women and their experiences. Within all wings of Judaism, new and revitalized rituals are utilized to celebrate women’s life-cycle events. And perhaps most significant in terms of social change, communal attitudes trans-denominationally have shifted dramatically to regard as normative an increased level of Jewish education for girls and women.\textsuperscript{15}

\section*{Resistance to Women as Public Jews}

Despite these genuine social transformations, activists have often been startled by the extent to which women’s demands for greater ownership of public Judaism have aroused sustained animus among some religiously conservative thinkers and leaders, and continue to provoke this reaction among some segments of the Orthodox community in the United States and Israel. The request for greater women’s inclusivity is often perceived as threatening the foundations of Jewish tradition and society. In provoking these profound social changes, women-who-change-things have become symbols of all the disruptions of modernity over the past two centuries. If women, too, could claim ownership, gender would not signify the same thing as it did in traditional Jewish societies, and the last gradations in the religiously and culturally based social hierarchy would be rendered permeable. Given that other contemporary challenges seem more threatening vis-à-vis the halakhah than women’s search for increased participation in public Judaism, the vehemence of this negative response is seen by many as puzzling.

Observers have suggested a variety of reasons for the intensity of opposition. Some
feminist activists have stressed the issues of power and decision-making that are involved in making women “co-owners” of public Judaism. Noting that, historically, all elite strata in Jewish religious and communal life have been occupied by men, such observers suggest that men are simply loath to relinquish their power. Others, in contrast, take a more psychological standpoint, perceiving a male fear of female sexuality that is magnified in a group setting.

These hypotheses are useful, but I would also argue that women’s issues have attained a psychosocial symbolic meaning among the more traditional (and not only Orthodox) elements within contemporary Judaism. Women’s public ownership of Judaism is a synecdoche for modernity’s erosion of Jewish social boundaries. For example, a special issue of the journal *Conservative Judaism* (1974) explored topics connected to “women and change in Jewish law.” In one article, psychiatrist Mortimer Ostow characterized Jewish feminism as an attempt to obliterate “the visible differences between men and women” and a “possible encouragement of transsexual fantasies.” Ostow warned that the end result of fully empowering women within public Judaism would be to emasculate Jewish men, producing a society in which women would dominate the synagogue but suffer consequent frustration in the bedroom.¹⁶

Arguments over the proposed ordination of female rabbis eventually split the Conservative movement, resulting in the formation of a small, alternative rabbinical seminary and congregational umbrella organization, the Union for Traditional Judaism (originally the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism), headed by the prominent scholar David Weiss-Halivni, formerly of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Yet in Reform temples, as women have increasingly moved into leadership roles such as temple president, as well as occupying religious leadership roles as rabbis and cantors, men seem to be correspondingly less interested in playing such roles: in recent years, cantorial classes at the Reform Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion have been overwhelmingly female.

Historical Judaism placed individuals within hierarchies of social, familial, and communal group categories. Although recent research by Bernadette Brooten and others have revealed that powerful, wealthy women probably played significant non-religious leadership roles as public Jews in ancient Jewish communities,¹⁷ many rabbinic decisors constricted women’s public roles as the centuries passed. For instance, the rabbinic Judaism of mainstream postmedieval European communities restricted women’s roles by means of halakhic proclamations that expressly prohibited females as a group from functioning as leaders.

One reason given for discouraging women from public leadership roles is the talmudic concept of *kevod haZHîbur*, the dignity of the [male] community: the presence of prominent women might signify that no men could be found with similar leadership qualifications. Within this social-psychological framework, the prominence of women signals the diminished competence of men. The assumption is that female leaders make men feel ashamed.

A second reason for excluding women from leadership positions in public Jewish spheres was consideration for female modesty. Women who were thrust—or thrust themselves—into the public eye would surely garner inappropriate male attention to their persons. Interestingly, in most Ashkenazic communities this concern about women in public places was primarily in public Jewish settings, not in the market-
place. Thus while women often were occupied in business, they were not found in the *beit midrash*, the study hall for sacred texts, nor were their voices heard in public worship in the synagogue. Indeed, a whole cluster of laws and customs grew up in recent centuries around the curious concept of *kol ishah*, the prohibition against listening to the voice of a woman.

The evolution of the concept of *kol ishah* over the centuries is convoluted. Since the focus of this essay is the symbolic meaning of social transformations and not the halakhah per se, the reader interested in halakhic reasoning is referred to Saul Berman’s masterful article tracing the law’s unlikely history. Perhaps counterintuitively, greater stringency developed in the rabbinic definition of *kol ishah* as the years passed. Eventually, with a few important exceptions, rabbinic conceptions in early modern and modern times moved toward considering the publicly “exposed” voices of postpubescent women as tantamount to nudity.

Concern about the power of male sexual response, and the loss of control leading to inappropriate sexual behavior, were the animating rabbinic anxieties articulated in discussing each of the separate laws that eventually developed into today’s *kol ishah* construct. Within classical rabbinic texts, women are not generally pictured as deliberate temptresses, as they are in some other religious cultures. Rather, in the rabbinic imagination, men have low sexual flashpoints. Male sexuality is viewed as an extremely volatile element: given visual or aural stimulation, and given opportunity, the assumption is that men will pursue inappropriate sexual liaisons. Fascinatingly, the rabbis of the Talmud seemed to include themselves in this observation. Many anecdotes illustrating the strength and involuntary nature of male sexual response feature prominent rabbis trying to outwit their own powerful impulses. One way of dealing with men’s capacity for inappropriate sexual activity was simply to prevent interaction between men and women except under the most controlled conditions. One might say that rabbinic law prevented prohibited sexual intercourse by prohibiting social intercourse.

Thus (again speaking from a psychosocial rather than a halakhic standpoint), women were shunted away from ownership of public Judaism to avert the possibility that men might feel ashamed or do something shameful. The side effect of these halakhic prohibitions was the isolation of women from the center of public Jewish life. Much of the effort of women to transform contemporary Judaism has focused on the amelioration of this isolation.

**Public Jewish Rituals and the Sacralization of Jewish Women’s Lives**

The two most sweeping gender changes in contemporary Jewish life involve the sacralization of women’s life-cycle events through public Jewish rituals and the dwindling of the gender gap in Jewish learning. I begin with ritualized life-cycle events, which are ubiquitous in American Jewish life today and have far more significance to the people involved than may be realized at first glance.

To fully understand the impetus behind women’s appropriation of formerly male rituals, such as the celebration of a bar mitzvah or women’s recitation of the kaddish prayer, one must begin with a discussion of the role of public rituals in people’s lives.
When an individual performs a public ceremony or ritual to mark a life-cycle change, the psychosocial import of communal presence and response is multivalenced. As data from numerous interviews have demonstrated, the presence of the community at a bat mitzvah ceremony signals to the celebrant: “This event is not only important to you. It is important to the people around you as well. We care about you, and we rejoice with you.” Moreover, the recitation of ancient sacred liturgies by the celebrant sends a signal that what she does is not only important to Jews now, but also to her Jewish ancestors; her community exists in time as well as in space. And not least, the invoking of God’s name further underscores the importance of the occasion: God, too, notices and cares. The celebrant feels at once connected with friends and family, the Jewish past and future, and whatever notion of divinity she ascribes to.

The enterprise of providing women with sacred Jewish life-cycle events has taken two forms: the adaptation for women of traditional Jewish public rituals, ceremonies, and responsibilities; and the creation of new events to publicly sacralize women’s experience. Examples of the former include the bat mitzvah, the ceremony welcoming an infant daughter into the community of Israel (variously known as a shalom bat, simhat bat, seder zeved habat, or brit banot), and recitation of the kaddish mourning prayer by a bereaved female. Totally new rituals include communal rituals to mark the beginning or cessation of a female’s menses, and mourning ceremonies for children lost through miscarriage. Not surprisingly, adaptations of traditional Jewish ceremonies have succeeded among a far broader segment of the population than the new creations. Indeed, participating in experimental ceremonies is largely limited to the Jewish renewal movement in its various forms. It is precisely the familiarity, and the sense of owning something that is now and has “always been” Jewish, that makes appropriated traditional rituals so meaningful to contemporary women. Interview data make it very clear that for most girls and women who take part in appropriated life-cycle ceremonies today, the psychological power derives from doing what Jews do, rather than from doing what men do.

Although the external forms of some life-cycle events may parallel those in historical Jewish societies, the meaning for Jews in contemporary Jewish societies has often shifted. Thus, in historical Jewish societies, a bar mitzvah (frequently a rather low-key event consisting of a 13-year-old boy being called up to make the blessings on and read from the Torah scroll for the first time) signaled to the celebrant, his family, and his congregation that he was now responsible for all adult commandments, including daily prayer with phylacteries. He “owned” his Judaism publicly because of his condition of individual “commandedness.” In contrast, for contemporary westernized Jews whose lives are usually remote from the concept of personal commandments, the bar or bat mitzvah is a rite of passage that enables the celebrant to join the “club” of Jewishness. In interviews, adults will say, “I was bar mitzvahed,” meaning “I became a Jew.” Only for Orthodox boys and girls—about 10 percent or less of American Jews—do the terms bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah have a connotation of daily religious responsibilities. However, for non-Orthodox Jews, the impression that they have joined the club of Jewish peoplehood can also have deep psychological significance. It is another way of “owning” Jewishness. Conversely, not having had a bar or bat mitzvah often makes those thus deprived feel as though they are not really bona fide Jews. Many describe their not having had a bar or bat mitzv-
vah as indicative of being alienated from Judaism, and those who wish to develop closer ties to Jews and Judaism often pursue an adult celebration.

Today, the bat mitzvah celebration is virtually universal in synagogue-affiliated families in American Jewish communities, from Orthodox through Reform, and across the generations. Reconstructionist founder Mordecai Kaplan, who was also closely associated for many years with the Jewish Theological Seminary, is considered the first to have suggested the concept of bat mitzvah, and American Conservative Judaism made popular the actual celebration of this event. At first, few families chose to celebrate the bat mitzvah during the 1950s and 1960s, many Conservative synagogues limited the celebration to the less problematic Friday night services, when the Torah is not read. Reform congregations, for their part, did not take the lead in mainstreaming bat mitzvah ceremonies, since many of them had substituted the concept of confirmation ceremonies at age 16 (at the completion of Sunday school studies). It was not until some time later—when the Reform movement began to reincorporate a number of more traditional rituals into its services—that the bar mitzvah ceremony was revived, and with it, the bat mitzvah. By the late 1980s, however, most Conservative and almost all Reform and Reconstructionist congregations had made bat mitzvah and bar mitzvah ceremonies virtually identical, including within them the calling of girls to the Torah. Today, the vast majority of Jewish females aged 13 to 24 have had bat mitzvah celebrations.

Once nearly unthinkable in Orthodox settings, the celebration of bat mitzvah has become much more common. Orthodox practitioners, it is true, have responded slowly to the pressure to celebrate a girl’s religious majority. Some congregations have established a format for celebrating the bar mitzvah either on Sunday morning or at a traditional festive "third meal" (se’udah shelishit) on the Sabbath. At these occasions, the girl typically delivers a devar torah, a homiletic address marking the seriousness of the occasion. Other congregations leave the mode of celebration up to the discretion of the child and her parents. These celebrations have become commonplace in many Orthodox circles, with families sometimes traveling great distances to attend a bar mitzvah, just as they would for a bar mitzvah. Much feminist commentary on this phenomenon has tended to concentrate on the disparity between the limited Orthodox forms of bat mitzvah, on the one hand, and the egalitarian Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist modes of bat mitzvah, on the other. Orthodoxy, however, has in fact traveled a farther road than other wings of Judaism in breaking away from previously prevailing norms.

The impact of bat mitzvah celebrations is not limited to children. In the United States, “Sisterhood Sabbaths” at suburban temples feature women who have spent months preparing Torah readings in Hebrew, with cantillation. Even elderly women are rediscovering a heritage that for most of their lives they thought was forever closed to them. One woman interviewed by a journalist was the last in her family to have a bar mitzvah, after “my two daughters and two granddaughters celebrated their bar mitzvah.” Women in nursing homes, remembering a time when “women were nothing in the religious service,” are now “changed from being negative and frightened to being positive.” As one woman put it, “I never expected this, but it feels incredibly good.” In what was perhaps the world’s largest known bat mitzvah ceremony, with more than 1,000 women in attendance, 122 adult women participated in
a group bat mitzvah on July 15, 1996 at the Hadassah National Convention in Miami Beach.

Adult bat mitzvahs, including group adult bat mitzvahs, have attained much popularity among middle-class American Jews in their mature years. Many older American Jewish women feel that they have “worked” for Jewishness all their lives through communal voluntarism and synagogue sisterhood work. At the same time, many of them have been deeply conscious of what they perceive to be their inadequate Jewish education and subordinate status in public Jewish life. When they go to evening school to study for their adult bat mitzvah, when they learn to chant the blessings and passages from the Torah, when they increase their intellectual understanding of Jewish history and customs, they look forward to the bat mitzvah as a way to mark the fact that they are at last covenanted, bona-fide members of the group. This is surely “invented tradition,” to borrow Eric Hobsbawm’s useful phrase, but participants regard it as Jewishly authentic nonetheless. It fits in with their American identities, and it makes them feel more Jewishly connected at the same time.

Much Jewish feminist attention and effort has focused on providing vehicles for sacralizing other major events in women’s lives. Religious rituals and customs around major life-cycle events make individuals feel that events which are profoundly moving to them on a personal level are also significant to their friends and communities of faith, to God, and to Jewish history. As a result, even women who do not think of themselves as particularly feminist have, over the years, facilitated grassroots acceptance for events such as the shalom bat. Such ceremonies are often built on earlier customs in Sephardic and German Jewish congregations, which also welcomed female infants in a ceremonial service that featured the recitation of Psalms and other liturgical elements. Because the shalom bat is not prescribed by Jewish law as is the brit milah male circumcision ceremony, parents, friends, and rabbis often work together to create personalized liturgies. While shalom bat ceremonies often struck Jewish practitioners as “strange” two or three decades ago, they have gradually lost their strangeness and have become accepted, albeit not necessarily de rigueur.

Women’s roles have expanded even under the hupah (wedding canopy) in variations of traditional Jewish wedding customs and ceremonies. Sociological changes in this area have profound implications, because the roots of the traditional wedding contract are the husband’s acquiring ownership over his new bride’s sexuality and his assumption of financial responsibility for the support of his wife. For women to take ownership in this area is, to use a talmudic phrase, to “overturn the table.”

Within Conservative and Reform Judaism, the traditional ketubah, or wedding contract, is sometimes adapted so that it is more reciprocal. Some brides and grooms change the English translation only; at some weddings, changes extend to the Aramaic contract and liturgy as well. Double-ring ceremonies, in which both bride and groom make declarations to each other, are common. Passages from the biblical Song of Songs are sometimes recited or sung by women and men as part of the expanded liturgy, this new custom incorporating traditional materials into a nontraditional setting and implementation.

However, for some contemporary Jewish women, the traditional wedding contract seems irredeemably flawed: in terms of its language, it is basically a purchase agreement in which the groom promises the bride financial, social, and emotional security
in exchange for the exclusive rights to her sexual (and by implication, reproductive) capacities. Some within the Jewish feminist community dispense with traditional marriage texts altogether and compose their own original ceremonies of union. For Jewish lesbians who attend the weddings of heterosexual friends, traditional ceremonies often seem especially exclusionary, and some have urged wholesale revisions that are more inclusive to alternative lifestyles.

Change is afoot in Orthodox circles as well. A number of Orthodox brides have established a room for themselves and their friends, in which women’s song and dance are combined with edifying homilies for the bride. At some weddings the rabbi and groom come to the bride’s room several minutes before the ceremony in order to sign a prenuptial agreement that would prevent her ever becoming an ‘agunah (this occurs in cases where the husband disappears or refuses to give his wife a halakhically valid divorce [get]). In innovative Orthodox ceremonies today, it is not unheard of for female relatives, friends, or teachers to read the ketubah under the canopy—an honored task most often performed by a rabbi, teacher, or male family member. At some ceremonies, female friends and relatives read the English translation of the shev’a brakhot, the seven blessings bestowed upon the wedding couple under the canopy, which comprise the heart of the wedding ceremony. And in a change that is preserved for all time, some Orthodox rabbis now include the names of the bride’s and groom’s mothers, as well as their fathers, in the ketubah text.

Encouraging the reinterpretation of tradition, Leah Shakdiel, an outspoken Israeli Orthodox feminist, comments on the limitations of the unmediated Jewish wedding ceremony:

Women’s maturity is not based on individuation vs. God, Torah and community, but on their transition from father to husband, on their kiddushin, i.e., being set aside from all women in the world for a particular man who is going to make them into a kli (vessel) by having kosher sex with them. Note the wedding: father negotiates the ketubah and is present when it is signed, then accompanies the groom toward the bride, then lingers a moment behind to bless the daughter as he hands her over to her next possessor. . . . This is how it is if we just let halakhah and tradition do their job as effective socializers, without active reinterpretation of all this on our part.

Communal norms are changing not only in the area of joyous life-cycle celebrations, but also in the area of death-related ceremonies. Indeed, the universality of mortality and loss have made women’s roles in bereavement a motif that touches many devoutly Orthodox and self-described nonfeminist women. More and more, women in every wing of Judaism expect to be involved—to speak at a funeral, to give a class at a shiv’ a home, or to say kaddish for a departed loved one. Once rare, the sight of a woman saying kaddish for a parent has become increasingly familiar. The growing number of women who have taken on these religious responsibilities insist that they are motivated by the same emotions that motivate men: they want to honor both the memory of their parent and Jewish tradition. Women, like men, find that daily recitation of the kaddish in a communal setting provides a powerful opportunity to work through personal grief. Their ability to do so, however, has proceeded at a very uneven pace, so that mourning women appearing in an unfamiliar congregation run the risk of encountering unreceptive responses.
For women struggling with the loss of a loved one, opposition to their saying kad-
dish is a source of pain and puzzlement. Halakhic issues per se are not particularly
difficult to negotiate, as Rochelle Millen has demonstrated.\(^{24}\) Ironically, the kaddish
issue has galvanized many traditionalist women to become more feminist in their out-
look. Women’s kaddish is also one of the primary issues, along with the problem of
’agunot, that unify Orthodox and non-Orthodox women. By discouraging rather than
supporting women who wish to say kaddish, reactionary elements in the Orthodox
community have actually enhanced two “undesirable” developments (from their
point of view): they have transformed more Orthodox women into feminists, and they
have helped to build bridges between women in Orthodoxy and women in other
Jewish denominational spheres.

**Public Judaism and the Beit Midrash**

In traditional Judaism with its scholarly hierarchy, religious education has and con-
tinues to occupy a uniquely privileged and important position. Only the most elite of
initiates are considered erudite enough to interpret biblical and rabbinic law and to
make halakhic decisions. The key to understanding why contemporary Jewish women’s
scholarship comprises a true revolution depends on our recognition of the extent to
which a rigorous education in rabbinic texts conferred not only social power and the
ability to make or influence decisions, but also communal status in traditional Jewish
societies.

Jewish emphasis on study and articulation as a means of primarily male cultural
transmission has deep historical roots. The ubiquitousness of the educational enter-
prise is expressed in the biblical Shema, adapted since ancient times as the central
prayer of Jewish liturgy. In its powerful passages, worshipping Jews are repeatedly
exhorted to provide their children with Jewish education: to speak about divine com-
mandments when active or resting, residing at home or walking outside. The prayer
presents Jewish education not primarily in an elite or formal classroom situation;
rather, ordinary parents are enjoined to be involved in religious matters with pas-
sionate intensity, heart and soul, so that these subjects virtually never depart from their
lips.

Rabbincal interpretation of these passages focused on the teaching of the tal-
mudic law and defined the responsibility to teach as applying to fathers and sons.
Additionally, assuming that many fathers might not feel themselves capable of ful-
filling these educational injunctions, rabbinic law permitted delegation: fathers who
could not teach their sons themselves were expected to hire appropriate teachers.
Nevertheless, the expectation was that much education would also take place in the
home and in other settings. Traditional Jewish societies took quite seriously the re-
sponsibility to provide Jewish education for boys and to encourage life-long Judaic
study for men, and the aura of talmudic learning hovered palpably over communal
life. Judaism has been different from many other religious/ethnic identity construc-
tion modes because intellectualism defines male excellence. The legal decisions and
text-based discussions of Jewish scholars had widespread influence on the normative
behaviors of both male and female members of Jewish folk classes.
Most rabbinic commentaries interpreted the Shema passage restrictively as referring to “sons and not daughters.” Indeed, some talmudic views discourage fathers from providing rigorous text study to their daughters, suggesting that doing so may bring dishonor both to their daughters and to the texts they study. Girls were most often taught practical religious fundamentals at home by their mothers. Many girls were taught to read in the Jewish vernacular (for example, Yiddish) but not in Hebrew; others were taught to read basic Hebrew liturgy in the prayer book. In some families, knowledgeable fathers or mothers provided their daughters with text study opportunities or hired tutors for them, and in a few communities young girls also attended school. In exceptional cases, wives and daughters in elite families received impressive rabbinic text education at home from their fathers, brothers, or husbands—some of these women even made names for themselves as scholars, being cited by name or by relationship in rabbinic literature. But the norm was that female Jews experienced the world of intensive Judaic study vicariously or at one remove.

Girls’ and women’s increased access to public study followed different but mutually reinforcing paths in the United States and in Israel. In the United States women were among the pioneers of educational initiatives. Rebecca Gratz of Philadelphia, for example, established the American Jewish Sunday School movement in 1838 and employed women as teachers. As Sarna has noted, “by the time Gratz died in 1869, it can be safely estimated that the majority of American Jews who received any formal Jewish education at all learned most of what they knew from female teachers. These teachers, in turn, had to educate themselves in Judaism, which they did with the aid of new textbooks, some of them written by women as well.” Among the women who influenced American Jewish culture were the poet Emma Lazarus (1849–1887), the teacher, writer, and lecturer Ray Frank (1861–1948), and the Zionist activist and creator of Hadassah, Henrietta Szold (1860–1945)—along with hundreds of housewives who taught in 20th-century suburban congregational Hebrew schools and Sunday schools. Ironically, young boys in these schools were for many years much more likely to acquire an afternoon-school education than were girls because of the synagogue educational requirements for bar mitzvah. It was not until the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, when parents of pre-bat mitzvah girls became required to send their daughters to afternoon schools in the same proportion as their sons, that the gender gap in Jewish education narrowed.

During the same time period, albeit for different reasons, girls from observant Jewish families began to have access to intensive day-school education. New roles for women in Orthodox Jewish schooling can be traced back to the Bais Yaakov movement begun a century ago by Sarah Schnirer, a pious East European woman, in a daring response to the challenges of secular modernity. Observing that in enlightened, westernized Jewish communities, women who lacked deep knowledge of Judaic texts were more easily drifting away from Jewish lifestyles, Schnirer opened a school in 1917 with 25 girls; the school expanded rapidly and new branches were established. By the 1937–1938 school year, 35,585 girls were enrolled in 248 Bais Yaakov schools in Poland alone. Although the original Bais Yaakov movement came to a brutal end during the Second World War, the basic assumptions underlying its formation revolutionized attitudes toward Jewish education for girls. Following the Second World War, there was an exponential increase in the number of American
Jewish day schools, often staffed by teachers who had survived the Holocaust. Within these 12-year day schools, girls and boys began to acquire similar levels of Jewish education long before students in other educational settings such as the afternoon Talmud Torah or Hebrew school. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey data show that today’s Orthodox girls attend Jewish schools for approximately the same number of hours and years as their brothers. As day schools have become more numerous in medium-sized Jewish communities across the United States, a commitment to day-school education has become a normative marker of committed families. The majority of Orthodox families, along with a growing core of committed Conservative and some Reform families, now provide both daughters and sons with day-school education, some of them continuing through the high school years. Perhaps counterintuitively, the gender gap in length and intensity of Jewish education is lower among Orthodox Jewish youth than among any other group, although curricula vary by gender.

This growing cadre of highly educated Jewish women has been enhanced by the creation of women’s yeshivot in Israel; the expectation among American Jewish day-school administrators is that both male and female graduates will spend a year studying intensively in Israel before they proceed to college. Haredi, or right-wing Orthodox schools (including Lubavitch schools), for example, do not teach talmudic texts to girls. But modern Orthodox women now have the opportunity to do serious text study throughout their adult lives in settings as diverse as secular universities with strong Judaic studies programs or independent schools such as Machon Pardes in Jerusalem, or in New York’s Drisha and Shalhevet and Boston’s Ma’ayan. Some of these schools are for women only, and some are coeducational, but all share a fairly traditional religious orientation. Characteristically, women’s learning helps to bridge the differences between the wings of Judaism: Conservative and Reform rabbinical seminaries often encourage rabbinical students to spend time in Israel studying at these institutions.

Some schools are organized along a classical “girls’” model—that is, an instructor (often male) lectures and the female students take notes. Other schools, however, extend to females the traditional yeshiva style of learning in the hevruta model, in which two study partners wrestle with a given text on their own terms both before and following lecture sessions. Such peer study develops a base of knowledge and encourages women to move forward into new texts. Until recently, the hevruta model for female study was controversial. Detractors thought it immodest and unseemly, as though women who tried to study this way did so only in order to “copy men.” Over time, however, the notion that females could also study in hevruta has come to seem less startling.

Women’s study of Judaic texts is taking place both in a widespread, grassroots form, and on the most elite and esoteric levels. The expanding world of women’s scholarship has given rise to a new generation of female notables. Some well-known female scholars of Judaica are professors in secular academic institutions, as will be discussed shortly, and their personal religious affiliations run the gamut from Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform to a purely secular orientation. Other “stars” of women’s Torah-learning teach and study outside of regular academic settings. These scholars,
many of them Orthodox Israelis, are having a great impact on the status of learning for women in the diaspora. For decades, one of the few female Torah scholars who was sufficiently well-known to be frequently quoted was the brilliant Nechama Leibowitz, whose insightful, accessible books discussing biblical portions of the week and their commentaries appealed to scholars and novices alike. Today, a group of dynamic Orthodox scholars and educators such as Chana Henkin, director of the Nishmat school for women, Malka Bina, director of the Matan school for women, and Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg, who lectures regularly in a variety of venues, are known both within and without the Orthodox world, traveling frequently to the United States on lecture tours and fund-raising trips for their educational institutions. In part because these scholars have refrained from identifying themselves as feminists, their activities have by and large avoided controversy. Increasingly, Jewish federations and other non-Orthodox Jewish communal institutions have featured these female scholars within their regular lecture series and special events.

The landscape of women and Torah-learning and related women’s leadership options has also been dramatically transformed by economic change. Sympathetic women and men have increasingly funded programs that focus on higher Jewish education for women. This funding has helped to make women’s Jewish cultural literacy a normative goal among certain groups. Within Orthodox environments, a few rabbis and institutions have created new credentialed positions for scholarly Jewish women. In several New York-area synagogues, young women have been appointed interns who serve the congregational community in pararabbinic capacities. Shlomo Riskin, who left the rabbinate of New York’s Lincoln Square Synagogue to found and administer a variety of Jewish educational institutions in Israel, now trains to’anot—female pararabbinic lawyers who serve as advocates for women locked in difficult Israeli divorce situations. Perhaps the most revolutionary development in this area has recently taken place in Israel. In the fall of 1999, eight women graduates of a two-year program sponsored by Nishmat were accredited as rabbinical adjudicators (to’anot halakhah) who are qualified to answer religious questions posed by other women about matters relating to sexuality, reproduction, and the laws of family purity. While the program was launched quietly and discreetly, Orthodox authorities and laypersons alike recognize the momentous nature of the change it represents. Indeed, it has been argued that some of the most dynamic innovations in the Orthodox world today, including, but not limited to the roles of women, are occurring in Israel rather than in the United States.

In Israel, Jews who consider themselves Orthodox comprise a greater part of the Jewish population (about 20 percent). Even more important, Orthodox institutions impinge on a wide variety of everyday experiences—from the availability of kosher food to (the lack of) public transportation on Sabbath and holidays—and Orthodox institutions are mandated by law to supervise marriage, divorce, inheritance, and burial procedures. This interpermeability of “secular” and “religious” realms provides Israeli men and women with a thicker interface between religion and modernity and generates friction between ideological camps who are forced to share public space together, despite their differences. The variegated interface nurtures and contextualizes a diffusion of new women’s roles in Israeli public Judaism, in various ed-
ucational, civic, and public spheres. In the United States, in contrast, women’s efforts to expand their roles in public Judaism have largely been defined by the prominence of the congregational sphere in American Judaism.

The presence of female rabbis in Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Jewish movements has influenced both non-Orthodox and Orthodox Jewish life. In a very real sense, an ordained rabbi “owns” public Judaism. Girls and young women growing up in American female-led congregations are often unaware that women were ever excluded from Jewish leadership roles. The active role played by female rabbis has indirectly put pressure on Orthodox life as well. Even explicitly nonfeminist younger Orthodox women expect to be able to pursue leadership roles within Orthodox scholarly realms, should they so desire. However, in each of the Orthodox career paths noted above, the word “rabbi” is scrupulously avoided, and some interns recoil from the suggestion that there is any link between their activities and those of women rabbis. Like the directors of many Orthodox schools for women in Israel, they seem to feel that they will be far more securely ensconced within mainstream Orthodox life if they eschew overt association with feminism, which is routinely derided among right-wing Orthodox spokespersons as a purely secular and thus dangerous cause.  

The recent increase of women in the more elite, intellectual strata of Jewish learning and scholarship should not be confused with the earlier feminization of the Jewish education field. While it is certainly true that Jewish education—like education in general—has often been regarded as a good profession for women but not for men, this attitude has been characteristic only with regard to early childhood, elementary and, to some extent, high school settings. In Jewish and secular university-level education, men have been until very recently the exclusive “owners” of the intellectual educational enterprise. It is only within the very recent past that women have made their way into both the Jewish and secular ivory towers of higher education.

**Women and Secular Judaic Scholarship**

Secular Judaic scholarship, beginning with the German Jewish intellectual *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, was for most of its history as exclusively male as the rabbinate. Today, however, Jewish women’s scholarship has developed into a full-fledged field in colleges and universities across the United States and Israel. Some research on women takes place in institutions that have dedicated faculty positions to the study of Jewish women. At Brandeis University, for example, the Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women conducts research on Jewish women in diverse countries and historical periods, and graduate degrees in Jewish women’s studies—along with a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate courses on Jewish women from the Bible through contemporary times—are taught in the Near Eastern and Judaic studies, American studies, sociology, and women’s studies departments. Similarly, graduate degrees in Jewish women’s studies can be pursued at the Jewish Theological Seminary. In Israel, courses and programs on Jewish women were developed first in secular environments at Haifa University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and from 1998, at the Orthodox-sponsored Bar-Ilan University. Academic women are
organized in a women’s caucus at the Association for Jewish Studies conference, which enables them to learn about each other’s works and to share their experiences in the field. Scholarly research on Jewish women has also been aided by the publication of *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* in two massive volumes, which features 800 biographical and 110 topical entries. Numerous resource books and bibliographies are continually published in areas related to Jewish women’s studies, including a critical sourcebook on Jewish American women writers.

Scholars interested in analyzing the connections between gender, religion, social and historical change, and cultural milieu have explored the history of women in Jewish societies from the Bible onward, producing scores of pioneering scholarly works on the gendered nature of the Jewish experience throughout history. Such works, appearing in the field of Bible studies, rabbincics, history, literature, sociology, psychology, and popular culture, have had a significant impact on individual departments, on particular fields, and on Jewish studies as a whole. As thousands of students take courses taught by feminist scholars, the insights of female academics are reaching new generations and are slowly being incorporated into Jewish studies curricula for children and teenagers, as well as adults.

Interestingly, contemporary Jewish women’s scholarship in the academy often focuses on extraordinary women from the past. For most of Jewish history, women only occasionally held leadership positions within public Jewish life. This may or may not have been a source of frustration to women with leadership capabilities; perhaps the fact that women were seldom leaders in the non-Jewish societies in which Jews made their homes created a situation in which the non-leadership of females seemed to be a universal social norm. The scattered exceptions to this statement demonstrate that capable women existed in every generation, some of them surmounting the norms of the Jewish communities in which they lived. The growing awareness concerning Jewish women as individuals and as a group is changing the field of Jewish studies and transforming the understanding of Jewish social history. This research makes it difficult for reactionary elements within Jewish communities to be taken seriously when they claim that observant women before the rise of feminism lived in a kind of uncomplicated Jewish paradise.

Recently, Hillel Halkin has accused Jewish studies departments of becoming “feminized.” As his article makes clear, feminization to Halkin means not only or even primarily that Judaic scholarship is newly inclusive of women, but that it is profoundly trivialized by intellectual trends such as feminism. Ironically, Halkin perpetuates in a secular context the calumny against women’s intellectual work begun earlier in religious texts; he might as well have said, paraphrasing one talmudic rabbi, that the study of women leads to *tiflut* (foolishness, or licentiousness). Halkin and others like him set up an intellectual hierarchy in which the explorations of Jewish women’s lives in historical Jewish societies and their roles in shaping historical epochs are viewed as somehow diminishing intellectual excellence.

As Halkin notes, the feminist challenge to Jewish studies means more than the presence of women in the academy and study hall. Jewish thinking itself is being challenged by erudite, original Jewish thinkers who are women. Some of these women examine the very bases of historical Jewish thought. From the Reconstructionist/Reform end of the spectrum, Judith Plaskow challenges basic assumptions by asking:
“Who owns Jewish thought?” Viewing egalitarianism as a sacred principle by which all other things are evaluated, Plaskow proposes remaking Judaism as a completely egalitarian civilization, leveling traditional hierarchies of person, place, or time, and reincorporating women-centered spiritual elements that have been rejected by historical Judaism.37

From within the Israeli Orthodox framework, Bar-Ilan philosophy professor Tamar Ross has for several years been speaking and writing about her approach to the divine source of Torah (torah misinai), which she bases on the thought of R. Avraham Yitzhak Kook, one of the revered icons of the religious Zionist movement.38 Ross’s theory builds on a rabbinic principle often used to explain incongruities in biblical literature: dibera Torah bilshon benei adam (“God speaks to humans in human language”).39 Because God speaks in human language, the Torah includes anthropomorphisms that reflect human limitations rather than divine essence. In addition to using human words to communicate to people, Ross believes, God also situates prescriptions in a social context that people can understand. Since social contexts change over the centuries, the Creator is revealed in serial fashion, and thus people must continually readapt their understanding of what God wants. Ross quotes Kook to the effect that no human can ever truly know what God wants, hence all religions are an imperfect attempt to come close to God’s design for human behavior. Although R. Kook depicted Judaism as coming closer than any other religion, even rabbinic Judaism can be seen as an imperfect template requiring periodic correction.

Viewed in this way, changes in the understanding of divine will become sacralized as “a timely gift from God”:

Of course revelation is influenced by history and the evolution of ideas, but history and the evolution of ideas themselves are the tools of revelation. . . . [A]ccording to this view, the revolution in the status of women with which halakhah is now being confronted may be regarded as a new manifestation of Divine providence, or as a gradual unfolding of the Divine being. The newly evolving appreciation of the importance, integrity and value of women’s spirituality and perspectives in our time is not a threat, but a rare religious privilege, the basis for a new revelation.40

The Mainstreaming of Women’s Ownership of Public Judaism

Much writing about women’s new roles in public Judaism has focused on possible negative consequences. Across the denominational spectrum, observers voice concerns about “feminization.” Simply explained, the “feminization of Judaism” theory argues that if too many women are active in public Judaism, it will cease to be attractive to Jewish males. The assumption underlying this accusation is that before women became interested in public Judaism, men were irresistibly attracted to Jewish involvement. However, by the middle of the 20th century, the “Jewishness” of many Jewish males had dramatically diminished, being replaced by a “macho,” secularized, Christian, and western model of the modern Jew. The situation of American and Israeli Jews at the beginning of the 21st century is in many ways a realization of the “new Jew” envisioned by 19th-century theorists with diverse philosophies. In both the United States and in Israel, Jews have a modern, western image that vividly con-
tradicits the pariah image of Jews in their persecuted past. Moreover, as Jewish educators in Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Jewish communal settings note, the enthusiasm that Jewish women bring to the arenas of Jewish learning and spiritual expression have served as positive influences for many Jewish men. Indeed, at a conference on gender and adult Jewish education at Brandeis University in March 2000, papers delivered by leaders of the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox American communities demonstrated that women’s passion for Judaic text study has revitalized moribund educational programs as well as creating an institutional basis for the establishment and maintenance of new programs.\footnote{41}

Thus, although it has often been a source of communal anxiety, Jewish women’s new co-ownership of public Judaism challenges men to reevaluate—and revalue—concerns and activities in which large numbers of men had lost interest long before women’s roles in public Judaism were transformed. Even haredi communities are subtly affected by these trends, being compelled to focus in a new way on women, women’s place in public Judaism, and the nature of gender role construction. The proliferation of right-wing literature focusing on women during the past two decades (some of it even written by women) yields suggestive testimony that although haredi societies may well reseal the boundaries between their populace and modernity, in their own way they have been forced to confront modern conceptions of women’s roles.

We return, finally, to the conflict between the values of egalitarianism and Jewish traditionalism with which this essay began. To what extent does the coalescence of feminist and Judaic visions of the world, so evident in the work of contemporary feminists, inappropriately attempt to link two opposites? The tension between the two can be seen as the latest in a series of modern intellectual struggles yielding much that is fruitful and creative. Mitchell Cohen recounts that two of the great Zionist thinkers of the Yishuv (prestate Palestine) argued about the preferability of attempting to maintain a pure, or monistic, view of the Jewish world, versus working interwoven strands of historical Judaism together with other intellectual currents to produce a stronger Jewish ethos. According to Cohen, David Ben-Gurion insisted that the monistic approach was actually a misreading of Jewish history. He charged, moreover, that people tend not to be critical of amalgams in general, but only of the amalgams of which they do not approve. Ben-Gurion disagreed with Ze’ev Jabotinsky’s view that

“monism” . . . was the converse of shaatnez, a mixing of wool and linen forbidden by Jewish tradition as an inappropriate bringing together of opposites; an amalgam of Zionism with social democracy was a political equivalent to this transgression. A national struggle had to be unidirectional and unidevotional, drawn forth, one might say, as a single taut thread.

For almost a decade Ben-Gurion had been responding to such contentions with a simple claim: attacking shaatnez in politics was a deception, for no national movement was “pure. . . . ” [Ben-Gurion said:] “When you war against our ‘shaatnez’ you don’t war against ‘shaatnez’ in general, but rather against a specific ‘shaatnez’ you don’t like.”\footnote{42}

If the coalescence of egalitarianism and Judaism is a form of intellectual and social sha’a’tmez, sociological data show that these intertwined threads have wrought many positive changes in public Jewish life, despite resistance in some quarters. During the last quarter of the 20th century, the lives of western Jews as individuals,
in family groups, and in communal settings have undergone sweeping changes vis-à-vis gender role construction. However, many of these changes have come to seem so commonplace that their revolutionary status and flavor has been virtually lost. The extent and ramifications of these changes are often underestimated. In terms of the sheer percentages of girls and women affected, transformed Jewish educational norms and the creative exploration of Jewish life-cycle celebrations for females have changed the public face of Judaism. Even women who are not directly involved in the more intensive forms of Jewish feminist spirituality have a different relationship with their own religious and ethnic heritage in an environment in which women have increasingly become “public Jews.” For some, egalitarianism is the subject of passionate concern and a basis for ongoing activism. For many more, egalitarian change has become part of the everyday texture of life, and thus does not seem to them to be specifically feminist in resonance.

Despite the camouflage of familiarity, egalitarian expectations continue to produce change across a spectrum of mainstream environments. Both in those areas of life that are unique to Judaism and in those shared with non-Jewish populations, egalitarian values continue to have a powerful impact on Jewish societies. In bringing together values from Jewish and western sources, women committed both to egalitarianism and to Judaism have created a gamut of working models for modern public Judaism. As this discussion has demonstrated, the forms these models take, and societal reactions to them, differ in diverging subgroups of contemporary Jewish communities. Nevertheless, taken together, feminist-inspired changes in the ownership of public Judaism illuminate the intersection of Jewish traditionalism and western ideologies that forms the context for contemporary Jewish life.

Notes


3. See George Gallup, Jr. and Michael Lindsay, Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Religion (Harrisburg, Pa.: 1999), 122, 147, 159.


6. See Israel Bartal, “Responses to Modernity: Haskalah, Orthodoxy, and Nationalism in Eastern Europe,” in Zionism and Religion, ed. Shmu'el Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira (Hanover, N.H.: 1998), 13–24. As Bartal notes, western and eastern versions of modern Orthodoxy crystallized in reaction to the very different types of modernization emerging in their respective communities: in Eastern Europe, “Jews maintained social frameworks with a distinctly corporate nature,” whereas “in Germany, Orthodoxy was fundamentally a matter of making the religious element of life fit in with the demands of the state and the spirit of the age, while leaving behind the total immersion that had typified life in the traditional community.”


12. For a historical view of such issues in the interwar period, see Fishman, *A Breath of Life*, 11.


15. Ironically, equal levels of religious education for boys and girls obtain most consistently in the Orthodox day-school sector, whereas the ostensibly more egalitarian Reform and Conservative afternoon schools continue to show a disparity in years of schooling for boys and girls.


18. Saul Berman, “Kol ’Isha,” in *Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein Memorial Volume*, ed. Leo Landman (New York: 1980), 45–66, explains the development of this series of prohibitions. The evolution of the kol ishah concept can be briefly summarized as follows. The talmudic axiom kol beishah ’ervah (“the voice of a woman is naked/sexual/licentious”) is twice attributed to R. Shmuel. These initial talmudic references are concerned with the speaking voices of women, not their singing voices. That is, the sound of women speaking is considered a distraction to men absorbed in sacred tasks: were a man to hear his wife’s voice as he recited the pivotal Shema prayer, it might distract him in a manner similar to that of seeing her naked body, and he would lose his devotional intent and intensity (Berakhot 24a). Second, in a completely different discussion, Shmuel is quoted by a colleague who insists that talking or communicating via messages or messengers with married women, even to inquire about another man’s wife’s well-being, might lead to billets doux and illicit sexual liaisons (Kiddushin 70a). A third, entirely separate discussion about banning singing at feasts comments that when men and women sing together in a festive environment, they create an erotic conflagration (Sotah 48a). This discussion became the basis for prohibiting female instrumentalists or vocalists at such gatherings, but was not linked to the concept of kol ishah until much later.

The two separate talmudic principles about the dangers of women’s speaking voices (a) in prayer, or (b) in conversation, remained unlinked in rabbinic literature for hundreds of years. Some rabbis focused on which women’s voices should be prohibited, stipulating that the voice of a woman who is sexually unavailable to a man—that is, another man’s wife—is the most important application of kol beisha ’ervah. It was not until the late medieval period that the contemporary conception of kol ishah began to jell. By the time of the rishonim in Franco-Germany, rabbinic assumptions were usually that kol ishah refers to women’s singing voices, rather than to their speaking voices. Many of these commentators did not consider women’s voices to be inherently inappropriate, only situationally inappropriate. Moreover, they articulated the principle that the novelty of exposure makes kol ishah arousing and problematic, whereas regularity—(regilut)—insulates men from erotic feelings in ordinary situations.


22. For a feminist deconstruction of the traditional ketubah, see Laura Levitt’s article in Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt, Judaism Since Gender (New York: 1997).
29. See, however, Menachem Schneerson, Mesihat shabat parshat Emor, erav lag ba’omer 5771: ‘al davar hiyuv neshei yisrael behinukh limud hatorah, May 1990. In this article, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe urged that women be taught the Oral Torah so that they could supervise and guide their children’s religious studies. Such study sessions are necessary, he said, because without them, women could easily be seduced by the charms of secular studies. Schneerson also asserted that women should study (with their husbands) even the “fine, dialectical” points of law that most previous rabbis had posited as being inappropriate for women. He wrote: “It is human nature for male and female to delight in this kind of study. Through this there will develop in [women] the proper sensitivities and talents in the spirit of our Holy Torah.”
30. For an ethnographic study of the transformation of Orthodox Jewish norms, see Sylvia Barack Fishman, Changing Minds: Feminism in Contemporary Orthodox Life (New York: 2000).
33. Those interested in researching this area further should look for publications by Jewish feminist scholars such as Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, Ross Kraemer, Nehama Aschkenasy, Carol Meyers, Susan Niditch, Judith Hapman, Judith Baskin, Paula Hyman, Marion Kaplan, Hasia Diner, Shulamit Reinhart, Joyce Antler, Sara Horowitz, Rochelle Millen, Norma Baumel Joseph, Chava Weissler, Marcia Falk, Deborah Dash Moore, Ellen Umsansky, Judith Plaskow, and Riv-Ellen Preen, to name just a few representative scholars among scores of actively publishing academics. Within each field, the list of feminist scholars is long and diverse—and growing.
34. Natalie Zemon Davis’ brilliant study of 17th century women from three religious traditions suggests that unusual women actually used the constrictions of their lives as creative building blocks for extraordinary expression. One of her examples is Glikl bas Judah Leib (Glikl of Hameln), the pious daughter, wife, widowed businesswoman, and mother of 13, whose lively memoirs remain a major historical source of information on 17th-century European Jewish life. See Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives (Cambridge, Mass.: 1995).
35. Recent research has revealed information about such individuals as the frustrated 19th-century misnagdik (nonhasidic) pious intellectual, Reyna Basya Berlin of Volozhn, the wife of the renowned R. Naphtali Zvi Berlin. See Don Seeman and Rebecca Kobrin, “Like One of the Whole Men: Learning, Gender and Autobiography in R. Barukh Epstein’s Mekor Barukh,” in Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies and Gender Issues 2 (Spring 1999), 52–94.

38. Over the past few years, Ross has articulated these ideas at the first and second international conferences on Feminism and Orthodoxy, sponsored by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA), in New York (February 1997 and 1998) and at sermons and classes in a variety of synagogues and educational institutions, including the Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts in May 1997, and Manhattan’s Kehilath Israel in February 1998. See her essay, “Modern Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Feminism,” in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 16, *Jews and Gender: The Challenge to Hierarchy*, ed. Jonathan Frankel (New York: 2000), 3–38.

39. Anna Urowitz-Freudenstein explains the evolution of this principle:

This hermeneutical principle that is classically attributed to the School of Rabbi Yishmael first appears in the Tannaitic (Halakhic) Midrashim in two places: Sifra Kedosha Parsha 10 and Sifre Numbers Piske 112. It is also found in many places in the Babylonian Talmud. In Tannaitic literature, the phrase is used to explain the phenomenon of two words, or at least two roots repeated consecutively in the Bible. . . . [A]ccording to the principle that the Torah speaks in human language, special significance need not be applied to each occurrence of the two words/roots in question. (*H-Judaic Digest*, 7 Oct. 1999)


41. See, for example, the papers presented by Rabbi Larry Raphel (Reform), sociologist Steven M. Cohen (Conservative), and Erica Brown (Orthodox) at the Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women Conference on Gender and Adult Jewish Education, 12–14 March 2000, Brandeis University.


43. Indeed, one of the preeminent ethnographers of American Jewish communities, Samuel Heilman, dismissed Jewish feminism as affecting only “the minority of those American Jews who chose to be actively Jewish.” See his *Portrait of American Jews: The Last Half of the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: 1995), 94. In both written and verbal correspondence, Heilman has since amended his views.
Judaism Resurgent? American Jews and the Evolving Expression of Jewish Values and Jewish Identity in Modern American Life

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In 1943, at the height of the Holocaust and at a moment of intense agitation for the creation of a Jewish state, Joseph Proskauer, then president of the American Jewish Committee, authored an AJC-sponsored “Statement of Views.” Addressed to world leaders who would eventually frame the terms of an armistice and dictate postwar conditions of peace, the document stated: “We urge upon the United Nations and those who shall frame the terms of the peace the relief from the havoc and ruin inflicted by Axis barbarism on millions of unoffending human beings, especially Jews.” In commenting upon this statement, historian Marc Dollinger has observed that “the AJC’s decision to focus on ‘human beings’ first and list ‘Jews’ second reflected Proskauer’s universalist orientation. American Jews did possess the right to protect their co-religionists, but that campaign must focus on human rights, not Jewish particularism.”

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Or, to phrase it in other terms, the American context did not compel Proskauer to eschew particularism completely. However, it could only be championed comfortably when subsumed within a more universalistic framework and when Jewish concerns could be presented as being completely compatible with the larger humanistic values and affirmations of the broader American culture.

This episode is hardly a singular one, and both the primacy Proskauer accorded universalism and the trajectory that marked his statement were hardly idiosyncratic to this particular Jewish leader. Instead, they reflect an ordering of values as well as a sense of Jewish identity that have informed most American Jews throughout U.S. history. Indeed, Irving Howe, one of America’s foremost literary critics and Jewish intellectuals, reports a comparable episode that reflects the same American Jewish hierarchy of values in his autobiography, A Margin of Hope. In it, he recounts a heated public debate he had during the early 1960s with Oscar Handlin, the Brooklyn-born, Harvard-based Jewish historian of the American immigrant experience. At issue was the moral propriety of the Israeli kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann from Argentina to stand trial in Jerusalem. The crimes Eichmann had committed against the Jewish people during the Second World War were by any reckoning immense. According to Howe, however, Handlin unflinchingly condemned the kidnapping as “a violation of
international law.” Howe, in contrast, defended it “as a necessary moral act by victims of the Holocaust.” This debate, held before a predominantly Jewish audience at Brandeis University, produced conflicting emotions among the students that “it would still be hard to sort out—bruising conflicts between their liberalism and their Jewishness, between what they took to be principle and had to recognize as feeling.”

At the conclusion of his narrative, Howe attempts to account for why this debate aroused such “bruising conflicts.” In his view, he and the students, no less than Handlin, perceived a tension between their universalist heritage of American “liberalism” and the particularistic emotions “their Jewishness” elicited. They, no less than Handlin, seemed to believe that the broad-based ethics of the former tradition demanded that they condemn the kidnapping as “illegal” and “morally unworthy.” Only their own “narrow” Jewish patrimony caused them to view the act as a “necessary” deed. The ambivalence Howe expresses in recalling this event stems from his perception that “principle” alone would surely have compelled them to censure the kidnapping. The fact that Eichmann was brought to trial through such “illegal” means could only be warranted, it seems, through the “particularistic, emotive” demands that “Jewishness” imposed.

The incidents recounted here indicate that for generations of Jews there was surely some degree of discomfort, a perceived incongruity, between “Americanism” and its universal all-embracing values and larger identity, on the one hand, and “Jewishness” and its narrow values and particularistic identity, on the other. Ethnic affirmation was seen as suspect, even base, though its claims were so great that Howe and others could not avoid acting on them.

How different the year 2000 seems—at least from one perspective. In the time that has passed since the Proskauer and Howe episodes, Jews have gained an access to public positions of power and a proud visibility in American life that was surely unimaginable decades earlier. This novel turn in the public posture of Jews and Judaism can be seen most dramatically in the nomination and campaign of Senator Joseph Lieberman for the office of U.S. Vice President. Although the role of Jews in American public life had increased dramatically since President Woodrow Wilson first appointed Louis D. Brandeis to the Supreme Court in 1916, the nomination of a Jew as a major party candidate for such high elective office remained unprecedented. Lieberman’s nomination represented an exponential jump toward a maximal acceptance of Jews and a widespread visibility of Jewish values and practices in both the public and private spheres of American society.

Most striking was the fact that Lieberman is a traditional Jew whose public observance of Jewish ritual, as well as his public expressions of piety, are considered a significant virtue by a broad array of Americans. His observance of particularistic Jewish laws—for instance, those dealing with kashruth and the Sabbath—exposed Jewish ritual to an audience of millions of Americans. Furthermore, Lieberman did not hesitate to publicly proclaim his devotion to Judaism. As the New York Times put it, “Lieberman . . . refers at every campaign stop to his Jewish faith,” and he demanded “a role for religion in politics and public discourse.”

Many people were not sanguine about this development. Again in the words of the New York Times: “In a remarkable campaign development, Mr. Lieberman is being criticized by some Jewish leaders . . . fearful that his declarations of faith as a devout
Jew, and his calls for more religion in public life, are an affront to Americans who are less religious or whose faith comes from a different tradition.” Indeed, the Anti-Defamation League felt compelled to condemn “Lieberman’s regular infusions of biblical language and allusions to a heavenly creator” as “inappropriate and even unsettling.” As both the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times observed, such criticism of Lieberman on the part of the ADL stood as one of the greatest “oddities” of recent years, as it “pitted the nation’s oldest battler against anti-Semitism against the first Jew named to a major party presidential ticket.”

In contrast, many others—particularly non-Jews—were delighted with Lieberman’s injection of religion into the public arena. Richard John Neuhaus, a Catholic priest and the editor of the conservative religious journal First Things, argued that “there is nothing wrong with making policy proposals in frankly moral terms. . . . The only thing strange about what Senator Lieberman is saying is that people think it is strange.” According to Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, “just as it took Nixon to go to China, maybe it will require an Orthodox Jew to restore to its rightful place the role of religion in this society.” The influential Catholic theologian and social commentator Michael Novak echoed these sentiments in a remarkable op-ed piece that was published in the New York Times. In Novak’s words: “I love what Senator Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, is doing to wake this nation up to its deepest identity, rooted in Jewishness.”

Such fragments of the 20th-century American Jewish experience are telling, for they hold up a mirror to the diverse and evolving ways in which Jewish values and identity have been expressed in the United States. They reveal that the public expression of American Jewish identity and American Jewish cultural and religious values must be understood against a larger backdrop of general American social, cultural, and political developments. Indeed, these developments have had far-reaching consequences for the ways in which Jews and Gentiles alike have perceived Jewish identity. By rehearsing and analyzing these changes within American life during the course of the 1900s, this essay will highlight those elements of historical continuity and discontinuity that have marked (and continue to mark) the expression of Jewish values and identity. In this way, the nature and meaning of what has widely been hailed as the resurgence of Jewish values and identity in both the public and private spheres of American life at the end of the 20th century can be more properly assessed.

The political parameters of the modern West were established upon the basis of individual, not group, rights. In historical terms, dissolution of the medieval world brought with it the demise of corporatism. Civil rights were granted to individual persons within the context of a modern nation-state rather than to corporate semi-autonomous ethnic bodies residing within the nation. In an oft-quoted statement, Clermont-Tonnerre, a leader of the French Revolution, articulated this philosophy vis-à-vis the Jews when he proclaimed that “the Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals.”

In Europe, vestiges of a medieval feudal political order meant that the demise of the Jewish corporate order was not absolute, even with the advent of the 19th century. As Jacob Katz pointed out in numerous writings, the European Jewish community, though severely reduced in scope and coercive political powers, legally retained some
corporate prerogatives and features. However, the United States, conceived as a wholly modern nation free of the medieval past, was different. Jewish communities in America, “where no external forces impinged,” were, in contrast to European communities of the 1800s, completely voluntary associations, where individual Jews were free “to organize around synagogues with different styles and prayer services [or not], according to their individual choice.” America applied the theory of Clermont-Tonnerre and others in an unqualified way: bestowing full rights on Jews as individuals, it was unwilling to accept the legitimacy of a corporate Jewish community.

On a certain level, this created a dilemma for Jews, something akin to a secular version of the premodern Christian demand for conversion. The message was that individuals could fully participate in the larger life of the American polity only if they were willing to divest themselves of particular ethnic traits and group loyalties. Adherence to “universalism”—in effect, Protestant mores and manners—was the price demanded for admission to full participation in American society.

The desire to take on the cultural characteristics and, in large measure, the values of the dominant host society has been typical of Jews of all western nations since the onset of emancipation. In Germany, France, and England this was reflected not only through Jewish participation in the cultural, political, and economic life of host cultures, but also in the way that Jews came to view their religion, and, in turn, themselves. Anxious to divest themselves of ethnic particularism, the Jews of Western Europe consciously came to regard Judaism almost exclusively as a religion and did not see themselves as belonging to a unique ethnic group, a “Jewish nation.” To have done so would have betrayed the very notions of western universalism and liberalism that made the emancipation of the Jews possible in the first place. Thus, the German Jews who immigrated to the United States prior to 1881 brought their views of a non-particularistic, universal, and rational religion to a country that, it was hoped, was prepared to advance them into positions of prestige and status. Because of both their background and the promise of future advancement within American society, they were predisposed to eschew Jewish particularistic values that emphasized group distinctiveness. Hence their creation of American Reform Judaism in the “classical” mold that rejected all stress on particularistic Jewish loyalties and practices. Finding expression in documents such as the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, American Reform purged “Oriental” patterns of worship from the synagogue, devised a liturgy almost wholly universalistic in orientation, abandoned dietary laws, and rapidly conformed to the cultural patterns and mores of the United States.

With the onset of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a different type of Jew came to U.S. shores. The experience of East European Jews had been radically different from that which had informed their German Jewish predecessors, and during the first part of the 20th century, they both avoided and were purposefully excluded from the Reform community. Nevertheless, it is a romantic misconception to claim that East European Jews and their children did not possess the same desire for acculturation that had characterized the German Jews. Indeed, the desire to participate in the life of the larger society has been the most characteristic element of the Jewish response to the American nation.

Commentators such as Arthur Hertzberg and Charles Liebman have explained the East European immigrants’ proclivity to acculturate on the basis of their intellectual
and cultural characteristics. They have pointed out that these Jews were not carriers of elite Jewish religious values as articulated by the scholarly rabbinic leaders of Eastern Europe. Rather, they were drawn to America by its promise of a brighter future; by and large, they lacked a commitment to those Jewish religious values that could hinder their acculturation. Thus, most of them quickly abandoned observance of the Sabbath and the dietary laws, and their initial failure to construct ritual baths or Jewish day schools indicates their lack of attachment both to laws of family purity and to traditional Jewish learning.\textsuperscript{13} First-generation American Jews and, even more, their children, were largely lacking in those inhibitions that might prevent their full involvement in American life. Public expressions of Jewish values and identity that would have reduced their prospects for full participation were discouraged.

To be sure, this orientation exacted certain costs. After all, such purging of values and identity can be purchased only at the price of a high degree of psychological ambivalence. The author Israel Zangwill mirrored this ambivalence in his play of 1908, \textit{The Melting Pot}. Produced on Broadway, this play gave general currency to a type of thinking that dominated both America’s self-perception and ethnic minority groups’ views of the United States for the next 60 years.

The hero of the play, David Quixano, is a Jewish violinist whose parents have died in a Russian pogrom. He is engaged in writing a great symphony celebrating America when, at a settlement house, he meets and falls in love with Vera—the daughter of a Russian army officer. They determine to marry, but their love is almost ended when David discovers that Vera’s father was the murderer of his parents. David’s symphony is a great success, however, and its triumph revives his faith in the “melting pot.” Determined to cast aside the blood feuds of the past, David rejects his particularistic Jewish heritage and affirms his love for Vera. In the climactic speech of the play, David shouts, “God is making the American . . . he will be the fusion of all races, the coming Superman.” Thus, the rapturous vision of the play is that of the universalist who rejects selfish and confining particularity.

\textit{The Melting Pot} advances a negative view of ethnicity. “Ethnic” implies that there is something wrong with the individual or group that is so defined: the religion, character, or speech pattern is in some way aesthetically amiss, and such characteristics should certainly not be displayed publicly. Most significantly, “ethnicity,” by its failure to conform to universal standards of brother- and sisterhood, is also morally wanting. While Zangwill undoubtedly felt some disquietude as an advocate of the “melting pot,” there is little doubt that he favored the expansiveness of David Quixano’s universalism over the narrowness of particularistic loyalties.

\textit{The Melting Pot} does more than reflect the conflicts the Jews of those decades experienced in adapting to the demands of a non-Jewish world. It also bespeaks the intense desire those Jews had to acculturate, to revel in the freedom the United States promised. The American Jews of these years did so not only by eagerly accepting all the benefits that the American nation was prepared to confer upon them. They also accepted the definition of Judaism as exclusively a religion,\textsuperscript{14} and they established systems of religious thought and practice—Reform and Conservative Judaism—that applauded the virtues of democracy and the American way of life. Indeed, an offshoot of Conservative Judaism, Reconstructionism, accorded the status of \textit{sancta} to such
American civic festivals as Thanksgiving, Labor Day, and the Fourth of July. Even when a highly particularistic vision of cultural Judaism such as Zionism was affirmed, it was articulated so that Justice Brandeis—as well as many rabbis—could confidently proclaim that Zionism and the values of American democracy were one and the same. Finally, committed as well as “deracinated Jews” largely justified and celebrated Jewish particularity by their authorship of apologetic works “proving” Judaism’s decisive impact upon this or that value or element of American history and civilization. Such claims to Jewish influence upon the values of the United States, as well as the notion of compatibility between Jewish and American values, undoubtedly contain more than a kernel of truth; vestiges of these attitudes inform many American Jews to this day.

Yet even as they rejoiced in this model of adaptation and integration, Jews during these years still socialized almost exclusively among themselves. This outcome was not only the consequence of internal Jewish attitudes. External conditions also reinforced a collective distance that kept Jews at a social remove from non-Jews. Simply put, one sociological variable required for large-scale exogamy on the part of any minority group—widespread acceptance of group members as desirable or acceptable marriage partners—was missing. This in turn gave rise to a Jewish social solidarity that promoted group endogamy. In short, prior to the 1960s, intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles was virtually nonexistent. Although America was prepared to advance a model of the melting pot (at least for white ethnics), social reality did not always conform to the vision this model advanced. Hence, a certain sense of unease, though seldom overtly acknowledged, characterized American Jewry during this era. Of course, this is hardly surprising for a predominantly first- and second-generation immigrant community struggling to adapt to the demands and mores of the new country. Less than completely secure, American Jewry was not yet prepared to advocate (nor was U.S. society prepared to allow) a pluralistic American cultural model that would have permitted a greater display of public ethnicity of any sort, including Jewish ethnicity.

To the extent that they were observed at all, particularistic Jewish values and rituals were thus confined to the private sphere. Indeed, no less a personage than Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg gives voice to this reality in his account of the Jewish “self-denial and anonymity” of those years. In an interview, Greenberg reports that when he entered Harvard University in the 1950s to study for his doctorate in American history, “everything Jewish was marginal. . . . When I arrived no one told me, but I just knew you could not wear a kippah.” While this “bothered me a lot because I was Orthodox,” social mores simply did not permit Greenberg to cover his head either in class or at student receptions. In a poignant vein, Greenberg recalls that at such receptions he would “hold a drink in my hand all the time because I would not drink it without covering my head and making a bracha.” Such confinement of ethnic expression in general and Jewish ethnicity in particular, as mentioned earlier, hardly distinguishes the American Jewish community of this period. By constricting Jewish identity and praxis to the private realm, American Jews were displaying a compartmentalization between public behaviors and private manners that also marked members of other racial and cultural minorities who were desirous of acceptance into
mainstream American life—indeed, it may be said that the public/private bifurcation was a Protestant American mode that became generalized throughout American society.

The 1960s and 1970s changed all this, initiating a trajectory in American Jewish public expression and private commitment that remains in effect until this day. In his influential book *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (1972), Michael Novak coined the phrase “the new ethnicity” to describe what he saw as a then-emerging trend in American society. According to Novak, the prevailing cultural image of the ideal American, as established by members of the WASP, Ivy League–educated upper class of U.S. society, had been substantially discredited among many young Americans as a result of the Vietnam War, urban decay, racial frictions, educational decline, and the gross dishonesty of many public officials. As Novak, writing again on the topic in 1974, put it: “The older image of the truly cultured American is no longer compelling. Many, therefore, are thrown back on their own resources.” The times, it seemed, promoted a new and more pluralistic model that would ultimately have a profound impact on how Jews would understand and express their heritage in public as well as in private.

An explanation for how and why this transformation took place within precincts of the American Jewish community at this time can be found in *The Mask Jews Wear* (1973), authored by Eugene B. Borowitz, the premier liberal American Jewish theologian. Borowitz, like Novak, noted that significant numbers of Jews (as with members of other ethnic groups) were no longer infatuated with the model of the “melting pot.” Rather, they prized what he described as a “creative alienation.” In his words:

> Today mankind needs people who are creatively alienated. To be satisfied in our situation is either to have bad values or to understand grossly what man can do. . . . Creative alienation implies sufficient withdrawal from our society to judge it critically, but also the will and flexibility to keep finding and trying ways of correcting it. I think Jewishness offers a unique means of gaining and maintaining such creative alienation. This was not its primary role in the lives of our parents and grandparents.

In declaring such a role for Judaism in contemporary America, Borowitz bespoke an ongoing effort involving many Jews throughout the final decades of the 20th century. As Nathan Glazer observed, such Jews sought to anchor their quest for genuine community and enduring values in a recovery of the resources Judaism was capable of providing, without abandoning their commitment to liberal values.

Of course, this changed posture in American Jewish public and private ethnic expression did not derive solely from trends in the larger American society. Internal rhythms of Jewish history also played a role. The Six-Day War of 1967 prompted American Jews (and Jews worldwide) to celebrate their own distinctiveness. Fearing for the very existence of the Jewish state at the outset of the conflict, they responded to the stunning Israeli victory with both relief and unprecedented pride. As Charles Silberman noted, “the Six-Day War was a watershed between two eras—one in which American Jews had tried to persuade themselves, as well as gentiles, that they were just like everybody else, only more so, and a period in which they acknowledged, even celebrated their distinctiveness.”

The nature of the “watershed” of which Silberman spoke and the pride in “dis-
tinctiveness” he described can also be seen in an autobiographical vignette provided by Harvard Law School professor Alan Dershowitz in *Chutzpah* (1989). In this book, Dershowitz contrasts a number of his own sensibilities regarding matters of Jewish American identity and values with those of the renowned U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Felix Frankfurter. In one telling reminiscence, Dershowitz recalls that on his first day as a law student at Yale, “I read a Supreme Court decision [*West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (1944)] involving a compulsory flag salute during World War II, to which some Jehovah’s witnesses objected on religious grounds. The majority agreed with the religious objectors, but Justice Felix Frankfurter dissented... on the ground that patriotism during wartime is more important than religious liberty.”

Indeed, Frankfurter wrote a dissent in this case that was described by James O. Freedman—the first Jewish president of Dartmouth College—as “one of the most confessional and emotional of Supreme Court opinions.” Frankfurter wrote:

One who belongs to the most vilified and persecuted minority in history is not likely to be insensible to the freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution. Were my purely personal attitude relevant I should wholeheartedly associate myself with the general libertarian views in the Court’s opinion... But as judges we are neither Jew nor gentile, neither Catholic nor agnostic. We owe equal attachment to the constitution and are equally bound by our judicial obligation whether we derive our citizenship from the earliest or the latest immigrants to these shores.

Frankfurter’s dissent in *Barnette* was consistent with the position he had adopted in a similar case three years earlier. In that instance, Chief Justice Hughes had assigned Frankfurter the majority opinion in *Minersville School District v. Gobitis* (1940), a case “upholding the constitutionality of a statute requiring all students, including the children of Jehovah’s Witnesses,” to salute the flag, an act the Witnesses viewed as blasphemous. The Chief Justice had chosen Frankfurter for the task, Hughes recalled, “because of Frankfurter’s emotional description, in conference, of the ‘role of the public school in instilling love of country’ based upon his own experiences as a [Jewish] immigrant child.”

Dershowitz, the child of Orthodox Jewish parents raised and educated in an intensely Jewish Brooklyn enclave, comments that he read the 1943 opinion “in astonishment. As a twenty-one year old student, I simply couldn’t identify with it. I didn’t feel ‘vilified’ or ‘persecuted,’ or even as part of a ‘minority.’” In fact, the only “insensitivity” Dershowitz observed in these cases was that Frankfurter was “quite ‘insensible’ to the religious freedoms of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

The gap between Frankfurter’s views and those of Dershowitz is emblematic of the transition in attitude and ethos among American Jewry. Frankfurter, the product of an immigrant Jewish community that internalized the image of a melting pot, could permit no emphasis upon particularism and group distinction. Indeed, he regarded such ethnocentrism or religious isolationism as unworthy—under some conditions, even intolerable. Frankfurter felt obliged to insist upon the adoption of “neutral, universal” values in his efforts to guide American society. His vision of Judaism and all other “particularities,” like that of so many other Jews of his generation, allowed no room for the expression of specific ethnic or religious values and interests.

In contrast, Dershowitz, belonging to a post-Holocaust generation that was no
longer dominated numerically by an immigrant population, did not hesitate to affirm his or any other “particularity.” For Dershowitz, such affirmation was not only defensible; it was demanded by James Madison’s notion, articulated in *The Federalist Papers*, of an “expanding sphere”—that is, a free and open society where values of tolerance and diversity could best be realized. Agreeing with this notion was Norman Podhoretz, the conservative writer and commentator, who viewed as wrong “the conception according to which one [is] supposed to act not as a member of a particular community but as the ‘citizen of a human society’ . . .” Podhoretz, too, believed that Jews, as well as members of other ethnic and interest groups, have every right to promote “their own stake in the system.”

Notwithstanding very different political and ideological outlooks, Dershowitz and Podhoretz, in common with many other contemporary American Jews, share a confident sense of American Jewish identity.

By the last decades of the 1900s, more American Jews than ever before had begun to appreciate the wisdom that Judaism could provide, and many of them also advanced Jewish interests, agendas, and values in the larger public arena. Silberman’s claim that American Jews had now entered an age where they “celebrated their distinctiveness” thus contains more than a kernel of truth. Nevertheless, his claim is somewhat exaggerated. A more nuanced and judicious assessment of the phenomenon of public/private American Jewish identity must also take into account the fact that most American Jews today remain indifferent to their Jewish patrimony, at a time when the social and cultural distance between Jew and Gentile has grown narrower than ever.

A paradox thus emerges in this analysis of the resurgence of Judaism in contemporary American life, whose roots are to be found in the transformation in social and cultural status of American Jewry. First-generation East European Jewish immigrants and their children socialized exclusively among themselves; as late as the 1950s, it was extremely rare for Jews (whose roots in Anglo-Saxon culture were so “shallow”) to receive appointments as college professors in top-flight departments of American history or English—nor could they serve as executives or partners in major corporations or elite law firms. Given this situation, the understandable aim of Jewish immigrants and their children was to adapt to the manners of the larger American society. In contrast, third- and fourth-generation American Jews became less comfortable with the image of a universalistic American melting pot. Instead, they began to reclaim their Jewish heritage, both privately and publicly.

One outcome of this new situation was the steady growth in Jewish day schools during the past few decades. Another was the blossoming of college-level Jewish studies programs—currently, there are more than a thousand members of the Association for Jewish Studies in the United States; thousands of students are enrolled in college-level Jewish studies courses; and many others are attending one-year programs in Israeli institutions of higher learning. While the factors accounting for the growth of Jewish day schools and Jewish studies courses are of course multiple and complex, they indicate how an increasing number of American Jews have come to assert the legitimacy of a Jewish cultural heritage in a multicultural world.

Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the recent case involving five Orthodox Jews who sued Yale University to seek relief from the university requirement that first-year students live in a (co-ed) dormitory. However one assesses the merits of
their case, these students have exhibited a level of Jewish self-assurance that was virtually inconceivable a mere generation ago. In essence, their argument is that America must uphold its own principles of tolerance and freedom by affirming their right to be full participants in American life while at the same time holding to a strict code of particularistic Jewish behavior. In other words, Jewish values are not to be seen as parochial. Rather, the affirmation of Jewish identity implies an advocacy for one of many individual paths through which a universal American spirit can unfold.

Alongside their growing ethnic and religious assertiveness, American Jews today are also far more comfortable in social interactions with non-Jews. In the corporate realm, Jews with names like Shapiro have served as CEOs in corporations such as Du Pont, which in the not so distant past did not have a single Jew on its board of directors. In the educational sector, Ivy League universities that once enforced strict quotas on Jewish students are now headed, in some instances, by a Jewish president. The acceptance and high visibility of Jews in contemporary America is exemplified not only by Joseph Lieberman’s vice-presidential candidacy but also by the appointments of Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer to the U.S. Supreme Court. In contrast to the furor that erupted over President Wilson’s decision to elevate Louis Brandeis to the High Court in 1916, these two recent appointments were greeted with equanimity by the general U.S. public. Moreover, it is now common for Jews from all parts of the United States, including states with relatively sparse Jewish populations, to be elected to serve in Congress, in state legislatures, and in mayoral offices.

Concurrent with these indications of American Jews’ increasing social and professional success is a growing concern with Jewish continuity in the context of America’s open society. The rate of Jewish intermarriage has increased from less than 5 percent in the 1950s to 31 percent in 1970 and 52 percent in 1990. Furthermore, record numbers of Jews do not affiliate with any sector of the community whatsoever. American Jewry has thus entered a postmodern situation of antipodean trends: record rates of nonaffiliation and abandonment of Jewish religion and identity are competing with intense pockets of Jewish commitment and public expression. The pluralism of the modern setting, the bewildering variety of choices it provides, has led many to forsake Judaism. Simultaneously, other Jews, living within a pluralistic framework that continues to underscore the importance of individual choice, have sought out Judaism for the sense of wisdom, security, identity, and community it affords. As has been shown, this was not the function Judaism served for first- and second-generation American Jews.

The twin trends of renewed emphasis on ethnic-religious expression, on the one hand, and the ever-growing attenuation of such attachments, on the other, have been promoted by larger societal trends that have been identified by sociologist Peter L. Berger. In his influential work, *The Heretical Imperative* (1979), Berger points out that the quintessential feature of modern western culture is *hairesis*—option or choice. People leave their native towns; women become clergy; gays and lesbians “step out of the closet” and have their unions sanctioned by religious denominations. Such examples, among others, characterize the modern world. In Berger’s felicitous phrase, modernity is marked by the move from “fate to choice.”

As Berger describes it, this movement is liberating. It frees people from the shack-
les of stultified traditions that define roles and expectations in a narrow and confining way. At the same time, it leaves people feeling bewildered, or, as Berger states in one of his earlier works, “homeless.” In *The Homeless Mind*, Berger and his co-authors argue that the modern condition of choice—particularly the displacement that marks the upwardly mobile as they move about in search of career and opportunity—has left many persons without a secure sense of roots. Many have been liberated from “tribal brotherhood,” but still more have experienced the anomie and alienation of “universal otherhood.” One consequence is the seeking out of fundamentalisms of all sorts in order to cope with anxieties that are engendered by the loss of a stable communal framework. Another is the turn (or return) to religious tradition, which is perceived to offer values that are necessary for the emergence of a “good society.”

In Berger’s most recent edited collection, *The Desecularization of the World*, he and others argue that the process of secularization (which Berger foresaw as completely triumphant three decades ago) has actually run its course among certain people: modernization, it seems, often strengthens religion. Similarly, Jose Casanova, in his *Public Religions in the Modern World*, notes that many individuals feel “deprived” as a result of the dichotomy between public life and private beliefs. In reaction, they have become increasingly strident about giving expression to their “full” selves in the larger world—projecting, for instance, their views on such issues as abortion, school vouchers, and school prayer into the political arena.

These particular issues play themselves out in a variety of ways in the American Jewish community. What is clear, though, is that many contemporary Jews, like their Christian counterparts, believe that constitutionally mandated freedom of religion can be maintained without trivializing faith or treating believers with disdain. Thus, a large part of Joseph Lieberman’s appeal derived from his well-publicized sense of traditional community as well as his advocacy of time-honored values. Indeed, the sociological tradition to which Peter Berger belongs has long emphasized that humans (even in the age of the internet) are social creatures who seek out relationship and community. Moreover, as the sociologist Ferdinand Toennies commented at the turn of the 20th century, “the force of *gemeinschaft*,” that is, small, intimate community, “persists even in the period of *gesellschaft*”—impersonal, modern western society.” As Sharon Sandomirsky and John Wilson have also pointed out, voluntary affiliation remains as crucial in today’s America as it was in the past. Americans, like all others, remain inveterate joiners, notwithstanding the highly individualistic ethos that continues to dominate much of American society.

Many people simply do not want to choose between the extremes of a vacuous and ahistorical secularism, on the one hand, and a raging religious fundamentalism, on the other. Rather, they are anxious to perceive a sacred vitality at the core of both their nation and their own private worlds. For these reasons, religion continues to play a crucial role—even in a country like the United States with its constitutional wall between religion and state—in promoting social cohesion as well as group and individual identity.

As Stephen Carter, the Yale University professor of law, has pointed out, American democracy has always been dependent in part on religion’s perceived role as a “mediating structure” between people and the state. Accordingly, many Americans assert that religious faith must continue to be a significant element in American public life.
despite the importance of church/state separation.\textsuperscript{48} Here too, Joseph Lieberman’s campaign touched a responsive chord. As Jim Spencer, a middle American, non-Jewish political pundit, noted:

Joe Lieberman encourages Americans, even politicians and policy makers, to embrace a spiritual life. He tells you what that means to him, not what it should mean to you. The distinction explains why Lieberman might connect with Americans in a way that right-wing Bible thumpers never have and probably never will. While they might sound a tad pious to the cynical, Lieberman’s statements about the role of his personal religious beliefs in his life as a U.S. Senator do not presume that Jewish Orthodoxy is the only route to salvation, much less public education. . . . He has not asked to exclude anyone that I am aware of. He has merely asked Americans to think in spiritual terms. Lieberman does not push us toward theocracy, the God-centered government of which so many Christian conservatives dream. He pushes us toward tolerance. He reminds us that, like it or not, spirituality plays a role in the private lives of political leaders. He insists that such considerations are as enviable as they are inevitable. Somewhere, in the recesses of our over-stimulated minds, we know that intuitively.\textsuperscript{49}

Religion in general, and Judaism in particular, find acceptance in American society precisely because they provide for a communitarian ethos and a nonrelativistic sense of morality in a world where many people are mindful of both the atomizing excesses of individualism and the horrifying consequences engendered by moral relativism. Put somewhat differently, contemporary American expressions of Jewish tradition are viewed by many as bearing an affinity to the positive moral values bequeathed by Enlightenment rationalism to the modern world, while at the same time offering a corrective for the fragmenting effects of that secular tradition. Such Jewish expression, promoted by trends in the larger world, is attractive to many persons both within and beyond the Jewish community.

Nevertheless, any triumphalist conclusion concerning Jewish life and values in contemporary America must be tempered. As Charles Liebman pointed out more than a decade ago, Jewish religious erosion threatens to overshadow the achievements of the committed elite of American Jewry. “What I sense,” Liebman wrote, “is an increasingly incoherent pattern of symbols and a random structure of responses that constitute much of American Jewish life.”\textsuperscript{50} In a world where the political parameters that formerly preserved the premodern Jewish community have been dismantled, Jewish commitments and knowledge have become so attenuated that a diminution of Jewish life in this country is taking place despite the current efflorescence of Jewish culture and values.

By and large, modern Judaism has been taken out of the home and placed into public, institutional settings. Although the synagogue and the Jewish federation play a critical role in American Jewish life, the public affirmation of Jewishness may well mask the absence of more enduring private commitments. Given the lack of ritual observance on the part of most American Jews, Liebman worries about the durability of American Judaism and is pessimistic about its future. He does not dispute the accuracy of observations about the pro-religious achievements of some American Jews. Yet, for him, this reflects no more than “the capacity of a minority to sustain and even strengthen their Jewish commitments despite the tendencies of the majority.”\textsuperscript{51}

This essay demonstrates the ways in which American attitudes toward ethnic iden-
tity and public manifestations of faith have evolved greatly over the past century, with significant implications for the way in which Jewish faith and culture are today expressed. The ideal of the melting pot that dominated at the turn of the 20th century was rejected by many beginning in the 1960s, at which time a greater appreciation of ethnic values and identity began to emerge. Yet even as the groundwork was being laid for a resurgence of Jewish expression, it was being done within the embrace of the larger American culture from which American Jewry was not prepared to retreat.

For this reason, the revival of Jewish consciousness that was evinced in the birth of a “new ethnicity” was not identical to the Yiddish culture, ethnic distinctiveness, or the associational patterns that had characterized the first-generation East European immigrants. By the 1960s, American Jews had overwhelmingly internalized most of the dominant values of their host society, and that society no longer segregated them in any significant way.

All of this must be borne in mind in assessing the renaissance of Jewish life in contemporary America. Jews in the United States are overwhelmingly universalistic, and particularistic affirmations are made in the service of universal moral and spiritual values. For Jews, as well as for members of other U.S. ethnic groups, the question that remains is whether such affirmations will prove strong enough over time to sustain a broad cultural and communal identity.

Notes

9. No one has been more enthusiastic in asserting this position than Charles E. Silberman; see his *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York: 1985). The final part of this essay will discuss trends and views that allow for what I consider to be a more balanced appraisal.
12. Of course, I recognize that the historical reality was more complex than this overarching observation would indicate. There were surely places in the United States during the Federalist period and beyond where Jews were, in some sense, accorded political treatment as a corporate group and where individual political emancipation was not complete. Morton Borden makes this point quite well in his *Jews, Turks, and Infidels* (Chapel Hill: 1984). Notwithstanding, the general point made by Jacob Katz still holds: the Jewish community in America has always been essentially voluntary, with Jews being viewed as individual citizens of the state devoid of all corporate political identity. Furthermore, as a result of this modern po-
itical order and its liberal trajectory, there was no formal place for Jewish values or identity in the public square.


17. This anecdote appears in Irving Greenberg and Shalom Freedman, *Living in the Image of God—Jewish Teachings to Perfect the World: Conversations with Rabbi Irving Greenberg* (Northvale: 1998), 6–7. My own father, Samuel Ellenson, a 1948 Harvard Law School graduate, had a similar experience: wearing a *kipah* at the law school, he says, would have been tantamount to declaring: “I do not want to be employed at a law firm.”


23. On Frankfurter, see Michael Alexander’s essay, “Frankfurter among the Anarchists: The Case of Sacco and Vanzetti,” which appears in this volume on pp. 175–191.


25. The Frankfurter opinions cited in these two paragraphs can be found in James O. Freedman, “Insiders and Outsiders: Inaugural Lecture of the Center for American Jewish History at Temple University” (12 Nov. 1990), 8–9.


30. For figures documenting the growth of Jewish day schools in the U.S., see the booklet by Marvin Schick published by the Avi Chai Foundation, *A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States* (New York: 2000), 12ff. Also see Jack Wertheimer, “Jewish Education in the United States: Recent Trends and Issues,” *American Jewish Year Book* (1999), 3–115, in which he relates and analyzes the many factors that account for this increase. Prominent among them are “the attitudinal changes towards matters Jewish among baby-boomers. Many who had a less intensive Jewish education are receptive to giving their children opportunities they themselves did not enjoy” (ibid., 53–54).


32. The literature on this topic is considerable. Among the most prominent and representa-

33. For an analysis of Jewish participation in the United States Congress and American political life, see J.J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (Reading, Mass.: 1996). In my native region of Tidewater, Virginia—hardly a venue of dense Jewish population—the mayor of Newport News is Joseph Frank; and my cousin, Meyera Ellenson Oberndorf (who attended Stern College of Yeshiva University), is the mayor of Virginia Beach.


35. On the seminal role of individualism and autonomy in the contemporary American psyche, and the impact such doctrines have upon the religious expression of the American people, see the second edition of Robert N. Bellah, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: 1985). While other significant works have been written on this topic, *Habits of the Heart* remains the landmark volume. For an insightful treatment of how these themes play themselves out within the Jewish community, see Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America* (Bloomington: 2000), and Bethamie Horowitz, “Connections and Journeys: Shifting Identities Among American Jews,” *Contemporary Jewry* 19 (1998), 87.


38. These phrases were coined by the late Benjamin Nelson, one of the foremost students and observers of societal directions in the modern West, in his *The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood* (Chicago: 1969).

39. See Freedman, *Jew Vs. Jew*, for how this trajectory has marked many in the American Jewish community. For a more general and authoritative scholarly treatment of the rise of fundamentalism in the modern world, consult the various volumes of the University of Chicago Fundamentalism Project produced under the editorship of Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby.


41. See Peter L. Berger and Jonathan Sacks (eds.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: 1999).


43. For example, in a report on a State of Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling on the issue of school vouchers, *The Jewish Bulletin of Northern California* (19 June 1998), stated that liberal and traditional camps in the Jewish community were split over this issue. Persons such as Marc Stern of the American Jewish Congress and Steve Freeman of the Anti-Defamation League expressed opposition to the Wisconsin court’s decision that such vouchers were legal. Others, such as Nathan Diament of the Institute for Public Affairs of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and Marshall Berger of the Jewish Policy Center, applauded the verdict.


51. Ibid., 51.
Essay
Frankfurter among the Anarchists: The Case of Sacco and Vanzetti

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On April 15, 1920, during a robbery of a shoe company in the Boston suburb of South Braintree, the bodies of the company paymaster and his guard were left dead on the factory curb. Following a short investigation, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two well-known members of the Galleanist Anarchist movement in Massachusetts, were charged with robbery and murder. The evidence against the two anarchists was substantial: multiple eyewitnesses testified to their guilt, and at the time of their arrest, Sacco and Vanzetti were found, in the words of one reviewing judge, “armed to the teeth”—Sacco with a .32 Colt automatic (the alleged murder weapon) and Vanzetti with a .38 Harrington Richardson revolver. Soon after their trial and convictions, Sacco and Vanzetti’s Galleanist cohorts exploded a bomb on Wall Street, killing 30 people and injuring 200.¹

The Sacco-Vanzetti case may have begun, as one reporter assessed it, with “just a couple of wops in a jam,”² but by 1927, after seven years of motions, appeals, denials, and mass rallies in both Europe and the Americas, it had come to represent internationally what Louis D. Brandeis characterized in 1905 as the “continuing and ever-increasing contest between those who have and those who have not.”³ Support for the two anarchists initially came from the Italian- and Jewish-dominated needle trade unions centered in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. In 1924, for example, Vanzetti’s “The Story of a Proletarian Life” was printed serially in several labor papers. Yet it was the personal intervention of Felix Frankfurter, professor of law at Harvard and Jewish immigrant from Leopoldstadt (Vienna), that transformed a local criminal case into a rallying cause on behalf of marginalized peoples everywhere. Frankfurter’s prolonged public relations campaign would eventually help to end the Republican dominance of American liberalism and would herald the nascent social welfare policies of the Democrats.⁴ His example would also come to replace the progressive lawyering strategies of his friend and mentor Louis Brandeis and would introduce a new legal type: the civil rights lawyer who works to affect social policy not by defending the humanitarian legislation of the state, but by defending the rights of individuals, particularly those outside the mainstream.

The common understanding of the Sacco and Vanzetti case is that Frankfurter’s campaign was righteous, sincere, and above all reasonable.⁵ Nevertheless, the rea-
sons why Frankfurter and the larger American Jewish community came to support Sacco and Vanzetti categorically (unlike any other American group, including Italian Americans) are not at all plain. The two Italians were devoted to the annihilation of the American government; they openly espoused violence even after their convictions; and each was caught with a private armory on his person, one with the alleged murder weapon. Yet not only were Jews skeptical that the defendants had received a fair trial, they were certain that the trial could not have been proper because the two were Italian anarchists in Yankee Boston. Frankfurter argued that the judge and jury did not and could not have adjudicated fairly because an atmosphere of racial and political prejudice that pervaded America during the Red Scare of 1920 had created a condition of regular judicial bias in Massachusetts. This kind of argument is commonplace today, but then it was not; indeed, Frankfurter may have been the first to make it. And American Jewry nodded emphatically. It was because Sacco and Vanzetti were political outsiders that they became a Jewish cause. No public voice of American Jewry ever suggested the possibility that the presiding judge in the case, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, the governor, and the U.S. Supreme Court may have been right to uphold Sacco and Vanzetti’s convictions. Two worldviews were irreconcilably opposed: to the Massachusetts courts, the two were convicted murders; to many Jews, they were innocents who had been railroaded for their unpopular political beliefs.

Thus, the Sacco-Vanzetti case is of some importance in the history of American Jewry. In the 1920s, the second generation of East European Jews in America—that is, the children of immigrants or those who had migrated themselves when young—emerged from their urban ghettos and grew to adulthood. They rooted themselves in areas of second and sometimes third settlement, mostly took professional jobs or became self-employed, and created for themselves typical American experiences and a mainstream American social order that still dominates American Jewish identity. Simultaneously, however, some of them began to display a novel behavior that did not match their new social positions. They acted as though they were increasingly marginalized. Many identified themselves with individuals and groups that remained on America’s fringes, in some instances by defending such people’s political rights. This is despite the fact that, by the 1920s, members of the second generation, such as Frankfurter himself, had established themselves as important forces in mainstream American politics. By defending radicals from other ethnic groups, these Jews jeopardized their positions and the place of the larger American Jewish community. Yet this risky position was one with which most Jews agreed. When Jews of the 1920s took the side of anarchists, they consciously thwarted their own upward mobility and endangered their steadily improving position as a mainstream American group. Thus, the case of Sacco and Vanzetti is perhaps the earliest example of what I call political outsider identification—identifying with non-Jewish groups or individuals simply because of their outsider status. The Sacco-Vanzetti case epitomizes a paradox in the political psychology of American Jewry—as Jews moved up, they identified down.

It is probable that Frankfurter learned of Sacco and Vanzetti through Elizabeth Glendower Evans, a Boston society woman and close friend of Justice Louis D.
Brandeis of the U.S. Supreme Court. Evans had taken a strong interest in Sacco and Vanzetti soon after their convictions, and she later headed and financed the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee. In 1923, she prevailed upon Brandeis to find decent legal counsel to bring the case before the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts. Brandeis turned to his friend Frankfurter, and in December 1924, Frankfurter enlisted a very fine Boston lawyer, W.G. Thompson (who took what Brandeis felt to be a remarkably high fee of $25,000).

From then on, Thompson and Frankfurter worked two sides of the case as a team: Thompson handled courtroom advocacy while Frankfurter organized public opinion. Frankfurter enlisted the services of anyone who was willing to write a letter, send a donation, or simply make a casual remark across the right dinner table. He sent out hundreds of letters about the case, often including points of great detail, sometimes writing with tremendous passion. Often Frankfurter convinced his listeners. “What a triumph it will be,” Rabbi Stephen Wise wrote him, “if it can be fairly established that these men have been foully rather than fairly dealt with.” Wise, a leading political liberal and a Reform rabbi, came to ennoble Sacco and Vanzetti in the press.8

Frankfurter’s campaign for public opinion achieved its first great success when it won over the conservative Boston Herald, which on October 26, 1926, carried an editorial titled “We Submit.”9 This editorial, which won the Pulitzer prize the following April, suggested that Sacco and Vanzetti deserved at least a retrial in the wake of an affidavit Thomas had obtained from a convicted criminal, in which the convict maintained that he and his gang were responsible for the South Braintree murders. “We Submit” was the turning point in the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti. After it appeared, respectable members of Boston society permitted themselves to join in the Sacco-Vanzetti cause. Brandeis, keeping track of Frankfurter’s efforts, indicated as much when he sent off a note of congratulations several days after the editorial came out: “You have done an extraordinary thing in educating the Herald to its stand on S.V.,” he wrote Frankfurter, “the World also.”10

The World had been easier to convince, since Walter Lippmann, Frankfurter’s old friend from Harvard, was in charge of its editorial page. Among the causes that Lippmann adopted in the 1920s were the debunking of spiritualism, for which he enlisted Harry Houdini in May of 1924,11 and support for the presidency of Al Smith, which was founded on Lippmann’s belief that Smith represented the American immigrant classes against an older, stodgier American order. “Here are the new people, clamoring to be admitted to America,” Lippmann wrote of the Smith campaign, “and there are the older people defending their household gods. The rise of Al Smith has made the conflict plain.”12 Frankfurter agreed with Lippmann about Smith, and convinced Lippmann that Sacco and Vanzetti were two more examples of the same conflict. From 1926, Frankfurter remained in continual contact with Lippmann, advising him about legal details of the case and discussing strategies of rhetoric. Frankfurter even wrote unsigned editorials for the World, for which he affected a remarkably Runyonesque tone.13

Frankfurter also enlisted Judge Julian Mack of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, an avid Zionist and a force in Jewish politics. As an overseer of Harvard University, Mack was thoroughly connected to Boston’s establishment. Mack would report all of
the negative comments about the case that he heard in the Back Bay and among members of the Union Club and the Boston bar, and Frankfurter would advise him how to respond.

Mack also pleaded the cause to Horace Kallen, the Jewish academic who first introduced the concept of “cultural pluralism,” which is now understood as “multiculturalism.” Kallen came to support Sacco and Vanzetti with such vigor that he was arrested for blasphemy in Boston after he compared the two anarchists to Socrates and Jesus.\footnote{14}

Although Frankfurter participated in detailed conversations with Thompson concerning defense tactics, in public he was exceedingly careful to claim “no relation to the case other than as a disinterested student of the administration of criminal justice.” He grew “furious,” he later recalled, when he heard of people taking the side of Sacco and Vanzetti not from their own reasoning, but simply because Frankfurter had taken on their cause.\footnote{15} One supportive colleague at Harvard, for example, was rebuked because he had not subjected the case to “those tests of reason which you would apply to it were it a parchment discovered in some Egyptian catacomb.”\footnote{16}

Yet on rare occasions, and in secret, Frankfurter would admit how desperately and unsuccessfully he had searched to find the facts that would justify his position. “The incidents in the record aren’t very good,” he admitted in a telephone conversation tapped by Massachusetts authorities. “[Judge Webster Thayer] certainly was very careful. That cuss is cunning, you know, and he constantly was doing stuff which in itself is all right.”\footnote{17}

Thompson, for his part, looked for places in the court record to appeal the findings of the jury, including the claim that the jury foreman had brought his own bullet cartridges into the jury room to aid in discussion of the ballistics evidence. Thompson made several other motions for a retrial, most of which were reasonable and might have been accepted by some judges, although none of them was altogether persuasive. Thayer, the presiding judge for the Sacco-Vanzetti trial and for every post-trial motion, found due cause to dismiss each motion. When Thompson appealed to the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, it ruled that Thayer’s decisions and conduct had fallen within the realm of his jurisdiction, and that the judge had adequately fulfilled his judicial duty.

While Thompson worked unsuccessfully within the Massachusetts judicial system, Frankfurter continued to put a spin on these failures for the press and the other purveyors of public opinion that he had been cultivating. Finally, in the spring of 1927, three years after he had arranged for Thompson to take the case and after an immense and successful campaign to win public support for Sacco and Vanzetti, Frankfurter finally emerged, ex cathedra, with his objective opinion of the case—proclaimed not as a counsel for the defense, but from his office as professor of criminal law at Harvard University.

“The Case of Sacco and Vanzetti” appeared in the \textit{Atlantic Monthly} in March 1927 and was later expanded by Frankfurter into book form.\footnote{18} In the article, Frankfurter first argued the facts of the case. He went over Thompson’s several appeals and motions for retrial, arguing that any of these motions should have moved a reasonable judge to grant a retrial. He carefully attempted to discount the reports of eyewitnesses, and he tried to discredit the fact that Sacco and Vanzetti had been caught heavily
armed by claiming that the “extensive carrying of guns by people who are not ‘gun-
men’ is a matter of common knowledge.”19 All of his points about the evidence had
been made by Thompson in various motions and appeals. Most had already been ruled
upon and denied by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts. Eventually that
court would deny them all.

But evidence had never been Frankfurter’s chief interest. Rather, he meant to ques-
tion the very possibility of justice for two Italian anarchists. He began his core argu-
ment by admitting that “Sacco and Vanzetti were notorious Reds. They were associ-
ates of leading radicals; they had for some time been on the list of suspects of the
Department of Justice; and they were especially obnoxious because they were draft-
dodgers.”20 Having stated these ugly facts, Frankfurter turned them to his advantage.
Because Sacco and Vanzetti were radicals, he argued, they had not been granted a fair
trial by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. “By systematic exploitation of the de-
fendants’ alien blood, their imperfect knowledge of English, their unpopular social
views, and their opposition to the war,” Frankfurter claimed, “the District Attorney
invoked against them a riot of political passion and patriotic sentiment; and the trial
judge connived at—one had almost written, cooperated in—the process.” “Outside
the courtroom the Red hysteria was rampant,” Frankfurter concluded, and “it was al-
lowed to dominate within.”21

Frankfurter’s reasoning managed to transform Sacco and Vanzetti’s defects into as-
sets: the more one pointed to the fact that the two had openly espoused anarchist pol-
itics, the more they became the innocent victims of Red hysteria. Downplaying the
issue of innocence or guilt, Frankfurter focused on the unfairness of their trial. This
was a profoundly more penetrating argument. By suggesting the possibility of sys-
temic judicial bias, Frankfurter shifted discussion from the crime of the defendants to
the lawlessness of the state, both in Thayer’s courtroom and throughout America. The
Massachusetts judicial system itself became an enemy of the law.

Judge Thayer well understood the depth of this accusation. In one opinion, he had
even classified the defense’s position as yet another kind of “hysteria . . . called ‘lego-
psychic neurosis’. . . which means: ‘a belief in the existence of something which in
fact and truth has no such existence.’” Thayer went on to state that “this disease would
seem to have reached a very dangerous condition” when the defense had charged “Mr.
Sargent, Attorney General of the United States and his subordinates, and subordinates
of the Former-Attorney General of the United States Mr. Palmer and . . . the District
Attorney of Norfolk County, with being in a conspiracy to send these two defendants
to the electric chair, not because they are murderers but because they are radicals.”22

Frankfurter had never sought to win Thayer over to his point of view. From the be-
beginning, his cause had been to expose to the general public the impossibility of find-
ing a fair verdict for two anarchists within the Massachusetts system of justice. For
this reason, Frankfurter had not joined the defense team or addressed officials of the
Massachusetts courts, choosing instead to plead Sacco and Vanzetti’s cause in the
realm of public opinion.

More than anyone, Frankfurter himself had created the wave of public opinion on
behalf of the two Italian anarchists. He had arranged for Thompson to become lead
counsel and had seen to his salary. He had campaigned to convince the Boston Herald
and the New York World to defend the two. With equal vigor, he had cultivated the
good opinion of Massachusetts Brahmins, both directly through a campaign of letters to personal friends and acquaintances and indirectly through his close friends on the Harvard board of overseers and similar institutions (most notably and consistently through Judge Mack). With the help of Thompson’s steady and noteworthy work in the courtroom, Frankfurter had managed to carry the Sacco-Vanzetti cause beyond the labor journals in 1924, and into worldwide consciousness by 1927.

In no small part, then, Frankfurter had created the international cause. He managed to represent Boston as “the establishment” to rioting masses in Sydney, the Soviet Union, Paris, and Buenos Aires. He accomplished this by what may be regarded as an early example of political “spin,” but what Walter Lippmann understood to be the cultivation of press contacts in order to manipulate the shape of public discussion. Frankfurter positioned two anarchists against the Boston establishment and guided the public toward identifying with the underdog. Many individuals who perceived themselves as disenfranchised thus came to identify with two violent anarchists.

Frankfurter himself had never intended to support anarchism. He always distinguished carefully between the political beliefs of the defendants, with which he did not agree, and the importance of unbiased legal procedure. Yet by handling the Sacco and Vanzetti affair the way he did, by working in the arena of public opinion, he had created a situation that was easily misunderstood by the very public to which he appealed. The public might have regarded a retrial as evidence that capitalist courts were inherently unjust, as Sacco believed. It might have equated a retrial with a legitimization of anarchist politics and criminality. Was it not incumbent on Frankfurter—professor of law at Harvard, respected member of the American legal system, figure of authority—to preclude this potential misreading by the public?

Indeed, Frankfurter’s appeal to the public troubled many, including some of his allies. One friend wrote: “I was very much disturbed by your book on the Sacco-Vanzetti case—not by the arguments, but by the fact that you wrote them.” When a bomb exploded at the home of a member of the Sacco-Vanzetti jury, Lippmann suggested that Frankfurter ask Vanzetti to appeal publicly to his anarchist comrades for a statement espousing nonviolence. Frankfurter replied that “every kind of explosion in Massachusetts during the last years has been shrieked as ‘Sacco bombs’—yet again and again later the charge has been denied.” Frankfurter seemed utterly impervious to a recognition of his own responsibility for having helped to foster an excuse for anarchist violence, which was becoming rampant as the media hype developed. For him, there was only one issue, from which he would not be deterred. “I have consistently refused to make defense or otherwise divert attention from the central issue, and the only issue, namely, were the processes of criminal justice fairly and rightly applied in the sentences of death which now hang over these two Italians.” Frankfurter simply would not address the question of whether his manner of appealing to the public might have been inappropriate for a person of his legal stature. Perhaps he did not recognize the danger, or perhaps he was uncomfortable with the special responsibilities coincident with the office of authority that he occupied in America.

On June 1, 1927, at the behest of a sizable group of Massachusetts patricians and clergy, Governor Alvan T. Fuller created a special advisory committee to investigate the Sacco-Vanzetti trial so that he might make an informed decision about execu-
tive clemency. Heading the committee was the president of Harvard University, A. Lawrence Lowell. That the committee would be led by the force behind the Jewish quota at Harvard of 1922 concerned both Frankfurter and his friend Harold Laski, a professor at the London School of Economics. Laski had experienced his own difficulties with Harvard’s board of overseers and was understandably distraught about Lowell’s heading the committee. Nonetheless, he wrote to his friend Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes of the hope that “a reading of Felix’s book ought to lead them to the salient points and result in a full pardon.” Instead, on August 3, the Lowell committee issued a short report stating that there was ample evidence with which to convict Sacco and Vanzetti. Lowell later explained that when Frankfurter’s article first came out he had been “very much impressed,” but that when he read the evidence himself, he felt forced to conclude that “the whole matter had been grossly misrepresented to the public.”

The next day, Judge Mack wrote a frantic note to Frankfurter: “I was up until the news came last night. It is terribly crushing. I just cannot understand it, and if Lowell’s report is no better than Fuller’s decision, it will be a complete evasion of all of the questions that you raised. . . . It is too crushing to think about.”

At the World, Walter Lippmann also envisioned the end. After the Lowell report, he felt that the World should make a simple and direct plea for mercy to the governor. He thought that any criticism of the report would only assure the executions of the men. Frankfurter insisted, however, that the report be discredited. He would not have the affair end ambiguously with a merciful reprieve granted from the governor, without any admission of wrongdoing by the courts. Frankfurter wanted nothing less than an acknowledgment from the executive office that the judiciary had acted injudiciously, or else a retrial that would be tantamount to such an admission. Frankfurter jumped on a train to New York, and met with Lippmann and his editorial staff. Eventually Frankfurter convinced the World to publish an editorial critical of the Lowell report.

Other members of Frankfurter’s coterie were active as well. Laski had been needling Justice Holmes about Frankfurter and the Sacco-Vanzetti case for months. At one point he compared Sacco and Vanzetti to Leo Frank and Dreyfus. He confidently pontificated to Holmes that “the whole thing is an injustice characteristic of the American courts.”

Holmes did not immediately respond. He waited until Sacco and Vanzetti were dead and thereby out of his jurisdiction. A day after their executions, he fired off a note to Laski: “Your last letter shows you stiffed up like the rest of the world on the Sacco-Vanzetti case,” he wrote. And although “my prejudices are against the convictions . . . they are still stronger against the run of the shriekers.” Holmes—possibly the greatest champion of free speech ever to sit on the Court—went on to clarify his position. No responsible person in a position of authority, he wrote, could ignore the danger of giving a stage to the political views of anarchists, views which were decidedly not about justice. “The lovers of justice,” he noted tartly, “have emphasized their love by blowing up a building or two and there are guards in all sorts of places, including one for this house.” In a follow-up letter to Laski, Holmes reiterated his point: “I think the row that has been made idiotical, if considered on its merits, but of course it is not on the merits that the row is made, but because it gives the extremists
a chance to yell.” As to the merits of the Sacco-Vanzetti defense, he concluded de-

finitively: “I doubt if anyone would say that there was no evidence warranting a con-

viction.” Laski said no more about the case.

Holmes, however, had not quite finished his lesson, which the 89-year-old justice
delivered more gently three years after the affair. “I think that the wisest men from
Confucius and Aristotle to Lincoln (if he is entitled to the superlative) have believed
in the via media,” Holmes wrote Laski. “I say it because little things once in a while
make me wonder if your sympathies are taking a more extreme turn as time goes on.
I always am uncertain how far Frankfurter goes. But I notice that he and you are a

good deal more stirred by Sacco and Vanzetti, who were turned into a text by the reds,
than by a thousand worse things among the blacks.”

Sacco and Vanzetti had been turned into “a text by the reds,” and Frankfurter, by
choosing two anarchists as his test case for Massachusetts justice, had served their vi-

olent cause. There had been enough injustice in the courts against wholly innocent
African Americans with which Frankfurter might have made his point. Civil rights
for African Americans lay along the “via media.” Yet instead of heralding justice from
along the via media, always a more persuasive and responsible position from which
to speak, Frankfurter had chosen to flirt with political extremists.

In contrast to his fellow justice, Brandeis had no such lesson to preach. In fact,
Brandeis had been as partisan and active for Sacco and Vanzetti as a justice of the
Supreme Court could be; his actions may even have crossed ethical boundaries,
given the possibility from the outset that the Supreme Court might one day review
the case. As previously recounted, he had initially enlisted Frankfurter to find a
lawyer and maintain a watchful eye on developments. Frankfurter did much more
than this, of course, but entirely with the justice’s blessing. Brandeis had encouraged
Frankfurter’s courting of the press, and he had waited impatiently to read Frank-

furter’s book, which he hoped would “prove an event of importance with bench &
bar; perhaps a turning point.” In April 1927, after the Supreme Judicial Court de-
nied yet another appeal, Brandeis comforted Frankfurter by suggesting that their ac-
tion would “help the holy cause. Another instance of ‘the Blood of the Martyrs be-

coming the seed of the Church.’”

The night before the execution, however, when lawyers for Sacco and Vanzetti ap-
proached Brandeis on his front porch in Chatham, Massachusetts for a writ of habeas
corpus, Brandeis refused even to listen. He had become too close to the case, he ad-
mitted. He had shown too much sympathy. His friend Evans had been a basic force
in the defense of Sacco and Vanzetti, and his wife and daughter had become active as
well. And there was his relationship with Frankfurter himself. Furthermore, he knew
that there were no grounds on which the Supreme Court might reverse the decision
of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts. By the time the matter had reached
him, the cause was already lost.

The public did not understand Brandeis’ or Holmes’ decisions. “These two Justices
are the symbols of liberalism in the Federal Supreme Court,” Vanzetti wrote in one
of his last letters, “and they turned us their shoulders.” Kallen absolutely agreed.
He wrote Frankfurter expressing utter disbelief at what had happened. “What was a
slap in the face to me,” he wrote, “was not so much Holmes as L.D.B. How could he
have evaded the issue like that?” In Kallen’s view, which he later explained in a let-
ter to Mack, no legal rationale should have prevented Brandeis from stepping in. “It was not merely the lives of the two men that were at stake,” Kallen wrote, “but a whole complex of ideals and perspectives so tangled and so profound that nothing but arbitrary action could have saved them from the arbitrary action which has destroyed them. There is more to say than I can write.”

Mack responded passionately to Kallen, himself swept away by the revolutionary spirit that the Sacco and Vanzetti case had aroused. “I too believe in revolution,” Mack pledged to Kallen, “whether it be the American, the French, or the Russian. I too believe that there are times when the mob is fully justified in taking matters into its own hands. But I can never believe that a judge, pretending to exercise the judicial function, would deliberately evade the law and exert his own unrestricted judgment as to what is best for the community.”

Though Mack ultimately backed Brandeis’ decision, he invoked incredible language in doing so: revolution; mob rule; vigilantism. This was an indication of the extent to which Frankfurter’s campaign on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti had damaged even a judge’s beliefs about America, its judicial system, and its democratic process.

Taken as a whole, the Jewish press put itself in Kallen’s camp and agreed, albeit for varying reasons, that Brandeis had failed. As noted, Jewish-dominated labor unions had been early supporters of Sacco and Vanzetti; Vanzetti’s 20-page autobiography, “The Story of a Proletarian Life,” had even been translated into Yiddish. Most Jews, however, followed the rest of America and paid little attention to the curious trial in Boston until Frankfurter’s article in the Atlantic Monthly. This article, combined with Frankfurter’s covert campaign for public support, brought world attention to the Sacco-Vanzetti case, including that of Albert Einstein, which the Yiddish press duly noted in the headlines of its first coverage of the case.

The Forverts, a socialist newspaper, maintained an unswerving stand that paralleled the campaign of other American communists and socialists: Sacco and Vanzetti were simply “two sacrifices for class justice.” Regarding the entire episode from this predictable perspective of class struggle, the Forverts accuses Brandeis of participating, albeit unwittingly, in the capitalist conspiracy.

The daily Yidishes tageblat was considered socially conservative, which meant that it generally supported the American government and what it thought to be mainstream American mores. Nevertheless, after the Lowell report was released and Governor Fuller proclaimed his intention to see the death sentences through, the Yidishes tageblat respectfully suggested that the governor was responsible to millions of individuals throughout the world who still had doubts that justice had been done in Massachusetts. “One should forget all of the awful propaganda and pay attention only to the details of the case itself,” the paper advised the governor. The higher meaning of the case, according to the Yidishes tageblat, was not class conflict but rather “justice forlorn,” for in fact the two men were innocent. When Sacco and Vanzetti were eventually executed, a column predicted that “the feeling of justice will long remain unsatisfied and doubting.” “We can only sincerely wish,” the editorial continued, “that this feeling of doubt will not be transformed into a feeling of bitterness and an accusation against the entire system of American justice.”

Der tog, a liberal Yiddish newspaper, agreed with the Yidishes tageblat that the issue was not class. Nevertheless Der tog thought that Sacco and Vanzetti represented
something other than the unfortunate but honest mistake of Massachusetts justice. In its view, the issue was justice for those who were not part of the ruling group. The paper proclaimed the inherent injustice of a system in which “a ‘Yankee’ from Yankee-land”—by which it meant Governor Fuller—“decides the fate of two poor, foreign, condemned men.” Der tog recognized that Sacco and Vanzetti were not Jews, and that Jews as a group had no obvious connection to the two Italians. In answer to those readers who asked, “What have Sacco and Vanzetti got to do with us?” Der tog proclaimed: “Jews!—because Dreyfus was a Jew!”47 Thus, Der tog compared the anti-semitic injustice administered by the French military courts against Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army, to the behavior of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Jews and Italians, the paper thought, were equally vulnerable.

The theme of injustice for groups outside of the political establishment was echoed by Der amerikaner un froyen magazin, which surmised that “if the prisoners had been American citizens and not foreigners, the jury would have found sympathy” and Sacco and Vanzetti “would not have been ‘railroaded.’” Because the two were “‘underdogs,’” the jury could not see its way through to the truth of their innocence. As had the other moderate Jewish papers, Der amerikaner publicly disagreed with the radical interpretation of the events. “This was not about class hate, as the communists would like to believe,” the paper claimed. Rather, the Sacco and Vanzetti trial turned on “a race conflict of Nordics against non-Nordics.” “And that,” the paper confidently told its readers, “is the source of the protest from liberals in America and from all parts of Europe.”48

Thus, although analysis of Sacco-Vanzetti differed, the Yiddish press’ support for Sacco and Vanzetti as outsiders was unqualified. Brandeis was roundly criticized for refusing to grant a writ of habeas corpus for the two convicted men. In a noteworthy move,49 even the Morgen zhurnal—usually the voice of religious orthodoxy and cultural isolationism—joined in the lambasting:

The Jewish Justice of the United States Supreme Court had an excellent opportunity to stay the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti . . . and millions of Jews will regret that he did not find it proper to make use of it . . . . He was the right man on the Supreme Court to break through the wall of “technicalities” that have prevented the sentenced from obtaining a new trial. . . . A doubt of 1 percent against 99 should have been sufficient to forget what is proper [legally] and what is not proper.

With an ethnic pride unusual to its columns, the Morgen zhurnal added that “more people among us [Jews] than among other men and women were against the execution of the sentence.” Moreover, “it would have made a marvelous impression upon the entire world had a Jew given the word for which tens of millions had waited with the greatest suspense. Even such persons who believe that, under normal circumstances, it is better for the Jew not to attract too much attention would admit that this case is an exception.”50

Unlike its Yiddish counterpart, the English-language Jewish press tended not to take explicit positions on the Sacco and Vanzetti case at the time of the executions, although several carefully worded treatises on the themes of justice, the death penalty, and even circumstantial evidence clustered in the August and September 1927 issues of those magazines.51 The Menorah Journal also printed a qualified accolade to left-
ist Jewish political activity in an article titled “The Jew as a Radical,” and the Chicago Sentinel dared to ask “Is Justice Brandeis Guilty?” and to answer in the affirmative.\textsuperscript{52} Two years after the incident, the American Hebrew safely declared its postmortem partisanship for “the lives of a poor shoemaker and fish peddler who were executed by the state of Massachusetts for a crime of which the whole intelligent world believed them innocent.”\textsuperscript{53}

Not many subjects rendered Felix Frankfurter speechless. Yet when he was called to accept an award from the National Institute for Immigrant Welfare he stumbled with his words. “I can express with very limited adequacy,” he said, “the passionate devotion to this land that possesses millions of our people, born, like myself, under other skies, for the privilege that this country has bestowed in allowing them to partake of its fellowship.”\textsuperscript{54} Frankfurter believed with all his heart in American democracy. He dedicated his life to the administration of that democracy. As a young man, he had left the world of corporate law to serve what he considered a higher calling, first in the office of the U.S. Attorney in New York, and then in Washington, D.C. And when he came to feel that his effectiveness in Washington was through, Frankfurter went to Harvard, where he hoped to advance the cause of American democracy from behind the professor’s lectern.

Ultimately, Frankfurter believed that the great American experiment relied upon a properly informed population. As he explained in 1928: “In a democracy, politics is a process of popular education—the task of adjusting the conflicting interests of diverse groups in the community, and bending the hostility and suspicion and ignorance engendered by group interest to the reconciliation of a common interest and a common understanding.”\textsuperscript{55} In Frankfurter’s view, his effort on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti was a calculated exercise in public education and the realignment of group interest. He had a lesson to teach America. What was it?

At the time of the affair, many thought that Frankfurter’s defense of Sacco and Vanzetti was tantamount to a defense of their anarchist politics. Of course, Frankfurter was no anarchist. Today the public often hears of an attorney who represents a known criminal or a violent political cause, not in the name of the crime or the cause, but to maintain the legal rights of the accused. But in 1928, this stance was far more uncommon, if indeed it existed at all. In his defense at the Scopes trial and at that of Leopold and Loeb, for instance, Clarence Darrow appealed to no particular legal right of the accused. He simply disagreed with the law as written.

In the case of Sacco and Vanzetti, Frankfurter did not advocate civil rights and civil liberties for their own sake. Nor did he defend anyone whom he believed to be guilty of a crime. He did, however, believe in the necessity of proper criminal procedure, and he took the letter of this law, and all democratically authorized law, “very seriously, deeply seriously,” he said, “because fragile as reason is and limited as law is as the expression of the institutionalized medium of reason, that’s all we have standing between us and the tyranny of mere will and the cruelty of unbridled, undisciplined feeling.”\textsuperscript{56}

Frankfurter believed to his core that “unbridled, undisciplined feeling” embodied in the Massachusetts courts had convicted Sacco and Vanzetti, and that nothing short of an appeal to the public could save others who might find themselves in such a po-
sition. If only he could educate establishment Boston that it was mistaken, that he, Felix Frankfurter, Jew from Leopoldstadt, was the true voice of Anglo-American law. To a Back Bay lawyer, he complained of the “anarchists among the so-called respectable[s]” and of the “blissful ignorance of some of the leaders of our own profession in Boston who said that the men ought to die, guilty or not.” When the Boston lawyer suggested that Frankfurter make clear that he did not share the political views of anarchism, that he affirm the rightness of government and law, Frankfurter exploded into a blaze of rage and despair:

Have you ever seen a line I have written, or ever heard me utter a word that expressed or indicated a disbelief in government or law? . . . What have you—or some of my other critics—ever done for law and order compared with [me]? . . . My whole life has been given to Law—and wouldn’t it look silly for me to write a letter saying “I believe in law.” You’ll next be asking me to deny that I believe in free love and make public avowal of my love for my wife!

“But I suggest that you consider what law really means,” Frankfurter continued, answering the charge that he had tried to “frighten” upper-class Boston into action by heralding the rights of two vocally violent anarchists. Here, Frankfurter finally answered the accusations of his hero Oliver Wendell Holmes and produced his most frank utterance about what he deeply believed to be his vocation: “Anybody can give law to his friends,” Frankfurter proclaimed, “it’s the essence of law to give it to our enemies!”

Although the Anglo-American system of jurisprudence is adversarial, Frankfurter meant something more in his proclamation. In the case of Sacco and Vanzetti, Frankfurter had opted not to join the defense table. Rather, he had chosen to attack the court itself. He had done this because he felt that he needed to teach Boston what it could never learn from within: that the very complex of the Massachusetts legal system was in fact the enemy of law—that the entirety of establishment Boston was in fact the enemy of Anglo-American justice. As professor of law at Harvard, and not as private counsel to Sacco and Vanzetti, Frankfurter thought it his duty to deliver this lesson to Boston. He had to instruct the enemies of law and Anglo-American justice who sat in the Union Club, in the Back Bay, in the president’s chair at Harvard, and in the governor’s mansion. To Frankfurter, the Boston establishment was not simply of a different, legitimate, legal opinion about Sacco and Vanzetti. It was not simply wrong about the crime in South Braintree; its entire worldview was systemically corrupt. Frankfurter had to teach Boston what he knew.

Yet Boston would not listen. For Frankfurter, a casual comment made by John F. Moors, a Boston Brahmin who supported Sacco and Vanzetti, summed up the entire affair by personifying establishment Massachusetts in the form of the president of Harvard: “Lawrence Lowell was incapable of seeing that two wops could be right and the Yankee judiciary could be wrong.” “That posed a dilemma for Lowell which his mind couldn’t overreach,” Frankfurter later explained. “His crowd, the Yankees, were right, and the alien immigrants were what they were—pacifists and draft dodgers. He was incapable of doing what men have done, namely, say their crowd was wrong.”

For Frankfurter, the case had revolved around “crowds.” There were those who could see the simple truth that Sacco and Vanzetti were innocent, and there were those
who were inhibited by the worldview of their group, which would not allow political outsiders to be innocent. When Lowell had submitted his report to the governor, he was not being dishonest or unscrupulous, Frankfurter thought. Rather, his Yankee perspective could not perceive the truth. The two Italians had managed to blind Lowell’s “crowd”—“the Yankees”—to the basic principles of law and justice. For this reason, Frankfurter believed, the Sacco-Vanzetti affair possessed “almost every important, really sizable issue that cuts deeply into the feelings and judgments and conduct of the community, implicates factors that transcend the immediate individuals who, in the main, are instruments of forces that affect many, many beyond the immediate actors in the affair.”

Frankfurter intended to write a second work on the case of Sacco and Vanzetti that would expose the insipid worldview of the enemies of law in Massachusetts and throughout America—a worldview that excluded outsiders because of timidity or misplaced group feeling. This book would be less passionate than the thin one he had dropped into placid Boston Bay in the spring of 1927. He intended to write a careful, scientific study in which he would calmly demonstrate the “psychological forces whereby the most influential citizens of Boston, with rare exception, failed to see that the great way to vindicate the greatness of the Puritan tradition was to show that ‘a good shoemaker and a poor fish-peddler’ were not real threats to the security of the Commonwealth.” Someday, after the tension had eased, after Harvard and Boston had returned to the pace of New England life, Frankfurter would explain to the establishment of Massachusetts the essence of its Puritan tradition of law and justice for all, and how it became forsaken one summer in the execution of two innocent outsiders.

He had wished acutely to say something while the men were still alive. “Every instinct of my nature impelled me to speak out,” he wrote W.G. Thompson, “but I found . . . that I was the center of irritation and hostility (to put it mildly) and any peep from me would harden still more the stern purpose to kill Sacco and Vanzetti. . . . When I tell you that Wiggin [counsel to the governor] . . . still circulates the statement that one of ‘the gravest features of the whole business’ is that I should for years have been on ‘the secret payroll of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee’ and have gotten big money for stirring up the whole matter, and that I’m at the bottom of it all, etc., etc., etc.”

Here Frankfurter’s thought trailed off. Indeed, the antisemitic accusation that he had accepted “big money” had been present from the moment Frankfurter had entered the case. Furthermore, Frankfurter felt it was no coincidence that he, personally, along with the two Italians, had become in the mind of Boston “the center of irritation and hostility.” “Criticism of me in the conservative circles in Boston,” Frankfurter wrote Mack, “is compounded of the fact that I am supposed to be a ‘radical,’ at all events that my views run counter to their opinions and that it so happens I am not only an outsider in this community, but also a Jew.” Because of his outsider status in Boston, he felt, he had understood the position of the two Italians. As an outsider and as a Jew, he could see what Lowell and his crowd of Yankees could never see.

“I have read a little history,” Frankfurter reflected as fall turned to winter in 1927, “and had some personal contact with the forces of fear and hate operating against outcast people and outcast opinion.” Accordingly, he had seen Sacco and Vanzetti as two
of his own. When they died for being outsiders, as Frankfurter believed they had, his dream of America died a little, too. Perhaps he would have been devastated to learn what a team of impartial ballistics experts under the supervision of Dr. Henry Lee (now known for his work during the O.J. Simpson trial) reported after a conclusive examination in 1983: the bullet that killed the paymaster of the Slater Morill Shoe Company in April 1920 had come from the Colt automatic of Nicola Sacco.63

Notes

This essay, in a different and expanded form, appears as Part 2 in my recently published book, *Jazz Age Jews*, published by Princeton University Press.

5. Some treatments of Frankfurter’s life are very fine, though none emphasize the Sacco-Vanzetti case. See Parrish, *Felix Frankfurter*, 176–196; Liva Baker, *Felix Frankfurter* (New York: 1969), 121–138. H.N. Hirsch treats Frankfurter’s work on the Sacco-Vanzetti case—as he does all of Frankfurter’s work—in light of his understanding of Frankfurter as “a textbook case of a neurotic personality”: see his *The Enigma of Felix Frankfurter* (New York: 1981), 90–94. Robert A. Burt, whose work has influenced this study, does not treat Sacco-Vanzetti extensively. Moreover, he views Brandeis and Frankfurter as “outcasts in the promised land” and presents Frankfurter’s behavior as resulting from a “diaspora mentality.” Burt claims that “Frankfurter can easily be seen in [Hannah] Arendt’s terms as a parvenu: always charming, cajoling, seducing the widest possible circle of admirers, but never quite successful in finding the right chord…” (See Burt, *Two Jewish Justices: Outcasts in the Promised Land* [Berkeley: 1988], 57f, 62). I would suggest that Frankfurter indeed struck the right chord, as is evidenced by the categorical approval accorded him by the immigrant Jewish press, and that Back Bay Boston was not cajoled in the least. As Frankfurter moved ever higher in the American political order, he continued to identify with outsiders.
7. For a theoretical development of outsider identification and its sources, see Michael Alexander, *Jazz Age Jews* (Princeton: 2001), which also considers this phenomenon in the realms of economy and culture through the cases of Arnold Rothstein and the World Series fix of 1919 and Al Jolson and the making of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927.
symbol. . . . The lowliness of his origin, his lack of cultural opportunities, and his esthetic limitation will fall into their proper places in the perspective of his whole personality. More and more it will become manifest that his character is an achievement and not a gift of circumstances.” (Frankfurter, “Why I Am For Smith,” New Republic, 31 Oct. 1928, reprinted in Law and Politics: Occasional Papers of Felix Frankfurter 1913–1938, ed. Archibald MacLeish and E.F. Prichard [New York: 1939], 320–328.) Remarkably, Frankfurter felt comfortable noting the “lowliness” of Smith’s origins, although Smith’s Irish-American family had in fact been in America since 1841, whereas Frankfurter himself was an immigrant. See also Alfred E. Smith, “Catholic and Patriot,” Atlantic Monthly 139 (May 1927), 721–728.


20. Ibid., 159.
21. Ibid., 160, 164.
25. Frankfurter to Walter Lippmann, 25 July 1927, Felix Frankfurter Papers in the Library of Congress (hereafter: FFPLC) 77/47–320. Frankfurter was well aware that nonviolence was far from Vanzetti’s avowed political position. Among other things, Vanzetti wrote: “If we have to die for a crime of which we are innocent, we ask for revenge, revenge in our names and in the names of our living and dead.” “I will make a list of honor of the perjurers who murdered us. I will try to see Thayer death [sic]. . . . I will put fire into the human breaths.” From The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti, eds. Marion D. Frankfurter and Gardner Jackson (New York: 1997 [1928]), 119–120, 151, 315; also in Avrich, Sacco and Vanzetti, 212.
33. Holmes to Laski, 1 Sept. 1927, ibid., 975.
34. Holmes to Laski, 10 July 1930, ibid., 1266.
36. Brandeis to Frankfurter, 14 April 1927, ibid., 284, letter 270.
38. Kallen to Frankfurter, 2 Sept. 1927 (FFPLC 71/43–531).

42. *Forverts* (11 April 1927), 1, 12; *Yidishes tageblat* (11 April 1927). Einstein had been a celebrity in the pages of the Jewish press since his first trip to America in 1921. See “Idishes kep oyf goyishe pleysetes,” *Forverts* (23 July 1921), 3; “Azyo hot gesogt Aynshtayn!,” *Der amerikaner* (29 July 1921), 6; “Prof. Aynshtayn ferendikt nay verk oyfn kranken bet,” *Der tog* (6 Oct. 6, 1928), 1; “The World’s Greatest Man,” *The Southern Israelite* (9 Nov. 1928), 1.

43. See *Forverts* (10 Aug. 1927), 7; (22 Aug. 1927), 1, 8; (24 Aug. 1927), 4, 5.
44. *Yidishes tageblat* (5 Aug 1927), 4; (12 Aug. 1927), 4.
45. Ibid. (14 Aug. 1927), 4.
46. Ibid. (24 Aug. 1927), 2.
49. The Chicago *Sentinel* (1 Sept. 1927), 10, and the *Jewish Daily Bulletin* (24 Aug. 1927), 2–3, noted in their reports that even the usually stolid *Morgen zhurnal* had joined in with the rest of the Jewish press on the Sacco-Vanzetti case.
50. *Morgen zhurnal* (23 Aug. 1927), 4. Nevertheless, when the death sentence was carried out, the *Morgen zhurnal* stood by what it considered “the talmudic rule: ‘after the court has acted, there is no complaint’” (24 Aug. 1927).
51. See, for example, “Circumstantial Evidence,” *Jewish Tribune* (3 Sept. 1927), 28.
56. Phillips, *Felix Frankfurter Reminisces*, 189. Frankfurter was fanatically interested in upholding the law even when justice was denied. Helen Shirley Thomas describes how, from a legal standpoint, Frankfurter was against a progressive child labor law:

> When the Court in 1922 struck down the Federal Child Labor Tax Law, many people were outraged. Frankfurter pointed out, however, that “humanity” is not the test of constitutionality. Recognition that a law enacted by Congress seeks to redress monstrous wrongs and to promote the highest good does not dispose of the Supreme Court’s duty when the validity of such a law is challenged.

See Thomas, *Felix Frankfurter: Scholar on the Bench* (Baltimore: 1960), 110, citing Frankfurter’s “Child Labor Law and the Constitution,” *New Republic* 31 (26 July 1922), 248. This stance even applied to the Congressional Act of June 5, 1920, which greatly limited the rights of certain immigrants and political beliefs. As much as he hated the legislation, Frankfurter considered it to be the law. See Frankfurter, “Karolyi, Kellog, and Coolidge,” *New Republic* 2 (Dec. 1925), reprinted in MacLeish and Pritchard (eds.), *Law and Politics*, 137. Frankfurter’s attitude may be compared—although by no means identified with—the traditional diaspora Jewish concept of *dina demalekhuta dina* (“the law of the state is the law”). However, it is far more likely to have derived from Frankfurter’s understanding of the Massachusetts Constitution as guided by Holmes’ practice of judicial restraint, which proclaims America to have a “government of laws and not of men.” See Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (West Orange, N.J.: 1961), 48–63.
59. Ibid., 205.
61. Ibid.
Review Essays
Asymmetries in America: Recent Work on Jews and Blacks


“Jews and blacks have been linked in a kind of symbiotic relation with each other,” the Harvard philosopher Cornel West observed in 1995. “Whether they are allies or antagonists, they are locked into an inseparable embrace.”¹ That assertion does not appear to be true. But authors and editors of histories of American Jews and blacks do seem locked into an inseparable embrace with compliant publishers, from whose warehouses have come a torrential flood of volumes huge enough to have kept Noah’s ark afloat. The purpose of this review essay is to summarize and evaluate some of the recent scholarly effort that has been devoted to the historical entanglement of these two American communities.

All of the volumes under review take for granted the decisiveness of race in analyzing the national experience. Most of the books also record the intensity and peculiarity of the force that brought these two groups together. Overall, these books suggest that it is no longer quite fashionable, either in scholarship or in politics, to stress
the affinity between America’s blacks and Jews. The attraction has dimmed. And yet without a recognition of the “embrace” that was once believed to have entwined their fates, this wave of volumes would make little sense. It is ahistorical to deny the power of the faith held by many Jews that those who were persecuted were obligated to join in the fight for equality and that, in such a struggle, the nation’s democratic ideals would emerge vindicated. The interpersonal dynamics between blacks and Jews might be fraught with tension and misunderstanding; and representations of the Other—in fiction, painting, and music—can also be judged aesthetically, not merely sociologically. (Four of the volumes under review address the arts.) But politics has seemed to be inescapably part of how the Jewish-black relationship has been defined.

Neither side can easily overlook the fact that no American minority was more despised, or subjected to greater cruelty, than those who had been brought in chains from Africa. And throughout history, no minority has suffered marginality and martyrdom so long as the Jews, who are enjoined every Passover to imagine themselves as slaves in Egypt. Nevertheless, a glaring asymmetry haunts the experience of these two groups in the United States, where the burden of oppression they bore was radically different. Let one biographical contrast suffice. Ruth Bader Ginsburg has been called the feminist counterpart to Thurgood Marshall, who succeeded brilliantly as a legal advocate for equal rights for blacks. Both of these appellate attorneys were eventually appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. But earlier, as a crusading NAACP lawyer, Marshall found himself in the hamlet of Hernando, Mississippi, where he was approached by a pistol-packing white man who apprised him of some local news: “The sun is never going down on a live nigger in this town.” Marshall grabbed the next train. Nothing remotely like that ever happened to Ruth Bader Ginsburg—either as a woman or as a Jew.

Despite such an imbalance of treatment, the encounter between black and Jew on American soil was supposed to elicit mutual sympathy, respect, a shared dedication to progressive and egalitarian values, and a yearning for liberation that derived solace from the book of Exodus. Typifying this sense of solidarity was Hannah Arendt, who was not even a liberal. Analyzing racial desegregation in 1959, she wrote: “As a Jew I take my sympathy for the cause of Negroes as for all oppressed and underprivileged people for granted.” Similarly, Allon Schoener, the curator of an exhibition on the cultural history of Harlem sponsored by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1969, recalled himself becoming “someone who could, who had adopted a certain amount of black consciousness . . . I transformed myself.” Many other Jews harbored a fascination with black Americans that no other group of Christians—indeed, no other racial or ethnic minority—could inspire. Likewise, as blacks struggled to participate fully in American society, no group of whites aroused greater hopes than did the descendants of those who felt the whips of Pharaoh. The annual interfaith seders sponsored by the Boston chapter of the Anti-Defamation League, designed to encourage greater knowledge and appreciation of Judaism, are illustrative. Initially they were not conducted with Roman Catholics, who constituted the bulk of the city’s population, nor with the Irish-Americans who long dominated its politics. Instead, Passover was annually celebrated with representatives of Boston’s black community, who were invited not because they were Christian but because of their status as a racial minor-
ity, which meant that the seder was not even formally an interfaith event. (The Irish were added later.) Such examples of that embrace could easily be multiplied.

Yet the scholarly literature under review suggests a certain discontinuity. None of these books could be classified as a historical overview of the subject akin to Jonathan Kaufman’s *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times between Blacks and Jews in America* (1988) or Murray Friedman’s *What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (1995). The paradigm around which those two volumes are organized now seems to have been abandoned. Maurianne Adams and John Bracey, the editors of a mammoth anthology, did not bother to put the word “alliance” in their title or subtitle (as did both Kaufman and Friedman). And in the same year that *Strangers and Neighbors* appeared, Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain* referred to these two minorities as “the most unalike of America’s historic undesirables.” The mirror, it seems, has two very different faces. In fact, on the evidence that Adams and Bracey present, there was rarely much of an “alliance”—if that term means blacks operating as blacks, and Jews identifying as Jews, combining for common purposes. The decade of the 1960s constitutes the sole exception.

To be sure, the Jewish defense agencies, established earlier in the century, committed themselves to the overall struggle “to secure these rights” proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence. But in mounting their attack on discrimination and prejudice, those organizations were pursuing essentially Jewish interests. The myth of a sustained organizational effort to turn “others” into “brothers” has been inflated. Even the 1960s are easy to idealize. When an Anti-Defamation League (ADL) staffer named Henry Schwarzchild was asked by Rev. Martin Luther King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference to help out during a critical weekend of the desegregation crisis in Birmingham, his bosses told him that, if he went to Alabama, he should not bother coming back. Schwarzchild flouted the warning and was finished with the ADL. The gallant work that many individual Jews performed on behalf of civil rights should not be impugned; and it is incontestable that several Jewish organizations fought effectively for a more open society, a more inclusive community, a multiracial vision. But the works under review tend to minimize or sidestep the problem of how that alliance might be judged, or even defined.

One striking continuity with earlier studies deserves to be noted, however: scholars who write on this subject are preponderantly Jewish. Is that because it matters more to Jews? Are Jews more interested in blacks than vice versa because of a general concern with intergroup relations? Or is it because the status of American blacks is the more salient test of whether the democratic promise has been kept? Or is it simply because, in the last half-century, Jews have been more heavily represented in academic life (especially its upper reaches)? Whatever the explanation, the challenge of specifying how these two groups have negotiated their way through American history has been met far more often by Jewish authors than by their black counterparts (none of whom has written a book on the subject). Indeed, Jeffrey Melnick goes so far as to claim that the very topic of “Black-Jewish relations” is mostly “a story told by Jews about interracial relations,” a discourse (rather than a dialogue) expressed “most frequently and most powerfully by Jews” (p. 4). Supporting this view is the fact that in 1996, when a journal devoted to black-Jewish relations was founded, the sponsors were the predominantly black Howard University and the American Jewish
Committee (AJC). But the latter committed more of its financial resources to Common Quest, and four years later, the AJC’s announcement of a withdrawal of support imperiled the magazine’s future.\(^7\)

Among the virtues of Strangers and Neighbors is that the range of black opinions and reflections is given greater weight than elsewhere, so that the imbalance noted earlier is somewhat rectified. (Bracey teaches Afro-American studies at the University of Massachusetts.) Heavy enough (at 3 lb., 4.5 oz.) to threaten back injury and costly enough (at $70) in hard cover, Strangers and Neighbors deserves commendation for making accessible a huge body of material, much of it obscure or virtually unknown: protest letters, poems, sheet music covers, op-ed pieces, after-dinner speeches, editorials, polemics, reportage, interviews, and reminiscences. The work of leading scholars in the field is also included in this compendium, which starts with the Atlantic slave trade and stops with pleas for “dialogue.” This book might have been even longer, the editors warn in their preface, had Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations, edited by Jack Salzman and Cornel West, not appeared three years earlier, enabling Adams and Bracey to forego certain topics and essays.

Strangers and Neighbors is inevitably padded; not every essay is meaty or thought-provoking. There are also omissions, such as “Confessions of an Anti-Semite” (1980) by the black nationalist poet and playwright Amiri Baraka. That Village Voice essay is relevant to the phenomenon of black antisemitism, which is not given quite the weight it deserves—a couple of the essays (pp. 645–668) even cast doubt on its existence, and no separate piece on Louis Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam, for example, is included. Moreover, because Strangers and Neighbors is only an anthology, not a work of synthesis, the reader is not informed whether the various protests, boycotts, campaigns, and the like, as described in the book, were eventually successful. Nevertheless, the scope and variety of this volume are so impressive that it merits praise as the single most valuable book ever published on the braided history of blacks and Jews.

A far more conventional anthology is African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century, which does not mark a major advance over previous collections such as Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews (1992), edited by Jack Salzman with Adina Back and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, or Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments (1994), edited by Paul Berman. The product of a special conference held at Washington University in St. Louis in 1993, this new compendium contains 13 scholarly essays, several of which are drawn heavily from their authors’ own books. Thus, Hasia R. Diner analyzes Jewish representations of race relations, based on her standard work, In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915–1935 (1977, 1995). Murray Friedman discusses the civil rights movement. Michael Rogin elucidates the social meaning of blackface in films, as he did more extensively in Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot (1996). There are also portraits of Marcus Garvey and Franz Boas, as well as a superb essay by Cheryl Greenberg on how Southern Jewish resistance to desegregation imposed limits on the egalitarianism of the New York-based Jewish defense agencies.

An original piece is by a co-editor, V.P. Franklin, on “The Portrayal of Jews in The
This essay should have been more incisive, since hostility to Jews took an ideological turn among some blacks only in the 1960s, and no one was more responsible for that change than Malcolm X (albeit posthumously, through his autobiography). Before this, black antisemitism consisted mainly of snippets of Christian folklore concerning who was to blame for deicide, alongside class-based resentment at the exploitation, greed, and cunning ascribed to Jewish merchants, landlords, and creditors. (Farrakhan’s phrase for them was “bloodsuckers.”) Malcolm X introduced a couple of novelty items to this list of accusations. More forcefully than any previous black spokesman, he scorned the Jewish invocation of the Holocaust. After breaking with Elijah Muhammed, Malcolm X told a Harlem crowd how tiresome it was to keep hearing about the Six Million. “I was reading a book the other day that showed that one hundred million of us were kidnapped and brought to this country,” the autodidact announced. “Now everybody’s wet-eyed over a handful of Jews who brought it on themselves. What about our one hundred million?”

Malcolm X also denounced the hypocrisy of Jews who fled from urban neighborhoods where blacks sought to purchase homes. (The ethnic enclaves of white Catholics were more likely to be violently defended.) But above all, he pioneered in injecting into black public discourse a Third World ideology that defined his own country as the chief source of evil in the world and located Israel as the only source of evil in the Middle East. Tapping ancient myths about Jews, Malcolm X made black militancy geopolitical even as he professed a racial solidarity with Arabs, especially Palestinians, whose land, he charged, Zionists had “stolen.” The impact that his 1965 autobiography exerted can scarcely be exaggerated; although more moderate champions of black communal interest did not endorse all of his accusations regarding Jews and Zionists, his ideology had to be reckoned with even two generations later. Franklin’s essay captures little of that impact, and it does not do justice to the frequency with which The Autobiography of Malcolm X maligns the role of Jews.

In the sense that Malcolm X also made the category of race so pivotal to an understanding of the United States, he can be seen as a kind of spiritual ancestor of anthropologist Karen Brodkin. Her book, How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America, is a curious one. In place of conscientious research, she substitutes her own family’s experiences as though they were not only representative but paradigmatic, advancing broad claims that her personal upward mobility, along with that of her schoolteacher parents, was due not only to their own abilities but also to an early version of affirmative action programs—for whites only. The educational advantages conferred by the G.I. bill and favorable mortgage rates guaranteed by the Federal government, alongside other post–Second World War programs, gave citizens of European ancestry extraordinary advantages. Meanwhile, Americans of African ancestry were subjected to systematic discrimination even as the economy boomed. Because Jewish immigrants had often arrived with industrial skills and urban backgrounds, their children and grandchildren were poised to take advantage of economic opportunity immediately after the Great Depression. Once-stigmatized white ethnic groups thus succeeded, Brodkin observes, and were largely embraced by the Anglo-Saxon Protestants whose ancestors had founded the republic. The “Irish, Jews, and southern and eastern European Catholics were all held back,” she argues, “until they
were granted—willingly or unwillingly—the institutional privileges of socially sanctioned whiteness” (p. 41).

Brodkin concedes that more than structural changes were at play in benefiting Jews. But she barely notices or considers the cultural values that activated Jewish ambitions, preferring to suggest that only when the category of whiteness was enlarged (to heighten the exclusion of blacks) was ethnic advance facilitated. That racial discrimination horribly curtailed opportunities for blacks is obvious and familiar; that the expansion of “whiteness” was what primarily spurred the growth of the ethnic middle class after the Second World War is farfetched. Polish Catholics have fared rather poorly, for example, despite their “socially sanctioned whiteness”; whereas other groups whom she does not mention, such as Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans, have ascended quite spectacularly despite an ugly legacy of racial discrimination against them and the lack of any boost from affirmative action of any sort. Asian Americans now constitute about a fifth to a quarter of the undergraduate populations of Stanford, Columbia, and Harvard—far out of proportion to the general population. Have Asian Americans become white folks, too?

Describing herself as a secularist whose identity and learning could be labeled “Jewish lite” (p. ix), Brodkin offers an especially inadequate treatment of the economic and social status of American Jewry. In denying that this particular minority overcame the barriers of poverty (those who did so were “special”), her book not only contradicts itself but cavalierly defies both empirical data and common knowledge. By 1969, for example, the per capita income of American Jews had become nearly twice that of Gentiles, an income gap that was wider than the chasm separating whites and blacks.9 Moreover, in a wide variety of societies, large proportions of Jews have historically risen (and are currently rising) from the lower depths of the economy. Such comfort and affluence cannot everywhere be ascribed to the advantages of “whiteness.” Brodkin notes that when How the Jews Became White Folks was published, she found herself living in “a shrinking economy” (p. 52). Others, however, have noticed instead the most sustained prosperity in U.S. history. “Sure, Jews need ability,” she acknowledges, “but that was never enough for more than a few to make it” (p. 52). In fact, by the end of the 20th century, the “few” were the Jewish poor: embourgeoisement has remained an inescapable feature of the American Jewish experience.

Matthew Frye Jacobson’s study of the interplay of race-thinking, law, and society is much more subtly presented, more wide-ranging and more thoroughly (and ingeniously) researched. Whiteness of a Different Color is also more effective in reinforcing the tendency of American studies specialists to see the insidiousness of racism at work virtually everywhere. The author wonders: What became of the racial groups of the 19th century—“its Hebrews, Iberics, Mediterraneans, Teutons” (p. 2)? How in the 20th century did they become Caucasians? What was the enduring legacy of the Naturalization Act of 1790, which confined citizenship to “free white persons”? Believing that to write about race excludes from consideration “virtually nothing” (p. 11), Jacobson overstates his case for the consequences of citizenship restriction. Only because they could be classified as “free white persons,” he writes, were European immigrants able to “gain . . . entrance [to the U.S.] in the first place” (p. 12) and
thus catapult over those who were denied citizenship because they were neither free nor white. Here, as Nathan Glazer pointed out in an astute review, Jacobson confuses immigration with citizenship. The Naturalization Act of 1790 excluded no one from entering the republic, and his book provides no evidence that the absence of citizenship impeded upward mobility. Nor were “the prospects of becoming American and becoming Caucasian completely intertwined” (p. 12)—not, at least, after the Fourteenth Amendment defined all persons born in the United States as citizens (even if both parents were aliens, and even if both parents were ineligible for naturalization). 10 Such misconstruing of the impact of the 1790 law is fatal to the overall argumentative force of Whiteness of a Different Color.

Only partly (in one chapter, with several extended passages elsewhere) does this book deal with Jews, who were once categorized as a different race, as were other immigrants and their descendants who were not of Albion’s seed. Jacobson draws upon stray comments in the works of New England writers (from Cotton Mather to James Russell Lowell) and offers an illuminating explication of the meaning of Jewishness in two novels decrying American antisemitism, Arthur Miller’s Focus (1945) and Laura Z. Hobson’s Gentleman’s Agreement (1947). He is obliged to concede that, from the very beginning of the republic, “Jews were indeed ‘white’ by the most significant measures of that appellation: they could enter the country and become naturalized citizens” (p. 176). How then were they also not “white”? Because they were held to have stable and resilient traits (and features) that made them different (Jewish social scientists, by the way, often concurred). This sounds more like “ethnicity” than “race,” although Jacobson insists that “race” meant precisely that—the social construction of a biological entity that marked a sharp differentiation. Yet his argument is counterintuitive. Hebrews and Celts and Slavs did become Caucasian by the dawn of the 20th century, he acknowledges, although among those classified as whites and thinking of themselves as whites there could be hierarchies that rendered darker complexions worse than fair, or that placed the Irish, say, below Germans. But such acts of differentiation could hardly have turned 19th-century American society into merely a mosaic in which the line separating black and white was blurred. That line was pretty close to absolute, maintained as it was with legal definitions, force, and violence; and Jews must have been well aware of the advantage of whiteness.

To be sure, they were often casually distinguished from “whites.” Jews themselves commonly did so, as did blacks as well as white Gentiles. But Jews were never “black” in any social or legal sense that mattered. The firmest proof comes from the South, where Jewish immigrants—first from Central and then from Eastern Europe—fit into the landscape with surprising ease, their progeny assimilating into a society that classified them as white. The Jews diverged from the rest of the white population in religion, in customs, and in manners, even in physiognomy. But they did not constitute some sort of anomalous or hybrid group, some sport of nature that an acutely color-conscious and resolutely divided region could not account for. Consider, for instance, the 1878 claim of Raphael J. Moses, who had fought for the Confederacy, to belong to “a race whom persecution cannot crush.” 11 In the era after Reconstruction, when white supremacist ideas were solidifying, Major Moses could not have intended his “race” to mean anything more than a synonym for “people.” He would not have wanted to imply that Jews needed to be incorporated into the category of whiteness.
Jacobson’s book is nevertheless intriguing in its exposure of the uncertainties and confusions of racial thinking and in the peculiar shifts in classification that the logic of racism entailed.

Doubts about the political cohesiveness of the alliance between blacks and Jews have opened up opportunities to explore the cultural ramifications of the relationship between the two groups. As the paradigm of a shattered civic collaboration has lost its appeal to scholars, the artistic embrace has been increasingly explored, even though politics is not thereby repressed.

One of the achievements of *A Right to Sing the Blues* is to demonstrate how tight was the black-Jewish embrace in popular music. The black nationalism that emerged after the decline of the civil rights movement has likely obscured how fully both white (mostly Jewish) and black composers and performers dipped into the same pool of inspiration—whether in ragtime, the blues, or jazz. The rigidities of the color line earlier in the 20th century could not keep Negro and Jewish artists from learning from and challenging one another. A revised Harvard dissertation, Jeffrey Melnick’s elegant, perceptive, and clever book shows just how porous were the boundaries in music from the late 19th century until roughly the era of big bands and *Porgy and Bess* (1935).

Melnick recognizes the racial inequities: Jews ran the music publishing houses such as Witmark & Sons and dominated the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). One ethnic group therefore determined much of what black musicians earned, where they were booked and hired, and what they were given credit for. The system was both shamelessly unfair to the vulnerable and the unsophisticated and open to charges of plunder (or, to be kinder, creative appropriation). Melnick, however, prefers not to prosecute but rather to expose how intimately Jews were seen, and saw themselves, as uniquely positioned to showcase the most indigenous music America has ever created. The “Jewish relationship to ragtime and jazz,” he writes, seemed to be “organic, legitimate, and maybe even predestined” (p. 79). He forms no judgment on the aesthetic merits of “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” “Swanee,” *Rhapsody in Blue*, “Stormy Weather,” “Ol’ Man River,” or “Strange Fruit.” Instead, he shows how strongly Jewish songwriters and composers believed themselves to be joined at the hip with the inventors of ragtime, the blues, and jazz—and how readily black musicians themselves acknowledged that role, which Melnick calls “Jewish cultural nationalism” (p. 12).

Yet a demurrer must be registered. Neither that term nor the concept behind it would have made any sense to Irving Berlin, the Gershwins, Jerome Kern, or Harold Arlen. For they wanted to be the voice of America. They wanted to write a nation’s tunes and satisfy its taste, which often meant providing a distinctively black sound. They wanted to achieve integration and acculturation (if not unmodulated assimilation). The idea of serving a Jewish interest, or of honoring a Jewish communal purpose, would have mystified or dismayed them. (Had they wanted to be “more Jewish,” they could have been—but the cost in acclaim would have been prohibitive.) Although Melnick asserts that “one major use of Blackness in twentieth-century America has been to delineate and reinforce Jewish identity itself” (p. 135), the opposite may be closer to the truth: “white Negroes”—that is, Caucasians who imag-
inatively crossed the color line—have generally been “non-Jewish Jews,” and the degree to which they absorbed a black sensibility and style reflects their distance from normative Judaism and from the conventions of the Jewish community. Indeed, the most effective reinforcement of Jewish identity has been associated with Jewish education and other institutional stimuli of ahavat yisrael, rather than with blackness.

The interactions in painting and sculpture have exerted far less influence in the United States than has popular music. But perhaps the most wondrous feature of Milly Heyd’s monograph, amply illustrated with 112 figures, is how frequently and how intriguingly black artists have depicted Jews (and not just ancient Hebrews), just as Jewish artists have portrayed blacks. Included in this engrossing and pathbreaking volume are some of the most famous African American artists working in the representational style, from Henry Ossawa Tanner—an expatriate in Paris for 46 years—to Aaron Douglas, Romare Bearden, and Jacob Lawrence, and most currently, Jean-Michel Basquiat. Also included are Jewish representational artists who belong on the short list of the best-known Jewish contributors to the nation’s art: Jacob Epstein, Ben Shahn, the three Soyer brothers, William Gropper, Jack Levine, George Segal, Alex Katz, and Philip Pearlstein. (The work of Philip Guston is also analyzed, although none of his works are reproduced; his estate denied permission.) And virtually an entire chapter is devoted to Larry Rivers (né Yitzroch Loiza Grossberg), who crossed the color line so effortlessly that his work has sometimes been classified by black art critics as “black.” (See, for example, Richard J. Powell’s Black Art and Culture in the Twentieth Century [1997].)

On both sides of the ethno-racial divide, the works that are salvaged, assessed, and reproduced in this volume are almost entirely free of caricature, ridicule, or animus. But there is plenty of anger, pity, and sublimity. Any reader seeking to confirm theories of what is authentically black art, or what truly reflects the Jewish spirit, is bound to be frustrated. The works are too variegated to be so straitjacketed, and they are sometimes too ambiguous to serve any programmatic interests. Nevertheless, these “mutual reflections” do not demonstrate parity. “Jewish artists have been more involved with African-American social and racial causes than vice versa,” Heyd claims (p. 210), if only because the black condition has historically been so much more desperate. But unlike Jewish songwriters and performers, whose politics tended to be ill-defined or muted, Jewish painters and sculptors were overwhelmingly progressive, ranging from liberals to Communists. In the 20th century, the most famous exemplar of a politically committed American artist was probably Ben Shahn. But Gropper, who was if anything to Shahn’s left, was just as emphatic in his opposition to racial violence and bigotry, professing to “react, just as Negroes react, because I have felt the same things as a Jew” (quoted on p. 91). As the civil rights movement crested in the 1960s, Guston chaired the art committee of Artists for CORE—the militantly nonviolent Congress for Racial Equality. The Jewish-leftist sentimental and utopian vision of divided peoples coming together culminates in Heyd’s penultimate illustration: in the aftermath of the traumatic Crown Heights riots in Brooklyn, Art Spiegelman’s cover for the New Yorker magazine, titled Valentine’s Day (1993), portrayed a hasidic man kissing a West Indian woman. Such is the intimacy of this pair that they are indeed locked into the inseparable embrace that Cornel West deemed the essence of black-Jewish relations.
Both *A Right to Sing the Blues* and *Mutual Reflections* offer fascinating glimpses of interaction in arts that have been peripheral to American Jewish studies in a way that literature has not been. Although *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation* examines works that are more academically familiar, Emily Miller Budick brings to key texts a flair for nuanced and judicious readings. These “conversations” are a bit more like collisions. For example, there are Irving Howe and Ralph Ellison disagreeing on what black writing should be and who should best define its contours; Norman Mailer, Leslie Fiedler and James Baldwin combating liberal pluralism; the fictional writers Harry Lesser and Willie Spearmint duking it out in Bernard Malamud’s novel *The Tenants* (1971); William Styron, Toni Morrison, and Cynthia Ozick diverging in how they imagine the proper object of suffering in extreme situations.

*Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation* is easier to praise than to summarize. It consists of an analysis of texts that are approached from several angles, above all in juxtaposition to other texts, which Budick tends to interpret as rebuttals and counter-arguments. She highlights the literary and polemical artifacts that reflect a cross-racial relationship that has somehow mattered to the writers themselves; and even if she too acknowledges that “the term ‘alliance’ misstates or overstates the nature of the exchange” (p. 9), the importance of these writers and their texts testifies to the ineluctable influence each group has had upon the other. Budick does not treat novels and short stories in a vacuum, but rather within a charged historical setting that is fundamentally a dispute about power—which, among other things, is defined as the authority and autonomy to define how the experience of the other is to be understood.

Budick’s study is admirably fairminded. Notwithstanding, it cannot completely conceal the asymmetry that dogs this subject. Her Jewish writers are more concerned with the black experience than her black writers are with imagining Jews. In no Ellison or Morrison novel is there a Jewish character, although Alice Walker did make a Jewish civil rights worker, Lynne Rabinowitz, central to *Meridian* (1976); and Chester Himes did devote an entire novel, *Lonely Crusade* (1986), to connections between blacks and Jews. Black characters, at least in cameo roles, are far more likely to crop up in Jewish texts—even if only as figures of danger (as in Saul Bellow’s *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* and Norman Mailer’s *An American Dream*). Nor is there, in metaphoric power, a black fictional counterpart to *The Tenants*. No wonder, then, that Adam Zachary Newton (who thanks and cites Budick) adopts a different strategy in his own monograph, juxtaposing particular works of fiction because of their parallel concerns rather than observing how black and Jewish writers seem to be addressing each other. The two volumes overlap, however, in their consideration of Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) and Ozick’s *The Shawl* (1989), which are both tales of mothers whose daughters are killed—in the first instance, to prevent resubmission to slavery; in the second, as part of the Final Solution. In addition, Newton compares *Invisible Man* (1952) and *Call It Sleep* (1934) because Ralph Ellison and Henry Roth exhibit “a common concern with recognition” (p. 27), whereas Himes’ *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945) and Bellow’s *The Victim* (1947) are contrasted because of the ways in which “space” (as he terms it) is occupied in each novel.

Of all the volumes under review, Newton’s is by far the most esoteric. Unlike Budick’s work, which is finely attuned to the extraliterary debates and the historical circumstances within which texts are constructed, *Facing Black and Jew* is remorse-
lessly grounded in theory—especially the abstractions of Emmanuel Lévinas—and written in an unintelligible style that seems deliberately intended to exclude the serious general reader. The author, it seems, is eager to demonstrate via his texts the applicability of the mandarin fashions that are current in departments of English. But he seems indifferent to their literary merit, the heated public discourse they generated, or the context that makes certain novels and short stories a showcase for considering how two minorities have jockeyed for position within a rambunctious democracy. *Facing Black and Jew* is simply too ethereal to be useful as a guide to the subject of blacks and Jews.

Even culture cannot be spared the passions of politics. Consider, for instance, the essay by Adolph L. Reed, Jr., in *Strangers and Neighbors*, which mentions in passing a furor that occurred nearly two decades ago when a curator was hired to oversee the celebrated collection at New York’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The curator was not only white, but “rumored to be Jewish,” and black nationalists were vehement in their opposition. Reed, a political scientist, locates a double standard: “While the idea of a Jewish Schomburg curator is plausible to the public consciousness . . . appointment of a black director of the Wiesenthal Center or a similar institution devoted to Jewish cultural documentation would seem somehow counterintuitive, if not plainly ludicrous” (p. 730). In fact, there is no double standard. The criteria for hiring public employees is supposed to be meritocratic rather than genetic. The New York Public Library, which sponsors the Schomburg collection, is a public institution supported by tax revenues, and therefore cannot discriminate on the basis of race or religion. The Wiesenthal Center is private (though it, too, cannot discriminate), and also happens to make warnings of the indivisibility of bigotry central to its mission. Nor is there anything ludicrous about insisting upon individual merit in hiring decisions. The chief archivist of the American Jewish Archives is a Gentile; so is the associate director of the American Jewish Historical Society. At the same time, there is a white curator of the famed Amistad collection of African American history in New Orleans, which is also the locale of predominantly black Xavier University, which employs two white archivists (one of whom is Jewish).

The Schomburg controversy mentioned by Reed suggests a final asymmetry that might be considered. The insistence that the archivist be black was more than a fight for patronage: it was also symptomatic of a yearning to define blackness as an ideology springing from biology. Making such a claim was a way of vindicating the separateness of African Americans, who would be able to define themselves, like the Jews, as an “ideological minority,” in the phrase of the Zionist historian Ben Halpern.

The Jews differed historically from black Americans, Halpern argued in 1971, because Judaism in the diaspora has required resistance to utter integration, even when that option is available. Jews had a reason to be separate—and therefore aroused opposition not for who they were, and not primarily for what they looked like, but rather for what they believed and did. They felt historically bound to one another not merely because of outside pressure or persecution, but also because, according to Sa’adiya Gaon, the medieval Babylonian scholar, “our nation is only a nation by reason of its Torah.” The sense of election, Sigmund Freud speculated, gave Jews “a particularly high opinion of themselves”; and such a self-definition as participants in a majestic
and eternal destiny made “them proud and confident.” Such a psychology cannot have come from suffering, although it might make suffering more bearable. Rather, it springs from ideology. Black nationalist thought represents an effort to find its equivalent, a rationale for distinctiveness that can be traced in the experience from the dreaded trans-Atlantic Middle Passage to plantation to ghetto. Are black Americans to be more than what Germans call an *Abstammungsgemeinschaft*—a community of common descent? The palpable decline of racism in recent decades is likely to erode such an effort to find destiny in the past. Here, since the sense of peculiarity and chosenness has manifestly weakened among American Jews as well, there might indeed be parallels and common ground.

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**Notes**

Sand and Iron


Terminating the “52-year conflict” in the Middle East was the theme of the July 2000 conference in Camp David sponsored by the Clinton administration, whose strategists had declared the dispute ripe for resolution. The outcome of this conference has now become part of the thickening Middle East chronicle of dismissed opportunities. It is worth taking a closer look at the subjective, remarkably constricted and therefore blatantly misleading half-century time frame adopted by various actors in U.S. peace efforts. For there is no more telling indictment of conventional wisdom’s pernicious hold on peacemaking than the repeated reference to the “52-year conflict” in official summit statements and postmortems.

Do we really need to be sensitized to the fact that 1948 only marks America’s freshman introduction to the complexities and perplexities of Palestine? Must we still be prompted to acknowledge that the seemingly interminable “one long war” between Arab and Jewish nationalism has been going on for at least twice 52 years? Or that Arab-Jewish competition for the dubious distinction of Most Victimized and Aggrieved Party, together with their mutually exclusive claims to entitlement over spiritual as well as temporal Jerusalem, represent core issues too ingrained to be dispensed with in a mere 14 days of high-intensity diplomacy?

Apparently so, judging from the inflated expectations and superficial analyses rendered both by presumably seasoned “Middle East hands” and by otherwise sophisticated media commentators who surely ought to know better. Arab-Israeli peacemaking efforts show that there are no easy “win-win” answers, neither quick fixes nor procedural shortcuts. This timely and evidently timeless reminder is the principal service offered by Avi Shlaim, Sasson Sofer, and the Karshes, Efraim and Inari: four authors with three notably dissimilar books and different, even contradictory emphases, who nonetheless complement one another in highlighting the infelicitous chemistry and physics underpinning Israel’s encounter with the Middle East.

Viewed sequentially, the Karshes supply the fin de siècle regional backdrop—the vacuum left in the wake of the Ottoman empire’s demise at the end of the First World War—against which the initial confrontation between Arabs and Jews took place. Sofer’s scholarly treatise treats the political environment of competing imperial am-
bitions (European versus Arab) that posed a real-life test for Zionist thinkers who were philosophically more inclined to put their energies into debating first principles for a Jewish “reorientation toward the nations.” Shlaim continues this theme of simultaneous, overlapping battles at multiple levels (between external Great Powers and local Arab power brokers, between Israel and the Arab world, and between Jewish power and Jewish principle) as he traces the chronology of collision into the contemporary era, up to the threshold of the most recent Camp David conference.

In one sense, historiography (to alter the aphorism) makes for strange bedfellows. Efraim Karsh and Avi Shlaim, both of them expatriate Israelis residing in England, have had several public skirmishes in recent years in which they have faced off in an uncommonly adversarial and polemical fashion. Apart from differing sharply on the matter of the historian’s craft, they hold strongly varying opinions on the degree of Israel’s culpability for the consequences of the 1948 conflict. Thus in his 1997 study, Fabricating Israeli History: The ‘New Historians,’ Karsh singles out Shlaim, along with Benny Morris and Ilan Pappe, for particular censure, accusing them of sacrificing studied objectivity and the careful use of documented archival sources in their rush to harshly judge Zionist intentions. Simultaneous publication of the Karshes’ and Shlaim’s respective new books now finds these self-styled agents provocateurs equally matched and, to some extent, occupying common ground—albeit moving in somewhat different directions. In this latest work, Efraim Karsh (together with his wife/co-author) moves backward in time, himself now hell-bent on revisionism; whereas Shlaim heads forward to the present, presenting his case somewhat less categorically than usual.

Both books, to be sure, are profoundly biased. Whereas the Karshes dislike the Arab Middle East, Shlaim is consumed by criticism of Israel and its leaders. Yet these authors have a similar aim: to upset standard historical interpretations about what ails the modern Middle East. Both books give greater weight to individuals than to political forces, and neither is reticent in pointing an accusatory finger at those leaders who have made a critical difference . . . always for the worst.

In Empires in the Sand, the Karshes offer a direct counter to the overdrawn critique of another scholar, Edward Said, who castigated “the West” for its “Orientalism,” that is, for misrepresenting and subjugating the Arab world, both physically and culturally. Taking issue with the commonplace that Middle Eastern social and political instability can be traced back to a single source—European rapaciousness—the Karshes argue that violence and fragmentation were no import from Europe. Nor, for that matter, were they attributable to Zionism. Rather, they were “an integral part of the region’s political culture well before the area’s occupation by the European powers” and a function of the Middle East’s own “millenarian imperial tradition,” such that “in this respect, Europe has had little to teach the Middle East” (pp. 348–349).

The Karshes are far from suggesting that England and France were driven by noble motives. They neither condone these nations’ interference nor absolve them (and, in the same vein, the United States and the Soviet Union) of responsibility for at least some of the region’s misfortunes. At the same time, they shift much of the onus onto the local actors. In this the Karshes follow in the authoritative footsteps of Elie Kedourie, Bernard Lewis, Fouad Ajami, and David Fromkin, who also provide a
healthy antidote to western, American (and lately, Israeli) self-effacement. In the Karshes’ view, “had the Western powers kept out of Middle Eastern affairs . . . allowing local forces to run their course, the region would most likely have been transformed into a volatile amalgam of numerous small fiefdoms and kingdoms, mostly antagonistic to one another” (p. 354).

Consistent with this interpretation, the authors come down hard on the excesses of pan-Arabism and anti-western Arab nationalism. Yet their harshest criticism is reserved for the false hopes spread (concurrent with the Balfour Declaration of 1917) by a Hashemite dynasty whose founder, Hussein of Mecca, “represented little more than himself” (p. 349). More specifically, the Karshes fault Hussein for being an “imperialist aspirant” who discarded Ottomanism not for the high ideals of Arabism but rather for the “self-serving cause of ‘Hashemism’” (pp. 185–186).

What this historical argument does not take into account is the dilemma confronting Zionist (and later, Israeli) policymakers. Faced with the Arabs’ “iron wall” of rejectionism, successive leaders opted for the realistic strategy of tacit cooperation with “Hashemism,” as embodied first in Amir Abdullah (Hussein’s son) and later in Abdullah’s grandson, the late King Hussein. Is this to be viewed as commendable pragmatism? The Karshes do not get us that far (ending the book in 1923), but Shlaim certainly does not view the matter in this light. In an earlier work, he accused David Ben-Gurion of nothing less than “collusion across the Jordan.” His latest work offers more of the same.

If Shlaim’s *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* is any indication, the wave of iconoclastic Israeli revisionist history by indignant “new historians” may be cresting. Not so, however, the parallel school of postmodern, post-Zionist, and quintessentially post-Jewish “new sociologists,” whose adherents’ determined crusade on behalf of Israeli atonement for past injustices vis-à-vis the Arabs of Palestine goes on unabated.

Shlaim appears to have made his peace with Israel as a state entity, here concentrating his arrows more selectively at Israeli leaders who commit the unpardonable sins of a) standing firm, and b) insisting on seeing only worst-case scenarios—thus refusing, shortsightedly, to accept peace at any price. Like the Karshes, Shlaim parsimoniously subordinates larger historical forces and processes to the dominant role of individuals and personality. His cast of villains, however, is different. Whereas the Karshes see the Hashemites of Jordan as the chief culprits, Shlaim looks to the Jewish side, pinning the original blame on two men generally viewed as ideological opponents: David Ben-Gurion and Vladimir Ze’ev Jabotinsky. In Shlaim’s view, Ben-Gurion essentially converted into national policy a notion first broached by Jabotinsky in 1923—namely, that the correct response to Arab rejectionism was to hold out behind an “iron wall” of security. In so doing, Shlaim charges, successive Israeli leaders squandered numerous opportunities for a peaceful settlement with the Arabs.

Apart from Ben-Gurion (castigated in earlier works by Shlaim both for projecting toughness and for implicitly endorsing ethnic cleansing during the War of Independence), Shlaim’s “rogues’ gallery” includes later figures such as “Arab fighter” Moshe Dayan, “symbol of a whole generation of Israeli activists,” who insisted on “establishing rules of what was permissible and what was forbidden” (p. 103) in the armed truce between Israel and its Arab neighbors (as if responsible states are not expected.
to explicate what they regard as their casus belli). Predictably, Shlaim also denounces Menachem Begin for “his mistrust of all non-Jews, including the Arabs”; Yitzhak Shamir, “a man who systematically subverted every initiative to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Arabs during his tenure”; Binyamin Netanyahu, “the destroyer of dreams,” who “reverted to rejectionism with a vengeance”; and, until he saw the light and sought to transcend the “iron wall” via Oslo, Yitzhak Rabin.

Shlaim is certainly entitled, as a historian, to go beyond the mere reporting of events and to offer his own evaluations. Unacceptable, however, is his decidedly one-sided presentation of Israel and the Arab world. When Yasser Arafat, PLO “Jew fighters,” and Hamas “destroyers of dreams” are not given at least equal billing in the apportioning of blame, then representation shades into misrepresentation. It is not sufficient to state, as Shlaim does at the outset, that the emphasis throughout will be on “Israeli perceptions, Israeli attitudes, Israeli thinking, and Israeli behavior in the conflict” (p. xii). I submit that this one-dimensional approach is untenable methodologically and indefensible as historiography. Israel’s Palestine tragedy, let us be clear, is not self-inflicted. It is fair (as we shall see) for Sasson Sofer to dig conscientiously into the foundations of Zionist debate over policy—gravitating between two poles (Shlaim’s “retaliation and negotiation”)—but in truth, Israel has not been merely debating or wrestling with itself. Rather, it has always been engaged in an interactive pattern of conflict with its Arab protagonists. There is more than enough guilt to go around on both sides.

What possible value lies in pronouncing Israel “more intransigent” and bearing a “larger share” of blame, whereas “individual Arab states had less freedom of action”? Or, when treating the Palestinian refugee problem, asserting that “the collective position of the Arab League was based not on political expediency but on principle?” (p. 50). By what comparative yardstick do historians measure intransigence and apportion responsibility? When is one side’s principle another’s rigidity? How much validity, or peacemaking utility, can there be in censuring “the unsentimental realpolitik approach” (p. 47) dictating Israel’s conduct during the first Arab-Israeli war without asking, for the sake of balance, precisely how much sentimentalism and Kantian idealism was shown by Arab leaders then or since?

In this sense, Shlaim’s proven skills as an articulate historian are offset by his ideological predisposition in favor of Israeli appeasement and his disappointment with the historic course the Jewish state has taken. Shlaim’s argumentation is also biased by the fact that, whereas he prides himself on his use of archival documentation, he ignores the reality that source material for the Arab side is either nonexistent or inaccessible. (Moreover, the incriminating “evidence” for Israeli misdeeds over the last four decades thins out in the book’s later chapters; as Shlaim confesses, “I was able to consult Israeli documents only up to the mid-1960s” [p. xiii]).

To partly compensate for these shortcomings, Shlaim might have availed himself of the rich literature on the dynamics of conflict and conflict resolution, which most often posits a two-player paradigm. For it is the spiral of reciprocal missteps and misperceptions, the interlocking “tit-for-tat” pattern of action-reaction that—in the absence of goodwill, open lines of communications, and genuine cooperation—set Israelis and Palestinians on a bloody collision course.
Of the three books under review, I am willing to hazard that Sasson Sofer’s in-depth study of early Zionist attitudes toward worldly politics will prove to be the most enduring. Despite being somewhat abstruse and repetitive, *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy* is a worthy companion piece both to Arthur Hertzberg’s insightful introductory essay to *The Zionist Idea* (1959) and to Ben Halpern’s classic *The Idea of the Jewish State* (1961). Like them, Sofer deals with the internal Jewish-Zionist war of ideas, but he focuses his gaze on the wider diplomatic arena, showing how early ideas gradually evolved into the underpinning of Israeli foreign policy.

One of the most exciting and rewarding transformations wrought by modern political Zionism was the renewed opportunity for a sovereign Jewish polity to play “the game of nations.” Inspired by this prospect, early Zionist thinkers, beginning with Theodor Herzl, ardently debated among themselves what was the ideal course to adopt in foreign affairs. Their arguments—ideological in bent and anchored in ancient biblical, midrashic, and talmudic texts—were often hard to follow for anyone not adept at pilpulism. To his credit, Sofer, a professor of international relations at the Hebrew University, makes the debates both intelligible and pertinent.

Precisely because he lays no claim to being intentionally provocative, Sofer succeeds in provoking serious thought. He engages the reader in a quest for linkages uniting the socialist Zionist and rival Revisionist political traditions of the 1920s and 1930s (in the process devoting an entire chapter to Jabotinsky’s “iron wall” strategy) with the more modern-day duality apparent in Israeli strategy, which oscillates between flexibility in negotiating and a propensity for compromise (perhaps best exemplified by Shimon Peres and Yossi Beilin) and the far less forthcoming policies of leaders such as Yitzhak Shamir.

In real-life foreign affairs, as in life in general, the philosophical coexists with the political, the ideal gives way to the possible, and thinkers share the arena with more pragmatic doers. Taken together, these three books provide a similarly complex view of their common subject matter. The Karshes return us to Middle East realities and uncertainties. Sasson Sofer categorizes the soul-searching and indecision at the ideational level of Israeli decision-making, underscoring as well the decisive role of men of action in breaking through seemingly paralyzing and often deadly impasses. And Avi Shlaim reminds us of the harsh sentence often handed out to those who dare to take a strong stance on security—not necessarily by history, but by this particular historian. The value of reading all three works is the greater perspective and deeper understanding that is gained. Surely the striving for such perspective is a prerequisite for any intellectual or diplomatic peacemaking attempt in Palestine.

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Jews, Intellectuals, and the Dreyfus Affair


The new cultural history that has been on the ascent during the last decade emphasizes not so much what happened and to whom (political history), nor even why and how it happened (social history), but what its meaning was at the time and subsequently. Notwithstanding the vast historiography on the Dreyfus affair, these three books offer new insights—not necessarily through rearguing the facts of the case or reviewing the economic, social, or political dimensions of the era, but rather through an examination of its cultural history. The cultural history undertaken in these volumes discusses different questions than have previously been posed: What defines French identity and how was this contested in the fin de siècle? How did French Jews negotiate their double allegiance to their *francité* and their *judeïté*? What were the different political, social, and cultural currents that influenced individual intellectual choices, and how did the outcome of the Dreyfus affair shape subsequent movements? What were the epistemological rubrics that forged how intellectuals determined the “truth” of the unfolding saga? How was the Dreyfus affair perceived in national contexts beyond France? What was the larger social discourse within which the events themselves were debated, and to what extent was the same discourse shared by both sides? And finally, was the Dreyfus affair a foil for the French to negotiate their entrance into modernity?

At their best, through examining the politics of culture and the culture of politics reciprocally, the three books under review provide illuminating responses to these questions. They thereby contribute to a more multifaceted and ultimately more profound appreciation of why the Dreyfus affair continues to haunt the French and Jewish imagination as the *lieux de mémoire* that served as a dress rehearsal for the 20th century and at the same time defined the agons of a new modern intellectual consciousness.

Venita Datta, associate professor of French at Wellesley College, has written an outstanding first book. She discusses the emergence of the French intellectual both as “a symbol of a modern, democratic, and secular society” (p. 1) and in terms of the struggle to create that society during the Third Republic. While many studies treat the Dreyfus affair as the point of departure that shaped the modern French intellectual,
Datta focuses on the literary avant-garde to elucidate the processes that enabled intellectuals self-consciously to establish themselves as the mediators for the meaning of French modernity.

The major contribution of Datta’s book is that in historicizing the genesis of the French intellectual, she carefully interrogates the polemical oppositions that crystallized in the midst of the Dreyfus affair and that are often reiterated in the work of historians: republican versus monarchist; secular versus religious; progressive versus reactionary; truth versus ideology; the military and the Church’s desire for an organic, hierarchical, aristocratic, Catholic, and traditional social order, as opposed to the Third Republic’s recasting of the democratic ideas and ideals of the French Revolution.

Datta makes this contribution on methodological grounds by skillfully negotiating two approaches to the intellectual culture she historicizes; in so doing, she makes a significant contribution to both. In drawing upon the historical sociology of the intellectual in works such as Regis Debray’s *Le Pouvoir intellectuel en France* (1979) and Christophe Charle’s *Naissance des “intellectuels”* (1990), Datta questions the sometimes stark oppositions that characterize their conclusions about the groups that confronted one another in the course of the affair: the “battle between the university and ‘French literature,’” between the Left Bank and the Right Bank, the provinces and Paris, the scholarship men and the inheritors” and between “the literary avant-garde vs the literary establishment . . . the newer disciplines vs older disciplines, the younger generation vs the older generation” (p. 6). She shows that emphasizing these bifurcations “neglects the diversity within each group as well as the common beliefs—or at the very least—common vocabulary shared by both sides” (pp. 183–184). Datta’s questioning of these dichotomies comes from her training as a historian of French culture and is based on her widespread quotations from the literature and political commentaries of intellectuals. Rather than stressing the antinomies between Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards, she elucidates their shared discourse and sociocultural framework.

In her first two chapters, Datta writes the collective intellectual biography of the “generation of 1890,” showing that the avant-garde intellectuals of the Left and Right were formed by the same institutions and experiences and shared many ideas in common. They converged in their opposition to the political and literary establishment, in their need to negotiate the vicissitudes of the new literary marketplace, and in their scorn for the bourgeoisie. These writers met one another in the centralized intellectual milieu of Paris by attending the same schools, often as early as their elite lycées (Henri IV, Louis-le Grand, Condorcet), or later in the republican universities (Sorbonne) or at the École Normale Supérieure. They met in cafés, through family relations, or through the various literary journals to which they contributed.

Datta maintains that “the young men of 1890 were France’s first republican generation as well as the children of the defeat, the first generation to come of age in a Europe no longer dominated by France” (p. 42), and that their shared generational experience was expressed using a similar cultural syntax. The crisis of French cultural identity created by the Franco-Prussian war, France’s specific route through the second industrial revolution, the rise of mass democracy, the growth of cities, and the success of France’s new “state Jews” (who became visible markers of the changes wrought by modernity) was put into relief when French intellectuals reflected on
themselves in opposition to Germany. They were preoccupied with their own demo-
graphic decline, which they perceived as a symptom of French decadence, and they
shared an organicist and medical discourse in describing their degeneration. They
were obsessed with these social questions and with defending the body politic.

Datta’s subsequent chapters reveal what will seem to some a surprising conver-
genence between the nationalist discourse of republicans and that of the Right as they
waged a polemic over la nation and la patrie. Both those who became Dreyfusards
and those who became anti-Dreyfusards were elitist: they defended heroism and male
codes of honor, used organicist metaphors, and converged in the extent to which
Jewish difference was ultimately excluded from their conceptions of the nation. Datta
draws on the work of Robert Nye, George Mosse, Edward Berenson, and Karen Offen
on nationalism and sexuality. She examines the cult of heroism shared by both sides
and emphasizes that each celebrated the masculine ideals of action, self-control, scorn
of danger, service for the common good, honor and duty, discipline, and sacrifice. In
comparing the heroizing of Emile Zola and Colonel Picquart on the one side, with
Colonel Henry on the other, Datta indicates that while the vocabulary and ideals re-
garding the hero were the same, “a real man” for the Dreyfusards “was one who
obeyed his conscience, even if it meant defying authority” (p. 151).

Thus, what was significant to the Dreyfusards was moral courage, while “the shed-
ding of blood seemed to be of primordial importance to anti-Dreyfusards.” These two
visions of the hero, synecdochically represented by “the sword or the pen,” corre-
sponded to differences in their ideas of the essence of France: “The physical bond
forged between anti-Dreyfusard heroes and the nation distinguished them from their
Dreyfusard counterparts, who viewed the nation less as a physical entity than as an
idea” (p. 160). In her discussion of “Individualism and Solidarity,” Datta traces
the history of these fluid terms, showing that Dreyfusards such as Emile Durkheim and
Jean Jaurès, and anti-Dreyfusards such as Maurice Barrès and Ferdinand Brunetière,
shared an affinity for organicist discourse and were critical of the notion that any kind
of abstract “individual” existed prior to society. Where they ultimately differed was
on the issue of whether France should be open or exclusive with respect to foreign-
ners and foreign influence.

Datta’s central chapter, “The Jew as Intellectual and the Intellectual as Jew,” dis-
closes both the strengths and the shortcomings of her book. She makes an important
contribution by linking the emergence of the French intellectual to the “Jewish
Question” and explicating how both were “inextricably linked to the issue of national
identity not only because the Republic and the integration of Jews in it were seen as
alien to a French, Catholic tradition by antisemites, but also because assimilated
Jewish intellectuals themselves helped to propagate the republican, Revolutionary vi-
sion of national identity” (p. 116). Datta argues that increasing antisemitism in France
from the 1880s was linked to the rise of “state intellectuals” (that is, university pro-
fessors—including some Jews) who were a symbol of a modern, democratic society.
“For Jews,” Datta notes, “the modernist intellectual was a way to escape their mar-
ginality; for neo-traditionalists, this figure was a symbol of a new order which threat-
ened to marginalize them” (p. 87).

In examining “the Jew as intellectual” through the writings of Durkheim, Bernard
Lazare, Léon Blum, and Julien Benda, she shows how these “assimilated Jews” as-
sociated themselves with the new, universalist model as a means of reconciling their Jewish heritage with the values associated with the modern intellectual. Datta examines the “inherent contradictions” between this Jewish identification and the republican model of assimilation and explores how the positions of these Jewish intellectuals had “discursive parallels with certain antisemitic formulations” (p. 87). However, these insights are limited by the methodological approach of the book as a whole, since Datta’s wide-ranging analysis ultimately depends upon culling from texts. This approach does not permit close reading and exploration of the subtleties that are afforded by the consideration of each figure she assesses individually, to see how each fits into the wider cultural context.

The shortcomings of Datta’s analysis are made evident in the differences between her depiction of Durkheim as the model of the state intellectual and Ivan Strenski’s exploration of Durkheim’s Jewishness in *Durkheim and the Jews of France*. Specifically discussing the Jewish intellectuals associated with *La Revue blanche*, Datta suggests that

> they were both attracted to and repelled by the traditions of Judaism. They faced the dilemma of all secular Jews: of reclaiming the cultural aspects of their heritage while rejecting its religious character. On the one hand, they drew strength from an abstract, intellectual vision of Judaism in harmony with their universal, republican beliefs. Yet as anticlericals and modernists, they were repulsed by Judaism’s religious practices and rites, which they viewed as backward and even barbaric. (p. 114)

Strenski, professor of religious studies at the University of California, Riverside, and the author of three previous books on theories of myth and religion, provides a more nuanced understanding of secular or assimilated Jews in the fin de siècle. Although his interpretation of Durkheim’s *judeïté* is a polemic against any notion of “essential Jewishness” (and the essential Jewishness of Durkheim’s thought in particular), he uses this notion as a wedge to engage in an historical examination of the “argumentative context” in which Durkheim’s understanding of religion must be considered.

Essentialists contend that Durkheim was “guided by some sense of original and essential ethnic and religious Jewish roots” (p. 6). Against this position, Strenski makes the important methodological and historical point that there is no essential Idea of Judaism behind history and that essentialism is tautological, hypostatizing Judaism and Jewishness into an ideal construct or type. Rather than an essential Jewishness, Strenski argues that Jewishness is something learned, negotiated, and practiced. He prefers to speak of “routes taken” rather than roots that determine identity, and he examines the construction of Jewishness within the social circumstances of individuals. His book is primarily an exploration of the French Jewish interlocutors who shaped the Durkheimian understanding of religion.

While not elegantly written, Strenski’s book is clearly structured. Each chapter is animated by Strenski’s search for the Jewishness and Judaism of real Jews in Durkheim’s time. Thus, the book focuses as much on some members of the group of scholars around Durkheim as on Durkheim himself. Strenski begins with a consideration of the sociological nature of Durkheimian thought, rejecting the notion that sociology was a “Jewish science” or a “Jewish sect” that derived from essential Jewish qual-
ities—whether familial, tribal, or collectivist. He contends that the Paris Jewry of Durkheim’s acquaintance was not particularly disposed to collectivism. Rather, Strenski argues, Durkheim’s societism was part of the rise of French and Jewish nationalism and emerged in response to the antisemitism that would crystallize in the Dreyfus affair. Clearly not intended for the uninitiated, this book offers no discussion of the development of Durkheim’s societism and its major concepts, nor how they changed through time, nor what the differences are within the Durkheimian équipe. It merely presents the Durkheimians’ relations with other Jewish intellectuals who favored a societist conception of religion and discusses how Durkheim was influenced by solidarity, socialism, French progressive thought, and German social thought. Strenski’s discussion of the wider contextual influences on Durkheim is certainly enriched by Datta and other French cultural historians’ more probing examination of these currents.

As delineated by Strenski, the Durkheimians’ views can be seen as part of a wider fin de siècle discussion among Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish modernists on the question of whether all religion was symbolic and founded upon the basis of social relations. “Modernists or liberals, whether religious or secular, Gentile, Jewish, or Durkheimian, generally stood for certain closely related fundamentals,” he writes: “the primacy of science, the belief in social evolution and the possibilities of progressive reform, opposition to religious literalism and ritualism, the adoption of symbolist modes of interpreting religious doctrines and scriptures, and the development of nontheistic, impersonal conceptions of the focus of religious life” (pp. 61–62). To establish this position, Strenski elucidates some of the major exponents of religious modernism, helping to rescue from relative obscurity those who contributed to this position within the Jewish community, in particular Joseph Salvador, James Darmester, Louis-Germain Lévy, and (discussed at greater length) the better known Salmon Reinach. Strenski’s exposition of these Jewish reformers confirms Datta’s conclusions about Jewish modernists, even with respect to Durkheim.

However, Strenski’s interesting chapter on “How Durkheim Read the Talmud” gives pause to Datta’s broader conclusions. According to Strenski, the Durkheimians were influenced by the talmudic scholar Israël Lévi and consequently rejected the modernist Jewish critique of talmudic and rabbinic Judaism, celebrating ritualism instead as the key to understanding religion. Strenski also outlines the “historical and ideological bonds linking Durkheimian scholarship and the approach to Judaism practiced by the French heirs to the Wissenschaft des Judentums” (p. 90), thus making it clear that Durkheimians also opposed a similar criticism of Judaism on the part of political antisemites such as Edouard Drumont and scholarly antisemites such as Paul de Lagarde and Julius Wellhausen. The links that Strenski establishes between the leading Jewish scholars of his time and the Durkheimians’ understanding of religion are continued in the final chapter, which documents the influence of the work of Sylvain Lévi, a Jewish scholar of Indian civilization, on Marcel Mauss (Durkheim’s nephew and close colleague). According to Strenski, “the Durkheimians’ societist conception of religion as a concrete ‘thing,’ their ritualism, and their positive and palpable idea of the sacred all point to origins in Lévi’s Indology and thus in his specific concerns about the integrity of Judaism” (p. 131). Strenski’s analysis of Durkheim’s Jewishness confirms some of Datta’s general conclusions but reveals the greater com-
plexity of his relationship to the Jewish community and to the group of avant-garde Jewish scholars who informed the Durkheimians’ work.

If Datta’s work explicates the broad strokes of the cultural context and Strenski’s analysis of Durkheim’s Jewishness highlights the importance of understanding in more detailed fashion each of the major characters in the era of Dreyfus, then *Les intellectuels face à l’affaire Dreyfus alors et aujourd’hui* offers a tableau of many of these individuals and traces the heritage of the Dreyfus affair from its own time to ours. The book, an outcome of a conference held in 1994 at Bar-Ilan University, brings together mainly French and Israeli scholars.

The first part of this collection discusses perceptions of the Dreyfus affair in its own time by the French; some Jewish reactions to the events; and analyses of the affair outside France. Articles on the last topic, which until recently received scant historiographic attention, include a muddled assessment of the influence of French antisemitism on German antisemitism by Walter Zwi Bacharach; Leonid Preisman’s examination of public opinion in Russia; an engaging article by Bat-Ami Zucker on the response of African American intellectuals to the affair; and a piece by Shaul Schayik on how the Dreyfus affair was depicted in the Arab press.

Several other articles in the first section offer perceptive interpretations of one or more of the affair’s important participants. Robert Wistrich’s erudition is once again evident in his portraits of “Three Dreyfusard Heroes: Lazare, Zola and Clemenceau.” Unlike Datta, who historicizes the very heroizing of the key protagonists in the affair, Wistrich reclaims these figures as historical examples. Lazare is seen as a “conscious Jewish outcast . . . drawing the strength for national emancipation from that knowledge” (p. 41). Zola, who, as Wistrich shows, was often depicted at the time as a secularized Christ, sacrificed his personal ambition in the name of his ideals; whereas Clemenceau represented the struggle to achieve equality before the law.

Alain Pagès offers an acute discussion of Zola’s response to the “Jewish Question” in which he identifies five stages in Zola’s evolving confrontation with antisemitism. Missing in this piece, however, is a critical appraisal of the limits of Zola’s universalist humanism and his advocacy of a policy of assimilation that ultimately excluded differences—and in particular, Jewish difference. Danielle Delmaire presents a careful, balanced assessment of the role of French Catholic intellectuals, arguing persuasively against the idea that the French Catholic clergy (and French Catholics generally) were monolithically antisemitic and anti-Dreyfusard.

Jacques Kornberg’s essay tackles the Zionist myth—constructed, he argues, by Theodor Herzl himself—that the Dreyfus trial marked the moment of Herzl’s awakening from assimilationist slumber. According to Kornberg, Herzl understood the power of myth and symbol in the rising mass politics of the fin de siècle and understood, moreover, the emotive power of juxtaposing the origins of the Zionist movement with the Dreyfus affair. As Phyllis Cohen Albert and Michael Marrus have both shown, France was the modern symbolic site of emancipation; hence, widespread antisemitism in the heart of liberal Europe shattered the illusions of those who believed in the emancipationist social contract.

In the second part of *Les intellectuels face à l’affaire Dreyfus*, focusing on the 20th century, the Dreyfus affair is discussed as a *lieu de mémoire*. Several articles assess
the effects of the affair on the Right and on the Left. David Ohana’s fine article, for instance, delineates how Dreyfus “was a crossroads for [Georges] Sorel,” who “had always been seeking a vital spirit that would revive French and European civilization” (p. 204). In the course of the affair, Sorel came to find this spirit in nationalism rather than within his spiritualized Marxist myth of a general strike. Richard Griffiths examines the Right’s distinction between intelligence (which they prized), and the intellectuals’ alleged perversion of what was unique about French intelligence. This distinction is then correlated with Maurice Barrès’ relativist epistemology and its relation to his political stance.

In an essay by Ilan Greilsammer, Barrès’ epistemological perspective is shown to contrast sharply with a pronounced theme of Léon Blum’s *Souvenirs de l’affaire* (1935), wherein Blum contended that the Dreyfusards held to a naive and positivist conception of truth that they believed would eventually open the eyes of the anti-Dreyfusards. Greilsammer also demonstrates that, while the Dreyfus affair marked an ideological turning point in Blum’s life in that he stopped following Barrès, turning instead to Jaurès, the two men continued to have an amicable personal relationship, as evidenced in their correspondence.

This essay is followed by an assessment of the Dreyfus affair in the literature of Proust offered by Juliette Hassine, with Evelyne Meron contributing a parallel piece on Martin du Gard’s *Jean Barois*. Georges-Elia Sarfati examines how the affair is presented in French dictionaries and encyclopedias. Roselyne Koren, for her part, surveys a wide range of recent texts that exploit the affair as an “obligatory reference” for a diversity of situations that are understood, in one way or another, to be analogous. Exploring the limits of association, Koren shows how the Dreyfus affair is posited as the paradigm for all political affairs, especially “Franco-French” conflicts and, more generally, as a matrix for certain “essential aspects of modernity” (p. 280). The final section of the book consists of two essays detailing the principles of civic engagement that underpinned the intellectuals’ intervention at the time of the Dreyfus affair, the first by Guy Haarscher and the second by Louis Bodin—the latter, one of the first scholars to historicize the role of the intellectual in France.

Indeed, the differences between Bodin’s pioneering work, *Les Intellectuels*, published in 1964, and Datta’s more recent work clearly evince the historiographic evolution of the past four decades in assessing the interrelations of Jews, intellectuals, and the Dreyfus affair. Taken together, these three books present a complex tableau of the cultural context of the Dreyfusard era, with engaging portraits of some of its most renowned personalities. The reader is thereby invited to participate in uncovering the archaeology of meaning that constitutes the Dreyfus affair even as these works contribute another layer of significance.

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The Decline and Rise of German Antisemitism


One of the most flourishing areas of historical research in Germany today is that concerning German Jewry. Included in this broad topic, of course, is the path taken by German society toward the ultimate Final Solution, about which many thought-provoking studies have been published.1 Another key subject is antisemitism in the period before the rise of the Nazis. Several factors have contributed to increased scholarly interest in this phenomenon: the archival discoveries in Eastern Europe, which have caused a reevaluation of traditional lines of research and historical approaches; the rise of a new generation of scholars, who are investigating both the Third Reich and German antisemitism without ideological or emotional preconceptions or inhibitions; and finally, the storm surrounding Daniel J. Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (1995). At a time when Holocaust studies were becoming increasingly preoccupied with functional, structural explanations of the Final Solution, Goldhagen’s enormously successful book—although faulted on a number of methodological grounds—argued strenuously that the roots of the Holocaust were to be found in historic German antisemitism.2

Through a survey of a number of recent studies, this essay seeks first to examine the roots of German antisemitism from the 19th century onwards, and then to determine what were its consequences in the Third Reich.

The outstanding feature of 19th-century German antisemitism was its provincial character, as the works by Ulrich Baumann and Stefan Scheil demonstrate.3 Both authors take as their starting point the complexity of 19th-century German society, which,
perhaps more than other European societies, was marked by profound geographical, cultural, religious, and political divisions. Such cultural fragmentation makes it difficult to determine what, if anything, can be defined as “German”—hence, one cannot speak of a uniform German antisemitism. However, antisemitism did flourish in various local versions, its proponents tending to be members of social groups who could in some way benefit from anti-Jewish sentiment. Such local antisemitism was common in the 1880s and 1890s, as Baumann shows for the South Baden region and as Scheil, basing himself on electoral results, finds for Germany as a whole.

Historians generally adopt one of two approaches in seeking to characterize German antisemitism, viewing it either as a socioeconomic phenomenon or as a political-cultural code of behavior. In the books under review, the latter approach is mainly represented by Scheil, Blaschke, Kaplan, and Walter. But Baumann, following the seminal works by Moshe Zimmerman, Werner Jochmann, and Shulamit Volkov, argues that the rapid social and economic changes experienced by Germany in the last third of the 19th century contributed to the rise of a modern form of antisemitism. This new antisemitism was different from the racial antisemitism that was a relatively marginal phenomenon in German society. Baumann shows that many villagers in the southern part of the Grand Duchy of Baden were proponents of this form of antisemitism. Such villagers were mainly peasants and artisans who had suffered from the effects of the industrial revolution and who thus directed their resentment against those, like the Jews, who played a major role in the local economy and the local cultural scene—in the social life of local associations (Vereinsleben), in particular. According to Baumann’s analysis, modern German antisemitism was really an anti-modern and anti-industrial phenomenon.

Baumann fails to answer various questions—for instance, why was it precisely these villagers who linked themselves to the old-new ideological phenomenon of antisemitism, whereas others hurt by capitalism and industrialization (such as the workers of Hamburg and the peasants of the Rhineland) expressed relatively little hostility toward Jews? And why was the phenomenon more marked in certain villages and towns in south Baden, such as Ihringen, Lahr, or Müllheim? In other words, what factors limited this form of antisemitism in Baden? Why did it not become a more widespread phenomenon, as was the Protestant hatred of Catholics in all parts of Germany (especially in the mixed communities of South Baden during the period under investigation by Baumann)? To be fair, such questions do not reflect the main thrust of Baumann’s book, which concentrates mainly on personal relations between Christians and Jews. According to Baumann, until the 1930s, such relations were generally unmarked by antisemitism.

As noted, the second view of German antisemitism perceives it mainly as a kind of cultural code. In this more bourgeois manifestation, intellectuals who were not economically affected by industrialization nonetheless felt threatened by the growing power of materialistic Jewish values. In their case, antisemitism was part of an attempt to preserve social and cultural hegemony of the bourgeoisie.

Olaf Blaschke’s pioneering work focuses not on German Protestants—whose antisemitism is well-researched—but rather on the Catholic minority. According to Blaschke, Catholic antisemitism was a complex phenomenon that existed in two basic forms: “bad” and “good.” Racial antisemitism, he shows, was considered un-
Christian or even anti-Christian, as opposed to the “authentically Catholic” anti-semitism, which was simply a defense against what was seen as the superior power of the Jews. Blaschke explains that such antisemitism was subsumed under ultramontanism, the conservative ideology of the Catholic church throughout the 19th century. In effect, it was a defensive strategy against modernity, which Catholics believed it was their supreme duty to oppose. Thus Blaschke sees a direct connection between anti-modernity, Catholic parochialism, and antisemitic tendencies—all of which were preconditions that paved the way for an acceptance of Auschwitz. However, unlike Goldhagen, he does not believe that Catholics were characterized by antisemitic racial fanaticism, nor that they supported the extermination of the Jews. Their preferred solution to the “Jewish problem” was a Catholic community in which the Jews would be allowed to reside, without being given citizenship or full civil rights.

The Catholic antisemitism analyzed in Blaschke’s study was also a phenomenon of the periphery. It was widespread mainly in rural Catholic Germany and in Catholic popular culture. Many middle-class Catholics, as well as Catholic members of Parliament and high-ranking officials, rejected this kind of thinking, as evidenced by the increasing support for the Catholic Center Party (which itself was moving toward a more liberal and tolerant position) at the beginning of the 20th century. More important is the question of whether the Jews really were the chief focal point of Catholic animosity. Here Blaschke misses the chance to make an important point: in South and West Germany where most Catholics lived, anti-Protestant cultural sentiments were more developed than were anti-Jewish sentiments. Catholic thinking in this regard was centered on local cultural phenomena such as saints, customs, religious books, almanacs, and penny pamphlets. For this Catholic audience, the words in bold print evoked a whole series of social, cultural, and political associations—all of them negative, most of them directed against Protestants.

Friedrich Naumann, one of the most perceptive political observers of the Second Reich, spoke in 1897 of “the restless Reich” (das ruhelose Reich), which in his view was characterized by antagonism between the various “tribes” (Stämme)—hostility to Jews being just one among many forms of “tribal” antagonisms. Stefan Scheil appears to agree with this line of thinking. In his book Die Entwicklung des politischen Antisemitismus in Deutschland zwischen 1881 und 1912, he examines a number of public manifestations of intergroup rivalry and demonstrates the inability of antisemitism to attain the status of a dominant cross-regional force in late 19th- and early 20th-century Germany. In his analysis of antisemitic parties in various strongholds in the German Reich (two thirds of the book is devoted to detailed tallies of election results for every constituency in which antisemitic candidates appeared on the ballot), Scheil shows that antisemitic parties were an integral part of the nationalist camp in Germany, a conclusion that is neither new nor surprising. More interesting is the evidence indicating that antisemites frequently changed their party allegiances, not necessarily remaining within the antisemitic or nationalist camp, but also venturing among the national-liberal or even socialist parties (in one instance, a Jewish candidate from the ranks of the Social Democrats, Oskar Cohn from Nordhausen, was supported by an antisemitic group that came out against the Left-Liberal candidate). In Saxony, Württemberg, and Hessen, Social Democrats and the antisemitic Agrarians
were politically “homeless,” too. Protesting mainly against local economic and social elites—the Junkers and the administrators—German farmers threw their support to antisemitic parties but were also willing to accept liberals, socialists, or radical nationalists, under certain circumstances, as legitimate alternatives.¹⁰

For instance, the well-to-do peasant landowners of western Schleswig-Holstein found a natural partner in economic liberalism, and so, from the turn of the century, antisemitism had no chance of becoming a mass force in that region. In contrast, poor non-Catholic peasants, agricultural workers, and day laborers in Hessen all supported antisemitism because the alliance between liberals and the local conservative aristocracy threatened their economic existence. From the end of the 1880s, with the rise of local antisemitic movements, there was a mass desertion of supporters of liberalism to the ranks of the antisemites in the poorer areas of Hessen (and, as Baumann demonstrates, also in south Baden).¹¹ As noted, antisemitic movements portrayed themselves as protesting not only against the Jews, but also—and especially—against the government, the bureaucracy, the “system” and the “authorities” (Obrigkeit). In fact, many villagers in south Baden and Hessen regarded the antisemitic groups as the direct continuation of local protest movements that had been active in the area from the 17th century onwards.

The social protest of Protestant tenants in these areas—whose short-term source can be found in the crisis of the Vormärz prior to 1848—needed an organizational framework. It was only the radical antisemitic protest movements that provided such frameworks in the 1880s. That such movements were also antisemitic was merely an additional selling point. As Baumann stresses, however, many south Baden supporters of antisemitic parties actually maintained good neighborly relations with Jews. Protestant peasants lit fires for the Jews on the Sabbath and accepted Jews in the local veteran associations, and both groups attended each other’s festivities. And yet, the antisemitic movements in some villages garnered more than 40 percent of the votes in the elections of 1893 and 1898. Only with the economic improvement at the beginning of the 20th century, together with personal rivalries among local antisemitic agitators and reorganization on the part of the liberals (who rid themselves of their conservative image, adopting a platform of radical populism), did the foundations of the antisemitic movements weaken not only in Baden and Hessen, but throughout Germany.

Overall, Scheil shows that antisemitic parties and movements declined from the late 1890s onwards. Even prior to that, their success had been limited. With 16 representatives in the Reichstag in 1893, antisemites constituted a mere 4 percent of the delegates, and they were even less successful in the various regional parliaments (except in the Duchy of Hessen and in the province of Hessen-Nassau). On the eve of the First World War, there were about seven representatives of antisemitic movements in the Reichstag. The number is not precise because many delegates who had belonged to antisemitic parties went over to the conservative parties, the Agrarian League, and the nationalist organizations. Although antisemites were better represented in various peasants’ associations in southern and western Germany, from the electoral point of view they never repeated their success of the 1890s. By the First World War, they had grown progressively weaker.

That being the case, when did German antisemitism change from being a marginal phenomenon to becoming central in German life? When did the antisemitic periph-
First World War, some of the peripheral or minority groups described earlier (Catholics, small peasants in rural Hessen, artisans in Saxony) offered a suitable target for radical antisemitic mass movements such as the Schutz und Trutz Bund. Standing at the center of Walter’s work is the period from 1916 to 1924, with its difficult political, psychological, social, and especially economic conditions. Walter sheds new light on the question of continuity between Weimar and Nazi antisemitism and the processes whereby developments in Weimar paved the way for what happened to the Jews after 1933, as described in part by Kaplan.

One of the major conclusions to be drawn from Walter’s book is that in the Weimar period there was a sharp rise in the intensity of German antisemitism, which was undoubtedly to be attributed to the First World War, the threat posed by the Bolshevik revolution, and Germany’s difficult socioeconomic situation. Walter gives a good description of this state of affairs in the period after the war until the year 1924. In these years, physical assaults on Jews became increasingly common, as well as attacks on Jewish property. Unfortunately, Walter does not have much to say about antisemitism in the period after the beginning of the great economic crisis of 1929, dwelling instead on the violence deployed both by Nazis and Communists. He also fails to draw attention to the fact that manifestations of physical hostility to the Jews were feasible because no significant opposition was expressly stated, either by official government institutions or by the German populace at large. Even more significant, younger Germans born in the years before the outbreak of the First World War grew to self-awareness in a period of violence, war, and revolution. Reaching young adulthood, they knew little apart from economic distress, political extremism, and government coercion. Thus, it was easy for them to discard cultural values belonging to an older code of civility. This was a lost generation without a moral anchor, and its members were especially receptive to the siren voices of both the Nazis and the Communists.

The frequent and difficult crises that plagued Germany under Weimar contributed more than any other single factor to the dehumanization of society and the undermining of Germany’s elites. The Jews were not the only victims of the German moral collapse: Communists, organized workers, and the French were also targets for right-wing German hatred. The terrible inflation of 1922 and 1923 resulted not only in money losing its value, but also in a deeper devaluation of life. The sense of national humiliation following Germany’s defeat in the First World War, the astronomical sums the Germans were forced to pay in reparations, feelings of insecurity, the drastic unemployment that overtook the society toward the end of the 1920s, the great fear of the extreme left and the almost continual atmosphere of civil war—all of these undermined the civil foundations, the bourgeois values (Tugend) and the Christian morality that had hitherto characterized various sections of German society. Here, perhaps, is a partial explanation to the question posed by Kaplan at the beginning of her book—namely, how German “normality” functioned during the Third Reich (see hereafter).

Walter is right when he argues that Nazi members and sympathizers had many en-
emies and objects of attack, of which the Jews were only one (albeit an important one). The National Socialists were undoubtedly an antisemitic party, but the antisemitism of its members before 1933 was not sufficient to account for what happened from 1933 onwards. As Shulamit Volkov points out, Nazism at this time still represented a “written (or spoken) antisemitism” rather than a violent one. In this, the Nazis of the early 1930s resembled the conservative and populist antisemites of the pre-First World War period. For this reason, they were perceived by many to be relatively harmless.

Many studies have been written on Nazi antisemitism during the Third Reich and the reaction of Jews both as individuals and on the communal level. Very little, however, has been told about German Jews’ everyday life amid the ever-increasing hardships, threats, restrictions, and violence that characterized their life after 1932. Marion Kaplan fills this gap in her detailed study of how middle-class Jews—mainly women—sought to go on with their lives, families, and work between 1933 and the end of the war.

Kaplan’s gendered approach is of considerable methodological interest. She distinguishes between the experience of Jewish women and men because, in her words, being male or female mattered. For example, when it came to the question of whether to emigrate, women usually took a positive stand, urging their husbands to take their families out of Germany. This, argues Kaplan, was because they were more attuned to danger signals their husbands were apt to overlook.

Kaplan, it is true, does tend to elevate gender above everything else, in this way suggesting that gender was the decisive factor in Jewish experience under Nazi rule. I have my doubts whether the Nazi authorities thought the same. Yet by focusing on female experience, Kaplan presents a side that is too often lacking in scholarly research. Blaschke, Baumann, Scheil, and Walter have all written male-oriented histories of antisemitism: the Catholic antisemites studied by Blaschke are male, as are members of the antisemitic parties (Scheil) and violent Nazis in the street (Walter). Even Baumann, who writes on the relations between Christians and Jews, focuses in the main on males—though, interestingly, the front cover of his book shows only women.

Kaplan makes an interesting distinction between the fate of Jewish men and women. What is missing here is the other side of the coin: Did the Nazis also pay attention to such a distinction? Was there a distinct policy toward Jewish males as opposed to females? Kaplan argues that the Nazis knew how to manipulate the plight of Jews (male and female) to their own advantage. We also know that the Nazi party dealt not only in political wares, but also in cultural goods. This is what made their regime so popular, enabling them to carry out a social revolution, among other things, in gender relations. Yet even if it could be demonstrated that Nazi policy on Jews in the pre-1940 period was, to some extent, a gendered one, no such distinction existed after 1940, as tragically evident in the Nazis’ extermination policy. It would be interesting, indeed, to study gendered aspects of the Nazi policy toward the Jews before that year.

Some of the men in the brutalized atmosphere of Eastern Europe after 1939 were old National Socialists, as described so well by Walter. Others were part of the “Lost
Generation” who fought in the trenches of the First World War, who lived on the eastern borders of interwar Germany, or who were students attracted to völkisch ideas during the Weimar years. Some were Catholics who heard a priest’s denunciation of the Jews; others had fond childhood remembrances of Jewish friends. Most Germans lacked any strong antisemitic ideological convictions. Nonetheless, many were able both to give and to carry out orders of extreme cruelty against the Jews. Such behavior was contrary to the education and outlook they had received from their parents.

The older generation of the Second Reich, as described in most of the books under review, most often regarded antisemitism as merely one way among others of expressing their social and economic grievances. The next generation’s behavior toward the Jews after 1933 thus raises striking questions that remain unresolved. Despite exhaustive research, the last word on German antisemitism has yet to be written.

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Notes


2. See J. Borut and Oded Heilbronner (eds.), German Anti-semitism Reconsidered (Tel Aviv: 2000), 7.

3. For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Oded Heilbronner, “From Antisemitic Peripheries to Antisemitic Centres: The Place of Antisemitism in Modern German History,” Journal of Contemporary German History 4 (2000), 451–470.


6. Also see Oded Heilbronner, “From Ghetto to Ghetto: The Place of German Catholics in Modern German Historiography,” Journal of Modern History 2 (2000), 453–495.


12. In an interesting recent article, Hans Medick traces the rise in mass antisemitism in Germany back to the First World War. In the course of research he was carrying out in a small village in south Württemberg, Medick found a document written in 1913 about mass starvation in the village a hundred years before. No antisemitic expressions appeared in this document. However, the author of the document wrote a second version three years later in which there is a clear antisemitic strain: in the interim, farmers in that area began to suffer hunger as the war continued and blamed Jews for much of the trouble. See Hans Medick, “The So-Called Laichingen Hunger Chronicle: An Example of the Fiction of the Factual, the Traps of Evidence, and the Possibilities of Proof in the Writing of History,” in Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations, ed. Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith (Toronto: 1997), 284–299.


Book Reviews
In December 1993, a huge international conference was held in Washington, D.C. upon the inauguration of the research department of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Fifty-four of the papers presented at this conference have now been published in an impressive volume titled *The Holocaust and History*. At 836 densely printed pages, the book is hard for the common reader to digest and even harder for a reviewer to critique. Therefore, only a general overview, touching as well on several points of major interest, will be presented here.

Most recent conferences on the Holocaust in the English-speaking world have dealt with issues of impact and collective memory. Because many younger academics lack knowledge of the needed European languages, historical research has become a somewhat neglected realm. This volume thus stands out by virtue of its focus on research of the actual Holocaust period. Such a focus was arrived at through the participation of 27 researchers from non-English-speaking countries alongside members of the “founding generation” of Holocaust researchers in America, Canada, and Great Britain (many of whom, including Raul Hilberg, Henry Friedlander, Randolph L. Braham, Gerhard L. Weinberg, and Nehama Tec, are themselves of European origin). From a vantage point nearly a decade later, my impression is that younger U.S. scholars have not, by and large, been stimulated by the conference to continue in this line of historical research. Nonetheless, the volume can be seen as the most important scholarly contribution to date of the Holocaust Museum, presenting as it does a survey of Holocaust research as seen primarily from a U.S. angle of vision.

*The Holocaust and History* consists of 11 parts. Part 1 (“Probing the Holocaust: Where We Are, Where We Need to Go”) deals with historiography and brings the opening remarks of four leading scholars: Raul Hilberg (United States), Yehuda Bauer (Israel), Eberhard Jäckel (Germany), and Michael Marrus (Canada). All four essays essentially summarize the historical foci and approaches of these scholars as they were formed over decades of research. Only Jäckel, perhaps the researcher most identified with the “intentionalist” approach, proposes a new hypothesis regarding the decision-making process of the Final Solution in which certain “functionalist” elements are included. Jäckel argues that implementation of the Final Solution was the outcome, at least in part, of rivalry between Reinhard Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler. According to Jäckel:
It seems likely to me that Heydrich was striving for a supreme authority independent of Himmler’s, and that he did so by fulfilling Hitler’s anti-Jewish desires better than Himmler. My argument is that in the Jewish question Himmler was less determined than Hitler, that Heydrich sensed this difference in determination and decided to outdo Himmler in this area, not because he was more anti-Jewish but because he recognized that outdoing Himmler was an effective means of winning Hitler’s favor and getting a promotion. (p. 27)

Those acquainted with the historical debate concerning the decision-making process that led to the Final Solution will sense Jäckel’s opting for the moderate “functionalist” view, best represented by Ian Kershaw, that depicts a process of “working toward the Fuhrer,” in the course of which were constant internecine struggles. Consequently, Jäckel’s basic “intentionalism” appears less extreme than that of Richard Breitman, who presents Himmler as “the architect of genocide” and who believes that Himmler, Heydrich, and others at the top of the SS were working as a team to prepare plans for the Final Solution long before the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.2 Jäckel also comes across as much less dogmatic than his longtime “functionalist” rival, Hans Mommsen, who most recently attempted to demonstrate—in an almost ridiculous manner—that Hitler’s infamous speech of January 30, 1939 (in which a possible Vernichtung [annihilation] of the Jews in the event of total war was mentioned) should not be interpreted as meaning that Hitler had any real intention of killing the Jews.3 Notwithstanding Jäckel’s openmindedness, I found his hypothesis not particularly convincing.

Part 2 consists of four articles on antisemitism and racism within National Socialism—examining its ideology, practice, and postwar interpretations—written by David Bankier, Steven Katz, Walter Zwi Bacharach, and Omer Bartov. All of these articles contain new insights alongside overviews of previous research. For example, Bartov’s article, published as well in his book Murder in Our Midst (1996), presents the Holocaust research of three major centers (Germany, Israel, and the United States) and incorporates it into a coherent picture.

In part 3, three German scholars deal with scientific research in the 1920s through the 1940s on human genetics, “racial hygiene,” and eugenics and the repercussions on racial policies toward Jews, Gypsies, and others. Especially interesting in this section is Anne gret Ehmann’s article concerning the origins of Nazi population policy and the so-called Mischlinge (people of mixed blood) question, which derived, according to her findings, from theories developed in German colonial racist circles in Africa. Her approach is original and partially convincing although it prompts further questions, especially in terms of the link implied between non-antisemitic racism and the Nazi treatment of the Jews.

Other sections of the volume deal with issues such as the leadership and bureaucracy of the Nazi state (with articles by Breitman, Mommsen, Peter Hayes, Franklin H. Littell, and Charles W. Sydnor, Jr.); “ordinary men” (this section features, of course, essays by two well-known opponents, Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen, but also includes summaries of research on such issues as euthanasia [Henry Friedlander], the Wehrmacht [Juergen Foerster], and the Amsterdam police [Guus Meershoek]); other groups persecuted by the Third Reich (Mischlinge, Jue-
dischversippte [those of Jewish descent], Gypsies, “spastics,” homosexuals, and even blacks); concentration camps; the fate of the Jews in Axis countries, on the one hand, and the reactions of the Allies and the neutrals to the persecutions, on the other; Jewish leadership and resistance; rescuers; and finally, the survivor experience (mainly in the United States and in Israel).

This volume covers many areas, but there are several methodological problems. First, the term “Holocaust” is understood clearly by some as “the persecution and murder of the Jews by the Nazis” but by others as “the fate of all people persecuted by the Nazis.” This problem of terminology and understanding is never clarified in the volume, perhaps quite deliberately, given the all-embracing nature of the conference at which the papers were originally presented. Nevertheless, the distinction is passed over in tacit confusion rather than anywhere being addressed directly. Second, there is virtually no attention given to the 1930s, which points to a definition of the Holocaust as focused on the wholesale murder of the 1940s only. This focus, while widely accepted in Germany and in some other countries, is rejected by various scholars in Israel and the United States. The third problem—an outcome of the second—is the almost exclusive emphasis on murder, to the neglect of many other aspects of persecution, including economic persecution. Finally, the Jews themselves are almost absent as having been actively involved, either on the scene itself or further afield. To this last issue I would like to devote my closing observations.

The keen effort to comprehend and clarify the processes and motivations that led German society, other advanced European communities, and Western civilization in general to stage such a horrible cataclysm has found scholarly expression in research dealing with the “perpetrators” and the “bystanders.” Consequently, however, the Jews have been almost forgotten as an active and dynamic group with its own characteristics. Research regarding the Jews in this volume—four articles in all—is set within the framework of Jewish reactions to the persecution: strategies of Jewish leaders, and resistance and underground activities. What is needed for a full, multifaceted understanding of the period is knowledge of such issues as Jewish daily life; the ways Jews interpreted Nazi antisemitism against the background of their historical experience; the impact of former Jewish integration in the culture and mentality of different European societies on the Jews’ fate during the Holocaust; and the ghetto as a form of Jewish existence. In order to understand such issues, historians must first be familiar with Jewish—and especially modern Jewish—history. Only one representative of this type of scholarly approach, Richard I. Cohen’s article on French Jewry, is found in the current volume.

Since the Washington, D.C., conference, a number of important developments have taken place in the field of historical research on the Holocaust—especially in the wake of the opening of archives in formerly Communist Eastern Europe and the emergence of a vibrant young generation of scholars in Germany, Austria, and (to a lesser extent) Eastern Europe. These developments have influenced the debate on the decision-making process of the Final Solution, particularly the attention now being given to the careers of many of the perpetrators (such as Werner Best, Theodor Dannecker, and Adolf Eichmann) in an attempt to give bureaucracy a human face. The issue of the centrality of antisemitism in Nazi ideology and practice has made a major come-
back, and aspects of Jewish life have also become a more attractive realm of research. Much of the scholarly discourse has taken a different course from that foreseen by the contributors in the section on “where we are, where we need to go.” This volume, therefore, should be viewed as an important summary of Holocaust research as it stood at the beginning of the 1990s, and as seen from a certain angle. For innovative approaches and Jewish dimensions to the Holocaust, one should look elsewhere.

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Notes

2. See Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (Hanover, N.H.: 1992). Breitman’s view is presented in The Holocaust and History in an article (pp. 187–196) titled “Plans for a Final Solution in Early 1941.” In it, he states that “premeditated mass murder was neither a last resort after other schemes were tried and found wanting, nor an unforeseen escalation under the pressures of a bitter war-to-the-death on the Eastern front” (p. 187).


In many respects, Hungary occupies a special chapter in the history of the Holocaust. Although denied their legal equality as citizens, 800,000 Jews in Hungary lived through the period between the first anti-Jewish legislation in 1938 and the Nazi occupation of the country in 1944 without being subjected to systematic physical persecution. However, in 1944, during the first four months of the German occupation, in one of the most concentrated offensives of the war against the Jews, some 500,000 members of this community (the exact number of victims is still disputed) lost their lives behind the barbed wire of Auschwitz and other concentration camps.

Would it have been possible for a large portion of Hungarian Jewry to have survived the final year of the war? Why did the Wehrmacht occupy Hungary, a state that was a German ally? Could the occupation of the country have been avoided? Why did German political and military leaders devote so much energy to the destruction of the Jewish community in Hungary at a time when they desperately needed all of their strategic resources to fight the Allies? What role was played by Hungarian politicians in the tragic fate of the Jews? Did the Allies and Jewish organizations do all they
could to prevent or alleviate the disaster? These are all questions that arise out of the specific circumstances of the Hungarian Holocaust. The dramatic tension of the scholarly debate stems from the realization that the entire Jewish community—or at least a great part of it—might have survived the years of danger, given the maintenance of Hungarian sovereignty for so long a period and the foreseeable, if not yet imminent, defeat of the Nazis at the time that Hungary was occupied.

In May 1994, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust, a conference was held in Washington, D.C. under the auspices of the United States Holocaust Museum, at which an attempt was made to find answers to the above questions. This book is the outcome of that conference.

In any discussion concerning the Hungarian Holocaust, a vital source of information is Randolph L. Braham’s monumental two-volume work, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (1981; rpt. 1994). For this new volume, Braham has contributed an essay titled “The Holocaust in Hungary: A Retrospective Analysis,” which offers both a historical framework and a summary of his own highly provocative positions. The principal question raised by Braham is whether the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews was inevitable. Historians generally agree that the majority of Hungary’s Jewish population could have survived the war had Hungary not been occupied, although they have been unable to agree on the real motive behind the occupation. Braham does not deny that Hungary’s reluctance to implement the deportation of the Jews was one of the factors responsible for the occupation. But the main factor, he argues, was strategic. As the military situation deteriorated, the Germans wanted to secure the unconditional loyalty and obedience of their allies. They were extremely worried about political developments in Hungary, notably the attempts of the Kállay government to reduce the war effort and to make contact with the Allied Powers. “Ironically,” Braham writes, “it appears in retrospect that had Hungary continued to remain a militarily passive but politically vocal ally of the Third Reich instead of provocatively engaging in diplomatic manoeuvres that were essentially fruitless . . . the Jews of Hungary might possibly have survived the war relatively unscathed” (p. 36).

This thesis stirred up heated controversy soon after Braham’s earlier book was published; as the distinguished historian Istvan Deak pointed out, the frightening conclusion was “that for the Jews in a given country to have had a chance of survival, that country had to be loyal to the Germans.” 1 Braham, however, does not mean to absolve the Hungarian political leadership and state apparatus from all historical responsibility for the fate of the Jews. He demonstrates that the Germans had no trouble in finding willing Hungarian collaborators and notes that, although Hungarian governments did not wish to implement deportations of the Jews in the period before the occupation, they could have hindered the systematic deportations that occurred immediately thereafter.

Various aspects of Hungarian responsibility are considered in a number of other essays. Attila Pók, the renowned Hungarian historian of ideas, makes a case for the increasing importance of antisemitism as a political ideology in the periods before and after the First World War. Pók explains the function of Hungarian antisemitism on the basis of the scapegoat theories of social psychology—which is undoubtedly correct,
considering the fact that, after the First World War, Jews were portrayed as the cause of the break-up of historical Hungary. Nevertheless, scapegoating is a constituent element of all antisemitic ideologies, and further research is needed in order to establish a closer connection between general theories of social psychology and concrete or individual historical phenomena.

Hungarian participation in the persecution of the Jews reached its peak during the period after the Hungarian Fascist (Arrow Cross) takeover on October 15, 1944. Still to be written is a full-scale political or social history of the Arrow Cross movement. In the meantime, we have László Karsai’s important contribution, based on thorough archival research, which concerns the last phase of the Hungarian Holocaust. A contradictory picture emerges in the documentation provided by Karsai. It appears that the leader of the Arrow Cross, the fanatically antisemitic Ferenc Szálasi, actually placed various obstacles in the path of German authorities who sought to deport the rest of the Jews. Arguing that Hungary, too, was in need of Jewish slave-workers, Szálasi ordered the construction of a large central ghetto. Meanwhile, however, tens of thousands of Jews were being deported to Germany as “workers on loan.” In similarly contradictory fashion, Arrow Cross party troopers were murdering hundreds of Jews on the banks of the Danube and elsewhere at a time when other Arrow Cross party officials, together with members of the Budapest police force, attempted to prevent violence against Jews of the ghetto (at the same time, however, they were also preventing the delivery of desperately needed food and medical supplies). Karsai’s analysis indicates increasing political and administrative chaos after October 1944. As a result, the survival of the Jews of Budapest became an entirely fortuitous matter.

Rudolf Vrba’s chapter is an eyewitness account of the preparations for the physical destruction of the Hungarian Jews in Auschwitz. Vrba, who made a dramatic escape from Auschwitz with a fellow prisoner, Alfred Wetzler, has already reported his experiences in several publications. The essence of his account is that Jewish organizations in Slovakia and Hungary, non-Jewish religious leaders, and Hungarian politicians all knew by May 1944—on the basis of information provided by Vrba and Wetzler—just what was the fate awaiting hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews destined for deportation. Their responsibility, argues Vrba, should be measured accordingly. The essay included in this volume, which was previously published in Braham and Pók’s edited collection, *The Holocaust in Hungary: Fifty Years Later* (1997), is in part a response to fierce criticism of his earlier reports. Vrba, however, remains firm in his conviction:

> It seems clear from the testimony of survivors . . . that the Jewish masses assumed that if something truly horrible was in store for them, these respectable leaders would know about it and would share their knowledge. . . . These leaders did in fact learn what Auschwitz meant but did not share this new knowledge with Jews earmarked for deportation. . . . It is my contention that a small group of informed people, by their silence, deprived others of the possibility or privilege of making their own decision in the face of mortal danger. (p. 94)

A more moderate judgment is offered by the late Asher Cohen. Analyzing the dilemma of the Hungarian Zionist resistance movement, Cohen concludes that the
Hungarian Jewish leadership in general was incapable of organizing any serious resistance because of its disoriented and apolitical nature. Given this situation, the Zionists did what was possible, establishing a relatively well-structured resistance organization that—especially after the Arrow Cross takeover—carried out effective life-saving activities. As Robert Rozett’s study demonstrates, an important role in such activities was also played by diplomats of various foreign powers and by the International Red Cross staff, the extent of whose assistance was greater than anywhere else in German-occupied Europe. According to Rozett, there were two possible reasons for this greater assistance: the increasing awareness of the real nature of Jewish persecution, and (with the conclusion of the war already in sight) “the belated attempt to build a respectable postwar record” (p. 138).

The historical essays in this volume are complemented by the more subjective pieces written by Charles Fenyvesi and Menahem Schmelzer, both of which successfully reproduce the atmosphere of the years of persecution, and by Miklós Hernádi’s chapter, which directs attention to the traumas stemming from the taboo placed on discussion of the Holocaust during the decades of Communist rule.

The Nazis’ Last Victims is a useful book that explores the disputed issues and conflicts surrounding its subject matter. Overall, the editors have done an excellent task: for one thing, Hungarian place names and personal names that are regularly misspelled elsewhere generally appear in this volume in their correct forms. It should be noted, however, that several of the chapters (those of Braham and Pók, as well as most of Cohen’s essay) have already been published in a publication edited by David Cesarani titled Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary 1944. The latter volume features works presented at a conference held in London in April 1994. One can hardly admonish contributors for having covered the same issues in two different forums conducted at roughly the same time. But perhaps the publishers should have drawn attention to these repetitions.

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Notes
2. See, for example, Rudolph Vrba and Alan Bestic, I Cannot Forgive (London: 1963).
Beginning with the publication of Rolf Hochhuth’s The Deputy in 1964, increasing attention has been paid to the attitude of the churches, Catholic as well as Protestant, both to the Nazis’ racial policy and to the destruction of European Jewry. Scholars such as Frederick K. Wentz, Frederick Ira Murphy, and Robert W. Ross have investigated the response of the religious press in the United States to events in Nazi Germany. William E. Nawyn, in American Protestantism’s Response to Germany’s Jews and Refugees, 1933–1941 (1981), went one step further. Investigating not only the press but also denominational and interdenominational records, he concluded that the response of the mainline denominations was limited, though not totally insignificant. Meanwhile, in an earlier work, The Grey Book: A Collection of Protests against Anti-Semitism (1970), Johan M. Snoek had collected every expression of Protestant protest in the western world to prove how outspoken were the churches.

In this recent volume, Alan Davies and Marilyn F. Nefsky have investigated the attitude of the churches in Canada. How Silent Were the Churches? is not a compilation of protests, nor is it an effort to acquit the churches (“What follows is in no sense an apologia”), but rather a serious and careful piece of research that tries to fathom the theological and ideological motivations of the various denominations. Furthermore, it discusses in detail the socioeconomic and political situation in Canada of the 1930s, which had an impact on the behavior of the Christian communities there.

This book is a collaboration between an ordained United Church minister (Davies) and a Jew (Nefsky). Davies is a specialist on Christian antisemitism, and Nefsky has published widely on antisemitism, racism, and religion. Unlike Nawyn, who minimized antisemitism as a factor in the churches’ apathy, the authors designate antisemitism as “the setting of our subject and its leitmotiv” (p. xiv). They follow Nawyn, however, in their scholarly approach, examining articles and editorials in the religious press and the official declarations of church bodies to determine whether these should be accepted at face value. Since several church journals maintained an independent attitude, “facile equations between the churches and their newspapers must be avoided”; unlike Nawyn, who dismissed official statements of denominational synods as “gratuitous and emotional protests,” Davies and Nefsky are inclined to grant them a more positive appraisal (p. xii).

The Great Depression of the 1930s, with its unemployment and hardships, engendered disappointment with existing values and institutions, which in turn led to flirtations with Communism, fascism, and Nazism, as well as increased isolationism, xenophobia, nativism, racism, and antisemitism. Consequently, anti-immigration sentiments were strong in Canada, particularly when the potential immigrants were Jewish refugees. Catholic antisemitism was conspicuous in French Canada, whereas in British Canada, widespread opposition to racial minorities such as Jewish refugees was based more on Anglo-Saxon tribalism. Such anti-Jewish sentiments cannot be ignored when discussing the attitude of Canadian churches to the Holocaust and to Jewish refugees.
Not only were church leaders and the rank-and-file affected by their times, they were also influenced by classical Christian anti-Jewish theology. But despite traditional anti-Jewish beliefs, Christian churches often formulated their response to the Nazi persecution of the Jews in accordance with their sociopolitical outlook, whether liberal or conservative. The liberals, who were more interested in social reform, were more critical of social disorders such as antisemitism, and thus tended to be more sympathetic to the victims. In contrast, the conservatives, drawn to fundamentalist theology, were preoccupied with personal faith and evangelism rather than with social reform; they often believed that the Jews deserved Nazi persecution as a punishment for their rejection of redemption. However, such generalizations do not always hold. Conservative evangelists who tried to convert Jews were sympathetic to them and opposed antisemitism, hoping that a more positive approach would open the Jews’ hearts to the church and facilitate their conversion.

Because of differences between the various denominations, the authors have chosen to discuss them separately rather than topically. These denominations are the United Church, the Church of England in Canada, the Presbyterian Church, Baptists and Evangelicals, Lutherans, Mennonites, and Quakers. For reasons of space, only the first two churches will be discussed here.

The United Church of Canada, the largest Protestant denomination in the country, was established in 1925 as a union of Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists. This church had a definite liberal approach, which translated into a deep concern with human issues and an ethical predisposition against social evil, including the evil of antisemitism. Nonetheless, ministers of the United Church flirted with fascism and Communism; during the 1930s, *The New Outlook*, the official church bulletin, occasionally published articles that supported Hitler and the Nazi regime. Gradually, however, the United Church pulpit and press produced what the authors call “a fairly steady stream of castigation” (p. 34) against the Nazi persecutions of Christians and Jews in Germany. For example, in September 1938 (before the events of *Kristallnacht*), the general council of the church issued a statement of sorrow over the severe persecution inflicted upon the Jewish people, adding that “we pledge our active and devoted cooperation” (p. 36). After close examination of the various official and private expressions concerning the mass murder of Jews in Germany, antisemitism in Canada, and the refugee problem, the authors conclude that “as a religious community the UC at large was silent, but not that silent. Institutionally, if editorials, letters, resolutions and sermons count for anything, . . . it was not silent at all. Far more was said than the post-mortems of our day have acknowledged” (p. 46).

The Church of England in Canada, with its theologically conservative line, its strong evangelical approach, and its traditional anti-Jewish sentiments, continued to print “inaccurate and antiquated images offensive to modern scholarship” even during the Holocaust (p. 47). Prominent British clergymen such as A.C. Headlam, bishop of Gloucester, and W.R. Inge, dean of St. Paul’s, were among the religious intellectuals who adopted “a somewhat soft approach to fascism” (p. 48). Notwithstanding, most Anglicans in England and Canada opposed Hitler and condemned the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Thus, the authors conclude that, although there were only words and resolutions rather than deeds, “having placed itself on the side of the Jews, the church had committed itself morally to their assistance” (p. 55).
It was not easy for Canadian Anglicans, with their strong British ties, to overcome the racial call for the exclusive admission of “Anglo-Saxon” immigrants. However, as a result of efforts made by Canon W.W. Judd, chairman of the Anglican Social Service Council, several resolutions were issued that called on the federal government to liberalize its restrictive immigration policy. Davies and Nefsky concentrate on several additional leaders, including Claris E. Silcox (United Church) and Raymond Booth (Quaker), who made outstanding contributions to the fight against antisemitism and who supported the admission of Jewish refugees. Although their efforts were unsuccessful, they “embodied . . . the conscience of Christian Canada” (p. 45).

Davies and Nefsky reject the suggestion made by Irving Abella and Harold Troper in *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe* (1982) that, given pressure by the churches, the government would have changed its anti-refugee policy. Only a united front of all the churches in Canada, including the Catholics, could have captured the attention of the public mind, which in turn might have had some influence on the government:

> No sustained universal outcry on behalf of the beleaguered refugees ever erupted from either the Christian or the Protestant rank and file. . . . Neither Christian nor Protestant Canada spoke with a collective voice. But many Protestant pulpits were not silent, nor were many . . . editorialists, bishops and academics, nor of course, were the special envoys who devoted themselves to the refugee cause: Silcox, Judd and Booth. Here, we suggest, is where the spotlight should fall, not on the “Christian” masses of the nation. Were the churches then silent? Yes and no. . . . The picture is neither completely black, nor purely white. It is grey. (p. 128)

*How Silent Were the Churches?* is an important contribution to the history of the struggle of the churches during the Holocaust and to Canadian contemporary history. It is a balanced, well-researched, and carefully written book. The authors have proved their thesis that the Protestant churches in Canada were not *totally* silent. However, if the churches were supposed to have served as the moral compass for their people, then the expressions of support of the Jews enumerated in this book serve as scarcely more than a fig leaf to cover the bad conscience of the Christian community in Canada. It seems that the only bright spot in this tragic story is that five decades after the Holocaust, there are some signs of change in classical anti-Jewish Christian theology, as can be seen from the 1997 statement of the United Church titled *Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church–Jewish Relations Today*.

HAIM GENIZI  
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I have read this work several times, and during the review process my judgment underwent a dramatic change. After the first reading, my verdict was a negative one, based on what I judged to be the book’s rather simplistic structure. The more I ex-
amine the text, however, the more I recognized that its clarity of expression, cohesive argumentation—indeed its very “simplicity”—afforded it a seldom found accessibility. Among the plethora of teaching resources on the Holocaust, *Studying the Holocaust* stands out as an exceptional educational tool.

Based on his extensive experiences as a teacher and scholar of the Holocaust, Ronnie S. Landau (director of the British Holocaust Education Project and an instructor at the Leo Baeck College in London) has compiled a reference book that meets the expectations raised in the preface in an exemplary manner, namely, it provides an educational guide for all those engaged in the teaching and studying of the Holocaust. The work addresses relevant historical, philosophical, moral, and educational issues of the Holocaust. This multidisciplinary approach gives *Studying the Holocaust* a relevance to students and teachers in diverse fields of study: history, literature, psychology, religious studies, and philosophy. It is clearly structured, informative, well written and, above all, easily accessible.

The introduction sets up in very precise and compact form the conceptual and topical parameters for dealing with “the Holocaust as educational theme.” Seven sections follow, each of which focuses on a particular subject. Part 1 contains a set of eight “readings and exercises”—brief historical and literary extracts supplemented by information and discussion questions. This format is repeated in the subsequent sections. Part 2 is designed to introduce students to the task of analyzing 21 key historical documents. Viewed within their historical context, these documents illustrate the history of modern antisemitism, the milestones of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, and the position of the perpetrators, bystanders, and victims.

Part 3 broadens the perspective by examining eight other genocidal campaigns waged in the modern era, including the destruction of the Tasmanian Aborigines, the Armenian genocide, the murder of the Gypsies under Nazi rule, the slaughter of the Hutus in Burundi, and the mass killings of Cambodians. Through these case studies, light is shed on locations and death tolls, immediate catalysts, context, and background. The Holocaust stands again at the center of part 4, where basic questions, themes, and select reading lists are provided for class discussion and personal reflection, and for those stimulated into further research. The broad areas covered relate to modern Jewish and modern German history, the history of the Holocaust and its aftermath, and the impact and lessons of the Holocaust. The last reference sections contain a chronology, a glossary of essential terms, brief biographies on key figures, and appendixes in the form of historical extracts, charts, and historiographical notes.

Very rarely can inaccuracies be found. There are a few typographical/spelling errors, especially German words such as “Einsatz[ö]gruppe” (p. 107) or “Zigeuner-lage[ö]” (p. 108). The term “genocide” was coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944 and not in 1943 (p. 152). A few dates within the chronological outline require correction or modification, such as the entry under 23 November 1939: “All Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe required to wear yellow Star of David” (p. 142). Not “Karl” but Klaus Hildebrand belongs to the group of prominent historians in the “intentionalist” camp (p. 176). And one final point: the select reading lists are occasionally outdated. More recent, relevant studies could have been included, as well as some references to “memory” and “remembrance” of the Holocaust and to other educational resources such as photo collections, television and film documentaries, and CD-rom programs.
These are minor shortcomings, which can very easily be rectified in the second edition.

In my opinion, this innovative, multidisciplinary, and challenging book is a groundbreaking educational resource. It is a must for everyone involved in the teaching and studying of the Holocaust.

Konrad Kwiet
University of Sydney


This volume is composed of papers presented at an international conference in 1994 on “The ‘Other’ as Threat: Demonization and Antisemitism.” It is edited by Robert Wistrich, whose introduction, “The Devil, the Jews, and Hatred of the ‘Other,’” surveys the various types of hostility against Jews during the past two thousand years, classifies them as “demonization of the Other,” and still advances Freud’s old theories as a valid explanation of the intensity of the hostility. The articles that follow, by scholars with different specialties, discuss a wide range of hostile thinking about Jews—and some other groups—that has been displayed by different groups of non-Jews in different centuries and different parts of the world. Given the diversity of perspectives of the scholars and the breadth of the terms of the conference, it is not surprising that the articles are only loosely connected by a common focus on hostility to Jews and on something as abstract and imprecise as “otherness.”

Although most of the articles deal with specific historical examples of hostility and are arranged chronologically, four deal with broader theoretical issues. Harumi Befu’s “Demonizing the ‘Other’” describes the demonic as the “anti-structure” of the in-group’s moral community and categorizes demonizing—somewhat questionably—as an extreme form of scapegoating. In “Why Do Stereotypes Stick?” Yaacov Schul and Henri Zukier provide a survey of the ideas and literature about stereotyping, using that term in a very broad sense, such that no distinction is made between blatantly false beliefs about outgroups and beliefs that have a kernel of truth. In a second article, “The Transformation of Hatred: Antisemitism as a Struggle for Group Identity,” Zukier takes his stand on recent theses about that mythical singular entity “the other” and asserts that “discrimination and prejudice are inherent in the very act of perception. At the social level, this means to be human is to have an essential ‘other’” (p. 122). Yael S. Feldman devotes “Otherness and Difference: The Perspective of Gender Theory” to a labyrinthine postmodern discussion of female otherness, with only passing references to stereotypes about Jews.

The bulk of the articles, however, are more empirical and historical, starting in part 1 with the 17 pages of text, 28 illustrations, and 151 notes of “The Demonization of the ‘Other’ in the Visual Arts.” In this article, art historian Ziva Amishai-Maisels offers a nice survey of how demons have been presented from the time of the Greeks
to the end of the Middle Ages, concluding that demonization is an expression of a sense of insecurity that makes people ethnocentric and xenophobic. In “Antisemitism and Other -isms in the Greco-Roman World,” Daniel R. Schwartz emphasizes the hostility generated by political competition, especially the increased friction that is generated when identity ceases to be tied to a geographic location and comes to be determined by adherence to an ideology. Such friction becomes even worse when two ideologies compete with each other—for example, Judaism and Alexandrianism or Romanism; or, especially, Christianity and Judaism, because they were so closely related.

In “Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages: Shared Myths, Common Language,” Israel Jacob Yuval provides an interesting and novel discussion of the similarity of some items in medieval Jewish and Christian mythic vocabulary and of some similarities or borrowings between Jewish and Christian mythical stories. In “Jews and Christians in Medieval Muslim Thought,” the late Hava Lazarus-Yaféh notes that the Islamic empire was multiethnic from the start and did not initially enforce restrictions on non-Muslims rigorously; that up to the 15th century, Muslims showed considerable interest in other religions; and that even if some of their understandings of Christianity were wildly off the mark, Muslims never stooped to accusations of well-poisoning.

With Shulamit Volkov’s “Exploring the Other: The Enlightenment’s Search for the Boundaries of Humanity,” we jump to the 18th century. Volkov argues that Enlightenment thinkers’ embryonic anthropological preoccupation with questions about the essence of man raised issues about the boundaries of humanity—and subsequently inspired efforts of categorization that took hierarchical inferiority within humanity and the distinction between humans and animals for granted—but paid little heed to the Jews. Shmuel Almog’s “The Borrowed Identity: Neo-Pagan Reactions to the Jewish Roots of Christianity” discusses the changing sense of identity of modern European non-Jews: namely, the critical attitude of Enlightenment thinkers to the biblical tradition and to Judaism; their efforts to find a substitute for the Christian sense of identity in Greco-Roman thought; the 19th-century interest in the Aryan myth; and the efforts of thinkers such as G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Ernst Renan, Paul de Lagarde, Alfred Rosenberg, Charles Maurras, Carl Jung, and Mircea Eliade to claim a European identity that was void of any debt to Judaism. Otto Dov Kulka’s essay, “The Critique of Judaism in Modern European Thought: Genuine Factors and Demonic Perceptions,” goes over much of the same ground as he traces the development of non-Christian ideological critiques of the nature of Judaism through the Deists, Young Hegelians, Marx, and Wagner. He explains these critiques as a product of the moral crisis brought on by the great changes in western culture and attributes to them the virulent dislike of Jews by people on the extreme right and left. In a more concrete vein, Richard I. Cohen’s “Recurrent Images in French Antisemitism in the Third Republic” provides an admirably clear historical analysis of the changes between 1849 and 1939 in French political conditions, in the status of Jews in France, and in attitudes toward them.

Part 2, devoted to the 20th century, opens with Saul Friedlander’s “Europe’s Inner Demons: The ‘Other’ as Threat in Early Twentieth-Century European Culture.” Friedlander analyzes the ideas and emotions about the Jewish threat that the images
of the Jew in Goebbels’ films and in works by Georges Bernanos, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, and Louis-Ferdinand Celine sought to inspire. He notes that the European peoples are often depicted as unaware or unable to resist, as brainless and hypnotized. In “Nazi Antisemitism: Animalization and Demonization,” Philippe Burrin—labeling familiar features of Nazi discourse according to the terms in the conference title—emphasizes the Nazis’ sense of living in a decisive apocalyptic moment and their presentation of the Jews as the antitype of everything the Nazis stood for. Simon Epstein’s “When the Demon Itself Complains of Being Demonized” describes the efforts of Nazi leaders to offset criticism by responding in apparently apologetic and civilized ways.

In “‘All poets are Yids’: The Voice of the ‘Other’ in Paul Celan,” John Felstiner gives a sensitive and highly informed literary analysis of Celan’s poetic sense—as a German-speaking poet and translator into German of Osip Mandelstam, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, and others—both of his own estrangement and of the otherness of Jews. Yisrael Gutman provides a rapid survey of changes in Jewish culture and in the attitudes of non-Jewish Poles to Jews from the late 19th century to the present in “The Popular Image of the Jew in Modern Poland.”

In one of the few essays dealing with comparative history, “Mass Death under Communist Rule and the Limits of ‘Otherness,’” Steven T. Katz gives a substantial, statistically detailed, and horrifying evaluation of Soviet mistreatment of the kulaks and Ukrainians, of the Muslim Karachay, Balkars, Chechens, and Ingushi, and of the Kalmyks, Tatars, and Volga Germans (ending with an appraisal of the Khmer Rouge massacres in Cambodia) in order to underline the difference between those killing campaigns and the racist motivation of the Holocaust. Another comparative essay is Ben-Ami Shilony’s “The Flourishing Demon: Japan in the Role of the Jews?”—which compares the development of negative ideas about the Japanese in Europe and North America since 1850 with the development of negative ideas about the Jews.

Rivka Yadlin’s “Anti-Jewish Imagery in the Contemporary Arab-Muslim World” stresses the importance of narrative and verbal expression in the Muslim world and describes the widespread acceptance in that world of negative and extremely irrational anti-Jewish ideas and stories, taken over in large measure from European antisemitism and then adapted to anti-Zionist propaganda. Dina Porat’s “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: New Uses of an Old Myth” describes the recent uses of the Protocols in Europe, the Muslim world, America, and Japan. She equates those who deny the Holocaust with those who promote the Protocols, because both combine the millennial antisemitic belief in a Jewish conspiracy with the 19th-century belief that this conspiracy controls much of what goes on in the world. After a prelude listing the principal “revisionists” and Holocaust deniers in Europe and North America, Wolfgang Benz’s “The Motivations and Impact of Contemporary Holocaust Denial in Germany” goes on to provide a disturbing description and analysis of their current activity in Germany.

The volume ends with Robert Wistrich’s “Xenophobia and Antisemitism in the New Europe: The Case of Germany,” which deals with conditions in Germany since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989—exacerbated as they have been by radical political and economic change and the immigration of asylum-seekers. Wistrich lists some of the more than 2,500 attacks by skinheads, neo-Nazis, and others on foreigners
(some six million of different kinds, of whom one-third are Muslim) and on Jews, of whom there are now only some 60,000–70,000 in Germany. He discusses the search by Jews in Germany for a new self-consciousness and self-image amid the surrounding effort of non-Jewish Germans to rehabilitate their own self-image. His conclusion is that anger in Germany is directed much more at Turks, Gypsies, and asylum-seekers than at Jews.

It is difficult to make any general comment about this volume both because it does not advance any thesis about hostility to Jews in general and because its contents are so diffuse. But by the same token, scholars with diverse interests may find specific articles that provide insights of value for their own work, while those with little scholarly knowledge of hostility to Jews are treated to a rich introduction to the complex dimensions of the subject.

GAVIN LANGMUIR
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Heinrich Graetz remarked in 1846 that “paganism sees its god, Judaism hears Him,” thus codifying an attitude toward Jews and visual culture that may persist to this day. Yet already in the 19th century, scholars of Judaism were quite aware that this was far from the truth. Hebrew illuminated manuscripts such as the Sarajevo Haggadah became the objects of study, as did synagogue architecture. Displays and exhibits of Jewish ceremonial objects formed the basis for the later foundation of full-fledged Jewish museums. Archaeological discoveries showed that in biblical and postbiblical antiquity, Jews adopted and adapted artistic motifs from their pagan neighbors. The decoration of sarcophagi with hellenistic mythical designs in the Beit She’arim burial vault (which also contains the crypts of important rabbis) is but one example proving a statement found in the Jerusalem Talmud: “In the days of R. Yohanan [3rd century], they began depicting [figural representations] on walls, and he did not protest; in the days of R. Abun [4th century] they began depicting [such figures] on mosaic floors, and he did not protest.”

But the belief in the negative relationship between Jews and the visual arts has not entirely vanished, at least judging by a number of recent scholarly works that assume it still to be conventional wisdom. In the last decade, Elliot Wolfson has demonstrated the importance of the visual in Kabbalah and, even more recently, Kalman Bland has examined medieval Jewish thinkers, demonstrating that the Second Commandment was almost never understood to prohibit representation of human beings. In another provocative recent work, Marc Épstein has shown how medieval illuminators and synagogue artists adopted Christian images, such as the hare and the unicorn, for Jewish purposes.

Richard Cohen’s Jewish Icons starts with the assumption that it is not necessary to demonstrate once again that the visual has always held an important place in the history of Jewish culture or that modern Jewish art emerges from a vacuum. Instead, his interest is in how the study of various forms of Jewish art, or art about the Jews, from the early modern period through the early 20th century can illuminate the mentalité of those who created the art and those who either commissioned or viewed it. But he is also interested in the very phenomenon described previously: the reasons Jews began to display publicly visual representations and ceremonial objects. What does this desire to see and own certain kinds of Jewish art tell us about the process of cultural modernization? This is, then, at once a book about Jewish art and about the culture surrounding the production and consumption of that art.
Cohen’s story begins not so much with Jews as with non-Jewish representations of Jews. The traditional medieval anti-Jewish icons (such as the blindfolded personification of synagoga or of Jewish ritual murders) gave way in the early modern period to a more neutral desire to depict the ceremonial and ritual life of the Jews. Although the ultimate motivation might still have been the conversion of the Jews, Christian Hebraists such as Bernard Picart, Johann Jakob Schudt, or Paul Christian Kirchner (a Jewish convert himself) fashioned the first folkloristic literature about the Jews. These works convey a sense of ethnographic interest in the Jews—an interest that was to be adopted by the Jews themselves in the wake of emancipation, as they moved away from traditional practices while still seeking to preserve something of the life they left behind. Whereas synagogue art had earlier been the only form of “public” Jewish art, the modern period brought about a variety of ways of making the private into the public. Ceremonial objects for personal use might be displayed in museums or exhibitions. Pictures produced for a wealthy patron might now be reproduced in printed form. The “consumption” or “possession” of Jewish art became important gestures of Jewish identity, in a way that was true only for the wealthiest Jews in an earlier age.

Cohen’s persuasive central argument is that the confrontation with modernity produced various forms of nostalgia that found expression in visual images or exhibitions, which themselves addressed contemporary issues facing the Jews. Moritz Oppenheim’s famous portrait, The Return of a Jewish Volunteer from the Wars of Liberation to His Family, Who Still Live according to the Old Tradition (1833), for example, captures this two-fold movement in both its title and its imagery. The Jew is now a proud volunteer in his country’s army, but his family still lights the Sabbath candles. What these kind of images (and exhibitions of these images) demonstrate is that the process of modernization was complicated by a nostalgia for what modernity had displaced, even as the very modes to express this nostalgia were themselves modern (exhibits, museums, and artistic techniques). The “return to the ghetto” was not only a visual motif but also a literary genre, and Cohen succeeds admirably in showing how works of visual art fit into this larger cultural matrix. The tense dialectic between nostalgia and its representation continues to this day with the creation of modern, high-tech museums to preserve historical Jewish culture.

The most fascinating chapter of the book deals with the ways in which the traditional, or Orthodox world (as it came to be called in the 19th century) also adopted modern arts. In particular, Cohen shows how a demand for images of rabbis became something of a craze in the 19th century—a forerunner of the “rebbe cards” that many Orthodox Jewish children trade today. In an age when one’s spiritual mentor might hold court at a distance (a result of both the rise of Hasidism and the Lithuanian yeshiva), one could still connect with him by means of a photographic or lithographic image. The most amusing story in this regard concerns Rabbi Yehuda Aszod (1794–1866), who opposed representations of his image, but whose students propped him up in a chair after he died and took his picture so that they would be able to preserve the memory of his visage. The Orthodox, too, were concerned about losing their connection to the past, and they employed various similar means, both visual and literary, for its preservation.

Cohen’s portrayal of the way in which Jews produced and consumed visual objects and images conveys a sense of a culture at once secure in its self-image, and at the
same time also longing for the more authentic life of past generations. With the emergence of virulent antisemitism in the last part of the 19th century, however, artists took up the theme of Jewish suffering, the subject of Cohen’s final chapter. Images of Jews fleeing became increasingly predominant in the works of Samuel Hirszenberg, Jacob Weinles, Leopold Pilichowski, and—the best known—Marc Chagall. Cohen devotes special attention to Hirszenberg’s Wandering Jew (1899), a frightening portrait of a lone survivor running over piles of corpses through a forest of crucifixes. Hirszenberg’s powerful response to the East European pogroms takes on an added dimension in the way that Boris Schatz, the founder of the Bezalel School of Art in Jerusalem, would pose for photographs in his museum in front of the picture. Thus, what was initially an artist’s private statement became, in the context of its display, a public and nationalist statement.

Cohen’s book has been beautifully produced by the University of California Press with a wealth of images. My only criticism is that, at times, Cohen states his reading of a particular image in overly apodictic fashion. For example, in analyzing Hirszenberg’s Czarny Sztandar, he tells us that a young boy in the middle of the painting is the only one on whom a light shines and that “he seems undisturbed and engrossed in his own thoughts.” Cohen wonders whether this figure might “be in some way Hirszenberg’s answer to the future?” (pp. 234–235). To this viewer, the boy’s expression does not seem to differ radically from the other fearful and troubled faces in the picture, and it seems a stretch to read into it any programmatic statement. But while every reader and viewer may come to different conclusions from the images in this riveting book, Cohen has done a brilliant and erudite job of explaining the way in which art and its reception are crucial to understanding modern Jewish culture.

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Note


The Periodical Publications of the Jewish Labour and Revolutionary Movements in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, 1877–1916 is a thoroughly documented bibliog-
raphy covering a panoply of newspapers, journals, and ephemera published from London to Salonika and running the ideological gamut from anarchism, through mainstream socialism and Bundism, to socialist Zionism. The political ferment that was so prevalent during the decades preceding the deluge of the First World War leaps out of every page. This work complements other publications by Avraham Greenbaum on Judaism, modern Jewish scholarship, and Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. His 1959 book, *Jewish Scholarship in Soviet Russia, 1918–1941*—subsequently revised and reissued as *Jewish Scholarly Institutions in Soviet Russia, 1918–1953* (1978)—remains an indispensable guide to its subject. Even though it was based solely on resources available in Israel and the West, that survey has yet to be superseded.

“The importance of the periodical press for the study of the Jewish labour and revolutionary movements hardly needs stating,” writes Greenbaum in his introduction. “Whether under conditions of freedom, or under conditions of oppression which usually prevailed in Eastern and Southern Europe in the pre-1919 period, periodicals were the chief means of informing adherents and sympathizers of what was happening. They also presented the party’s platform to a wider public” (p. 9).

A glance at the “Index of Parties, Movements, and Other Sponsoring Bodies” reveals the range of radical and labor organizations and movements behind the serials that are documented in this bibliography. Roughly 100 citations of the 250 entries are for periodicals generated by the Jewish Labor Bund. Trade unions such as the Garber-Bund (Tanners’ Union) and the Warsaw Metal Workers’ Union are represented. Non-Jewish political parties that issued periodicals directed at the Jewish proletariat, such as the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (RSDWP) and the Polish Socialist Party, are also included. Various gradations of Territorialism receive entries, so do several Zionist parties—above all, Poale Zion (in second place after the Bund, with about 40 citations).

All of these groups vied for the allegiance of the Jewish masses during the years leading up to the First World War. Through its succinct annotations and exhaustive indexing, Greenbaum’s book joins such important bibliographies as Walter Goldwater’s *Radical Periodicals in America, 1890–1950*. All that is lacking here is a genealogical chart of political parties and groups (which Goldwater’s work contains). A table outlining political tendencies among European Jews is arguably of no lesser value for modern Jewish historiography than are the elaborately diagrammed lineages of hasidic dynasties that commonly adorn Judaica reference works.

Treating pre-1914 East and Southeast European Jewry as a geopolitical continuum, the scope of Greenbaum’s bibliography transcends the boundaries of tsarist Russia, which is covered by such sources as A. Kirzhnits’ *Di yidishe prese in der gevezener rusisher imperye*. Still, the overwhelming majority of periodicals cited were either published in the Russian empire or—as was the case with many Bund and RSDWP publications—in such West European centers of Russian political exile activity as Geneva and London. And notwithstanding the fact that during “the last quarter of the 19th century and the first of the [20th], the Jews of Eastern and Southeastern Europe were swept up in a growing process of linguistic assimilation” (p. 10), it is striking that 188 of the 250 periodicals cited—fully 75 percent—were published in Yiddish. An additional nine titles were in Ladino, and only four in Hebrew. The non-Jewish languages that are most heavily represented are Russian (26 titles) and Polish (8 titles).
One of the bibliography’s salient features is the identification, wherever possible, of libraries holding issues of each periodical. Locations are provided mainly for libraries in Israel and the United States, though sometimes repositories in the former Soviet Union and its neighboring states are also noted—a feature that would have been impossible before the opening up of East European archives and libraries since 1989. *Periodical Publications* contains separate indexes for persons; for parties and movements; for places of publication; for languages (other than Yiddish); and for Hebrew- and Cyrillic-alphabet titles—as well as a chronological index, based on the initial year of each periodical. Perusal of these indexes enables readers to learn, for example, that the Yiddish populist Sh. An-ski and the Hebrew author (and Zionist icon) Yosef Hayim Brenner collaborated as co-editors of *Kampf un kempfer*, the expatriate Yiddish-language Socialist Revolutionary periodical published in London during 1904–1905 (no. 108). Remarkably, Greenbaum has identified these two editors on the basis of their pseudonyms, Z. Sinoni (pronounced “Sinani,” approximating the Russian “syn Anny,” or “Anna’s son” = An-ski) and Yohanan ha-Kanai (= Brenner). The Dinur Center is to be commended for sponsoring this exemplary bibliography.

*History of the Ararat Publishing Society* documents an ambitious Hebrew publishing venture undertaken in England during the Second World War by Simon Rawidowicz, with the financial support of the brothers Benzion and Alexander Margulies, and Oscar Isaac Philipp. It also represents Avraham Greenbaum’s homage to the legacy of a revered teacher.

During the nearly 20 years of its existence, Ararat’s collaborators experienced numerous difficulties. First there was the geographical separation between its editorial and managerial operations: when Ararat was established in 1942, Rawidowicz was living in Leeds, whereas Philipp and the Margulies brothers resided in London. In 1947, Rawidowicz relocated to Chicago, and in 1951 (after being appointed professor of Jewish philosophy at Brandeis University) to Boston. Other impediments included the disruptions of a world war, the search for suitable printers, and the quest for an audience. Rawidowicz’s academic responsibilities also intruded upon his ability to devote undivided attention to Ararat’s ambitious projects. Finally, his illness and subsequent death on July 20, 1957, effectively marked the end of Ararat, though several books did appear under its imprint from 1958 to 1961, including two Hebrew works written or edited by Rawidowicz.

The Hebraism that was at the core of the Ararat venture appears quixotic in retrospect, given the linguistic realities of Anglo-American Jewry. As Greenbaum observes, “Of course the market for Hebrew publications in England was small . . .” (p. 11). Indeed, of the two Margulies brothers only Benzion was able to read Hebrew (both did speak Yiddish); moreover, much of their business correspondence with Rawidowicz was carried on in German and in English. Rawidowicz reluctantly recognized that English had become the predominant language of Anglo-American Jewry, and while most of Ararat’s publications were in Hebrew, it also issued four titles in the new lingua franca, along with one in Yiddish (Itzik Manger’s ballad *Der shnayder-gezel Note Manger zingt* [The Tailor Lad Nota Manger Sings]), published in 1948.

Greenbaum treats the first, unnumbered volume of *Metsudah*, which came out in
February 1943, as Ararat’s inaugural publication—even though Ararat was still in gestation at the time of its preparation. Four additional volumes of Metsudah (including three thick double issues) appeared between 1943 and 1954, all of them under the Ararat imprint. Their contributors included some of the most prominent Hebrew essayists and Judaic scholars in Britain, in the United States, and in Israel, who wrote on a wide array of historical, literary, and contemporary topics. Among other Ararat publications were the Sefer Shimon Dubnov (Simon Dubnov in Memoriam) (1954), Bavel virushalayim (Babylon and Jerusalem) (1958), and Kitvei rabi Nahman Krokhmal (The Writings of Nachman Krochmal) (2nd enlarged ed. 1961)—all of them either written or edited by Rawidowicz (two of them appearing posthumously)—and Midrash vayikra rabah, part 2, a critical edition redacted by Mordecai Margulies (1954).

Rawidowicz selected the names Ararat and Metsudah at a juncture when it appeared that Europe and its Jews were finally about to emerge from the catastrophe that had engulfed them. As Rawidowicz wrote in a 1954 letter to Alexander Margulies:

> Before the mountains of Ararat were seen at the beginning of the decisive hour in World War II, when Hitler flooded all Europe and threatened the rest of the world, Jewish and Hebrew creativity in Europe was totally extinct, as never before in the last 1500 years or so—in the “Fortress” [mezudah] of Europe Ararat was established, as a symbol for our will not to surrender to annihilation, not to give in, to stand up for the Jewish spirit, Jewish learning, survival of our people, etc.  

In addition to Greenbaum’s well-documented introductory essay, History of the Ararat Publishing Society includes a chronological bibliography of Ararat publications, a short introduction by William Margulies (Benzion’s son), and two moving memoirs about Rawidowicz by Greenbaum and the Israeli American psychologist Aaron G. Auerbach (both of them students of Rawidowicz at Brandeis). Photographs and facsimiles document the personalities and publications connected with Ararat, as does a selection of letters, in English and Hebrew, by the various principals involved in that venture. Unfortunately, English translations of the Hebrew letters are not provided (and vice versa).

Both Ararat’s history and its editor’s personality and teachings receive considerable amplification in the recent reissue of Rawidowicz’s “essays on the ‘ever-dying people,’” in State of Israel, Diaspora, and Jewish Continuity (1998), edited by the author’s son, Benjamin C.I. Ravid, a distinguished professor of Jewish history at Brandeis. That anthology includes an extended biographical essay by Ravid, who explores in some detail the uncomfortable, arm’s-length relationship of his father to mainstream Zionism—a topic that is also dealt with by Auerbach in History of the Ararat Publishing Society. Rawidowicz’s refusal to accept the “negation of the diaspora,” coupled with his insistence that Israel and the diaspora were destined to be partners, led him to be ostracized by many leading Zionists. (Greenbaum acknowledges that, to “many commentators and critics,” Ararat symbolized Rawidowicz’s isolation from the ideological mainstream [p. 10].) Ravid’s anthology also provides extensive excerpts from letters sent by Rawidowicz to Alexander Margulies concerning Ararat—correspondence that is not replicated in the book under review here. Thus,
readers seeking background on Ararat will need to consult both the Greenbaum and Ravid collections.

Simon Rawidowicz’s “vital legacy,” asserts Aaron Auerbach, is that he “is the only major figure whose writings are capable of bridging the gap between Eretz Israel and the Diaspora” (p. 70). The time and effort that Rawidowicz devoted to Ararat were a clear expression of his wish to serve as that bridge.

ZACHARY M. BAKER
Stanford University Libraries

Notes


Ask almost any New York Jew over the age of 50: “Who was Max Lerner?” and you’ll be told, as I was recently, that “he was once the spokesman for Jewish liberalism.” If you ask anyone else about this distant cousin of Shimon Peres, they’ve probably never heard of him. But in his heyday during the 1940s and 1950s, when he was the lead columnist first for the left-wing daily *PM* and then for the liberal (in the American sense) *New York Post*, as well as being the author of a much-acclaimed book, *America as a Civilization*, Lerner was a major figure in American intellectual and political life. “No other writer,” argued I.F. Stone, “has been so successful in articulating the feelings, doubts, dilemma, hesitations, beliefs and gropings of the contemporary middle class Leftist intellectual.” And for his biographer, Sanford Lakoff, a second-generation American Jew, Lerner was a “household god.”

Lakoff’s *Max Lerner: Pilgrim in the Promised Land*, which draws heavily on his idol’s never completed autobiography, skillfully recreates the path by which American Jews became Jewish Americans—if they remained Jews at all. Lerner’s personal history traces the course of secular American Jewish life in the 20th century. He was born in Minsk in 1902, the son of a poor, close-knit family, with a strong-
willed mother and a father who learned Talmud and worked as both a Hebrew teacher and a milk delivery man. Following the Kishinev pogroms, the family moved to America. Lerner spent the first productive half of his life trying to come to grips with his adoptive country. He quickly threw off his family’s religious traditions, although he maintained an identification with the Jewish people and their history. As a scholarship student at Yale, where he tried to deflect the prevailing genteel antisemitism by renaming himself “Maxwell,” Lerner won over much of the faculty through sheer brilliance. “He won’t impress you at first, because he is rather unprepossessing in appearance—a little Jew who doesn’t perhaps amount to much,” wrote one professor. “But when you get acquainted with him, you will find that he is about two laps ahead of you on any question which you raise.”

Intellectual life aside, Lerner’s great passion—it was to become a lifelong obsession—was wreaking revenge on the Gentiles by conquering their women. “In my own case,” Lerner wrote, “the hunger for erotic acceptance, still unsated, and the impulse to storm the city and conquer the domain of ideas and letters . . . were connected in a circuit.” For all his pride in a *yidishe kop*, he rode a succession of Gentile women into the mainstream of American life. His first wife, a descendant of George Washington, complained that Lerner loved her lineage more than he loved her.

But Lerner’s greatest and most significant love proved to be the United States itself. He once acknowledged that he had a “crush on America.” But before that “crush” took hold, the Lerner of the 1930s, still smarting from his treatment at Yale, was sentimental about the Soviet Union. Lakoff, himself a professor of political science at the University of California in San Diego and Lerner’s former student at Brandeis, does a good job of describing how the Lerner of the 1930s, while never an apologist for Stalin, was nonetheless unable to come to grips with the enormity of Soviet crimes.

A strong supporter of President Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, Lerner mixed hopes for Soviet-American friendship with arguments for an American welfare state. During the Second World War, he insisted that the heroism of the Soviet people was proof of the power of the socialist ideal. “If these people are slaves,” he asked, referring to the reports about the Gulag, “why do slaves fight so well?” And while he suffered the failings of the left-liberalism of the day, he also exhibited its strengths—as in his support for black civil rights, his criticism of FBI excesses, and his passionate advocacy on behalf of creating the state of Israel, even as he spoke of the need to respect Arab rights.

By the early 1950s, Lerner had reversed himself not only on the USSR, but on the U.S. as well. Where once he had equated the failings of the two countries, he took a new look at the more tolerant and pluralist America that emerged in the 1950s and decided (like many other formerly radical Jews) that America was worthy of his admiration. Lerner wrote of the United States as being defined by an “extended genesis.” It was a dynamic society constantly in the act of recreating itself, he argued, and as such had room for the kind of creative elite of which he was a member, alongside a capacity to gradually cure its own ills. Lerner’s 1957 book, *America as a Civilization*, was the culmination of this transformation in thinking. Where once he had looked to European socialism for inspiration, Lerner now argued that “in America the vigorous European elements were brought into play as against the exhausted ones.” America
was, he insisted, no longer a mere offshoot of Europe but a great civilization in its own right—and the model for modernity.

Lerner lived for another 40 years and gradually grew more conservative on political and economic matters. As Lakoff implicitly acknowledges, little of what he subsequently wrote is worth remembering. His personal reconciliation with America left him intellectually exhausted but still erotically energized. In the 1970s and 1980s, an aging Lerner tried to reinvent himself as a sexual guru. He dated Elizabeth Taylor, hung around with Hugh Hefner at the Playboy mansion, and conducted innumerable affairs to little effect. Having freed himself from his utopian political illusions, he was caught up in a senseless search for a sexual utopia.

As the book closes, Lakoff tells us about the occupations of Lerner’s five children by two marriages. It would have been interesting to know if any of those children considered themselves to be Jewish, and if so, in what sense. For Lerner, Jewish life and American liberalism were so thoroughly conflated that he never seemed to have considered what would happen when the one could no longer suffice for the other.

FRED SIEGEL
The Cooper Union for Science and Art


This book is aptly named In Search, for two good reasons. First, the concept of an American Jewish culture is notoriously baffling in terms of what is or is not to be included (depending on what sort of culture one has in mind). That is to say, there is just too much to deal with in the framework of one coherent cultural concept, or so it would seem: “high,” “low,” and “popular” culture; the “culture” of organizations, summer camps, and retirement homes; religion and secularism; class and gender; Glatshteyn and Gershwin; matzah and MGM; bagels and lox. Where does one draw the line? Second, more than a few observers have looked askance at the very idea of an American Jewish “culture,” considering it (like other ethnic cultures in America) to be little more than the dwindling vestige of a European heritage brought to American shores.¹

The attempt to negotiate between the Scylla of “everything goes” and the Charybdis of “nothing lasts” entails not so much dealing with a defined phenomenon, as a quest (as Whitfield signals in his title) for something elusive that emanates from the atmospherics of American Jewish life—giving it tone, perhaps, more than substance. “American Jewish culture has no essence,” he warns us, “and has never been autonomous. But it does have a history” (p. 31).

Whitfield himself, who has been plumbing the depth of these waters for years, has referred on at least one occasion to American Jewish culture as a “paradox.”² Here he succeeds in bringing together between two bound covers a great deal of insight and intuitive understanding, as well as a characteristically entertaining diet of detail,
capping one of the most sustained efforts in our generation to arrive at some initial definition of what we mean when we say “American Jewish culture.” Whitfield has designed this book to deal with how Jews’ engagement with American society and culture has altered American culture itself while, in the process, leaving non-members-of-the-tribe such as Marlon Brando with the impression that Jews are, as a group, culturally advantaged (p. xii).

Following an initial foray into methodological questions (“Definitions” and “Conditions”), In Search of American Jewish Culture moves on to a topically arranged discussion of cultural endeavor in the performing arts: “Musical Theater,” “Music,” and “Theater.” The interrelationship between these separate and combined artistic media holds the key to Whitfield’s understanding of the culture question (to which I will return presently), namely, have Jews made a distinctive cultural contribution to America? Following these three chapters, we move into a different field of culture entirely; in place of forms of art, Whitfield deals with formative issues—“Race,” “Shoah,” and “Faith”—and then offers his evaluation of future “Prospects.”

His central argument about the role played by Jews in American culture, especially with regard to the performing arts, is that Jews were a major catalyst (if not the major catalyst) in breaking down formal barriers between art forms and social barriers between “high” and “popular” audiences. They contributed a substantial amount toward creating an America that was, in Whitfield’s words, “a little less disparate” (p. 87). They invented “Broadway with brains”—here he uses the example of Show Boat: “As the first musical to be entrenched in the Broadway repertory, Show Boat broke loose from the category of operetta, only to become the first Broadway show to enter the operatic repertory when the New York City Opera staged it in 1954” (p. 75).

Jewish artists and cultural entrepreneurs were able to work toward these unconventional syntheses, Whitfield’s thesis goes on, because they conceived culture as something accessible, rather than something for the snobs and this, in turn, grew out of their minority experience. Their desire to gain access to the wider world of culture would have remained hamstrung in a society riven by rigid distinctions of class, race, and religion; their cultural ideal could flourish best in a society “a little less disparate.”

There is something very appealing, from the cultural and artistic point of view, in a situation where all forms, media, styles, and national traditions lay open and available on the palette of the creator or performer. Culture really ought not to know boundaries, whether national, racial, socioeconomic, or religious. That ideal kind of sociocultural openness embodies the best of what America and the Jews had to offer each other, and that is the gist of what Whitfield is saying in the entire first part of the book.

It is because music, theater, and musical theater (topics that he continues to pursue under the “race” rubric as well) fit Whitfield’s scheme so well that literature gets relatively short shrift. Perhaps literature is less amenable to the thesis Whitfield is pounding, because while there are American Jewish literary gate-crashers, they still stay more or less in the formal ballpark of highbrow writing. Saul Bellow and Philip Roth, for example, each merits mention on seven or eight pages, whereas Leonard Bernstein racks up an impressive 23-page total. Irving Berlin outdoes Bernstein, with references on 26 pages. Even Eddie Cantor, with a mere 11 entries, occupies our at-
tention more than does Bernard Malamud (4 entries). David Mamet gets eight, Barbra Streisand gets four, but Cynthia Ozick does not even get an honorable mention.

Whitfield’s choices and definitions will certainly be challenged; indeed, given the selectivity that must be employed in such a work as this, challenges are not only inevitable, but salutary. Nevertheless, if this book “works,” it is because Whitfield has at least chosen a set of guiding parameters that lend his concept of “culture” some coherence.

And yet, one reads the end of this book with a deflated sense that Whitfield himself would, after all, like to leave the question open. While affirming (“relishing” is not too strong a word) a 20th-century heritage of sparkling American Jewish cultural creativity and innovation, he offers the reader a pessimistic conclusion on the chances of sustaining or replicating that bountiful harvest. It is as if he is saying that it is all well and good for a tiny minority to become the nation’s culture-mongers; but what if “culture” is not the source but only an effect of the asymmetric terms of Jewish engagement with America? If that should be the case—and that is clearly the sense of his conclusion—the implication Whitfield draws is that only the opaque religious core of Judaism, not the cultural interweaving of Americanness and Jewishness, can offer the Jews any hope of retaining a separateness obvious enough to warrant a bifocal engagement with America. Culture as such, without religion, has insufficient specificity of purpose or demeanor—although this conclusion is not necessarily borne out by the discussion in the first several chapters of the book.

In Search of American Jewish Culture is a pleasure to read and a treasure for the cultural historian and lay reader alike. It is a passionate book that engages the reader because the author is so patently engaged himself. We are left, perhaps, still “in search,” but we are indebted to Whitfield for making this attempt to bring the notion of an “American Jewish culture” within conceptual range.

Eli Lederhendler
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Notes


The work under review is both more and less than a translation of Hirsz Abramowicz’s collection of biographical sketches and memoirs, Farshvundene geshtaltn. Less, because not every one of the 27 short biographies of the Yiddish original appears in the translation, but also more because the introductions, notes, and illustrations do much to make this important work comprehensible to an English-speaking audience. The title is slightly misleading: Abramowicz writes not about “East European Jewish Life” in general, but very specifically about his beloved Vilna—and surrounding areas—from the late tsarist period through 1939. In these articles, mostly written after Abramowicz found himself marooned in New York in late 1939, are a moving remembrance not only of colorful personalities swept away by the Holocaust, but also a deeply felt homage to Jewish Vilna, which, no less than the people described here, has also disappeared forever. This lively, well-written, and excellently produced translation belongs on the shelf of anyone interested in Jewish life before the Shoah, and one hopes that Wayne State University Press will soon produce a paperback edition for course use.

In the translation, the order of the sketches is completely rearranged, following a mainly chronological plan. In the original, the biographical sketches come first, and for good reason. Abramowicz’s Yiddish-speaking audience would most likely have known from personal experience the kind of life to be found in an East European Jewish quarter or shtetl. Many of them, no doubt, were also acquainted with the individuals whom Abramowicz eulogizes here: the revolutionary Hirsz Lekert, the pedagogues Chaim Fialkov and Samuel Gozhanski, the librarian Khaykl Lunski, the sculptor Mark Antokolsky, among many others. For present-day readers, however, these names are rarely familiar and require a historical context to make their lives comprehensible. The editors accomplish this task admirably, first in their informative introductions, then by beginning the volume with more general essays under the rubric “Lithuanian Jewish Traditions” before proceeding to individual sketches. The original publication place and date of each sketch is given, along with helpful notes explaining details and identifying individuals who would have been familiar to the original Yiddish-speaking audience. The volume ends with an extremely helpful glossary with entries ranging from “blintze(s)” and “Bund” to “tsimmes” and “zhid(y).”
A carefully compiled bibliography lists dozens of pertinent works in English, Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, and Russian.

Abramowicz wrote the majority of these articles after the tragic fate of Jewish Vilna, and of his own wife and other relatives, was known. Knowing this background, it is all the more moving and astonishing that the author rarely dwells on the murderous end of this community, preferring instead to remember its vitality, joy, humor, and foibles. Abramowicz’s short sketches “Rural Jewish Occupations in Lithuania” and “A Lithuanian Shtetl” are exemplary for their clear, nuanced, and fascinating description of Jewish everyday life. His own career as a Jewish educator is reflected in the articles on Jewish vocational education in the interwar period, as well as in his portraits of several well-known teachers and educational administrators. On a different level, his reminiscences of the chaotic years at the end of the First World War provide a fresh and vivid portrait of that period when Vilna changed hands several times between the Red Army, Poles, and Lithuanians. In all cases, Abramowicz never fails to seize the reader’s interest with his well-crafted descriptions, striking details, and humorous asides.

Hirsz Abramowicz’s life stretched from the pogrom year 1881 to 1960. During that period, he observed the growth of Yiddish literature, Zionism, various types of Jewish socialist and nationalist movements, the rise of Hebrew as a spoken tongue and, of course, the destruction of the world of his birth. The articles collected together here on Jewish Vilna and Lithuania recreate that world. This book deserves a broad audience.

Theodore R. Weeks
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale


This is a new kind of book. It is the product of a tape recorder, chance, and the rich acquaintanceship of the author. It does not pretend to be any kind of statistical sampling of immigrant Jewish women, but simply records Marjorie Agosín’s interviews with nine women now living in America, three of whom she met at meetings of human rights groups. Some are her friends from Chile. Others are people whom she met in the course of her professional life and judged suitable for this project. These nine women come from eight different countries (two are from Hungary). The six who come from Europe, one of whom is a survivor of Auschwitz, are all refugees either from the war or from totalitarian regimes of the postwar period. Their stories are skillfully edited to parallel one another in form: childhood; the crisis that led to flight; and then its resolution and the career of the narrator.

There are several themes that inevitably come to the fore or are introduced by Agosín: language; the meaning of home; and the place of Jewishness in these women’s lives. As a writer, and as someone who has herself been an immigrant,
Agosín is particularly interested in the theme of language; in fact, three of the interviews were conducted in Spanish. Matilde Salganicoff, originally from Argentina, reports: “I’ve kept my Spanish and I kept my children bilingual. It’s only in Spanish that I have a real feel for fluidity, elegance, and the ease with which words flow. Speaking English is still an effort for me and I have to think about it. My English doesn’t seem pretty to me, it doesn’t sound musical” (p. 106). Despite this note of regret, Salganicoff ends her interview on an altogether different note. She had come to the United States for a year in 1964 because her husband had won a fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania. As they heard worse and worse news from home, they decided to wait, and the waiting gradually turned into a commitment to stay. “I think I would have died in the Dirty War,” she says. When Agosín asks, “Would they have killed you?” she replies emphatically, “me and my two children for sure” (p. 110).

But Salganicoff found more than safety in her life in the United States. “What I gained,” she says, “is that I grew a lot, my horizons expanded. I was much more useful here than in Argentina, and my children have opportunities they never would have had in Argentina. I made new friends . . . I think that this country offered me possibilities of doing things that Argentina could never have offered me professionally” (p. 110).

Since these women come from such a variety of backgrounds—East European, German, and Sephardic—the question of their Jewishness is perhaps the most interesting theme of all, and also the most unifying. While all the women have remained Jews, there is a great range in the place held by Jewishness in their lives. Zezette Larsen, who survived the final death march to Auschwitz but who lost her parents there, responds to Agosín’s question about being Jewish in America with a very bleak answer. “I can’t even put into words what it means to be a Jew for me, because I don’t believe in God anymore. God, God is good. How, how can it be? If that is so, then how could this have happened?” (p. 35). Elena Ottolonghi Nightingale, who was born in Italy in 1932 and whose grandfather had been a rabbi, grew up in a prosperous family. By her generation, religious observance had waned, but “the Jewish ideals and the Jewish heritage and the Jewish history,” she recalls, “were retained and are precious. We attended the synagogue in Livorno. . . . It is strange that, until anti-Semitism, we had our traditions, we were Jews, but I did not feel as strongly about it as I have felt it since” (p. 64).

The acknowledgment of a Jewish heritage and the embrace of their Jewish history is predominant in this little band of interviewees. “Culturally we were Jewish,” reflects Matilde Salganicoff, “but I never had a Jewish education. As far as I can remember, my family did not observe the Jewish holidays” (p. 112). But when she realized that her six-year-old daughter did not even know that she was Jewish, Salganicoff decided to send her two children to a secular Jewish school. Renate Brailowsky, originally from Breslau, managed to combine the secular and religious strands of Jewishness in her experience. As a teenager in Chile, she joined Hashomer Hazair, a left-wing Zionist youth group, but when she went to Santiago College, she taught an improvised class in Jewish religion. “I didn’t have much training for this,” she admits, “just the desire that all the Jewish girls at the school should have the same opportunities as the rest of the students, since there were Catholic and Protestant religion classes taught by priests and pastors” (p. 139). Susan Rubin Suleiman, herself
a distinguished writer and professor of French at Harvard, sums up the mood of the participants best by emphasizing that “every life story is part of a larger history. . . . being Jewish in the second half of the twentieth century, you cannot help but feel connected to that collective experience.” Suleiman illustrates her point by reporting that “in the Holocaust Museum in Washington . . . I have heard people saying things like ‘Gosh, if my grandfather had not migrated to New York . . .’” (p. 158).

Agosín has a rather less elevated view of migration than the people whom she interviewed. In one extended comment about her family’s move from Chile, she resorts to the well-worn and hostile cliché of American materialism. “We came from a very secure situation in Chile,” she tells one of her interlocutors, “but little by little we understood that this country’s culture measures everything in economic terms” (p. 102). Her respondents are less burdened by such preconceptions. Despite the upheaval in their lives, in some cases multiple migrations with multiple language changes, what emerges is the strength and resilience that carried them over the first bewildering times. In some cases, they were alone and could barely support themselves—as with Zezette Larsen, who, despite a degree in social work from the University of Rotterdam, could only find work addressing envelopes at Macy’s in New York.

While they tell these stories, they do not cast themselves as victims. In fact, their accounts leave the overwhelming impression of their resourcefulness and their satisfaction in their useful lives. These are qualities that are too often overlooked in studies of survivors, which tend to emphasize trauma and damage. It is one of the strengths of this book that its subjects emerge, by their own testimony, as energetic and vital women.

RUTH GAY
Hamden, Conn.


For many years, historical research on 18th- and 19th-century Jewish communities in the Russian empire was characterized by a focus on religious and political issues. Researchers of the period tended to emphasize phenomena such as the rise and spread of Hasidism and legislation affecting the Jews (such as establishment of communal taxes and forced conscription to the tsarist army). Yet for all that is known about the lives of these Jews, much remains a mystery. Because of the political conditions prevailing in Eastern Europe until the early 1990s, most of the relevant archival records remained out of reach, making it impossible for researchers to fashion a full and accurate historical account. Even important Jewish communities such as those of Odessa and Riga were not studied in a definitive manner, let alone smaller or geographically peripheral communities. As a result of the new accessibility of East European national and local archives, we are now witnessing a renaissance of the pre—Second World War tendency of archival-based communal research.¹ The unique difficulties that characterize this field, such as the multilingual nature of the relevant documentary materials, have made this historical research attractive only to a handful of
talented and skillful historians. This volume thus represents a welcome innovation as it examines and describes the life of the Jewish community of Shklov at the end of the 18th century.

A cursory glance at the table of contents reveals the way in which David Fishman intends to broaden the discussion from both a chronological and a thematic perspective. True, the first chapter deals with a subject that has been exhaustively researched—the conflict between *hasidim* and *mitnagdim*. Following this, however, Fishman turns to fresher material and to a more innovative approach. Chapter 2, for instance, offers a colorful portrait of R. Baruch Schick (1744–1810), a central figure in the process of the early dissemination of Enlightenment (Haskalah) ideas among East European Jews. In chapter 3, the author concentrates on the cultural milieu of the non-Jewish local elite, inspired and molded by Baron Semion Gavrilovich Zorich (1745–1799)—and the remarkable involvement of the Jewish economic and intellectual elite in that milieu. The following chapter deals with the ideological and cultural ferment within this Jewish group, personified by such figures as Naftali Hirtz Schulman and the communal preacher of the neighboring Jewish community of Mogilev, Hayim Avraham Katz. Chapter 5 is devoted to the struggle for emancipation of the Jews of Shklov under the leadership of Nota Notkin, Avraham Perets, and Yehoshua Zeitlin. Fishman also discusses (in the following chapter) the unique relationship between the rabbinical elite and the local enlightened intellectuals, as well as the Vilna Gaon’s attitude toward the scientific world, as reflected in the writings of Benyamin Rivlin and Yehudah Leyb Margoliot. Fishman concludes his survey with a description of Shklov’s gradual decline from prominence, both as a cultural and economic center and, more particularly, as an important center of the Haskalah within the Russian empire.

Fishman is one of a very few scholars who have chosen to consider the larger environment of Jews in the late 18th-century Russian empire. Several previous studies, notably John D. Klier’s *Russia Gathers Her Jews* (1986), have examined broad aspects of Jewish life during the period under discussion. But Fishman’s innovation is his focus on communal and socioeconomic aspects of society not only as a means of describing Jewish daily life, but also as a basis for identifying and characterizing the process of cultural change. Thus, his subject moves beyond the geographical confines of Shklov to consider the nature, the image, and the development of the Haskalah within a much wider geographic region. At the same time—this is one of the most innovative aspects of his book—he examines the broader phenomenon through the prism of a small and peripheral community. Fishman’s understanding is that the local community is not solely an organized religious entity but also a wider playing field, where (in the case of Shklov) there may emerge differing streams of broad-based cultural-ideational movements such as Hasidism and the Haskalah. Quite often, it seems, such developments occur more readily in a peripheral community such as Shklov rather than in more central communities that are characterized, in greater measure, by social and ideational conservatism.

Moreover, the maskilim of Shklov internalized the concepts of the Berlin Haskalah differently from Haskalah thinkers in larger communities such as Odessa and Vilna. Those of Shklov were more selective, attempting as well to integrate ideas taken from the local, non-Jewish intelligentsia. At the same time, as Fishman shows, there were important ties between the maskilim of Shklov and those of the maskilic centers of
German-speaking Jewry. Fishman notes the parallels, for example, between the educational program formulated by Naftali Hirtz Wessely (Weisel) in his Divrei shalom veemet (1782) and the program developed by Naftali Hirtz Schulman. But at the same time, he notes, Schulman “pioneered the effort to free the Haskalah movement of its Germano-centric tendency, and reorient it toward civil and cultural integration with Russia” (p. 73).

As do many others, Fishman sees the Haskalah as primarily an intellectual phenomenon. Thus, the heroes of his book are generally those who expressed their maskilic notions in writing (Schulman, Katz, and others). Notwithstanding the importance of such individuals, an exclusive focus on them contains the seeds of a methodological stumbling block. From the subtitle of Fishman’s book, “The Jews of Shklov,” we are led to believe that the author’s intent is to describe the processes affecting this Jewish community as a whole. However, by concentrating on the intellectual and economic elite, Fishman removes from discussion all “the plebeian elements of the community” (p. 62), who were themselves exposed to the complex environment of the Haskalah. He does note that Enlightenment ideas “were spread by living exponents, not only by books” (p. 61), noting, for example, the role of Jewish merchants and doctors. Would it be unreasonable to assume that such phenomena occurred as well in the local sphere, thus widening the maskilic circles beyond those of the thinkers, the authors, and the poets?

In Fishman’s view, Shklov was not only “the foremost center of Jewish cultural, intellectual, and political activity in the Russian Empire” (p. 133) at the close of the 18th century, but also the first East European Jewish community to struggle with the challenge of the Enlightenment and acculturation. One cannot, however, ignore similar trends that took place at the same time in Warsaw, in Mittau (in the province of Kurland), and, of course, in Vilna. The common denominator in all three of these communities, and in many that followed in their wake, was that maskilic ideas gradually penetrated into all social classes of Jewish society, rather than remaining the exclusive preserve of the local elite. Finally, with all due respect for the importance of Naftali Hirtz Schulman, Fishman’s claim for his being the first Jewish maskil in Russia and, as such, the first disseminator of the concepts of the German Jewish Haskalah within the Russian empire, seems a bit presumptuous. Most scholars have not yet succeeded in clarifying the exact nature of the East European Haskalah, much less its main figures during that early period. Similarly, Fishman’s claim that Schulman founded a maskilic school in Vilna (p. 72) is based on very problematic sources.

Here and there, errors have crept into the text. For example, the Vilna maskil and author Kalman Schulman was not Naftali Hirtz Schulman’s grandson (p. 132), but rather his nephew. There are also a number of errors of transliteration from Hebrew to English—for instance, Mordechai Aharon Gunzburg’s book is Glot [not Gelut] haarez hahadashah (p. 68). Overall, however, Russia’s First Modern Jews deserves a prominent place among those books dealing with the history of the Jews in the Russian Empire during the last two centuries, and especially among those describing the development of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe.

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Notes

1. See, for example, Yisrael Klausner, *Toledot hakehilah ha’ivrit bevilna* (Vilna: 1938) and Majer Balaban, *Historja Żydów w Krakowie I na Kazimierzu 1304–1868* (Kraków: 1936).


Arthur Goren opens this collection of essays, spanning some 35 years, with a special thanks to historians Deborah Dash Moore and Ezra Mendelsohn, who convinced him that these individual articles ought to be brought together. Moore and Mendelsohn deserve the thanks of the scholarly community as well for recognizing how this collection not only makes a statement about the nature of American Jewish history, but also shows the broad and creative sweep of the author’s corpus of work.

Goren, author of a pathbreaking book, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community*, has been busy for the last three decades since that book came out writing articles—each a provocative and challenging gem. Now made available in a mainstream, American academic publication, they can be read as a totality and judged in terms of their contribution to the field.

Some of these articles attracted immediate attention on their first publication. The important “Pageants of Sorrow, Celebrations of Protest,” for example, which appeared in this journal in 1997, brought American Jewish history into line with the emerging general interest in how people use public space. Influenced by social theorists, historians in a number of areas of specialization have explored the multiple uses of streets and sidewalks, theaters, parks, and other “public” places. They have begun to “read” such places as texts or as sources on a scholarly par with, say, newspaper articles or poems. By asking how American Jews used the streets to parade their identity, Goren sheds light on both the internal fissures within the Jewish world and the consciousness they had of the non-Jews around them.

Other articles are equally noteworthy for their penetrating questions about Jewish leadership, communal structures, and the politics of communal life. “Americanizing Zionist Pioneers,” for example, appeared in a 1996 book of essays that was published in Israel and in the United States. In this piece, Goren focuses on nuances of language and the mutability of cultural tropes to highlight the changing, and Americanizing, image of the pioneer (*haluẓ*). Readers not only learn much about American Zionism but come away with an understanding of how American ideas profoundly shaped Israeli culture. In this piece, we can see how the scholarly community’s “linguistic turn” in the 1990s made its way into the work of American Jewish and Zionist history; subtle changes in language can reveal much about shifts in politics.
In another important essay, this one on the 1954 tercentenary of Jewish settlement in America, Goren tackles a crucial period in American and American Jewish history, the post–Second World War “golden age” of civic liberalism—an era that seemed tailor-made for American Jews. In interrogating the surface comfort of that supposedly comfortable era, Goren joins in the scholarly rethinking of the 1950s that has been going on since the 1990s, challenging blanket and simplistic statements made by historians such as Peter Novick (in *The Holocaust in American Life*), and Karen Brodkin (in *How the Jews Became White Folks*). This essay also exhibits Goren’s talent for exploiting seemingly small details. For instance, the iconography of the Tercentenary’s seal—a menorah with a five-pointed (as opposed to six-pointed) star—offers Goren a chance to ponder the meaning and power of symbols as expressions of identity.

What is notable about Goren’s scholarship is the skill with which he moves back and forth from his clear interest in leaders as the shapers of communal politics to the broader social and cultural history in which these notable individuals operated. Goren emphasizes the leaders, be they members of the Orthodox world, Zionists, Socialists, or heads of Jewish defense organizations. But just as significantly, he shows how these leaders existed because of the sentiments of the masses.

Finally, a word about structure. *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* is organized in a chronologically loose fashion, beginning with Goren’s essays on the immigration era of the late nineteenth century and ending with a crucial and pathbreaking essay on the Jewish role in the “new ethnic” movement of the 1970s. This is certainly a logical way to put a book together, as it provides an overview of roughly a century of American Jewish history, covering such phenomena as the Jewish labor movement, the Yiddish press, Jewish participation in American politics in the immigrant generation, Orthodoxy as a force among the newcomers, Zionism, and the human relations movement within the Jewish organizations. Notwithstanding, the book might have been equally effective had it been organized by date of publication. Since these essays were written over a period of almost four decades, during which time American Jewish history moved from the margins of both American history and modern Jewish history (with its European bias), such structuring would have shown the course of American Jewish historiography. How has Goren—one of the first scholars to give American Jewish history academic respectability—changed his thinking in light of changes in American and Jewish history, particularly those transformations in the culture of the Jewish people and of the Americans among whom they live and function?

HASIA R. DINER
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The application of psychoanalytic theory to issues arising from religious, racial, and ethnic differences has a long history. It begins, of course with Freud himself, who was
interested in the psychocultural role of Jews in a Christian culture. By the 1950s, thinkers such as Theodor Adorno, Bruno Bettelheim, and Erik Erikson were describing and explaining antisemitism by means of psychoanalytic categories. But already in the 1930s, sociologist John Dollard had analyzed the racial order in the (U.S.) South in terms of the relative degrees of “instinctual repression” allowed to each race and to each class within each race. Since the 1960s particularly, psychoanalytic concepts have been used to guide efforts to reduce intergroup prejudice. Overall, it would be surprising if America, the one-time slave republic and the homeland of several million Jews, had not become the site of an ongoing analysis of the sources and dynamics of racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice.

In *Blacks and Jews on the Couch*, Aisha Abbasi, a psychoanalyst of Pakistani origins, asks a deceptively simple question: Why is it that African Americans and Jewish Americans have such a “problem” with each other when the “real” enemy—the general white population, historically, the white South—seems to get off scot-free? Why is the dialectic of power and weakness, of insider and outsider, of victim and “executioner” between Jews and African Americans explored to the point of diminishing returns, while the main source of all this historical suffering is barely mentioned?

One answer is that the powerful have always arranged things so that the weak fight among themselves, thus allowing the powerful to escape unscathed. Another response has been to trot out Freud’s old saw about the “narcissism of small differences,” and thereby point to the way that two groups blow relatively minor differences and disputes all out of proportion. Yet the first response is hardly convincing any longer—does anyone in white, small-town Alabama or Iowa, or on Protestant Wall Street or in Catholic Boston really care whether Jews or blacks get along or need them not to get along? More importantly, both Abbasi and C. Fred Alford, who identifies himself as neither Jewish nor African American, dispute the “small differences” notion. In fact, Alford suggests the phrase really should be “the magic denial of big differences” (p. 58), since the two groups display such striking differences in status and power, physical characteristics, educational attainment, and spheres of cultural achievement.

There are other, more specific explanations for why the two groups find it so hard to get along. E. Victor Wolfenstein observes incisively that in the Jewish community, “the remembered trauma of the European Jewish religious-racial past distorts perception of the American Jewish religious-ethnic present” (pp. 65–66). This creates all sorts of hypersensitivities and may cause Jews to radically misread black intentions. Wolfenstein’s observation is also important since several of the other contributors (who seem to be overwhelmingly Jewish) assume with varying degrees of smugness that the source of the problem lies in the African American community, particularly in the extremist rhetoric of leaders such as Louis Farrakhan and his sidekick, Kalid Abdul Muhammad. Yet A. Michele Morgan, as far as I can tell the only African American contributor, rightly calls on American Jews to acknowledge their “white skin privilege” while urging black Americans to engage more in “the process of self-criticism” (p. 161). She echoes a double point Alford makes about attitude: “outrage and hurt are the great enemies of curiosity” (p. 50), which suggests that it “would be progress if blacks and Jews were less certain of each other and more curious” (p. 60). Put another way: part of the problem about black-Jewish relations is that, at some level, both groups assume a fundamental innocence about themselves and thus direct blame at the other.
By this point, the observant reader may be wondering what any of this, however cogent, has to do with psychoanalysis. The answer is not a great deal, at least not in any direct way. To be sure, the old psychoanalytic favorite, “projection,” puts in a frequent appearance. The role of fantasies in mutual misrecognition is certainly alluded to, though I was surprised to see that little was made of the Lacanian “Imaginary” in the one essay (by Mark Bracher) that drew upon French psychoanalysis. Heinz Kohut’s concept of “chronic narcissistic rage” does seem to capture something about the almost always present anger of African Americans. But more often than not, the interesting insights and observations do not depend upon psychoanalytic theory, or at least need not be articulated in psychoanalytic terms.

Perhaps this is all to the good and may signal two things: first, that psychoanalytic discourse is no longer esoteric but has instead blended with other psychological theories and concerns; and second, that—at its best—psychoanalytic thinking sharpens our insights and makes us more flexible in our attitudes, rather than impressing us into the service of a theory that demands exclusive loyalty. That said, too many of the essays in this collection show little awareness of economic, social, and political power disparities between Jews and African Americans. Insofar as psychoanalytic theory diverts attention from the “objective” to the “subjective,” it can be neither convincing nor useful. But insofar as it continues to insist that phenomena such as racism and antisemitism always entail more than just rational self-interest—and that they are ultimately self-defeating—psychoanalytic theory will continue to deserve our consideration.

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University of Nottingham


The history of the Jews of Hungary, like that of certain other Central European communities, occupies a rather odd position in contemporary presentations of modern Jewish history. In terms of numbers, this was a very large Jewish community. Before the First World War and the truncation of Hungary, the Jewish population of Hungary was close to a million. This was larger than the Jewish population of Germany, France, and England combined. Moreover, the Jewish population of the capital city, Budapest (often referred to as “Judapest”) was about 200,000 in 1910—almost as large as that of Berlin, the largest Jewish community in Western Europe. Yet in many contemporary surveys of Jewish history, the only aspect of Hungarian Jewish history to get attention is the struggle of R. Moses Sofer, the “Hatam Sofer,” against certain aspects of modernity. Perhaps ironically, this rabbi who is so identified with Hungarian Jewish history was born and bred in Frankfurt and later lived in the city now known as Bratislava (then Pressburg), which is now the capital of Slovakia and in which hardly a Hungarian word can be heard. In any event, despite the fascinating career of R. Sofer, there was much more to the history of Hungarian Jewry than the story of his life.
Hungarian Jewry was a richly variegated community with a fascinating past reaching far back into the Middle Ages. The special sociopolitical conditions of Hungary in the Habsburg empire provided opportunities for social and economic integration that were in many respects unmatched in Europe, and the Jews were quick to take advantage of these conditions. There was massive Jewish immigration into Hungary in the modern period, which resulted in a heterogeneous population of Moravian, Galician, Sephardic, and German Jews alongside veteran Hungarian Jews. Yet the process of assimilation was perhaps the fastest here of all European communities. Hungarian Jews quickly entered the wider society and occupied prominent roles in many economic and cultural fields.

Most of these facts have been overlooked in recent generations. One of the reasons for this, I think, is the absence of a comprehensive and approachable history of Hungarian Jewry. An attempt at such a survey was published in German in 1874; more recent publications in Hebrew and Yiddish are far from filling the need and are not accessible to most western readers.

In his last book, the late and lamented Raphael Patai filled the gap with a well-written, wide-ranging, and comprehensive general history. Hence, there is no longer an excuse for ignoring the multifaceted history of Hungarian Jewry. Unfortunately, since this work is a survey and not a monograph, its statements and claims are not footnoted. (Had notes been provided, this large book would probably have been half again as long.) As a partial rectification, the bibliography is organized by chapters so that the reader (preferably one who is literate in Hungarian) who wants to follow up a specific point can narrow down the relevant sources relatively easily.

The first 200 pages of the book deal with the period up to the mid-18th century. As the sources for this period are very incomplete, Patai was able neither to write a synthetic history of the community nor to offer detailed information on the number and size of communities. Using limited materials, however, he was able to reconstruct the broad outlines of a history that began perhaps in the 2nd century.

Just as important is the detailed description (more than 120 pages) of Hungarian Jewry in the period between 1938 and the early 1990s. This is not merely a description of the Holocaust period but one that provides the context of the preceding decades. Perhaps as important, Patai describes the grim years under Communist rule in various contexts. Each of these chapters could easily have been a book; Patai’s concise presentation, arranged in chronological sequence, makes it possible for western readers unfamiliar with Hungarian Jewish history to gain a coherent picture of this community. The last part of this section, which deals with the reconstruction of Jewish life after the fall of the Communist regime, is based to a large extent on the author’s interviews in the early 1990s with more than 20 central figures in the revival of Jewish life in Hungary. In certain respects, this part can be treated as a primary source.

Among the many impressive characteristics of The Jews of Hungary is its vast scope—which is not confined to the time frame of nearly 2,000 years. Patai was interested not only in the history of the Hungarian Jews but also in their cultural life, and especially in their psychology. He tries to explain the Hungarian Jewish responses to Zionism, antisemitism, and Communism (which may not always have been to his liking). The Jews of Hungary also contains detailed and enlightening discussions of demographic issues. Patai does not fall into the common trap of “examples” but takes the trouble to bring data to buttress his choice of cases. A welcome—and touching—
reflection of Patai’s intellectual honesty is his addition, at the end of the book, of four pages of criticism (often sharp) of the initial draft of the book. This reached Patai after the book was in print and when corrections could not be made, but he still wanted the readers to benefit from the comments.

*The Jews of Hungary* is clear, readable, and well organized. The index is full and reader-friendly. The publishers have produced an attractive, well-printed, and well-bound volume that is a pleasure to hold. As Patai does not usually assume previous knowledge of Hungarian history, this book can be easily put in the hands of undergraduates without concern that there will be complaints. It will no doubt be the standard history for many years. Many are those who are, and will be, indebted to the late Raphael Patai.

**Shaul Stampfer**  
The Hebrew University


David Shuldiner’s book, written from the vantage point of a folklorist, is concerned with the relationship(s) between ethnic identity and political perspective within a selected group of Yiddish-speaking veterans of the American Jewish labor movement. The heart of the work is based on a series of valuable interviews conducted by Shuldiner in the early 1980s in southern California. The men and women interviewed by Shuldiner (approximately 20 people, most of them senior citizens) included people who had identified at one point or another in their lives with a range of Jewish groups, including the Workmen’s Circle, the Labor Zionist Alliance, Yiddish-speaking trade unions, and Yiddish-speaking anarchist organizations. A particularly large proportion of the interviewees was (or at some time had been) affiliated with organizations that were in some way close in spirit to the Communist party: the International Workers’ Order, the Jewish People’s Fraternal Order, the Jewish People’s Chorus, the Emma Lazarus Clubs, and the Progressive Jewish Children’s Schools.

It seems highly probable that this sample does not reflect the relative weight of the various political tendencies within the American Jewish labor movement during that movement’s heyday. Shuldiner’s family ties and connections may well have given him greater entrée to those on the “hard Left” than to others. It should be noted, however, that Shuldiner does not claim to have created a representative sample. He simply interviewed those to whom he had access and those who were willing to speak with him.

The interviews provide interesting information on a broad range of subjects, including the family backgrounds of some of those who participated in the Jewish labor movement in the United States, the political activities of these participants prior to their arrival in the United States, the ways in which they tended to link their Jewish backgrounds with their radicalism, and the social rituals developed by the organiza-
tions with which they were affiliated. Shuldiner devotes particular attention to the “folk ideology” of his informants and explores the ways in which they adapted Jewish rituals for their own needs.

He examines, for example, the development of secular, radical, “third seders” through which some of these people found “ways of affirming, in a concrete way, their solidarity with their compatriots, while maintaining some sense of community, albeit on a more abstract level, with Jewry as a whole” (p. 129). Shuldiner does not point out—though it tends to confirm his point—that later generations of Jewish radicals in America have continued to adapt Jewish traditions. In recent decades, for example, the few remaining Jewish secular schools in America have tended to introduce secular bar and bas mitzvah ceremonies, paralleling the introduction of third seders by their (spiritual or actual) grandparents.

Shuldiner’s scholarship is not flawless, and it suggests the limits of his knowledge of more traditional Jewish lives. He identifies a kapote (caftan), for example, as the “skull cap worn by observant Jews” (p. 39). Yiddish phrases are occasionally transliterated or translated in a garbled fashion. Nevertheless, Shuldiner has performed a significant service. Among other things, the interviews he conducted provide new and otherwise unobtainable information on the Kleyner Bund, which was made up of children in tsarist Russia who were sympathetic to the Bund. The memories of those interviewed by Shuldiner—most of whom, I presume, have subsequently died—provide unique data that supplement what can be found in previously published works.

Moreover, whether or not Shuldiner’s sample is representative of the Jewish labor movement as a whole, his conclusions ring true: “The folk ideology of Yiddish radicals was not simply a political canvas stretched over a traditional frame. It was not a simple case of calculated exploitation of ethnic ‘color’ to paint images of class struggle. . . . Ultimately, these Yiddish radicals came to embrace a Jewish-identified politics with genuine enthusiasm” (pp. 141–142). Whereas Shuldiner’s methodology may not be beyond reproach, his intuitive sense of those he studied strikes me as being right on target.

Jack Jacobs
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Both of these books make a contribution to the often discussed topic of Sigmund Freud and Judaism. Their approaches to this topic, however, significantly differ from each other. While Ana-Maria Rizzuto places Freud’s attitudes toward religion into a psychoanalytic context, tracing Freud’s personal development as a background to his theories, Richard J. Bernstein openly refrains from putting “Freud on the couch.” He instead attempts “to do justice to the explicit claims and arguments of the text,” focusing on the analysis of Freud’s last and most controversial book, Moses and Monotheism (p. 3). The result is a rather personal dialogue with Freud in which Bernstein comes to terms with what he considers to be Freud’s main contribution to our understanding of religious tradition, namely an awareness of how much is unconsciously conveyed even in “direct communication” (p. 110). Rizzuto, by contrast, presents a careful and original analysis of Freud’s references to religion as scattered throughout his work, letters, and personal antiquities collection. These pieces of evidence are placed in their historical context and interpreted in terms of Freud’s own development and the spirit of his time. The result is a speculative but compelling reconstruction of how Freud began to doubt the idea of a benevolent father God and became an atheist.

Bernstein’s book shows the typical traces of a personal engagement with Freud’s text: he raises direct questions to Freud, expresses value judgments as well as emotional reactions to his arguments, and at times substantially repeats himself. For instance, Bernstein responds to Freud’s famous statement that, while estranged from his father’s religion, he felt a “Jew in essential nature,” with an emphatic question: “Can one so neatly and rigorously distinguish the religion of Judaism from the essential nature of Jewishness?” (p. 2). Furthermore, Bernstein does not hesitate to state in the preface that “Freud does not do full justice to the meaning of Judaism and Jewishness” (p. xi). His reaction to Freud’s theory of Moses’ Egyptian origins is open skepticism: “It is difficult to know whether one is expected to take any of this seriously—even as an application of psychoanalysis” (p. 7). Rather than investigating the historical background or philosophical significance of Freud’s conjectures, as Jan Assman has admirably done in his recent monograph, Moses the Egyptian (1997), Bernstein states that they make him “feel uneasy” (p. 14). They seem to him “outra-
geous” (p. 11) as well as “tendentious” (p. 15). Finally, Bernstein’s coming to terms with Freud also involves numerous extensive quotations and some repetitions, both perhaps a sign of less than fully realized analysis (his discussion of Freud’s alleged Lamarckianism on p. 104ff, for example, closely parallels his discussion on pp. 46–58).

Yet despite his ambivalence, Bernstein seeks to appreciate Freud and defend at least some of his ideas. While the theory of Moses’ Egyptian origins is isolated as a rather unconvincing and dispensable part of Freud’s book (see, for example, p. 98), special attention is given to Freud’s ideas about the return of memory traces in religious tradition. The heart of Freud’s argument, Bernstein suggests, is the link he establishes between a historical event in the distant past, the trauma it evoked in the human psyche, and the lasting effect this has had on the character even of contemporary Jews (p. 28). The murder of Moses, which Freud assumes to have actually taken place during the Exodus, left an ineradicable impression on the soul of ancient Jews. The traces of this traumatic experience did not fade over time but were transmitted to every new generation. They are consequently still visible in the character of contemporary Jews. In this context, Bernstein openly takes issue with Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, whose interpretation of Freud he finds rather distorting (esp. pp. 90–93). Following Jacques Derrida, Bernstein especially criticizes Yerushalmi for wrongly accusing Freud of a primitive Lamarckianism, namely, a belief in the unconscious, quasi-biological transmission of character traits. Bernstein argues that this interpretation of Freud’s theory involves a serious misunderstanding, because Freud never denied the conscious aspects of traumatic memory traces (p. 93). Unlike Jung, Freud never believed in a collective unconsciousness, but instead offered a fascinating discussion of how conscious, unconscious, and half-conscious memories correlate to form human recollection (p. 107). Freud’s arguments are thus shown to be neither truly Lamarckian nor absurd, as Yerushalmi believed (p. 106).

It is doubtful whether the overall impact of Bernstein’s book will be lasting. While he has hardly offered any fundamentally new insights, he vindicates Freud regarding the dynamics of collective memory. The book’s greatest merit is the fact that it has once more drawn our attention to the crucial relevance of Freud’s writings to any discussion of religion and modernity.

As mentioned previously, Rizzuto’s book investigates the nexus between Freud’s psychological make-up and his overall views on religion. The author does so on the basis of two assumptions: 1) Freud’s statements regarding the image of God as a sublimation of one’s own father figure (p. 169); 2) Rizzuto’s conclusion from her previous research that a positive image of God depends on maternal satisfaction in childhood (p. 235). The author then sets out to prove that on both grounds Freud could hardly have become a believer. His emotional disappointment in both his mother and his father erased the necessary psychological basis for faith in a benevolent and providential God.

Why did Freud Reject God? is structured almost like a detective story. It opens with the riddle of Freud’s compulsive collecting of antiquities, mostly statues of deities, which he began two months after his father’s death. This collection quickly became far more important to Freud than his library. He sought to evacuate all of it from Nazi-occupied Vienna and even asked Marie Bonaparte to smuggle out his favorite figure.
of Athena. Rizzuto highlights the importance of this phenomenon and suggests that it holds the key to the mystery of Freud’s personal attitude toward religion. The entire book is then devoted to uncovering ever more layers of this riddle and reconstructing the emotional development that led up to Freud’s atheism in adulthood.

Initially, Freud’s antiquities collection is traced back to the death of his father and his unconscious working through their conflictual relationship. Rizzuto identifies significant childhood experiences of Freud and shows that he, while being the favorite son of both his parents, was never satisfied in his deepest needs of infancy. Faced with a narcissistic and emotionally unavailable mother, as well as an unsuccessful and outwardly helpless father, Freud had to rely on himself from very early on. According to Rizzuto’s reconstruction, especially traumatic events were the sudden departure of Freud’s beloved nurse, who served him as a surrogate mother, and the family’s transfer to Vienna, which deprived Jakob Freud of his position as a respectable pater familias. Both events were catastrophic for Freud and substantially shook his confidence in the world. They ultimately prompted him to reject the idyllic religious notions to which he had as a child been introduced by both his nurse and his father.

Rizzuto indeed argues that in view of these successive experiences of failing emotional support, “Godlessness was the adolescent Freud’s only choice” (p. 251). His need for protection and parental warmth, however, could not be entirely suppressed. It resurfaced most dramatically in his collection of antiquities, which were arranged like a personal audience on Freud’s desk. Rizzuto suggests that these divine figures closely resemble the colored plates in the Philippson Bible that he had studied as a child with his father (pp. 105–133). Freud’s continuous attachment to these statues indicates a displaced and never satisfied longing for greater intimacy with his father—and the religious tradition.

Two kinds of weaknesses may be detected in Rizzuto’s argumentation. One pertains to the stringency of her hermeneutic associations, the other to the book’s underlying assumptions. Rizzuto’s hermeneutic associations are suggestive in the best of Freudian tradition and therefore sometimes open to question. To be sure, she never jumps to conclusions and her suggestions are always well-thought through. However, they are not always compelling. An example is the link drawn between Jakob Freud’s death and the beginning of Freud’s antiquities collection. This association mainly rests on the chronological proximity of these two events. Rizzuto’s effort to substantiate it by further conjectures from Freud’s dreams remain rather speculative (pp. 83–84). The second weakness of the book is the author’s assumption of a necessary link between childhood frustration and atheism. This assumption almost seems to apply like a natural law from which there is no escape. The reader may instead ask whether Freud really had no choice given his childhood experiences. Could his frustration not equally have been translated into a substitute satisfaction in religion? Alternatively, could his atheism not have developed at least partially out of intellectual concerns? Perhaps Freud’s rational orientation inclined him toward criticism and secular humanism?

Notwithstanding such questions, Rizzuto’s book will prove profitable even to the reader who does not accept its basic premise and finds some of the author’s hermeneutic associations a little far-fetched. This is undoubtedly a magisterial study of Freud’s personal development and the emergence of his position on religion. It is therefore
recommended not only to specialists in the field, but to readers more generally interested in psychoanalytic readings of culture and religion.

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When Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the spiritual leader of Shas, made his ill-considered remarks about the victims of the Holocaust being the reincarnation of sinners, he sought to justify God by indicting the Jewish people. He believes that God is just. God is engaged in history, God is all-powerful, and therefore the Holocaust was divine punishment for sins so grievous as to warrant extreme punishment. In truth, he was saying nothing extraordinary. Faithful to the teachings of Deuteronomy and to the prayers recited in the additional (musaf) service of each of the major festivals—“because of our sins we were exiled from the Land”—the religious leader of Shas must have been surprised at the firestorm his words set off.

In fact, however, the issue of God’s role in the Holocaust (or, more accurately, of how to speak of God in the aftermath of the Holocaust) has been a central consideration of Jewish theology for the last few decades. The 1966 publication of Richard L. Rubenstein’s After Auschwitz and the events of the Six-Day War made it the existential issue for many Jews. They understood, as did Rubenstein, that for contemporary Jewish theology to have any relevance to the experience of the Jewish people, it had to come to terms with the twin revolutions of the contemporary Jewish experience: the Holocaust and the emergence of the state of Israel.

Zachary Braiterman’s (God) After Auschwitz is a highly intelligent and deeply worthy addition to this theological literature, which has developed primarily in the United States. Braiterman analyzes the religious thinking of such major modern thinkers as Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Mordecai Kaplan, and Joseph Dov Baer Soloveitchik and finds them wanting in their understanding of evil and hence in the capacity of their thought to handle an issue as grave as the Holocaust. All of these thinkers were pre-Holocaust in their orientation, yet Heschel and Soloveitchik were not yet in the prime of their careers when the Holocaust occurred, albeit nearing the peak of their intellectual and communal creativity; whereas Kaplan (b. 1881) and Buber (b. 1887) wrote many books in the Holocaust’s aftermath. As Braiterman documents, Buber was far more insightful than his contemporaries. Soloveitchik’s distinguished student David Hartman has also not been able to grapple with the Holocaust. One wonders whether Hartman’s annoyance at what he perceives to be an overemphasis of the Holocaust masks the challenge that it poses to his thought.

The heart of Braiterman’s work is his consideration of Richard Rubenstein, Eliezer Berkovits, and Emil Fackenheim. In the sections dealing with these figures, he displays his intellectual mastery of philosophy, sociology, theology, psychology, tradi-
tional Jewish texts, and even contemporary historiography and art. Braiterman is at home in the intellectual traditions of the West, moving easily from Peter Berger to Jacques Derrida, from Walter Benjamin to Anselm Kiefer, and from Sigmund Freud to Max Weber. He is also at home in the intellectual traditions of Judaism, discussing with ease traditional and medieval texts as well as contemporary Jewish scholarship. The display is impressive and underscores his consideration of these thinkers.

Braiterman is fair to Richard Rubenstein. He does not engage in personal attack, but does engage him intelligently and critically. He appreciates the role that Rubenstein’s radical conclusions played in advancing the question of God after the Holocaust, even as he suggests that Rubenstein’s “paganism” and the tone of his work were too dissonant for his contemporaries. Braiterman benefits from having read the first and second editions of After Auschwitz—two very different works separated by a quarter of a century of history and thought. Indeed, he uses the Rubenstein of the second edition to critique and engage the author of the first. The result is not only an important treatment of Rubenstein, but a rediscovery of his importance for contemporary Jewish theology.

Braiterman’s consideration of Eliezer Berkovits also benefits from the inclusion of a range of Berkovits’ halakhic and philosophical works. He discusses With God in Hell and Modern Jewish Philosophy as well as Faith After Auschwitz, elaborating on the essential relevance of Berkovits’ point of view as he considers not only theodic but also antitheodic traditions in Jewish thought. Although Braiterman perceives Berkovits as more radical and more insistent on confronting God than I do, his argument is persuasive enough to have encouraged me to reread this important and undervalued modern Orthodox thinker. Among other things, he shows how Berkovits rehabilitates the good name of both Job and Elisha Ben Abuya (also known in the Talmud as “Aher”—“the Other”), the teacher of Rabbi Meir who became a heretic.

There are two important mistakes in Braiterman’s approach to the topics that he has chosen for analysis, which will surely be corrected in future work. Braiterman is wrong when he claims that ultra-Orthodox Judaism has not responded to the Holocaust with new thinking. Contrary to Ovadia Yosef’s simplistic reading, the work of Gershon Greenberg documents an ultra-Orthodox response both during and after the Holocaust. By now there are many works that must be considered in order to evaluate the character of that response. Certainly, contemporary messianism must be considered a response to the Holocaust.

Second, Braiterman is wrong in his depiction of Irving Greenberg’s limited efforts to present a post-Holocaust theology. With the exception of “Clouds of Smoke, Pillars of Fire,” which was first presented at the International Symposium on the Holocaust in 1974, the bulk of Greenberg’s major works have not appeared in scholarly journals, but mostly in pamphlets, oral presentations, and newspaper articles: odd but important forums for serious theological discourse. Greenberg has deliberately faced the lay audience, yet he has continued to present a post-Holocaust theology in a very systematic way. One would have liked Braiterman to have focused his analytic skills on Greenberg’s thought.

Braiterman is unusually insightful in his treatment of Emil Fackenheim. He considers Fackenheim’s early work, in which he claimed that nothing can alter the con-
tent of Jewish thought from Sinai to the Redemption, thus insulating Jewish thought from history. He is also precise in his consideration of every iteration of Fackenheim’s post-Holocaust theology. Without taking issue with Fackenheim’s politics, which have grown increasingly right-wing, Braiterman does challenge the role that the state of Israel plays in Fackenheim’s thought. He wonders how any temporal entity (with all the imperfections of its politics and policies) can play the role that Fackenheim assigns to it. Fackenheim’s romantic observation of the harmony between the secular-sacred in Jerusalem certainly did not anticipate the contemporary clash that is at the heart of current societal conflict, nor can it sustain itself in the wake of such conflict.

One can only nod in agreement to Braiterman’s finding that Rubenstein, Berkovits, and Fackenheim have moved what had since become marginal outbursts of anger along with priestly, mystical and feminine figures into the center of their discourse. They hardened tradition’s central concern for the community of Israel into stubborn solidarity. They deactivated central tropes like retribution, the-world-to-come, afflictions of love, and prophetic rebuke by moving them out into the margins of their thought. In the process, post-Holocaust religious thought came to constitute a unique, antitheodic loop in the semiotic web of Jewish tradition. (p. 167)

While future generations may sense these questions without quite the same urgency, they will not easily return to a discourse that does not grapple seriously with evil.

Few future Jewish theologians will want to do their theological work without considering Braiterman’s work and its role as a theological critique. He is sharp and well informed, and his intellect is powerful. A copy should be sent to the venerable Ovadia Yosef.

MICHAEL BERENBAUM
Los Angeles


Any work bearing the claims of the title of this volume that is also dedicated to the memory of Gillian Rose must be taken seriously. Rose was one of the leading British sociologists who dealt with Jewish identity formation. A contributor to this volume, she converted to Christianity on her deathbed. Is there any life that is a better exemplar of “modernity,” “culture,” and “the Jew”? In this first-rate volume, Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus have compiled the papers of a conference held initially at the University of London under the auspices of the Centre for English Studies. Thus suspended between Jewish studies and English studies, the collection examines not only the representations of “the Jew” as phantom in western culture, but also raises the requisite questions about what is the appropriate model for such an examination.

In a world that is now postcolonial, it is fitting that Homi Bhabha writes the fore-
word on the idea of the Jews as a self-critical community. But is self-criticism today a virtue, or is it a sign that the Jews in Britain are now at a point where they can be self-critical, that is, visible because they are no longer the targeted minority? Bhabha, certainly the leading light in postcolonial thought, writes not merely as an Anglo-Indian but as a Parsi. The Parsi are a merchant class differentiated from the majority Hindus and Muslims in South Asia because of the uniqueness of their ancient monotheistic religion. They are not “the Jews of India,” since there really are Jews in India, but they form a relatively silent minority, as their position in the world of South Asia (and indeed Iran) remains precarious. Ironically, perhaps, Bhabha speaks about the Jews as a self-critical community from the standpoint of a group that is silent in the South Asian diaspora.

In their opening essay, Cheyette and Marcus present a detailed methodological look at how “Jews” and their representations, self and other, have been and can be examined. This, taken together with Bhabha’s introduction, sets the stage for the volume in great style. There follows a section on gender and Jewish representations, with complex essays by Ritchie Robertson on Otto Weininger, Eric Santner on Daniel Paul Schreber (not a Jew, but what else is new?), and Daniel Boyarin on Jews and masculinity. The section on modernism and antisemitism has essays by Jean Radford on the image of the woman and that of the Jew; Daniel Pick on Svengali; and Ian Paterson on Mary Butts. The section on modernity contains contributions from Zygmunt Bauman (who coined the idea); William Outhwaite (on Jurgen Habermas); David Feldman; Geoffrey Bennington (on Jean-François Lyotard); and Max Silverman. The final section on the Holocaust contains essays by James Young, Tony Kushner, Gillian Rose, Nancy Wood, and Bryan Cheyette. The volume has an afterword by Paul Gilroy, the major critic of multiculturalism and the black experience in the United Kingdom.

Cheyette and Marcus have placed a serious challenge at the feet of those interested in multiculturalism and minority discourse. Where do the Jews fit; indeed, where does the image of “the Jews” fit in this brave new world? In his brilliant short story, “We’re Not Jews!” Hanif Kureishi illustrates the complexity of how images are transmitted in a postcolonial world among colonized peoples. Cheyette and Marcus have begun to help all of us begin to explore these questions by providing methodological, historical, and theoretical approaches to such conundrums. This is a special book on the history of Jewish cultural studies in the United Kingdom, but it is of great value to any critic interested in the problems of the Jews (however defined) and the modern.

SANDER L. GILMAN
The University of Chicago


Neil Gillman, philosopher, theologian, and historian of Conservative Judaism, has distinguished himself as an articulate expositor of modern religion and its relation to traditional Jewish sources. The present book extends his award-winning *Sacred
Fragments, which constructs a contemporary theology. The Death of Death faces ultimate questions, such as “Do we ‘invent’ God?”—to cite the subtitle of his first chapter. It is the work of a consummate pedagogue, a systematic reflection on “body and soul”—terms that Gillman puts into their historical and existential contexts. It should leave no one indifferent.

What does Jewish tradition say about physical death, resurrection of the body, and the career of the soul? What are we to believe today about traditional doctrines and insights? Gillman’s survey of Jewish sources is remarkably clear and comprehensive, if a bit brief. For those who seek the complexities of arguments and their sources, he gives references in footnotes. The book’s discourse and documentation, however, remain oriented toward “the intelligent and concerned lay reader” (p. 244).

Gillman establishes his nomenclature in chapter 1, “The Eschatological Impulse,” which introduces anthropological notions of religion as a system of symbols and myths that shape the chaos of existence into some intelligible order. Myth is his central conceptual tool, which he wields in order to justify a “second naïveté” (in Paul Ricoeur’s terms) in which the conscious, rational mind admits the grim data while retaining a passionate will to believe. He then extends Abraham Joshua Heschel’s notion that “as a report about revelation, the Bible is a midrash” to Jewish tradition as a whole.

Gillman’s purpose is not to debate the specifics of revelation theology but to introduce a flexible manner of reading religious texts, in which symbolic language is seen as pointing toward a reality inaccessible to reason and empirical verification. His intent is bold: to achieve the immediacy of belief in our post-Holocaust, postmodern age. In practical terms, Gillman’s study of sources seeks to restore the prospect of authentic prayer.

First, the biblical view that death is final. The notion of eschatology in chapter 2, “The Origins of Death,” helps to clarify the Adam and Eve story as well as primordial myths of creation and chaos in Genesis, Psalms, and the Book of Job. “Death in the Bible” (chapter 3) is “real and tragic” (p. 79), with two exceptions, Enoch in Gen. 5:21–24 and Elijah in II Kings 2:11. The Psalms assert the definitive nature of Sheol, the underworld of the dead who sleep forever in the dust, inaccessible even to God. Note that the chapter ends by citing the kaddish, anticipating God’s renewal of the world. This liturgical element plays a central role in Gillman’s multilayered exposition.

The definitive transition from the Bible’s finality of death to the canonization of afterlife survival as proof of God’s power is explained in chapters 4 and 5. There are two strands to this doctrine, bodily resurrection and the immortality of the soul. Gillman’s frame of reference is Dan. 10–12 and apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature (Enoch; II Maccabees; and some Psalms in which “resurrection becomes universalized” [p. 104]). He traces the dualistic immortality of the soul, comparing Jewish and Platonic sources through the apocryphal book The Wisdom of Solomon, accounts of the Pharisees, and Josephus. This survey leads to a crucial discussion of the gevurot benediction of the Amidah (pp. 122–127); references to this prayer become a leitmotiv, reinforcing the existential dimension of Gillman’s primarily empirical and rationalistic exposition.

Historical context deepens in the two central chapters that contrast two modes of
understanding, the rational and the intuitive or poetic: “Maimonides: The Triumph of the Spiritual” and “The Mystical Journey of the Soul” (chapters 6–7, pp. 143–188), which posit the inception of Sabbatianism and Hasidism (following Scholem’s hypothesis) as responses to the brutalities of political persecution and exile.

Gillman makes his own perspective more explicit in chapters 8 and 9, “The Encounter with Modernity” and “The Return to Resurrection.” His goal is to “re-enchant the world,” to revive a positive and meaningful sense of mystery. He traces the “modern triumph of the spiritual” from Moses Mendelssohn (pp. 190–196) and describes the inception of Reform and Liberal Judaism in Germany and its effect on the prayer book in the American Reform and Conservative movements. Gillman seems to emphasize Reform—and, less surprisingly, Mordecai Kaplan’s Reconstructionism—in order to justify his eventual affirmation of bodily resurrection. The Reform thinker Eugene Borowitz is given pride of place as the expositor of the “postmodern impulse” (pp. 216–218; esp. 230–236.) Somehow, skeptical or liberal thinkers lend credence to “outrageous” doctrines such as that of bodily resurrection, as explained by Will Herberg (pp. 220–225) and seconded by Arthur A. Cohen and Steven Schwarzschild. The critics are the ones who open the mental space for such belief—or hope.

And that is perhaps Gillman’s main point: even the doctrine of bodily resurrection, asserted in various ways from talmudic times on, provides a laboratory of hope. Gillman explicitly rejects wishful thinking and fantasy, but he elaborates plausible rational grounds for the belief in resurrection, supported by Jewish classical sources—and, most importantly, reinforced by liturgical prayer. Chapter 9 closes with a lovely and insightful summary of Hershel Matt’s important article, “An Outline of Jewish Eschatology” (originally published in *Judaism* in 1968), which affirms the “mythical or poetic truth” of God’s power to revive the dead.

Gillman’s final chapter, “What Do I Believe?” (pp. 243–274), is the most moving and the most frustrating. He candidly admits his own biases and presuppositions (“My Data,” pp. 244–245) and then develops arguments, careful but all too brief, on why “to accept the finality of death is to revert to chaos” (p. 248). The present summary cannot do justice to his valiant attempts. Boldly he testifies, both philosophically and liturgically, to the doctrine “central to popular Jewish religion” (p. 254), namely that God is more powerful than death.

A book such as this requires one to respond personally to this most personal of objective confessions of faith. Is it Gillman’s failing that I remain unconvinced of the plausibility of bodily resurrection or that some sort of immortal soul persists after physical death? Or that I don’t seem even to wish that I might survive in some form or another? And yet, the authority of Jewish tradition challenges one to do so.

Those of us who aspire to a confident faith—or who seek God—with desires less specific than survival after death receive in this book a precious gift. Gillman educates and nourishes our liturgical life. How do we, as moderns, pray? Neil Gillman lucidly integrates the postmodern into the traditional, not only to revive the power of myth as an organizing hermeneutic, but to reinforce critical thinking while opening the gates of prayer.

Edward K. Kaplan
Brandeis University
In this sequence of essays collected over a period of 15 years, David Hollinger presents a complex account of what he calls the “de-Christianization” of American university culture. This history is organized around two reciprocal narrative spines. The more familiar line of argument tells of the new rise of the old battle of science versus religion in the groves of academe, starting in the 1930s, gaining steam in the postwar era, and triumphing in the 1960s. The more inventive story recounts the entrance of Jews into the full reach of university culture—represented by a sweep of scholars ranging from sociologist Robert Merton to the literary critic Lionel Trilling.

More precisely, Hollinger relates the pivotal role of Jewish professors in accelerating this process of academic desacralization, which produced palpable benefits in terms of the demographic transformation of institutions of higher learning. In fact, by the 1990s, 17 percent of the faculty in the elite universities was constituted by an ethnic group, Jewish Americans, comprising less than 3 percent of the population. Among the historical explanations presented to account for this accomplishment are post–Second World War guilt over the past record of Ivy League antisemitism, the expansion of universities after the war, the G.I. Bill, and the growing need of the federal government to promote science as a facet of its anti-Communist crusade.

Structurally speaking, Hollinger has produced monographic essays of sundry sizes that exemplify aspects of this larger proposition on a smaller scale. But not every piece maintains the balance of the dual focus. In one case, his long study, “Academic Culture at the University of Michigan, 1938–1998,” Jews and Jewish issues are barely mentioned. Another remarkable study, “The ‘Tough-Minded’ Justice Holmes, Jewish Intellectuals, and the Making of an American Icon,” primarily explores the representations of Holmes as a “Great Man” by Felix Frankfurter, Harold Laski, and others. “The Defense of Democracy and Robert K. Merton’s Formulation of the Scientific Ethos” shows how Merton, born Meyer Schkolnick, aided in the formation of the ideology of liberal democracy during the Second World War and later facilitated the fashioning of the sociology of science as a professional discipline.

Hollinger, a professor of history at the University of California at Berkeley and author of *Morris R. Cohen and the Scientific Ideal* (1975), *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (1985), and *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (1995), presents much novel and judiciously reasoned material. Yet it would be all the more compelling if refashioned from a social history perspective—one that also acknowledged the trickle-up effect of social movements and organic intellectuals. *Partisan Review*, for example, which during the era celebrated by Hollinger became known as the leading literary journal in the United States and
most assuredly as a voice for secular values and liberal pluralism, began as the organ of the Communist Party’s John Reed Club. Its pages were filled with writings by Jews of the plebeian type—academic outcasts such as Sol Funaroff, Edwin Rolfe (Solomon Fishman), Tillie Lerner, and Alfred Hayes. These writers adhered to scientific socialism, and some in their number occasionally broke into the cultural mainstream to challenge the academic elite. One example is Mike Gold, with his famous New Republic polemic against Archibald MacLeish’s ostensibly anti-immigrant portrait of “Comrade Levine” in Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller’s City (1933).

Mostly this growing number of secular Jewish radicals and their allies, inspired by Marx and Darwin (or at least popularizations of their ideas in the socialist press), identified with the CIO, the antiracist struggles of African Americans, and the crusade against fascism in Spain. These were mass movements at the base, with cultural ramifications for decades to come. If Hollinger had turned his ample gifts toward the production of a full-fledged book on this topic, he might not have attributed the creeping pluralistic university culture of the 1950s and early 1960s so one-sidedly to the force of the civil arguments of elite professors adhering to the scientific credo. Surely there would also be a role for those unruly and untenurable types pushing against the culture from the outside.

Robert Oppenheimer and Lionel Trilling, both mentioned by Hollinger, had youthful connections with Communism. Neither openly acknowledged that their outlooks were originally forged “in the streets” as well as in the classrooms, but they and others among the progenitors of secularization efforts in academe had good reason to downplay or omit past ties, family connections, and other affiliations with movements of the Left. The political pillorying of Oppenheimer was as much a lesson for those employed in the scientific community as was the persecution of Paul Robeson for those in the culture industry. More than 40 years after McCarthyism, however, historical reconstruction can now afford to be more forthright than those who sought protective coloration for themselves or their friends. For example, Hollinger quotes from the Autumn 1944 symposium “Under 40,” published in the American Jewish Committee’s Contemporary Jewish Record, for material about Trilling’s attitude toward Jewishness in relation to the rational, pluralistic, and scientific culture then on the upswing in academe. For the sake of accurate historical reconstruction, it is now obligatory to state candidly that every one of the dozen writers and intellectuals profiled in the symposium was also associated with the Communist, Trotskyist, and (in one or two cases) the social democratic Left. Could their generational counterparts in the social and physical sciences have been of an entirely different breed?

From this bottom-up perspective, in which elites sometimes embrace milder versions of outlooks also generated from below, it is arguable that what Hollinger’s group shared with extra-university (and often extraparliamentary) Jewish radicals was less a common ethnic background and more an affinity for a version of internationalism. That is, it is not Jewishness per se but the strong attraction of early 20th-century Jews in the West to radical and liberal thought, and the corresponding social movements, that accounts for many of the commonalities of this cohort.

Of course, the internationalism of the pro-Communists such as Gold was drastically compromised by delusions about the Soviet Union; but the mid-century intellectuals’ “liberal cosmopolitanism” had an analogous blind spot about the sufferings
and urgent needs of the darker and poorer portions of humanity. Even the case for the “other America” of domestic poverty had to come from an academic outsider, socialist Michael Harrington, as did the first books in the early 1960s that decried the replacement by the United States of France as the aspiring master of Indochina. Moreover, the demand to integrate university life—by gender as well as color—did not spring from the minds of the “liberal cosmopolitans”; it came from the bodies of young people sitting in at the offices of college administrators.

To be fair, Hollinger concedes at the outset that his studies should be considered as “forays” that require more systematic exploration. When the moment for such investigation arrives, I believe that the priority should be on a broader historical contextualization of the academic culture produced by the 1930s—1960s “cohort” that is so splendidly chronicled in these pages.

ALAN WALD
University of Michigan
The 20 essays that make up this expansive and important collection derive from a conference on the subject held at Brandeis University and deal with a plethora of subjects that illuminate the multifaceted, always charged relationship between Zionism and Judaism. Many different historical perspectives are explored. They range from general discussions that take up the subject in a principled and abstract manner, to some very detailed explorations of the views of particular groups, among them German-speaking Jewry, English and American Jewry, different hasidic dynasties, the Yishuv community, and rural Atlas Jews. Although a certain unevenness is inevitable in such a compilation of essays, the overall impression is of high quality, clear writing, and assiduous editing.

It is difficult to find a single thread that runs through all the essays. But together they do form an admirable compendium that covers the subject rather methodically. German- and English-speaking Jewry, for example, are subjects of almost half the book’s essays. The often thorny relationship between religion and Zionism in Eastern Europe and Russia is dealt with somewhat less thoroughly in the opening essays. A few especially instructive essays on the fraught relationship between religion and Zionism in the Yishuv era come toward the end of the collection.

Overall, the picture these essays present is of a slow but inexorable victory of Zionism over many of its early opponents—from the assimilationists to the Reform, the “modern” Orthodox, the cultural autonomists, and those in the world of the yeshivas. Early hostilities were gradually modified in a variety of shrewd and often tortuous ways. From the fin de siècle onwards, cracks in the resistant armor of early oppositional groups begin to show, widening and deepening apace. With a few glaring exceptions (one taken up in an absorbing article by Aviezer Ravitsky on the hasidic dynasty of Munkacs) many early oppositional groups altered their tone from one of shrill hostility to one of grudging empathy, or at least to noncommittal neutrality. Theologians labored at formulating sometimes sophisticated justifications for the change of view thus adopted (see Jehuda Reinharz’s astute essay). In other cases, religion was reinterpreted in a secularized national form (see the essay by Steven J. Zipperstein on Ahad Ha’am and his followers). At times it was the leadership that followed the generally pro-Zionist sympathies of the Jewish masses (see, for example, Stuart Cohen’s essay on Anglo-Jewry). The standard arguments of the nay-sayers—
especially the claim that the drive to national autonomy would compromise the status of Jews in many countries and encourage antisemitism—seems to have become less and less cogent as the Zionist idea captured the imagination of the masses of East European Jewry, who, through emigration, came to represent a major proportion of West European and American Jewish communities.

A second general motif running through many of the essays (from Shlomo Avineri’s introductory essay to Anita Shapira’s and Israel Kollat’s discussions of religion and Zionism in the early decades of the 20th century) relates to the transvaluation of religious into national-Zionist themes. In almost every essay, this harnessing of religious themes, religious practice, and the ardor of religious commitment—reformulated and transformed—has central importance. Indeed, the success of Zionism in overcoming many of its opponents was rooted in its ability to redirect religious energies toward national causes, reinterpreting holidays in a new key, revising historical events to fit into the new dispensation, and reevaluating Jewish identity.

Zionism received much of its impetus from this redirection of religious energies. Indeed, until a few decades ago, one could still easily distinguish the transformative ambitions of Zionism that drew upon antecedent religious motives. It is difficult to set a sharp date for the exhaustion of this energy, the ceasing of this transformative moment in Zionist ideology. But writing at the beginning of the new millennium, it is clear that it has all but vanished, and Zionism as an animating faith has suffered in consequence.

Shlomo Avineri makes this point very clear in his preface to the book, and I can do no better than to conclude by quoting him:

The current rupture of this traditional alliance of Labor and religious Zionism may then portend more than a mere breakdown of a mutually rewarding political coalition. Similarly, the current decline of Labor may also suggest more than a mere weakening of electoral appeal and a failure of leadership. Since 1948, the Labor Party has hardly been successful in continuing its work of historical reinterpretation. Perhaps kibbutz galuyot (the ingathering of the exiles) was the last attempt of linking a modern political agenda with traditional symbolism as reinterpreted by the Labor movement. Currently the Labor Party lacks the sources of its historical appeal—a transformative ideology that nonetheless draws on a reinterpretation of historical, traditional and religious symbols and discourse. If Zionism is, then, a transformative revolution that reinterprets the traditions of the past, its future equally hinges on a reemergence of such a historical synthesis between memory and political praxis, for it is only those revolutions that were able to integrate historical memory into their future-oriented praxis which proved to be successful. (p. 7)

BERNARD (BARUCH) SUSSER
Bar-Ilan University


This is a difficult book to review. Dealing with a famous episode in the history of the Yishuv, it presents a clear and readable narrative of the chain of events in the light of
recently accessible archival material, describing and analyzing the roles and motivations of the main actors in their historical context. The Hebrew version was greeted with virtually unanimous acclaim by the Israeli scholarly community. One is tempted simply to say: “This is an excellent book. Read it!” But perhaps a brief survey will add to readers’ motivation.

The protagonists in this fascinating story are the Zionist movement and its leaders; the Mossad and the Palmach; British and French authorities; and—above all—the 4,515 Holocaust survivors who embarked from the French port of Sète in July 1947, were intercepted by the British navy and transferred to three other ships in Haifa. After failing to land them in France, the British had the passengers taken to Germany, where they were kept in various camps for about a year until they finally reached Palestine in small groups.

Each of the stages in this journey is described in detail, and each chapter ends with a question of more general historical interest. Many of these questions were not previously asked; others were obscured and mythologized. In most cases Halamish gives clear and convincing answers. Here are some examples.

Who were the travellers on the Exodus? A representative group of the people of the brihah: members of the revivified Zionist youth movements in the displaced persons’ camps, alongside “ordinary Jews,” whether families or orphans.

How did the Mossad manage to get the passengers together, bring them across borders, and arrange for them to sail from a French port despite firm British opposition? The answer: a mixture of bravery, trickery, bribery, and exploitation of differences within the French government and bureaucracy, conducted with the flair and chutzpah characteristic of the Mossad at this time—in itself a fascinating chapter. And this applies, too, to the process whereby the British failed to persuade either the French or the ship’s passengers that they should be returned to France.

Who first suggested the name Exodus? Moshe Sneh (its original name was President Warfield).1

Did Ben-Gurion personally prepare and direct the operation? No. In fact, his interest in it lessened in the early months of 1948, when he was concentrating on getting young recruits to fight the coming war, rather than on saving as many refugees as possible.

Were the people of the Yishuv deeply concerned with the fate of the ship and its human cargo? Yes, but only intermittently, as other dramatic and decisive events competed for their attention.

How did the passengers stand up to their long and often disheartening journey? Very well; indeed, much better than the organizers (people of the Mossad and the Palmach) originally believed possible. How? In large part, because of the inspiring example, rhetoric, and—more than once—manipulative tactics of youth movement members and their leaders, as well as those of the Palmach crew and emissaries; but also because of the determination and courage of the “ordinary Jews” who formed a considerable proportion of the passengers.

Was the meeting with the members of the UNSCOP commission in Haifa deliberately planned, and did it influence their final decision? Halamish answers both questions in the negative.
What was British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin’s involvement in this episode? Very deep, and apparently very emotional: he wanted “to teach them [presumably, both the Jews and the French] a lesson.” Yet Britain did not profit from the episode. The *Exodus* affair was expensive in terms of ships, money, and manpower, and it diminished Britain’s prestige in the eyes of the world. However, its effect on the diplomatic and political events culminating in the establishment of the state of Israel was only marginal. Although the well-publicized journey of the *Exodus* to Palestine helped to strengthen pro-Zionist opinion in Britain, Europe, and the United States, the ship’s arrival in Haifa coincided with an event that had precisely the opposite effect—the hanging of two British sergeants by the Irgun Zvai Leumi.

In general, Halamish’s argument is convincing, as it is backed up with a wealth of documentary and oral evidence. I would, however, take issue with the author on one matter. In a chapter entitled “From Catharsis to Apathy,” she describes the reactions of the Yishuv to the unfolding story of the *Exodus*. Both the chapter heading and the general tone of the chapter are sympathetic to those “activists” in the Yishuv who demanded more energetic steps to support the *Exodus* deportees. Discounting the evidence of the press, Halamish describes a lessening of interest as the affair dragged on, and seems to agree with those who felt that the Yishuv was leaving the ship’s passengers to bear the brunt of the struggle. But what alternative was there? More and better-attended protest meetings? Armed revolt? The first had more than once been ineffective, and the second was most likely to be counterproductive. Perhaps “From Catharsis to Resignation” would have been a better chapter heading. True, there is the evidence of the poor public support for funds to support those held in Cyprus and Germany; but this surely has to be seen in the context of the reluctance of Jews in the Yishuv (and later, in the state of Israel) to extend funds to causes outside the Yishuv—particularly when they believed that public (or American) funds should be made available.

This, however, is a relatively minor matter of interpretation. Since its first publication in Hebrew in 1990, this book has quite justifiably been considered the definitive account of the *Exodus* affair.

On the whole, the English translation suits the style and content of the Hebrew version: a plain, unpretentious narrative free of academic jargon, with an occasional colloquialism to emphasize a particular point. Unfortunately, it is seriously marred by a number of grammatical and stylistic mistakes. A few instances will suffice. “He found it necessary to point out a few accuracies” (p. 141) may simply be a misprint. But what are we to make of “exceeds somewhat from the obvious necessity” (p. 45), and “the request which Bevin lay before his colleagues” (p. 41)? The translator seems to have been totally unable to cope with the past in indirect and conditional speech, very often writing “may” instead of “might.” (For instance, on p. 152: “a call for a counter-struggle may have blown up the Hagana from within.”) There are many similar solecisms—an average of one in every two or three pages. Typical Anglo-Israeli errors are the use of Peikovitz instead of Faikovich for Yigal Allon’s former surname, and “desk plan” for “contingency plan.” And, finally, the assertion that a possibly biased document “should be read with care.” Any document should be read with care; the meaning here is “caution.” One can usually see what is meant by considering the con-
text; but such errors disturb the flow of an otherwise very readable narrative, and the 
copy editor should have caught them long before they got into print.
Nonetheless, this is an excellent book. Read it.

HENRY NEAR
Kibbutz Beit Ha’emek

Note

1. For collectors of trivia: this was not a misspelling of U.S. President James A. Garfield’s 
name—Warfield was the president of the shipping line that had once owned the ship.

Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz, Zionism and the Creation of a New Society. New 

The two authors of this book intended it to be a sequel to Ben Halpern’s important 
study published in 1961, The Idea of the Jewish State. Unfortunately, before the com-
pletion of the present volume, Halpern died in 1990. It seems, therefore, that Jehuda 
Reinharz has written most of this book, whose main theme is the emergence of the 
society and state that Zionist leaders had hoped to establish in Palestine. In this vol-
ume, the authors have focused on the connection between ideas and ideals, on the one 
hand, and the creation of the social structure and political institutions of the Jewish 
community in Palestine (the Yishuv), on the other. But their more ambitious end goal 
was to explain “Israel’s existence as both a state and a social structure” (p. 263).

More specifically, Zionism and the Creation of a New Society deals with the social 
sources of Zionism; the social structure of the Old Yishuv (and, to some extent, its re-
lations with the New Yishuv); the Jewish settlers in Palestine and their patrons, es-
pecially the Barons Rothschild and Hirsch; Hovevei Zion and the Zionist movement; 
relations between the religious and secular segments in the Zionist movement and the 
Yishuv; the development of political parties in the Yishuv; and what the authors call 
“the young workers.” The last three chapters, which deal with the development of the 
Yishuv, the hegemony of the labor bloc, and the transition to the state, are very 
sketchy, such that the multiple and complex links between the Zionist movement, the 
Yishuv, and Israel are not fully explored.

Altogether, this book is characterized by unevenness in its description and analy-
sis. Repetition is one problem. The founding of the agricultural school Mikve Israel, 
for example, is discussed in three or four different chapters. The reader comes across 
similar descriptions of Ahad Ha’am and Bnai Moshe more than once, and meets up 
with similar details about Laurence Oliphant and his endeavors in Palestine in sev-
eral different places. A second problem is the constant shifting between the philo-
sophical to the macro-social-political and then to the micro-social-political levels of 
analysis, without satisfactory explanation of the connections between the processes 
on all these levels.
Various Zionist and other political figures appear and disappear without mention of their personal, social, or political background. No explanation is offered for their motivations or their ascendance and demise in the movement; no description is given of their roles; and no assessment is provided of their contributions. Thus, for example, the reader never learns why Baron de Rothschild withdrew from his activities in Palestine, why and how Baron Hirsch replaced him, and what were the ideological and practical implications of this change. Nor do the authors examine the way in which Chaim Weizmann became head of the Zionist movement and the ramifications of his leadership.

A particular difficulty facing readers of this volume involves terminology. Among the terms that are not adequately explained are “traditionalists vs. modernists” (appearing as well in Halpern’s previous volume), “modernist liberal establishment” (in the context of the Jewish diaspora in the mid- and late-19th century), “perushim,” “ultratraditionalists,” “balanced uncertainty,” “unbelievers and transgressors,” “religious liberals,” “national individuality,” and “proto-nationalists” (does this mean proto-Zionists?).

Such problems are not merely editorial or stylistic. The book’s problematic structure, its ambiguous terminology, and uneven discussion (sometimes too much, sometimes too little) reflect certain basic conceptual, theoretical, and analytical ambiguities. In this vein, statements such as: “any social structure that is at all involved in historic processes is, to that extent, a structure of hypotheses and provisional values that are continually challenged by [unspecified] alternatives” (p. 265) do not help in clarifying the main arguments of this book. More substantively, the authors’ attempt to link the development of the Old and New Yishuv to the processes of modernization of Palestine as a whole confuses their analysis of the development of the Jewish segment in Palestine, especially since the Palestinian Arab and Jewish “communities” were almost totally separated insofar as their basic, internal social and political growth was concerned. Another problematic argument is that the development of the Zionist movement, the Yishuv—and, by implication, also Israel—was merely a reaction to external developments, whether in diaspora communities, the Ottoman empire, the Arab community in Palestine, Great Britain, or among regional powers. This is rather a simplistic way of looking at the historical processes of state-building.

Overall, despite some interesting descriptions and analyses, *Zionism and the Creation of a New State* has not added much to what can be found in other books, such as those, for example, by Shmuel Eisenstadt, Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak or Alan Dowty,1 all of which deal with the same questions pertaining to the historical roots of Israeli society and politics.

**Gabriel Sheffer**
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Yoram Hazony’s *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel’s Soul* is a passionate polemic advocating Israel as a Jewish state. Certainly one can embrace the values that underlie his work. Israel, he argues, must advance causes and take responsibility for something larger and more inclusive than the interests of its citizens alone. The Jewish people have a stake in the state of Israel. After the Shoah, Jewish power is a moral imperative: at the cost of six million, Jews learned that powerlessness invites victimization. Hazony is right to be concerned about the shattering of the myths of the founding generation by the “new historians” and the fragmentation of Israeli society, where religiosity is often beset by fanaticism and secularism is devoid of Jewish content. So a reader such as this reviewer (who endorses many of Hazony’s values) might expect to agree with this book; yet the more I read, the deeper my disappointment. It is a bad argument to defend a good cause.

Hazony’s world is dualistic. There are good guys and bad guys: the heroes are without blemish, the villains without virtue. Theodor Herzl and David Ben-Gurion are his heroes. Martin Buber and a cabal of other Hebrew University professors, past and present, are his villains. To be more precise, the bad guys comprise a virtual Who’s Who of contemporary Israel’s intellectual elite. They seem to be anyone who dares to criticize or oppose the idea of a Jewish state, or even to depict the tensions inherent between a Jewish state, the ethics of Judaism, and the requirements of democracy in a country in which one in five citizens is a non-Jew. As distinguished a Zionist thinker as Eliezer Schweid, for instance, is criticized for wondering aloud what the concept of a Jewish state means to Arab citizens of Israel. Schweid, whose entire religious philosophy is steeped in the land of Israel and the Jewish state, is apparently not sufficiently orthodox in his Zionism for the likes of Hazony.

Hazony’s categorizations lack subtlety. We learn that on the eve of the first Zionist Congress, Theodor Herzl memorized “the Hebrew words of the blessing over the Torah and with this, the assimilated Viennese journalist was transformed into a true Jewish leader” (p. 122). In Hazony’s flattering depiction, David Ben-Gurion was an advocate of Orthodox Judaism, rather than an opponent who simply found it easier to form a political coalition with sectarian religious parties rather than with parties with a broader political agenda. Hazony, moreover, castigates many individuals whose contributions to the Zionist cause he does not seem to recognize. Many examples could be cited. Permit me one. The late Hebrew University talmudist Efraim Urbach rewrote Jewish liturgy for Tisha B’Av to incorporate the new religious reality of a Jewish people restored to its land, rebuilding Jerusalem from its ruins and living in dignity. Hazony links him to the Hebrew University cabal, possibly because he made aliyah in 1938, the same year as Martin Buber.

According to Hazony, Israel stands between stark choices: Labor Zionism and its values, on the one hand, and the Hebrew University and its values, on the other. Yet the very Jewish power he celebrates is not now to be found in agricultural settlements of the Labor Zionists or in the manual work of Jewish laborers (the two pillars of Labor Zionism), but rather in the mastery of science and technology and the man-
agement of information that was initiated by the Hebrew University and enhanced by its intellectual offspring. In the contemporary world, military power is tied in with scientific achievement and political standing is related to economic potential. For Israel to extend and preserve its military and economic power, it must develop its greatest natural resource—the brainpower of its people. Had Labor Zionism not invested in the Hebrew University and other institutions of higher learning, Israel would not have prospered and would not be able to maintain itself in the global universe.

Hazony, for his part, offers the most narrow of interpretations where a broadness of vision is required. There seem to be irreconcilable tensions between democratic values and a Jewish state in Hazony’s mind. On the question of how such tensions are to be resolved, he is silent. If Jewish power is the principal value, by what standards does one critique or limit its exercise? Not all exercise of power by any state—even a Jewish state—is legitimate. (It is noteworthy that, in the entire book, there is barely a mention of the war in Lebanon, which did not fail for Israel’s lack of power.) What is the role of democracy as a value? It is more than an instrumental value? Can it be embraced as a Jewish value? Does a Jewish political thinker have to assimilate contemporary ideas (that have their origin outside of Judaism) into Jewish thought and into Jewish values? These are vital questions on which Hazony is mum.

Hazony says nothing regarding self-restraint on the exercise of Jewish rights to the land of Israel. Does that include Jewish settlements in Hebron or Shechem (Nablus)—or even Gaza, which the Bible describes as the land of the Philistines? Should Jews refuse to exercise their rights for other purposes, namely, peace, tranquillity with one’s neighbors, or even because it is unwise in terms of security to place Jewish settlements in the midst of Arab cities? Hazony is also silent on what shape the Jewish-Arab relationship should take in the Jewish state within the confines of a common democratic category such as citizenship, or the biblical and rabbinic categories of ger vetoshav (stranger and sojourner).

Hazony presumes a conspiracy among Jewish thinkers and scholars who were actually at odds with each other personally, politically, and philosophically. He does not differentiate between Martin Buber and Hermann Cohen. After all, both were German Jews and both had read the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant (but so had Ben-Gurion and Herzl). Hazony also does not distinguish between the philosophies of Franz Rosenzweig and Buber. Although he pays lip service to some understanding of Gershom Scholem’s rivalry with and antagonism to Buber, Hazony presumes that they shared a common intellectual endeavor determined to undermine the foundations of the Jewish state. No intellectual historian of modern German Jewish thought would assent to any of these portrayals. He also quotes Scholem’s praises of Buber, neglecting to inform us that Scholem praised Buber only to disparage the essence of his intellectual achievements.

Hazony misrepresents the historical record. I will leave it to historians of Israel to judge his rewriting of the history of the state. Here I would like to illustrate his presentation of one aspect of Buber’s career that is (at best) distorted. He writes: “Yet almost until the eve of World War II, Martin Buber . . . remained immured in Frankfurt, working on his translation of the Bible into German” (p. 244). Buber actually lived in Heppenheim, but let’s not quibble about details. More to the point: Buber provided spiritual guidance and inner substance to Jews in Germany between 1933 and 1938.
His public work on adult education in Nazi Germany has been well documented, and his writings of this period represent a masterful attempt to undermine the very foundations of the Nazi state. True, Buber’s writing was less direct than Hazony may have wished. Buber walked the narrow line in saying what had to be said in a way that did not quite get him arrested (a reading of Leo Strauss’ *Persecution and the Art of Writing* is recommended). And so he wrote commentary on the Psalms to speak to the Jews and philosophical discourses on Sören Kierkegaard to reach those few Germans prepared to listen. Hazony’s depiction of Buber is not the sole instance of falsehood—or gratuitous nastiness—in the book.

Hazony sees Buber’s influence as a conspiracy of the Hebrew University professors and their coterie. They seemingly imposed themselves upon the innocent and unprepared descendants of Labor Zionism. He neither asks why these children of Zion were so ill prepared nor whether the growth of Buber’s influence in the 35 years since his death stems from the intractability of the problem of what to do with the Arabs in the land of Israel. Between 1948 and 1967, this seemed like a question of no serious import. It remained unasked in the post-1967 era of nationalistic euphoria, but it is now seen as the core issue that will shape Israel’s future. The options facing Israel are quite basic: separation, domination, expulsion, or coexistence. Writing in 1965 within months of Buber’s death, Chaim Potok, then a young Jewish scholar, presumed that Buber’s notion of a binational state would disappear. Buber, he thought, had nothing to say to contemporary Jews about Israel. Yet if Israel were to continue to possess Judea and Samaria, or if Israel were to assent to the Palestinians’ right of return, there would be virtual parity between the two populations; in either scenario, coexistence, domination, or expulsion are the only alternative solutions. Hence, in the postmodernist world, Buber has been given a rehearing even in Israel.

Hazony does not engage thought. For example, his critique of historian Moshe Zimmerman assumes that Zimmerman’s contentions are so absurd as to warrant no further consideration. According to Hazony, Zimmerman has argued that:

- not every accusation leveled against the Jews of the Middle Ages was without justification;
- assimilation kept Judaism alive no less than it undermined it;
- Zionism “imported” antisemitism into the Middle East;
- Zionism used the refugees from the Holocaust as a lever to advance aims of its own;
- Zionism is not the optimal solution to what is known as the Jewish problem (p. 11).

Nowhere does Hazony bother to enlighten his readers as to why such arguments are not open to question. There are serious medieval Jewish historians who would not completely disagree with his first statement. As to assimilation: students of Maimonides, for example, might be quite comfortable in arguing that his assimilation of Greek and Arabic philosophy into Judaism gave the religion renewed vitality. Students of East European Jewish music can demonstrate its link to music of the region. More than one scholar has demonstrated the connection between Jewish pietism and Christian religious trends; and a student of Leo Pinsker, Theodor Herzl, or Vladi-
mir Ze’ev Jabotinsky would want to understand the way in which they assimilated contemporaneous notions of nationalism to set a new Jewish agenda.

I know of no serious historian who would disagree that Zionism used the refugees from the Holocaust to advance its own aims—but, I would add, rightfully and quite successfully so. During and immediately after the Second World War, Zionism had a clear agenda for the Jewish future. Finally, in order to disprove that Zionism imported antisemitism into the Middle East, one needs to engage the subject—endeavoring to understand the Islamic world’s relationship to Jews and Judaism, rather than dismissing the notion out of hand.

Hazony’s reading of Israeli culture is idiosyncratic. We learn that Yeshayahu Leibowitz of the Hebrew University is (was) Israel’s most influential philosopher. Really? Leibowitz was a scientist whose religious thought was rejected by most of his fellow Orthodox Jews. His religious notion that the commandments make no rational sense and that obedience to God is their only rationale has no appeal to secular Jews and precious little appeal to observant ones. His political philosophy made him a gadfly, a loner whose very extremism made for good newspaper copy but kept him at the margins.

Hazony avoids some basic questions. We Jews became independent precisely at a time when the world was becoming interdependent. What is the role of nationalism—even Jewish nationalism—in the emerging global universe? Shimon Peres’ vision of the “New Middle East” offered one answer to this question, which may be too distant from the tribalism that characterizes the region in which Israel dwells. Hazony sees him as a man without vision who has strayed from the path set forth by his mentor, Ben-Gurion. One wonders if a history of Peres’ career would rather demonstrate how his views on the future of Israel shifted as he understood the requirements of globalization and sought to bring his country into the 21st century. When I heard Peres speak at Brown University in 1995, he impressed me as a brilliant visionary—far too visionary—for, tragically, the 1st and the 7th centuries have more influence in the contemporary Middle East than does the 21st century.

There is one final aspect of this book that is perplexing and perhaps even anti-Zionist, as I was raised to understand the meaning of the term. If Hazony is conducting an inner-Israel polemic, a battle for Israel’s soul, why is he writing in English and not in Hebrew? To this English reader, prepared to assent to his defense of shared values, Hazony’s passionate polemic proves vacuous—sadly so.

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Note

1. Strauss argued that in order to understand what was said under conditions of oppression, one must decipher what could be said without endangering oneself. Consequently, to truly comprehend such work, one must look not only at the text but also at the context—in this way perceiving what the author may have been concealing. Certainly Buber’s writings in Nazi
Germany must be read critically and seen through the lens of his circumstances. See Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (New York: 1952; rpt. 1988).


The public and experts alike generally take an interest in the decline of major political actors that have played vital roles in the development of a particular polity. In this vein, it is fascinating to explore the evident decline of the Israeli Labor party since the critical election of 1977, in which Menachem Begin’s Likud party came to power. This is the main purpose of Neill Lochery’s book, which seeks to describe and analyze the position of the Labor party from 1948 to 1977, and its subsequent decline.

The framework for Lochery’s examination is a theoretical approach to parties and party systems that is based on a well-known study by Maurice Duverger, properly titled *Political Parties* (1954). Lochery follows Duverger in arguing that, while dominant parties need not win the majority of votes in general elections, they do need to garner more votes than any other party over an extended period, in this way creating a noncompetitive system that they firmly control. The underlying reason for such dominance is that such parties are identified with an epoch and therefore can appeal to broad societal segments. This situation, in turn, is predicated on the public’s prolonged belief in the party’s ideology and goals. Duverger also emphasizes the significance of resources that such parties control and can distribute to their voters; the effectiveness of party machines; the shrewdness of party elites; internal party cohesion; and the acumen displayed by party leaders in forming coalitions.

Like most analysts who have dealt with the Israeli Labor party and its place in the party system, Lochery argues that Labor was a “dominant party with power” during the period of 1948–1977. The party espoused a powerful and appealing social democratic ideology, and had as well a determined and effective leadership and an efficient party machine. Lochery notes, as have others, that Labor’s decline actually began in the late 1960s, although it was only subsequent to the 1977 general elections that the process was accelerated. Since then, Labor has experienced significant slippage in those resources that characterize a dominant party.

Thus, according to Lochery, between 1977 and 1981 (Begin’s first government), Labor constituted a “dominant party without power”—a paradoxical description, to say the least. Between 1981 and 1984 (Begin’s second government and Yitzhak Shamir’s first premiership), Labor was a “non-dominant party without power”; between 1984 and 1990 (the National Unity government in which Labor and Likud shared power), it was “a non-dominant party with a share of power”; between 1990 and 1992 (Shamir’s second government) Labor was “a non-dominant party without power”; and during 1992–1996 (Rabin’s government, which was led, following his assassination, by Shimon Peres) it was a “non-dominant party with power.”

Following in the wake of other analysts, Lochery attributes Labor’s decline mainly to a dwindling ideological fervor and a reduction in the party’s material and economic resources. Lochery attaches special importance to the “loss of the strong Trade Union
Movement”—in fact, uncoupling of the party from the Histadrut was a deliberate, albeit mistaken, strategy on the part of the Labor party leadership.

In his conclusion, Lochery contends that Labor’s gradual decline marked the end of the noncompetitive party system, and that as the “role and usefulness” of the parties has dwindled, “personality politics” has become more important. Unless the Labor party launches a major reform, Lochery warns, it will not be able to revive its previous position, and in fact will be doomed to further decline.

The Israeli Labor Party includes a considerable amount of information about the history of the Labor party, its leaders, intraparty politics and rivalries, and attempts at democratizing reforms (especially the problematic introduction of primaries). It is also well organized in its structure, so that readers can easily compare the party’s relative strengths and weaknesses over various periods of time. However, it neither presents new facts nor offers innovative interpretations. As a result, the reader is deprived of a deeper, more differentiated, and coherent analysis of the various causes for Labor’s decline. Perhaps because he sticks so closely to the theoretical framework that he has adopted, Lochery does not place the Labor party’s fate within the wider context of social changes (for example, the massive aliyah from the former Soviet Union or the rise of the Shas party) that have influenced all of Israel’s political parties. Similarly, in adopting a framework that focuses on the elites, Lochery forgoes serious examination of “bottom to top” influences on the decline of the party.

Notwithstanding, this book is worth reading because of its clearly organized information and data. Altogether, it provides a good grounding for further, more sophisticated study of the gradual decline of the Israeli Labor movement and party.

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Were Moshe Sharett alive today, and were he to say what he said in political meetings and what he wrote in his diaries and letters, he would surely be attacked as a card-carrying member of the “post-Zionist” array of “new historians.” At least that is the firm impression one gets upon reading Gabriel Sheffer’s massive and path-breaking biography of Israel’s first foreign minister and second prime minister. Sharett viewed the problem of Jewish displaced persons and the plight of Palestinian refugees as morally comparable. He angrily condemned Israeli retaliation policies in the 1950s, including what he knew to be deliberate provocations by the IDF and wildly inaccurate portrayals of Arab culpability in army reporting. He waged a relentless, and partially successful, struggle against Israeli adventurism and bellicosity in the new country’s relations with the Arabs. A very large proportion of the book is devoted to Sharett’s fierce but ultimately futile effort to prevent David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Dayan, and others from launching a second round of war with Egypt and to documenting his opposition to the territorial expansionism motivating Ben-Gurion and his
allies before the Suez War. (Until after the Suez War, Ben-Gurion, in Sheffer’s account of Sharett’s thinking, was virtually obsessed with a desire to annex the Gaza Strip.) These positions, along with Sharett’s criticisms of Ben-Gurion’s refusal to engage seriously in negotiations with Nasser, his protests against the behavior of Israeli soldiers during the 1948 war, and his consistent if ineffectual opposition to the oppression and exploitation of Arab citizens of Israel, all correspond closely to the analyses offered by contemporary “new” historians whose use of archival material to make just these points has provoked so much fascination and fury.

But this book is not of a piece with the work of Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim, Motti Golani, Uri Ben-Eliezer, Yagil Levy, and the rest. It is written neither as “objective” history, meant to substitute for the sanitized and archivally deprived histories produced by establishment scholars, journalists, and memorialists; nor as a treatment of Zionist faults designed to inform Israeli Jews of a culpability, or at least fallibility, that the familiar master narrative denied or obscured. Instead, this is a book written as part of a battle against the hegemony of distorted and distorting images of Ben-Gurion as the farseeing, wise, courageous, and (virtually) sole father of the modern state of Israel. It is meant to convince the reader that Sharett’s absence from the consciousness of contemporary Israelis is a cruel injustice to a great founding leader, statesman, and Jewish patriot of the first rank. Sheffer contends that this absence has served the political purpose of suppressing strains of prudence, moral sensitivity, balance, and restraint that Zionism—particularly Labor Zionism—has sometimes harbored. Deprived of these memories, Israelis are only too apt to think that pride in their history requires identification with the national egoism, hubris, and aggressiveness that is associated in the public imagination with Ben-Gurion and his foremost disciple, Moshe Dayan. In this sense, Sheffer’s contribution is not only the support provided by his exhaustive account of Sharett’s thinking to the arguments of the new historians but also a critique of the attitude that this body of literature has encouraged—a cast of mind that expects that the more one knows about the true nature and history of Mapai and the founders of the Israeli state, the less positive will be one’s assessment of their performance. Sharett’s career proves, according to Sheffer, “that it was possible to conduct a moderate foreign policy without harming essential Israeli interests. Above all [Sharett] was living proof that moral standards could be introduced into Israeli politics and that these could determine policies that the government implemented” (pp. 836–837).

This is an angry book. The truth, as Sheffer sees it, has been poured down the memory hole, and he is out to retrieve it. Far from the statesmanlike, prophetic, profound, and courageous figure celebrated by the hagiographical historians Sheffer regularly refers to as Ben-Gurion’s “admirers,” Ben-Gurion is portrayed as an adventurous warmonger—an aggressive, vulgar, calculatingly mysterious, petty, jealous, and treacherous politician. Sheffer’s characterization of Sharett, in contrast, is that of a polished, sensitive, and subtle diplomat—a man who sought to resolve the tension between his fundamental Zionist principles and the recalcitrant opposition of the world by always seeking to avoid explicit confrontation, to parse problems into small enough pieces so that some basis for agreement, and continuing discussion, could always be found, to use time, patience, and forbearance instead of force, bold declarations, or brinksmanship.
Much space is spent documenting the contributions that Sharett made both to the Zionist cause and to the birth and development of Israel—contributions too often, in Sheffer’s view, attributed primarily or solely to Ben-Gurion. Chief among these are Sharett’s crucial contribution to the acceptance of the principle of partition, both within the Zionist movement and in international circles; his leadership role in the creation of the Jewish Brigade during the Second World War; his editorship of the Labor daily *Davar*; his brilliant management of the sustained diplomatic struggle for partition; his successful fundraising efforts in the United States; his commitment to the cultivation and exploitation of working relationships with the eastern bloc; his key role in the achievement of a reparations agreement with Germany; his program to establish and strengthen Israeli ties with Asian countries; his establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an organization of proud and sophisticated civil servants; his lifelong and nearly fanatical loyalty to Mapai; and his contributions to the institutionalization of a partnership with the Jewish diaspora (in contrast to Ben-Gurion’s disdainful and even hostile attitude toward non-Israeli Jews). Sheffer seems as furious and as unforgiving as Sharett on one particular point. According to this account, Prime Minister Sharett played a key role in fostering relations with French officials that led to the first significant transfer of advanced weapons to the Jewish state. Not only is this contribution ignored, argues Sheffer, and not only is sole credit for this achievement given unjustly to Ben-Gurion and his coterie, but Ben-Gurion’s ouster of Sharett from the government was engineered, in part, on the basis of the false accusation that he was not willing to act energetically or unconventionally enough to provide for Israel’s security.

The author hammers home his points with a relentless and sometimes monotonous litany of Ben-Gurion’s sins and Sharett’s virtues. There is virtually no positive quality (except charisma)—including those virtues even Sheffer admits Ben-Gurion had—that Sharett did not display more impressively. As for negative qualities: Ben-Gurion had almost all of them, Sharett almost none. Indeed, aside from occasional comments on his punctiliousness, vanity, and hypersensitivity, Sharett is presented as the paragon of all good things—not merely a boy scout, but an Eagle scout—what is known in Hebrew as a *yeled-tov yerushalyim*. He was “friendly and compassionate” (p. 22), “dutiful” (p. 25), “a good pupil” (p. 28), “intellectual[ly] curious” (p. 34), serious, prudent, liberal, humane, moderate, gradualist, and pragmatic (p. 44), sincere (p. 45), “sophisticated” (p. 54), insightful, possessed of a good memory, “capable of sustained work, showing an interest in both overarching ideas and the minutest details . . . a workaholic” (p. 65), “realistic . . . far-sighted” (p. 67), “honest” (p. 116), “loyal to his colleagues” (p. 320), “affable” (p. 352), “always playing the role of the irreproachable gentleman politician” (p. 465), “driven by moral principles” (p. 619), a leader with “political stamina, acumen, and well-planned policy” (p. 624), “Israel’s foremost expert on Arab affairs” (p. 630), a “team person” (p. 639), a person of “warmth, charm, and polished manners” (p. 654), “a very observant and perceptive politician” (p. 700), “prophetic” (p. 793), “meticulous” (p. 929), “an accomplished educator” (p. 965), blessed with a “balanced and harmonious personality” (p. 979), and “the most open-minded, liberal, caring, and humane senior leader of the Labour movement” (p. 981). Ben-Gurion, in contrast, was “vain” (p. 72), “envious and conniving” and “vicious” (p. 128), “egotistical” (p. 129), “insulting” (p. 142), “devious”

It is worth emphasizing, though, that Sheffer’s target is not only Ben-Gurion, but more so those historians and admirers of Ben-Gurion who, in Sheffer’s view, effaced Sharett’s legacy of mainstream moderation and moral sensitivity from Israel’s past in favor of a manufactured legend to the effect that Zionism’s success and Israel’s establishment and development were the result of Ben-Gurion’s visionary, defiant, and belligerent leadership. These passages are representative:

Sharett could boast a long list of personal attainments, most of which have since been forgotten, or assiduously brushed aside by his political opponents and by historians, political analysts, and biographers, who either advocated the activist line, or accepted it as the only accurate description of Israel’s history. . . . (p. 992)

In the wake of the 1956 war, Ben-Gurion and his followers launched a not so subtle campaign against Sharett and the remnants of the Sharett faction in the political system. Their obvious purpose was once and for all to obliterate it from the national ethos and eventually from the nation’s collective identity and memory. (p. 1012)

A major problem with the book is that apart from an occasional appearance of a small number of secondary sources that might be identified by the informed reader as representative of the works of the authors with whom Sheffer has such a vehement disagreement, these historians, biographers, and the like—these Ben-Gurionists, or dupes of Ben-Gurionists—are never named in the text. Their works are never quoted. Their accounts are never analyzed in direct comparison with Sheffer’s analysis or with the vast amount of archival material cited in his chapters. To be sure, Sheffer does say in his preface that this volume was “specially prepared for English readers” and stands apart from “an even more detailed Hebrew version.” Perhaps more direct attention to the work of those he criticizes is present in the Hebrew version, which by the time of this writing did not appear to have been published.

Indeed the book is far from being an exemplary biography. Sheffer admits that his purpose was to focus entirely on Sharett’s political career, hence the subtitle of the book: “Biography of a Political Moderate.” Though he includes some scattered references to Sharett’s wife, Zipora, and his children, Sheffer does almost nothing to uncover for the reader the personal side of Sharett’s career—the kind of man he was with his friends and family. The book is so long and detailed, and focuses attention on such a wide array of important but obscured (mostly moderate) figures in Zionist history (such as Zalman Arrane, Pinchas Sapir, Giora Yoseftal, Pinchas Rozen, Eliezer Kaplan, Shaul Avigur, Dov Hoz, Eliahu Golomb, and Nahum Goldmann), that it is a pity that no photographs are included. The organization of the book is also rather tiresome. The chapters proceed chronologically, covering sometimes as little as one or two months of Sharett’s life, making the work seem at times less an integrative biography and more a chronicle prepared by a courtier with a few very sharp axes to grind.

Overall there is no question that Sheffer’s decades of work on this project have been well spent. This is certainly not the definitive biography we will have, or at least
should have, of Moshe Sharett. But it does stand head and shoulders above anything else available. The fact that it is the first serious treatment of Sharett’s political career and leadership style is as shocking as it is suggestive of just how valid most of Sheffer’s arguments probably are.

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Symposium—Jews and Violence

Michael Berkowitz, *Jews and Crime in Fact, Fantasy, and Fiction*

Gerald Blidstein, *The State in Modern Halakhic Thought*

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