Jewish Identities in 20th-Century America

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In an issue of the *Forward* newspaper a few years ago, Lisa Keys reported a dramatic shift in baby-naming patterns among American Jews. In an unscientific survey of Jewish newspapers in Phoenix, Philadelphia, and Cleveland, the *Forward* noted that 59 percent of babies born in 2001 would be known by distinctly Jewish-sounding names. The research found that the new arrivals pages of their local communal papers included nine Jacobs, seven Benjamins, five Sarahs, four Rachels, and Yossi, Shayna, Ari, and Ilana. Recalling their great-grandparents by name, a new generation of Sams, Maxes, Sophies, and Jacks—names typical of second-generation Jewish immigrants—are blazing their way through the nation's synagogue pre-school programs.[1]

The *Forward* report recalled the research of famed immigration historian Marcus Lee Hansen, who proposed a three-generation model of acculturation to American life. According to Hansen, the first-generation immigrant, steeped in old-world culture, strove to raise Americanized children. The second generation did all they could to divorce themselves from their parents' immigrant lifestyle. The third generation, however, longed for a sense of distinctive identity and returned to its grandparents for the knowledge and experience it never knew.[2]

While it took American Jews five generations to complete Hansen's cycle, one can argue at least some general similarities. Eastern European Jewish immigrants arriving at the turn of the century moderated their religious observance, sent their children to public schools, and almost prided themselves on the poor second-generation Yiddish language retention rate of 10 percent. The middle generations embraced secularized America, turned to non-traditional forms of religious expression, and celebrated the move into the middle class. By the late 1960s, many among a thoroughly Americanized generation of young Jews left the secular worlds of their suburban upbringing and returned to tradition.[3]

I would like to challenge this generational approach to American Jews by examining three critical eras in the formation of modern American Jewish identity: the New Deal of the 1930s, the civil rights movement of the 1950s, and the social protest era of the 1960s. By focusing our lens on these historical moments, we can see the limits of linear approaches to Jewish identity. American Jews have not journeyed along a generational continuum as much as they have sought to define

and redefine their ethnic identity according to imperatives created in the social and political culture surrounding them.

Traditional understandings of ethnic acculturation also complicate our understanding of some of the basic vocabulary in identity formation. We have sought to separate Jewish universalist strategies from more particularist orientations, as if the two somehow represented conflicting approaches to American Jewish identity. But accommodation, usually (and inaccurately) viewed as a synonym for assimilation, often enabled Jews to assert greater ethnic distinctiveness. And isolation from the mainstream, rather than signaling an aversion to the secular influences of American culture, sometimes resulted in a far more assimilationist posture for many Jews. The very definition of Jewishness often incorporated many more mainstream American cultural ideals than it did particularist Jewish traits.[4]

Four basic assumptions undergird my re-evaluation of modern American Jewish identity: 1) Jews accommodate to the larger culture around them, 2) local conditions inform divergent and often contradictory Jewish responses, 3) the American political and social scene encourages different American Jews to forge different ethnic identities, and 4) forms of Jewish expression change over time. In each of the historical eras examined herein, American Jews constructed identities that united the particular needs of a Jewish minority with the universalist appeals of the larger political culture. Often, accommodationist strategies strengthened Jewish identity. In many cases, Jewish leaders embraced seemingly contrarian strategies to achieve their communal goals.

The New Deal era, typically seen as an example of Americanization and assimilation for American Jews, actually promoted distinctive Jewish identity. The civil rights movement, generally accepted as evidence of universalist Jews linking their plight to that of African-Americans, split northern and southern Jews over what course of action would benefit the particular needs of Jews in this country. The Jewish ethnic revival of the late 1960s and early 1970s, usually credited for the return to the grandparents' tradition, evinced instead a powerful accommodation to American identity politics. In each era, American Jews negotiated a variety of social factors that informed their sense of themselves as Jews and as citizens of the United States. Considered collectively, they force us to challenge accepted wisdom in American Jewish history and the sociological assumptions that arise from those experiences.

Marcus Lee Hansen easily could have pointed to 1930s American Jews as evidence of his assimilationist second generation. Most observers of Depression-era America argue that the changes wrought by the rise of Franklin D. Roosevelt strengthened the universalist

components of American identity at the expense of particularist forms of ethnic expression. Gary Gerstle, in his exhaustive labor history of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, *Working Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in A Textile City, 1914-1960*, contended that "New Deal icons like the Blue Eagle...offered individual Americans security and a sense of belonging to a greater whole in a time of deep distress. These symbols and terms," he concluded, "thus encouraged adjustment rather than rebellion, conformity rather than dissent."[5]

Lizabeth Cohen, in her award-winning study of Depression-era Chicago, *Making A New Deal*, asserted that local ethnic networks collapsed under the weight of federal intervention. It was a time, Cohen asserted, "when the nation moved...from diverse social worlds circumscribed by race, ethnicity, class, and geography to more homogeneous cultural experiences." This diminution of ethnic identity, according to Cohen, led Chicago laborers to petition for a larger governmental role. The New Deal, she wrote, weakened communal ties. "People would depend on the government," Cohen explained, "the way they once had depended on" ethnic organizations.[6]

While Cohen posited that "ethnic workers would never again accept so easily the hierarchical authority of the ethnic community," the rise of the welfare state actually aided communal professionals interested in maintaining Jewish continuity through well-developed educational and identity-building programs. The U.S. government, often perceived as the great universalizing agent in the creation of a uniform American identity, actually acted to preserve distinctive Jewish expression. Depression-era Jews demonstrated how one religious minority used New Deal programs as a vehicle to forge stronger institutional bonds. Despite demographic trends that told of an ever-assimilating American Jewish community, communal leaders resisted the urge to follow the example of Cohen's Chicago Catholic community and jettison distinctive cultural traits. Instead, Jewish leaders articulated a definition of Americanism that combined the universalist imperatives of the Great Depression with the particularist needs of a Jewish minority.[7]

In March 1933, Roosevelt took the presidential oath of office. That same year, Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany. With these changes on the world stage, American Jews embarked on a monumental 15-year journey that would witness the worst economic depression in United States history, the rise of Nazism in Europe, the fighting of a world war, and the eventual creation of a Jewish state. These events sparked the most important transformations in American Jewish identity since the massive Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe a generation earlier.

In the first few years of the Great Depression, Jewish leaders worried about the continued viability of Jewish educational, cultural,

and identity-building programs. With unemployment hovering at 25 percent, bread lines forming in America's cities, and a federal government unwilling to fully disassociate itself from its laissez-faire approach, Jewish agencies faced incredible pressure to serve basic social-service needs for a growing clientele. "The impact of vast social changes," Benjamin Selekman, the executive director of Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies, explained in reference to the rise of the New Deal state, "has given new challenge once again to the Jewish tradition of communal responsibility. For, like all people, American Jewry faced today the central problem of our times—adaptation to rapidly moving economic and social forces."[8]

Two years after the 1929 stock market crash, more Jews applied for aid than in any previous year. "Practically every local Federation in the country was compelled to reduce its budget," the American Jewish Committee reported in its year in review. Chicago's Jewish Charities ended the 1931 fiscal year with a deficit. During the election year of 1932, the demand for Jewish social services rocketed 50 percent while contributions continued to spiral downward. In 1933, a third more Jewish Americans sought relief than the year before while Jewish federations in 13 of the nation's largest cities reported substantial declines in contributions. Given the dire human needs facing Jewish agencies, it did not seem prudent to devote large sums of money to identity-building programs.[9]

When the federal government assumed responsibility for America's Jewish poor in the months after Roosevelt's first inauguration, communal leaders moved quickly to channel their limited philanthropic dollars to programs that bolstered Jewish identity. Assimilation-minded German-American Jews, once the dominant force in organized Jewish life, faced increasing opposition from their more traditionalist co-religionists of Eastern European ancestry. "As the later Jewish immigrants, especially those from Eastern Europe, attained a more secure place in the [American Jewish] community, they urged another directing impulse for Federation programs," Selekman wrote. The Eastern European Jews "pressed their strong feeling that every Jewish child should be given a Jewish education."[10]

As early as 1928, Dr. John Slawson, who headed Cleveland's Jewish Welfare Federation and later became the executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee, led the charge for stronger identity-building programs. "Jewish organizations cannot rest on pure philanthropy," he argued. "It must not be based on a foundation of misery and woe." Slawson advised Jewish organizations to abandon their traditional relief work, arguing, "Our reason for being must be ethnic culture." Slawson pressed for a basic redefinition of the Jewish

federation from "a Federation for philanthropy" to "a Federation for Jewish ethnic group expression."[11]

Within two years, Jewish education and identity-building programs grew to "large and growing fields" and enjoyed a 60 percent share of local Federation budgets. Harry Lurie, the director of New York's Bureau of Jewish Social Research, recalled that the move from relief to Jewish identity-centered programs constituted "a shift of emphasis from the submerged part of the community to the community as a whole and from merely physical and economic needs to cultural and spiritual satisfaction." Jewish schools received "marked improvements" by 1937, while the president of the National Conference of Jewish Social Welfare boasted, "Our profession is now in a strategic position to enlarge its field of influence by becoming directly involved in the total pattern of Jewish group life." That same year, the American Jewish Committee noted an upswing in Jewish educational programming. The 1938 Los Angeles United Jewish Welfare Fund budget counted more than a 50 percent share for Jewish education, cultural, and social programs. In 1939, the figure rose to almost 75 percent.[12]

The rise of anti-Semitism at home and abroad also pressed communal leaders to highlight Jewish identity. While old-guard, assimilation-minded Jewish leaders continued to call for more universalist responses to bigotry and discrimination, events in Europe reaffirmed the need for Jews to construct American identities that encouraged particularist political activism just as they appealed to common national ideals. With Hitler consolidating his power in Europe and domestic anti-Semitism spiking to all-time highs, Jews forged identities based on the importance of teaching all Americans the importance of difference and the value of pluralism.

Jewish leaders pressed for special recognition of the anti-Jewish nature of Hitler's discrimination, demanded that the U.S. government take action to ameliorate Jewish suffering in Europe, and engaged in public protest to press their cause to the American people. They framed these particularist demands in universalist terms, hoping to offer European Jews the same civil protections enjoyed by Americans and seizing on German political intolerance to justify a new model of American adaptation that encouraged difference and protected Jewish interests. Organized Jewry backed programs that equated Hitler's policies with everything un-American and linked Jewish values to the spirit of unqualified Americanism.

This American Jewish organizational embrace of activist identity politics inspired heated internal debate. Just as the growth of the New Deal state brought Jewish communal division, so too did a 1933 effort by some Jewish leaders to launch an anti-German boycott movement. Organized in response to a Nazi-led German boycott of Jewish

businesses, the American anti-German boycott began after officials from the American Jewish War Veterans called on their co-religionists to take a public stand against Hitler. Boycott organizers hoped to dramatize the injustice of the Nazi edict while simultaneously inflicting damage on Germany's economy.

The American Jewish Committee considered such measures unwise, fearing that they would compromise American Jews' standing as loyal and patriotic Americans, and the group refused to endorse the boycott. AJCommittee president Morris Waldman labeled the boycott "futile [and] possibly dangerous" and "a threat to the United States." Joseph Proskauer, who later would head the organization, feared that boycotts, like rallies and marches, would imperil German Jews. A Glencoe, Illinois rabbi went even further, saying that "a publicly declared boycott by the Jews means the excuse for the furthering of Nazi propaganda here." In an accommodationist expression of American Jewish identity, the religious leader explained that Jews only should boycott "as American citizens affiliated with some movement in which all American citizens join. They cannot with safety to their own position come out as Jews in declaration of war against anyone. They are not too well loved in our own country or any other country."[13]

When the Joint Distribution Committee sought to aid Jewish victims of Nazi oppression, it sought to frame its relief work in purely American terms. As one JDC leader warned, "Ethnic or religious groups have no standing as such and it is to endanger that democratic process when groups, either religious or ethnic, attempt to create power through such groupings." In the classic tension between the universal and the particular, this Jewish official concluded, "We in America are not alone the product of Jewish culture but are even more strongly the product of the gifts of liberalism to the modern world." By 1939, with Europe at war and the United States still neutral, the JDC advised its people to "lean over backward to avoid engaging in any relief work that might infringe the country's laws."[14]

As conditions for European Jews worsened, more and more American Jews rejected the community's traditional aversion to particularist identity and chose to support the boycott movement. Cleveland rabbi and fiery American Zionist Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, along with the 500,000 strong Jewish Labor Committee, challenged the old guard's anti-boycott rationale and demanded public protests. As Silver explained, Hitler "must be attacked with political weapons, and the strongest political weapon, when all others fail, is the economic boycott."[15]

After debate, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise and his American Jewish Congress offered their support. One instructor at the Jewish Theological Seminary condemned "those who feel it is un-American to be Jewish in

anything but religion." Wise's conception of American pluralism demanded that, as he put it, "real Americanism" mean "not only toleration of religious difference, but a toleration of ethnic and national difference as well." He concluded, "Real Americanism should mean an *active encouragement* of cultural diversity."[16]

The boycott movement once again demonstrated the importance of framing particularist Jewish identity in the larger framework of universalist American ideals. Accommodation to the larger political culture, especially in times of rising anti-Semitism, proved critical to Jewish strategic success. By connecting Jewish communal imperatives to larger social themes, Jewish leaders succeeded in merging two otherwise contrary approaches to American acculturation. This synthesis, which borrowed heavily from Justice Louis Brandeis' defense of Zionism as an all-American pursuit, introduced a powerful alternative to the assimilationist strategies of most classic Reform German-American Jews and set the stage for the emergence of the interfaith and interracial alliances of postwar America.

Jews enjoyed a period of tremendous social mobility in the 1950s. The end of restrictive housing covenants permitted wholesale Jewish moves into outlying suburban communities while the nation's colleges and universities eased or eliminated their anti-Jewish quotas. Many analysts maintain that the accommodationist spirit of 1950s consensus America translated into a weakening of Jewish identity. Jewish leaders at the time feared that the rapid social immersion of Jews into previously Christian neighborhoods would lead to intermarriage. Jewish economic mobility fed a class-centered redefinition of American Jewish life characterized by opulent bar- and bat-mitzvah celebrations, mass construction of Jewish buildings (the "edifice complex"), and the maturation of a generation of young Jews who shared many more middle-class American cultural traits than did their parents or grandparents.

Against the backdrop of rapid Jewish acculturation to the white and Christian middle-class suburbs, northern Jewish leaders as well as many unaffiliated American Jews linked their identity as Americans and as Jews to the cause of racial equality. Unlike other white ethnic groups who constructed their identities within their own communal world, Jews sought alliances with blacks and drew powerful connections between the Jewish-American and African-American historical experiences.

Northern Jews took the lead in the postwar struggle to help African-Americans achieve civil equality. In the early postwar years, northern Jews led the call for a Fair Employment Practices Commission and joined leading civil rights organizations. When the call went out for volunteers to head south in the struggle for racial equality, Jewish students responded in disproportionate numbers. Jewish students

comprised roughly two-thirds of all the white freedom riders in the summer of 1961 and over a third of the volunteers for the 1964 Mississippi voter registration campaign. When freedom riders traveled through the South to test complicity with federal desegregation laws, 62 percent of the northern Jewish community approved and an astonishing 96 percent backed President John Kennedy's decision to send U.S. marshals to Montgomery, Alabama to enforce desegregation laws there. Northern Jewish representation in the struggle was so strong that one historian refers to the postwar period as the "Jewish phase of the civil rights revolution."[17]

While the American Jewish collective historical memory tends to focus on the incredible and meaningful sacrifices of a few American Jewish civil rights heroes, we often ignore the important perspectives of many Jews from the North and South. Defining the nature of Jewish identity in this era confounds traditional interpretations of Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement. While northern Jewish activism is well documented, relatively little work has been done on the Jewish South. Most often relegated to footnotes, southern Jews have faced historical marginalization based upon their relatively small number and seeming public opposition or indifference to the civil rights movement.[18]

Different northern and southern Jews responded to racial inequality in contrary ways. In the North, Jews lived outside the day-to-day realities of Jim Crow laws. They constructed a sense of Americanism based on the need for universal legal protections and supported civil rights efforts because they sought to foster a nation where Jews, blacks, and everyone else could enjoy constitutional safeguards. Once again, conceptions of American Jewish identity played on the simultaneous embrace of seemingly antagonistic concepts: universalism and particularism. Citing the need for the United States to protect all its citizens, regardless of race, northern Jewish leaders merged their American identities with those of African-Americans. Yet by championing black rights, Jews also distinguished their needs as an exceptional American ethnic group: neither Irish nor Italian-Americans, for example, chose to express their Americanness by running to the aid of blacks.

Southern Jews, though, acculturated to Dixie and refracted their identities as Americans and as Jews in ways that seemed contrary to their northern co-religionists. Fearful of economic boycotts by either side in the civil rights movement, cognizant of continued anti-Semitism and the infamous lynching of Leo Frank in 1913, those southern Jews who wanted an end to segregation most often chose to assert their positions more quietly. Maintaining good relations with the surrounding white Christian community proved crucial to southern Jews' physical

and economic well-being. While geographic and demographic factors insulated northern Jews from much of the ugliness of racial politics, southern Jews lived a more vulnerable existence. In 1964, Birmingham, Alabama Jews numbered only 4,000 in an overall population of 630,000. A local rabbi lamented that they were "very, very vulnerable." Montgomery counted 1,800 Jews among a population of 134,000. Other southern towns recorded similarly small Jewish communities.[19]

The modern struggle for racial equality challenged the continued acculturation of established southern Jewish families. In Jackson, Mississippi, for example, Jews assimilated to such a large degree that their rabbi considered them "indistinguishable in ideology" from the surrounding community and "as racist as any white non-Jew." In Montgomery, Jews advertised their affiliation with the White Citizen's Council "in an attempt to show that they are at one with the majority viewpoint in the Gentile community." They claimed that their actions sought "to inhibit the growth of anti-Semitism." The local Jackson newspaper boasted, "Today many a fine Jewish leader is part of the southern resistance. Jackson's citizen's council, outstanding in South and Nation, points to them with pride." Even rabbis from long-established southern families defended the distinctive "southern way of life," took issue with northern Jewish critics, and defended the racial status quo.[20]

Some Jews, many of whom only recently had relocated from the North, pressed for change. In the rabbinic community, they championed the civil rights cause at great risk to themselves, their families, and their congregations. Rabbi Jacob Rothschild of Atlanta's Reform congregation, targeted by white racists when his synagogue was bombed in 1958, criticized the delay tactics of those who believed that "you can't legislate the hearts of men." That argument, employed by self-described civil rights moderates, amounted in Rothschild's estimation to "as specious a statement as ever beguiled the soul." "Laws do not wait for general acceptance," he said, "they stimulate and coerce a way of life that is better." Arthur Levin, the Anti-Defamation League regional director in the South from 1948 to 1962, hailed another religious leader, Charles Mantinband, as an "example of a rabbi who was outspoken and who made no compromises with his conscience and his congregation." Malcolm Stern, a colleague of Mantinband's, called him "a quiet self-effacing individual whose fervent belief in the equality of mankind led him, as the rabbi of Hattiesberg, Mississippi, to take the presidency of that state's Council on Human Relations."[21]

Most southerners, however, feared retribution from both the white community and their own congregants and refused to take public stands on civil rights. They distinguished between what they called a private commitment to racial equality and their public responsibility to protect

their synagogue membership from the considerable wrath of the larger white community. As one writer explained in the *Southern Israelite,* "Jews who espouse and defend the cause of civil rights jeopardize the security of isolated Jewish communities in the South, threaten their social integration and economic position, and ultimately even their physical safety."[22]

William Malev, a Houston rabbi in one of the South's largest synagogues, explained that in communities where congregants opposed integration, "the rabbis have not spoken out, and to have done so would have been to invite resentment and anti-Semitism, if not, indeed, violence towards the Jewish community." Rabbi Moses Landau, spiritual leader of Cleveland, Mississippi's Jews, explained that if he decided to support the civil rights movement, "it would have been limited to twenty-four hours." After that single day, he stated, "I wouldn't be there in the state anymore." With the prevailing segregationist mentality, Landau argued, "the Jewish community could not exist, could not exist [sic], if they were in any way involved in the civil movement."[23]

In the North, the civil rights movement offered Jews a powerful means to identify as pluralist and civically responsible American citizens. Constitutional guarantees of legal equality, critical to the story of American Jewish social mobility, proved elusive in the black South. By hitching themselves to the civil rights wagon, northern Jews linked their identities as a persecuted minority with their faith and confidence in the American way of life. Jewish leaders never tired of explaining that a society that protected African-Americans from arbitrary violations of civil rights also guaranteed the sanctity of Jewish rights. As Cincinnati's Jewish Community Relations Council explained, "The society in which Jews are most secure, is itself secure, only to the extent that citizens of all races and creeds enjoy full equality." Geographically isolated from the ugliness of Jim Crow laws, or their fear-invoking impact on their southern co-religionists, northern Jews felt confident in their calls for racial justice.[24]

Yet Jewish-identity issues grew complex even for northern Jews when the interests of blacks and Jews came into conflict. At these moments, northern Jews learned that their similarities to southern Jews proved far more powerful than they ever imagined. Conceptions of American Jewish identity remained inextricably tied to the particular community's surrounding political culture. While it was difficult for southern Jews to identify with the civil rights movement as a vehicle for their own acculturation, northern Jews also faced similar tests when their particularist identity as Jews clashed with the social needs of American blacks.

In one lesser-known incident, Rabbi Wise traveled to Washington in 1947 to testify in support of a bill to give federal aid to public schools. The New York rabbi and head of the AJCongress cherished the public school system and credited it for elevating American Jews in just two generations from immigrant status to full-fledged citizens. In the public schools, second-generation Jews strengthened their identity as Americans when they spoke English, learned about the American democratic tradition, and met children from different religious and immigrant groups. In the eyes of the Jewish community, public schools acted as a social equalizer, giving less advantaged Americans the linguistic, social, and educational skills necessary for social advancement.

Southern legislators, fearful of opening the doors of their segregated schoolhouses to Washington's influence, attached an amendment to the federal aid bill to limit federal influence in southern schools and bar the dismantlement of the segregated school system. They considered federal support for state schools a threat to the racial status quo. Without even raising a specific objection to the Jewish community's goals of stronger public education, southern lawmakers complicated Wise's political strategy. Ideally, the New York rabbi would have wanted to argue for stronger public schools as a Jewish leader concerned about his constituents. By introducing race into the equation, the southerners forced Wise to comment on an unrelated topic: namely, Jewish attitudes toward segregated schools in the South.

Wise then faced a crucial test of Jewish identity as he tried to navigate through the shoals of American racial politics. If he honored his commitment to racial equality and refused to allow the southern amendment, he doomed the bill's chances for success and, with it, an opportunity to help build a pluralist and integrated foundation to American identity. If he sidestepped the thorny issue of segregation in southern schools, he would exclude African-Americans from his ideal public school system and limit the ability of the nation's children to interact with one another.

While he began his testimony by condemning state-mandated segregation, Wise fell in line behind southerners who demanded that federal aid to education not be used "as a means to attack the segregated school system." Wise assuaged his potential critics by invoking the "separate but equal" doctrine of the Supreme Court's Plessy v. Ferguson case. "So long as the law guarantees that States having segregated school systems do not discriminate financially against children in minority schools, we believe that the bill should be supported," Wise affirmed. Like most liberals of the era, Wise lobbied for the political success of his favored bill instead of waging a more difficult defense of racial equality.[25]

Ultimately, southern and northern Jews shared much more in common than either may have thought or wished. Each chose a form of Jewish identity that accommodated to their region's larger political culture just as it served their particular needs as Jews. In the North, that demanded a nation committed to equal rights for all. By supporting the civil rights movement, urban Jews could reaffirm a nation friendly to Jews just as they projected the most benevolent form of intergroup cooperation. In the South, the perpetuation of a distinctive Jewish culture mandated a separation between what they termed the "religious" and the "political." Congregational calls to "keep politics off the pulpit" served as an attempt to preserve a distinctive southern Jewish life amidst some of the nation's worst racial discrimination.

A decade later, the black-Jewish civil rights alliance collapsed with the rise of the Black Power movement. As even a casual observer can attest, there was reason for pessimism. Leaders of the new black nationalist movement abandoned interracial cooperation, embraced a form of social separation rooted in anti-Semitism, and called for violence and revolutionary change. Jews who had led white America in the cause of racial justice endured charges of paternalism and opportunism from members of the very community they had sought to help. In December 1969, Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver proclaimed that his organization "fully supports Arab guerillas in the Middle East" and proclaimed, "Zionists wherever they may be, are our enemies." Jewish concerns intensified just one month later when CBS news reported that Fatah, the PLO faction headed by Yasir Arafat, was considering a plan to train Black Panther activists "in actual combat against Israel to prepare them for a sabotage and assassination campaign in the United States." Similar sentiments dominated other high-profile confrontations between Jews and African-Americans.[26]

Just as they had in the New Deal and civil rights eras, Jewish leaders in the mid to late 1960s called on universal elements of the larger political culture to strengthen American Jewish identity. Their accommodation to the Black Power-inspired identity politics of the 1960s launched one of the most impressive Jewish ethnic revivals in modern American history. What Hansen may have considered a return to the grandparents' tradition should be described more accurately as a Jewish-centered emulation of black nationalist ideology and strategy. American Jews engaged their African-American contemporaries as much as they did their Jewish ancestors. Had it not been for the expansion of identity politics in 1960s American life, Jews would not have been able to rediscover their tradition or support programs that raised the public profile of American Jewish life.

In a dramatic illustration of contrarian history, the rise of black anti-Semitism inspired a counterintuitive movement toward heightened

Jewish ethnic expression. In the early years of the cultural-nationalist revival, mainstream Jewish leaders embraced Black Power as a positive force in Jewish identity formation even as they condemned it for its anti-Jewish component. Jewish leaders looked to black activists as models for their own identity formation. Boston's Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn, himself a member of Harry Truman's 1947 President's Committee on Civil Rights, observed, "The positive aspect of black power is its search for ethnic identity. This, we Jews of all peoples should be able to understand and approve," he explained, "the American Negro today is in this respect retracing precisely the experience of American Jews a generation or two ago." Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg lamented, "Perhaps the saddest element in this whole frightening picture is in the fact that Jews are the people who are best able to understand the rhetoric of Black Power, even though they are most directly on the firing line of its attack." The Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis was "especially understanding of this painful withdrawal into separatism and nationalism" and the AJCongress understood "why black men seek to shape their own destiny."[27]

When African-American activists declared, "Black is beautiful," Jews began to re-evaluate their own public posture. Even the moderate American Jewish Committee tried to link African-American ethnic nationalism to its own accommodationist perspective. "Black Power," it held, "stresses black initiative, black self-worth, black identity, black pride. Black Power seeks the growth and development of black economic and political power. Black Power seeks black leadership development. Black Power strives for a form of separation which will permit it to achieve the above goals and then to enter into coalition with whites as psychological, social, and political equals." San Francisco Jewish leader Earl Raab concluded, "The black Revolution is spurring the Jewish community—and America—into a renewed understanding of pluralist politics."[28]

As they had in the New Deal and civil rights eras, Jewish leaders pressed for responses that merged universalist and particularist aspects of identity. In the American Jewish campaign to rescue Soviet Jews, for example, Jewish activists borrowed a page from the civil rights strategy book, imitating the style, technique, and rhetoric of earlier liberal protests. Just as Martin Luther King, Jr., sought white liberal support by casting the civil rights struggle in universalist terms, leaders of the Soviet Jewry movement promoted an-all important accommodationist theme, anti-Communism, to link Jewish interests with those of the larger, American Christian majority. By focusing on Soviet human rights abuses, Jewish activists not only helped their Eastern European brethren, but also took advantage of American Cold War opposition to

the Communist state. In 1972, Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson of Washington State rallied 76 colleagues to co-sponsor legislation tying U.S. economic incentives to the human rights records of Communist nations. An April 1972 House of Representatives resolution calling on "the Soviet government to permit the free expression of ideas and the exercise of religion by all its citizens" passed by a 360-0 vote.[29]

The Student Struggle For Soviet Jewry estimated that 28 percent of its activists had participated in the civil rights movement. When asked why American Jews should protest the condition of Soviet Jews, Jacob Birnbaum, the organization's founder, responded, "Many young Jews today forget that if injustice cannot be condoned in Selma, USA, neither must it be overlooked in Kiev, USSR." One of the earliest meetings, a Conference on the Status of Soviet Jews held in October of 1963, counted civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, and labor leader Walter Reuther as sponsors. In one high-profile protest, the 1974 "Freedom Ride" from the capital to Seattle, Jewish leaders invoked memories of the 1961 civil rights bus protests to draw parallels between the oppression of blacks in the American South and Jews in the Soviet Union. "With its peaceful tactics," one historian explained, the Soviet Jewry movement "satisfied the needs of those who could not subscribe to the student militancy of the late sixties."[30]

Yet the struggle to save Soviet Jews also embraced particularist strategies pioneered by black nationalists. By the late 1960s, Jewish leaders abandoned much of their interracial agenda in favor of a movement focused on the needs of the Jewish community. College-age Jewish youths who once spent their summers registering voters in Mississippi journeyed instead to the Soviet Union where they consciously broke the law by smuggling prayer shawls, yarmulkes, and prayer books for Soviet Jewish refuseniks. Rabbis faced arrest for their protests in front of Soviet consulate buildings and thousands joined mass rallies in Washington. While the Soviet Jewry movement began at the height of the 1950s anti-Communist purges, it was not until the advent of ethnic nationalist politics that the struggle to free Soviet Jews gained national and international attention. Jews in the early postwar years, while mindful of the threat posed by Soviet authorities, chose to focus their attention on domestic racism. Only after the civil rights coalition fell apart and the nation's political culture encouraged ethnic activism did Jews embrace Soviet Jewry.

Jewish day schools, initially embraced as an alternative to court-ordered busing programs, evolved into important centers for Jewish education at both the primary and secondary levels. In 1955, 180 Jewish day schools served 35,500 students in 68 communities. Twenty years later, the number of schools ballooned to 425 with an enrollment

topping 82,000 in 160 different American cities and towns. The secularist influences of the "white-flight" crowd diminished as principals and day school boards opted for more intensive Jewish study.[31]

Ritualistic Judaism, shunned by most non-Orthodox Jews during the 1950s consensus, re-emerged in the wake of the civil rights revolution. The Chabad movement set up centers on college campuses across the country while a host of alternative Jewish religious centers offered once-marginal Jews a path to spiritual redemption. *The Jewish Catalog*, Richard Siegel, Michael Strassfeld, and Sharon Strassfeld's how-to guide for Jewish observance, ranked second only to the Bible after it was released by the Jewish Publication Society in 1973. Synagogues enjoyed strong demand for adult education classes as these middle generations made up for lost educational time. Reform Jews abandoned their assimilationist roots and called for heightened levels of observance. Israel Dresner, a Reform rabbi, explained that he would not be disappointed "if suddenly tomorrow a million American Jews were to walk into their white-collar jobs wearing a *kapote*, a beard, and a *shtreimel*." Dresner, reflecting the dramatic theological realignment in his movement, urged his congregants to give their children a traditional Jewish education and called for the creation of Reform *yeshivas*.[32]

The Black Power-inspired ethnic nationalism of the 1960s also translated into renewed American Jewish interest in the State of Israel. Zionism, which lacked strong American support during the 1950s and early 1960s, gained strength in the last years of the decade. When war broke out between Israel and its Arab neighbors in 1967, American Jews reacted with such an outpouring of support that even their leadership was surprised. In a 15-minute spurt, wealthy givers at a New York luncheon pledged 15 million dollars for Israel while the United Jewish Appeal's Israel Emergency Fund raised more than 100 million dollars in just 18 days. The 1967 campaign more than doubled the previous year's effort. Public opinion polls revealed "ninety-nine out of every hundred Jews expressed their strong sympathy with Israel." Over 7,500 American Jews gathered their passports, boarded planes for Israel, and took over the civilian jobs of Israeli soldiers. In the six years following the war, another 53,000 American Jews packed their belongings and moved to the Jewish state. Most hailed from nontraditional religious backgrounds and viewed *aliyah* as an opportunity to help create an idealistic Jewish homeland. Zionism enjoyed a status and prestige unmatched in American Jewish history as synagogues, Jewish day schools, and summer camps added educational curricula on Israeli history, life, and culture.[33]

After the war, relations between blacks and Jews in the United States soured when many African-American militants sided with the

Palestinian cause and linked the Israeli government to imperialist aggression. Yet American Zionists expressed unusual empathy for black nationalists, whom they saw in the same spirit as Jewish freedom fighters. Mixing Zionist ideology with the ethnic politics of 1960s America, Jews paralleled their love of Israel to the spirit of African-American ethnic nationalism. Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins noted that "black power is nothing more and nothing less than Negro Zionism," while Hertzberg considered Stokely Carmichael "the most radical kind of Negro Zionist. He talks exactly the language of those Jews who felt most violently angry at the sight of Hitler and most hurt by the good people who stood aside." Rabbi Gittelsohn argued, "The Black Power advocate is the Negro's Zionists. Africa is his Israel." Shad Polier of the AJCongress observed that "to the British people, the Stern gang in Israel was no less extremist than the Black Nationalists—the so-called Muslim movement—in the eyes of the American people." For Ben Halpern, Black Power's "fundamental meaning is quite clear: it means exactly the same as the equally vague term of 'auto emancipation' with which Jewish nationalism began in the 1880s."[34]

In the past 30 years, American Jews have reconstructed much of their tradition. Contemporary Jews, inheritors of both their community's economic success and the multicultural emphasis of American life, enjoy unprecedented opportunities to express their identities on their own terms. Jewish day schools proliferate in communities with quality public schools. Renewed associational networks have reinvented the Jewish neighborhood, the local synagogue, and even the popularity of the internet-based J-date matchmaking service.

Today's Jews, however, have not been returning to the Old World past. They are, instead, reinventing themselves as thoroughly modern Americans even as they reflect on their own Jewish history. The shtetls of Eastern Europe have been transformed into romantic Anatevkas while Manhattan's Lower East Side, according to Hasia Diner, developed as a powerful and mythical force in the American Jewish historical imagination. We live neither in a melting pot nor a salad bowl. Hansen's generations do not describe the development of American Jewish identity. The construction of American Jewish identity confounds these traditional interpretations and challenges us to look beyond linear interpretations. Our future studies must investigate the dynamic tensions that animate the relationship between Jewishness and Americanness over time, over place, and between all sorts of Jews. This will bring us to a more vibrant and accurate assessment of identity formation and reveal the important ways accommodationist themes have defined American Jewish historical and sociological experiences.[35]

NOTES

[1] Lisa Keys, "Marcs Beget Maxes as Parents Tag Old-World Names on Babies," *Forward*, January 18, 2002,
 http://www.forward.com/issues/2002/02.01.18/fast1.html.
[2] See Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant* (Augustana Historical Society, 1938), *The Immigrant in American History* (Harvard University Press, 1940) and *The Atlantic Migration, 1607-1860; a History of the Continuing Settlement of the United States* (Harvard University Press, 1940).
[3] See, for example, Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home In America: Second Generation New York Jews* (Columbia University Press, 1981). See also Johns Hopkins University Press series, "The Jewish People In America" especially Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920*, Henry Feingold, *A Time For Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920-1945*, and Edward Shapiro, *A Time For Healing, American Jewry Since World War II*.
[4] The definition of "Americanness" has also reflected Jewish traits. See, especially, studies completed on Jewish influence in Hollywood and the creation of American popular culture. Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (Crown, 1988); Stephen J. Whitfield, *In Search of American Jewish Culture* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999).
[5] Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics Of Labor In A Textile City, 1914-1960* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.7.
[6] Lizabeth Cohen, *Making A New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 8 & 362.
[7] Cohen, *Making A New Deal*, p.8 & 362.
[8] Speech by Benjamin Selekman, meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, *American Jewish Year Book*, Volume 36, 1934-35, p.65.
[9] *American Jewish Year Book*, Volume 33, 1931-1932, p.381, 29; *Jewish Social Work, 1931*, p.31; *Trends and Issues in Jewish Social Welfare, 1899-1952*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, p.280.
[10] *Proceedings, National Conference of Jewish Social Service, 1936*, p.11-12.
[11] *Proceedings, National Conference of Jewish Social Service, 1928*, p.88-89.
[12] *Proceedings, National Conference On Jewish Welfare, 1935*, p.1; *Jewish Social Work, 1935*, p.20; *Proceedings, National Conference Of Jewish Social Service, 1935*, p.104; *Proceedings, National Conference Of Jewish Social Welfare, 1937*, p.53, 12, 60; *American Jewish Year Book*, Volume 38, 1936-37, p.235; *United Jewish Welfare Fund*

Yearbook, 1938, p.32-33; *United Jewish Welfare Fund Yearbook, 1939*, p.48-49.

[13] Feingold, *A Time For Searching*, p. 235; Menahem Kaufman, *An Ambiguous Partnership: Non Zionists and Zionists in America, 1939-1948* (Wayne State University Press, 1991), p.47; Charles Shulman, "Boycott of Germany-What Course Shall The Jews Follow," Manuscript Collection 124, box 3, folder 4, p.3, American Jewish Archives (AJA) (Cincinnati, Ohio).

[14] George Backer, *Proceedings, The 1937 General Assembly*, Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, 7-8. Administration-U.S. State Dept. 1933-45, J.N. Rosenberg-J.C. Hyman, Sept. 9, 1939, Archives of JDC, New York, New York as quoted in Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, Wayne State Press, 1981, p.35.

[15] Mark A. Raider, Jonathan D. Sarna, and Ronald W. Zweig, eds., *Abba Hillel Silver and American Zionism*, Cass, 1997; Moshe Gottlieb, "The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the American Jewish Community, 1933-1941," (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1967); Gottlieb, "The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the United States: An Ideological and Sociological Appreciation," *Jewish Social Studies*, volume 35, July 1973, p.198.

[16] Samuel Dinin, "Conflicting Issues in Jewish Education," "Proceedings of the National Conference of Jewish Social Welfare," appearing in *The Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, volume 18, September 1941, p.80.

[17] American Jews looked with pride on their historic commitment to racial equality. See Murray Friedman, *Utopian Dilemma: New Political Directions For American Jews*, Ethics and Public Policy Center (Bryn Mawr, 1985), p.24.

[18] Some recent studies include Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, eds., *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (University of Alabama Press, 1997), Debra L. Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York University Press, 2001); Melissa Fay Greene, *The Temple Bombing* (Fawcett, 1996).

[19] See Bauman and Kalin, eds., *The Quiet Voices*; Allen Krause, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights" (Rabbinic thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1967), p.26; *World Almanac*, 1964, p.261, cited in Krause, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights," p.20.

[20] Theodore Lowi, "Southern Jews: The Two Communities," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, volume 6 July 1964; Krause, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights," p.16-17; *Jackson State Times*, 24 October 1958, cited in Krause, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights," p.17.

[21] Krause, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights," p.145; Krause, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights, Part Two," p.317; Malcolm Stern, "Role of the Rabbi in the South," appearing in Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., *Turn To The South: Essays On Southern Jewry* (University Press of Virginia, 1979), p.31.

[22] Isaac Toubin, "Recklessness or Responsibility," *Southern Israelite*, 27 Feb. 1959, p.13-15, cited in Arnold Shankman, "A Temple Is Bombed" (Atlanta, 1958), *American Jewish Archives*, volume 23, November 1971.

[23] William S. Malev, "The Jew of the South in the Conflict of Segregation," *Conservative Judaism*, volume 13, Fall 1958, p.36; Krause, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights," p.69-70, 78.

[24] "Program of Action for the Cincinnati Jewish Community in the Present Race Relations Emergency," Appendix A, p.3, Manuscript Collection 202, Box 16, Folder 4, AJA; "Program of Action for the Cincinnati Jewish Community in the Present Race Relations Emergency," July 15, 1963, p.3, Manuscript Collection 202, Box 17, Folder 1, AJA.

[25] "Statement of Stephen S. Wise, In Respect to Legislation For Federal Aid to Education, Before The Subcommittee on Education of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare (S. 80, 170, 199, 472), April 25, 1947," Papers of Stephen S. Wise, Box 64, American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), New York, NY.

[26] Eldridge Cleaver, *New York Times*, 31 December 1969, in Seymour Siegel, "Danger on the Left, II," *Ideas, A Journal of Conservative Thought* volume 2, 1970, p.30.

[27] Roland B. Gittelsohn, *Fire In My Bones: Essays on Judaism in a Time of Crisis* (New York, Bloch, 1969), p.53; Shlomo Katz, ed. *Negro and Jew: An Encounter in America* (New York, Macmillan, 1967), p.72; "Communities in Perplexity," p.2, from a brochure distributed by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform) in observance of race relations Shabbat, February 17, 1969, New York, NY, SC 8789, AJA; "Keep the Faith," nd., I-77, box 12, folder "Delegates Kit National Biennial Convention, May 20-24, 1970, p.4, AJHS.

[28] Earl Raab, "The Black Revolution and the Negro Question," *Commentary*, volume 43, January 1969, p. 32.

[29] William W. Orbach, *The American Movement to Aid Soviet Jews*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1979, p. vii, 129.

[30] Orbach, *The American Movement to Aid Soviet Jews*, p.4, 5, 20.

[31] Egon Mayer and Chaim I. Waxman, "Modern Jewish Orthodoxy in America: Toward the Year 2000," *Tradition*, volume 16, Spring 1977, p.9, in Chaim I Waxman, *American Aliyah: Portrait of an Innovative Movement*, Wayne State University Press, 1989, p.122.

[32] Riv-Ellen Prell, *Prayer & Community: The Havurah in American Judaism* (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1989), p.16; Rabbi Israel Dresner, "Communities in Perplexity, Transcript of a Discussion of the Problem of Blacks and Jews," p.21, February 17, 1969, New York, NY, SC-8789, AJA.

[33] Sorin, *Tradition Transformed: The Jewish Experience in America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p.215; Wertheimer, "The Turbulent Sixties," appearing in Jonathan D. Sarna, ed., *The American Jewish Experience* (Holmes and Meier, 1986), p.340; Shapiro, *A Time For Healing*, p.208.

[34] Katz, *Negro and Jew*, p.72; Gittelsohn, *Fire in my Bones*, p.55; "The Jew and the Racial Crisis," Address by Shad Polier, Chairman of the Governing Council, American Jewish Congress, at the American Jewish Congress National Biennial Convention, April 16, 1964—Hotel Carillon, Miami Beach, FL, I-77, Box 11, p. 1, American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY; Ben Halpern, "Negro-Jewish Relations In America: A Symposium," *Midstream*, volume 12, December 1966, p.44.

[35] See Hasia R. Diner, Jeffrey Shandler, and Beth S. Wenger, eds., *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America* (Princeton University Press, 2000); Hasia R. Diner, *Remembering the Lower East Side: American Jewish Reflections* (Indiana University Press, 2000). See also Henry L. Feingold, *Lest Memory Cease: Finding Meaning in the American Jewish Past* (Syracuse University Press, 1996).