

**Multiple Outsiderness:
Religious, Ethnic, and Racial Diversity in America**

**Hasia Diner
New York University**

The history of Jewish intergroup relations offers us a lens for understanding the history of Jewish integration in America. Intergroup relations, at least as I am using it for this paper, refers to the political projects, programs, and endeavors undertaken by American Jews in which they have linked their status in the larger society with those of other groups similarly situated. The term itself indicates that one group—in this case, Jews—understands the community in which they live—local or national—as made up of other groups with whom it shares certain commonalities, including a defensive posture toward the majority. The “inter” part of the phrase assumes that the group in question has chosen consciously to make some kind of common cause with those other groups and to link its present and future status with them. The “relations” aspect implies action as opposed to rhetoric, which is only a very specific kind of action.

The period in American Jewish history in which American Jewish political behavior was dominated by intergroup relations was in the aftermath of the Holocaust. In that era, intergroup relations involved a broad set of activities pursued by the Jewish “defense” organizations, characterized on the national level by the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, B’nai B’rith’s Anti-Defamation League and the National Council of Jewish Women. On the local levels, the newly formed chapters of these older organizations had to compete with Jewish community councils, themselves products of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s as the practitioners of intergroup relations. These organizations, their professional staffs and lay members built bridges to other Americans. They pursued their intergroup agenda in order to defuse the potentially explosive political environment of the Cold War era. The establishment of Jewish intergroup relations, sometimes known as the “human relations” professionals, attempted to build bridges using a massive public-relations campaign. They created and disseminated written, spoken and visual media that emphasized the common interests of all Americans. Through the new medium of television, as well as through radio, film strips, pamphlets, and informational materials, they sought to reach a wide breadth of American audiences. Jewish intergroup relations professionals sought to convince Americans that prejudice against any group harms all, including the perpetrators. They worked with Hollywood, hoping to maximize the number of people who would see, hear, and be moved by their message. They also

commissioned scholarly research focused on exposing the irrationality of prejudice and the evil that prejudice can, and did, bring in its wake. Commissioned by the American Jewish Committee in particular, these books, such as Gordon Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice*, became key works on the sociology of the era. They expected that these works would end up in university classrooms and would provide the intellectual and political basis for the education of teachers, social workers, policymakers, and Americans generally.

These educational materials tried to teach Americans that differences of race, religion, and national origin ought not be reflected in public policy. The film strips and cartoon clips emphasized the message that we all are Americans, and while we may worship differently, look different, or come from different places, when it comes to the formulation of public policy such differences have no real meaning and should as such be viewed with a blind eye.¹

The intergroup relations effort also worked directly with community leaders, including but not exclusively those in official capacities. When communities like that of Washington, D.C., for example, began in the 1950s to go through the process of desegregating its schools, parks, playgrounds, and other public facilities, Jewish intergroup relations professionals organized seminars and training sessions for school board personnel, teachers, recreational workers, police, and others community members. The Jewish Community Council of Washington, D.C., paid for police officers to attend short courses at college campuses on intergroup relations and on the pernicious affects of prejudice. These people stood on the front line of change, and Jewish communal leaders hoped they could be helpful in calming the potentially explosive transition from segregation to integration. Handled by the Jewish Community Council and its executive director, Isaac Frank, this effort at intergroup relations was done in conjunction with Catholic and Protestant groups and was made to appear as a broad-based coalition.²

This was cumbersome work. Those who designed, conducted, and published the scholarly research had no idea how it would be used. It all cost a great deal of money, and those spending it had little certainty that their efforts would pay off. All of these uncertainties were compounded by the urgency of the project. It was the peak of the Cold War era. The civil rights struggle had begun to attract wide public attention. Opponents of civil rights were becoming increasingly outspoken and violent.

As a consequence, Jewish intergroup relations took a new turn in the early 1950s, although the message stayed the same. Jewish organizational officials decided to augment the slower work of education with more proactive measures. They began to turn to

courtroom litigation, and *Brown v. the Board of Education* was an early and stunning victory. Notably, the American Jewish Committee had financed the research that underpinned the NAACP's case. By the middle of the decade, Jews, along with other advocates for civil rights, worked on the federal and state levels to lobby for anti-discrimination legislation. Their efforts culminated in the 1957, 1964, and 1965 Civil Rights Acts. They likewise scored notable legislative triumphs in many Northern and Western states by pushing anti-discrimination bills through state legislatures.

Jews had a great deal to gain from this work, not only in its educational aspects, but also in its legal and more overtly political aspects. Jews understood that in matters of access to higher education, jobs, and the housing market, the fact of their Jewishness still stood in their way. After all, quotas at many American colleges and universities, limitations on hiring Jews for certain kinds of jobs, and restrictive covenants in housing functioned both as real barriers and symbolic insults. Likewise, outbursts of anti-Jewish rhetoric in the press and from speakers' platforms linked Jews to all of the evils imagined by some Americans: Communism, the media, racial integration, progressive education, to name but a few. The more Americans learned to stop hating and labeling, the more secure Jews would be in the United States, American Jewish intergroup professionals argued.

Jews engaged in this project locally and nationally with others who shared their sentiments. They participated in religious coalitions, linking their agendas with those of mainline liberal Protestants and key leaders of various Catholic archdioceses, to negotiate a more liberalized vision of America. They participated formally in political efforts with civil rights organizations, taking a leading role in the postwar struggle to wipe out the Jim Crow laws. They also found common ground with organizations representing some of America's ethnic communities. Together, they set out to abolish the hated system of the national-origin quotas in the country's immigration laws.³

The rhetoric the Jewish intergroup relations movement used in its work tended to downplay any particularly Jewish agenda. It emphasized the pathological nature of prejudice, the corrosiveness of discrimination upon both victim and victimizer, and the commonality of suffering among those who found themselves marginalized. The movement articulated its concerns in this universalistic way rather than in terms of how discrimination left its mark on Jews. Jewish intergroup professionals argued that anyone who had felt the sting of discrimination could sympathize with their cause.

Even when it came to the issue of school prayer, which divided Jews from others in the religious coalition, they found partners. On this matter, culminating in the 1962 case *Engel v. Vitale*, the Jewish defense

agencies were able to make common ground with civil liberties groups and Jehovah's Witnesses who also opposed school prayer. That meant that the Jewish assault on this particular American practice also did not have to be undertaken in the name of Jews alone. They still did not have to articulate a Jewish concern that set them aside and apart from other Americans.⁴

Beginning in the late 1960s, some American Jews viewed this kind of intergroup relations activity as obsequious, based on an unwillingness to speak out for Jews in their own name. They also criticized it as dishonest, seeing it as the cloaking of Jewish self-interest under the mantle of universalism. Yet in the minutes of their meetings, in internal organizational reports, and even in volumes of the *American Jewish Yearbook*, Jewish intergroup relations professionals in this era did directly point out the Jewish interests driving their efforts. But in the later, more ethnically assertive paradigm, young Jews from various places along the political spectrum looked with disdain upon this kind of intergroup relations work.

In the late 1960s, American Jewish organizations also found themselves attacked by African-American groups. By then, public debate had shifted to affirmative action, racially preferential quotas, bilingual education, and the like. The same Jewish organizations that had worked so comfortably in the practice of intergroup relations now found themselves uncomfortable with these issues and tended to stick with their earlier agendas.

They asserted publicly that new policies and the new way of dealing with diversity in fact would disadvantage Jews. They also were accused of having been hypocritical. Before, they had not articulated any specific Jewish self-interest during the civil rights effort in the years not long after World War II. But now, they asserted that Jewish interests always had been at the forefront and that the new issues in the civil rights movement worked against their Jewish interests.⁵

I will not here criticize or defend the past decisions of American Jewish organizations. Rather, I seek to explore how the intergroup relations effort of the 1940s through the 1960s represented a logical step in the history of American Jews. Rather than seeing things as right, wrong, honest or dishonest, I seek to place matters in the context of history. As such, let us try to put the history of Jewish relations with other groups in America into a historical framework.

In order to do so, let us highlight a few points of departure. First, America, even during the colonial period, was a diverse society, with women and men of numerous religious, national and linguistic backgrounds having transplanted themselves to the colonies, particularly those in which Jews settled. At various levels, they all performed key roles in fulfilling the colonial enterprise, namely,

producing wealth for those who owned the colonies. Jews not only found themselves living with Catholics, Quakers, Anabaptists, Pietists, and non-believers, they did not suffer any more or any less than any of these others by virtue of their religion. To be sure, some colonies and a few states in the early republic required jurors or potential officeholders to swear an oath upon the King James Version of the Bible, thereby excluding Jews, Catholics, "infidels," and deists. Such requirements stemmed less from an American Christian concern with Jews as makers of public policy as with a fear of apostasy. In some of the colonies and states, the presence of Catholics and Quakers invoked far greater fear and loathing than Jews did. That, in turn, spurred anti-Catholic mobs to set churches ablaze and assault nuns and priests. This continued even after American independence. Americans—mostly Protestants until the end of the 19th century—expressed in word and deed much greater concern about Catholicism, which they believed was utterly incompatible with American independence and liberty. Americans drove Mormons out of their towns, killing them when they saw fit because Mormonism violated their sensibilities. None of this happened to Jews.⁶

So, too, with national origins. Three million Jews immigrated to the United States from the 1820s through the 1920s, but they were never the main focus on anti-immigrant activity. Jews actually garnered more praise than criticism as a "model minority," as "good" immigrants who worked hard, sent their children to school, saved money, and moved up in the world. They stood in stark contrast to the much larger pool of Irish immigrants, excoriated for nearly a century as lazy, stupid, drunken, and criminal, or the Jews' co-immigrants in steerage, the Italians. Americans had little praise for the "swarthy" "Eyetalians" who carried knives for constant use in fulfilling vendettas, exploited their children and kept them from school, and kept their illiterate wives in virtual prison. The one relatively successful anti-immigrant political party, the Know-Nothings, had no interest in Jews (a few Jews actually were active members.) Rather, it was the Irish whom they targeted as the enemy. While Jews joined Italians and other less-lauded Eastern and Southern Europeans as the targets of 1920s immigration restrictions, Jews never really served in America as symbols of the "foreign invasion."⁷ Obviously, those in America that experienced the harshest oppression were non-whites.⁸

Jews never experienced a time in the United States in which citizenship was denied expressly to them. Even in the handful of places like North Carolina and New Hampshire where Jews experienced some civil inequalities up to the middle of the 19th century, they never had their basic rights of citizenship challenged and they were not singled out for harsh treatment. Jews were always "white" in a society in which

whiteness meant access to full rights. The discrimination Jews experienced—quotas in higher education, job discrimination, restrictions from resorts and hotels—were acts of private individuals and corporations. In many cases, their behavior went unregulated by the government, but the government was never an active agent in singling out Jews for negative treatment.

To all indications, Jews were aware of the relatively privileged position they occupied. They understood both at an experiential and intellectual level that citizenship mattered and that they had achieved it with ease.

This kind of insulation from America's worst discrimination affected Jews' relations with other Americans and other Jews. They understood how much their lives differed from those of Jews elsewhere. Particularly for the immigrants, the Jews realized how few rights would have been theirs had they stayed in Europe. Therefore, as Jews forged relationships with and in contrast to other American groups—other immigrants, blacks and the upper strata of the country—they did so with caution, harboring the sentiment that the relatively good life they had access to could disappear at any moment.

Certainly one strategy they could have pursued to guard against that would have been to associate themselves publicly and politically with the power elite. In some ways, they did that. In small towns and large cities across America, Jews from the middle of the 19th century onward forged a place in local politics. They ran for office, served on town councils and school boards, and in some cases were elected as mayors and legislators. They participated in the apparatus of political parties and functioned as exemplars of the civic order. As befitted merchants—which most of them were—Jewish men took advantage of the political openness of America to demonstrate that they were there to stay. They sought to impress upon others that they had cast their lot with the local status quo. In Portland, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Nashville, Buffalo, or Chicago, these were not “wandering Jews;” they found ways to demonstrate to their fellow Americans that they deserved the welcome that they had received.⁹

In the pre-Civil War period, Jews in the South made it patently clear that they had no problem with that region's “peculiar institution.” While no Jews counted themselves among the “fire-eaters,” the rabid pro-slavery advocates of the 1850s, Jews owned slaves at a higher proportion than white Southerners generally, and we have no evidence that they felt any compunction about doing so. In the aftermath of the Civil War, Jews participated in various organizations dedicated to commemorating the memory of the Confederate cause, although nothing points to their participation in the Ku Klux Klan or other organizations actively bent on terrorizing freed blacks. The history of

Southern Jewry points to the importance of local and regional variation in trying to analyze how American Jews interacted with other Americans.¹⁰

In most cases, at most times, Jews in the United States did little to tip the established order of things. That established order served them relatively well. A new social order could make their situation worse. If, since the early 20th century, Jews have allied themselves with the liberal end of the American political spectrum, they have done so in the context of political ideas with which many other Americans also have identified. They did so in the context of accepting the basic ideas of the nation—its Constitution, its fundamental political processes—and sought to change particular practices they found wanting.

Indeed, Jewish rhetoric about race in America, as reflected in the English- and Yiddish-language press, invoked American metaphors to call for change. Jewish writers appealing to Jewish readers decried racism, lynching, segregation, and discrimination as violations of the American credo. By positing their arguments this way, they could at once both affirm their Americanness and condemn certain practices in America that they found morally repugnant.¹¹

From the latter part of the 19th century, large numbers of Jewish immigrants participated in and sometimes led various movements seeking to restructure American life. Socialism clearly played an important role in the Jewish community. Several key institutions, the Yiddish press in particular, gained its widest circulation through its advocacy of socialism. The *Jewish Daily Forward*, the socialist newspaper founded in 1897, began outselling the older, more conservative and religiously traditional *Yiddishe Tageblatt* by 1904. Some of its success may have been due to its marketing strategies and to the active role it played in the life of the immigrant community. But the socialism of its editor, Abraham Cahan, was not incidental to its appeal. Clearly, a newspaper that pointed out the need for a new kind of American social and political order appealed to the immigrant masses. Organizations like the Arbeiter Ring—the Workmen's Circle—squarely situated Jews in the ongoing critique of American capitalism. Labor unions with predominantly Jewish leaders and members—the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union—in particular offered immigrant workers a Jewish example of class-consciousness. In the process, they demanded first from their bosses (nearly all of whom were fellow Jews) and then from the state a more humane society for themselves and for all workers.¹²

Starting in the early 20th century, Jews as individuals began to participate in a series of progressive causes. Their work for civil rights starting at the dawn of the century, and their participation in efforts to

enhance civil liberties, birth control, and progressive education, drew the attention of many Americans. Their activities draw our attention to the fact that some Jews, far out of proportion to their numbers in society as a whole, were willing to behave in a manner others found threatening to the prevailing social order. The involvement of Jews with organizations on the extreme left end of the political spectrum—namely, the Communist Party—brought Jews both into alliances with other Americans and made it clear that Jews often were quite willing to embrace unpopular causes.

But throughout all of this, those Jews who claimed to speak for the Jews—the functionaries of organizations, religious leaders, journalists for the Jewish press—walked a kind of tightrope. They fretted over how best to bring about a different kind of America—one based on individual merit and liberalism—and how to ensure that their own status did not deteriorate. They simultaneously understood that they needed to capitalize on their own rights while bearing in mind that they could become the pariahs that other Americans were if things got worse.

They were acutely aware of the obvious fact that Jews made up only a small part of the American population. Never exceeding 4 percent of the American people, Jews had to act politically in ways that made sense for a group whose numbers alone could never guarantee their security. While their numbers brought them power and security in New York by the end of the 19th century, nationally things were quite different.

Many involved in Jewish defense work realized that the public attention that other Jews—socialists, communists, anarchists, labor activists, and the like—attracted affected the status of all Jews. Members of the Jewish organizational establishment negotiated between the strategies they hoped would serve the Jewish people well.¹³

This negotiation took place within two additional contexts that provide further depth to considering the ways Americans interacted with other Americans.

First, the leaders and functionaries—the tightrope walkers—waffled in their assessment of the pulse of their American neighbors. At times they seemed exceedingly optimistic and sincerely believed that Americans neither manifested nor harbored the kind of anti-Semitic prejudice that was rampant in Europe. Consistently, in both English and Yiddish publications, they waxed eloquent about America as a new Promised Land, a place unlike any of the other Diaspora homes where Jews had lived. Yet at other times they saw the good will around them as superficial at best. In the end, they asserted in sermons, editorials, and in organizational memos, Americans were Christians. And as such

they had as much potential to act out their historic role as persecutors as did their co-religionists on the other side of the Atlantic.

Which of these two assessments of the "American character" predominated varied with the ebbs and flows of anti-Jewish rhetoric that surfaced in America. But even in periods when that rhetoric was hard to miss for its volume and intensity, Jewish communal leaders debated how widespread the animosity really was. They disagreed about the depth of the roots of anti-Semitism in America. Notably, negative assessments were consistently balanced with positive views about the essential goodness of American institutions and the American people.¹⁴

Secondly, American Jews engaged in their various forms of intergroup relations with a sense that their actions had implications for other Jews in other places. Starting in 1840 with the vicious blood libel of the Damascus affair, Jews in the United States played a role in worldwide struggles to succor Jews in distress. With increasing frequency in the 19th century, American Jews turned to their government to help Jews in a variety of places. They had a stake in keeping immigration to the United States open. They saw a mounting crisis in Eastern Europe and moved to act, starting with their efforts for Romanian Jews in the late 1860s and continuing onward through the trauma of the 1930s and 1940s. American Jews, as well as other Americans, recognized that American Jews had a special responsibility toward Jews elsewhere. But antagonizing those with power and influence came with a price tag that most of these Jewish leaders could not pay. Demanding "too much" and "too loudly," they asserted, ran the risk of jeopardizing real good will that existed. It could indeed inflame anti-Semitism among those who did not manifest it and could make a difficult situation worse.¹⁵

The positive Jewish assessment of America as place unlike any other Diaspora Jewish home, and the negative one that saw American good will as just a patina under which lurked a familiar foe, provides the context for a chronological overview of Jewish intergroup relations. That history could be divided into five eras, with the post-Holocaust "golden age" of Jewish intergroup relations occupying the penultimate stage. In each era, Jews participated in activities that we might define as reaching across boundaries only insofar as they felt they could. In each one of these eras, the ways that Jews interacted with other Americans—particularly those who we might define as other "outsiders"—reflected the level of comfort Jews felt in America. The manner by which they traversed group boundaries for purposes of political action ultimately tells us much about the degree to which they felt secure in their dealings with members of the power elite.

The first, long era extended from the earliest Jewish settlement in the North American colonies to the mid-19th century. It was longer by far than any of the subsequent eras, but it bears little in the history of Jewish intergroup relations. We have no evidence of any efforts by Jews to reach out to other groups, despite the fact that Jews shared much in common with other religious outsiders in an era when Christian churches had some sway in the colonial and state establishment. In this period, Jews attempted to be as inconspicuous as possible. They did nearly nothing to attract the attention, let alone the wrath, of most Americans, particularly those who could determine their fate. If they had a political agenda, it was an indirect one in which they attempted to prove their usefulness to those in power and demonstrate that Jews in America presented no threat to the prevailing social order. They sought to convince Americans that the existence of Jewish congregations and communities would do nothing to challenge basic political and social relations.

This can be seen quite literally in the kinds of buildings they built. Until the early 19th century, no synagogue, for example, had any exterior marker on it to draw the attention of passersby—no six-pointed stars, no two tablets of the covenant, no Hebrew words were emblazoned on these buildings. Rather, they conformed to the architectural style of the period and were structures that fit appropriately into the landscape. It was not until the middle decades of the 19th century that symbols appeared to mark boldly the Jewish presence in the land.

In the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries, Jews sought anonymity more than anything else regarding their political interests. They took to heart the idea, articulated almost immediately upon their arrival in America by Peter Stuyvesant, that they might remain in his colony, one dominated officially by the Dutch Reformed Church, so long as they tended to their own communal needs and did not challenge the status quo. As long as they were useful to the colony and did nothing to disrupt the basic order of things, they were to be tolerated.¹⁶

It should hardly be surprising that in such a climate Jewish individuals and communities did not join in any of the popular protest movements of the day. Efforts in various corners in the early days of the country to redistribute power to those with little wealth attracted no Jewish involvement or commentary. Jews made a living in commerce. Some were involved in international trade, which included the slave trade. Others participated in the lucrative field of speculation in Western lands and in extracting the fur and lumber of the Frontier regions. Most Jews lived in cities and ran small businesses. In all of these they had no common stake with the landless farmers who clamored for access to more land and greater rights.

This tendency to avoid—in George Washington’s words—“entangling alliances”—persisted as a Jewish strategy. As late as the 1840s, when Catholics in New York attacked the public school system for its overtly Protestant and evangelical orientation, Jews did not join them. Jews also did not like the fact that the Public School Society, which ran the city’s schools, considered the propagating of Protestant Christianity a fundamental element in the education of children. Jews started a host of day schools for their children because, like the Catholics, they abhorred the public schools. But Jews did not directly challenge the system, nor did they join with the militant Archbishop John Hughes in his political efforts to have schools and Protestantism separated. They did, however, take advantage of the fruits of his labor once Hughes was successful of stripping schools of most of their overt religious activities. Once that happened, New York’s Jews rapidly dismantled their day schools and entered the public school system.¹⁷

Certainly, Jews played a role in the political activities of the new nation. For the most part, Jews supported the American Revolution, as did one-third of all Americans, according to John Adams. By supporting the revolutionary effort, Jews were not so much building bridges to dissident groups, but casting their fate with what seemed to be an emerging new reality. While in subsequent generations they trumpeted the Jewish contribution to the revolutionary effort as evidence that Jews participated in the nation’s founding moment, at the time they did not promote the Jewish interest in this support. That is, they did not announce that support for the revolution was “good” for the Jews.

In a few rare instances, Jews wrote letters to the press articulating their loyalty to the nation and their commitment to its common institutions. In these few instances they cited the fact of their Jewishness. Joan Phillips, a Philadelphia Jew, wrote a letter to the Christian men gathered there in 1787 to write a constitution for the new nation. He made it clear that he wrote to them as an individual, “one of the people called Jews of the City of Philadelphia.” His actions, as such, reflected his own views and not that of the city’s Jews or other Jews nationwide. He went on to describe himself as one of “a people scattered & dispersed among all nations.” He noted that Pennsylvania’s constitution maintained inequalities for non-Christians and called on the framers to create a different kind of document, one in which “the Israelites will think themselves happy to live under a government where all religious societies are on an equal foot.” Notably, he did not include in his petition non-believers who also were politically handicapped by Pennsylvania’s constitution.

Similarly, the letter sent by the Newport, Rhode Island, congregation, Yeshuat Israel, to George Washington in 1790 reflected

an aversion to forging common ground with others. Greeting Washington upon his visit to the city, the letter by members of the congregation extended Washington their "cordial affection and esteem." They informed him that they, "the stock of Abraham" had been "Deprived...of the invaluable rights of free citizens" in all other places where they lived and as such they had high hopes for "a Government erected by the majesty of the people."

They noted neither in their public statements nor their own internal documents the fact that other religious groups in the country also suffered from inequalities. If they made any overtures to other groups, they were to the dominant Protestant denominations in the particular state in which they lived.

The second era in American Jewish intergroup relations evolved gradually by the mid-19th century and extended until the beginning of the 20th. At this point, institutions began to emerge that attempted to speak for the Jews, be they the Jewish press, the multiple Jewish institutions in each city, and the very first Jewish defense agency, the Board of Delegates of American Israelites.

Founded in 1859, the Board of Delegates grew out of American Jewish involvement in the worldwide protest over the Mortara case, in which a Jewish child in Italy was baptized secretly by his Christian nursemaid and then was seized by Catholic clergy against the will of his parents. Isaac Leiser of Philadelphia and Samuel Meyer Isaacs of New York called together leaders of 25 of the more traditional congregations then in existence in the United States. They strove to create a body modeled along the lines of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the umbrella group for British Jewry. Among the gathering's far-reaching goals was "to watch over occurrences at home and abroad relating to the Israelites;" it then pursued that agenda. For our purposes, however, its concern with the domestic side of things is particularly salient.¹⁸

During the Civil War, the group championed two causes that demonstrated its aims and its lack of an orientation to intergroup relations. It protested directly to President Lincoln against the actions of General Ulysses S. Grant regarding his Order No. 11, which expelled all Jews from the "department of the Tennessee." Grant had asserted that Jews were profiteers and he demanded that they leave. The Board of Delegates, as well as individual Jews from Kentucky, communicated directly with Lincoln, who rescinded the decree.

Likewise, the Board of Delegates took up the issue of Jewish chaplains in the army. The legislation that enabled regiments to elect chaplains to minister to them stipulated that only regularly ordained Christian clergymen were eligible. Furthermore, the Young Men's Christian Association had the responsibility of overseeing the chaplains and their regiments' spiritual needs. When one Pennsylvania regiment

with a considerable number of Jewish men in its ranks elected a Hebrew teacher to be chaplain, the YMCA reported this infraction. The man, neither an ordained clergyman nor a Christian, faced dishonorable discharge, and he resigned. But the 65th Regiment of the Fifth Pennsylvania Cavalry voted in another Jewish chaplain, Arnold Fischel, who actually had rabbinic ordination. When Fischel applied to the War Department for his commission, he was turned down.

The Board of Delegates went into a flurry of activity. The group organized protest meetings and petition drives, published editorials in Jewish newspapers, and encouraged sermons on the topic by rabbis around the country. The basic message was that Jews should "have the same rights, according to the constitution of the U.S., which they endeavor to preserve and defend with all their might." According to one petitioner, Rabbi Isidor Kalisch, Congress should "make provisions that Jewish Divines shall also be allowed to serve as chaplains in the army and hospitals of the U.S."¹⁹

The protest, which turned out to be effective, demonstrated the Jewish approach. The Board of Delegates neither questioned the propriety of having commissioned chaplains in a country governed by a Constitution that banned congressional support of religion, nor did it speak up for others who also found themselves excluded. More significantly, the Board of Delegates' activities took place in the context of an American Jewish political culture that still reflected a high level of Jewish insecurity in America. It took no stand on the single-most important issue of the day: slavery. The board and all other American Jewish bodies looked out for Jewish rights alone. They never went on record supporting or objecting to any policy that involved other groups, such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. When they protested discrimination against Jews and Judaism, they did not point out that others in America also found themselves the subjects of discrimination.

Certainly, individual Jews, some of them communal leaders, were outspoken on some of these issues. David Einhorn, the rabbi at Baltimore's Har Sinai congregation, a Reform temple, participated in local abolitionist efforts. His nemesis in the American Reform movement, Isaac Mayer Wise, played a part in making Cincinnati's public schools religiously neutral. Other Jews—the numbers were not great—showed up in some of the other social protest movements of the day. Ernestine Rose probably was the only Jewish woman to participate in the first phase of the feminist struggle. But Rose not only was estranged from Judaism; her statements and actions were never presented as Jewish, nor did she seek to build a bridge between the feminist movement and American Jewish women.

This Jewish approach was not very different from those of other immigrant or minority groups. Both American Jews and Irish

Americans founded similar historical societies with similar journals in the 1890s; the Jews founded the American Jewish Historical Society in 1892, and the Irish started the Irish American Historical Society in 1897. Both stressed the early date when the first members of the group showed up on American soil. Both documented their high levels of their participation in the American Revolution and subsequent wars. Both stressed the compatibility between the basic institutions of their communities and those of the United States. At no point, however, did the two societies meet, share ideas, share strategies, or even talk about the similarities of their projects (That joint meeting would, appropriately, wait until the 1960s.) Neither used common history as a vehicle for forging intergroup relations.

This second era in Jewish intergroup relations shared much with the first in that there was little intergroup relations to report. It differed from the first in that it took place in an American Jewish culture that had begun the process of creating a complex structure of communal institutions, including those advocating for Jewish rights. As such, it offers a clearer example of the Jews'—as a collective entity—either lack of interest in, or discomfort with building coalitions with other disadvantaged groups. Both explanations—lack of interest and discomfort—were linked to each other. Jews defined the project of securing their own place in America as much more crucial. They protested selectively and only to promote their desire to be treated like those Americans who enjoyed the full range of rights. Often, their actions constituted proving their respectability and usefulness to America. They sought to build bridges to those with power and influence, not to those who also felt disadvantaged.

Just as the second era in the history of Jewish intergroup relations represented a continuation of the first, so too the second phase blended into the third. While the relative silence from the establishment continued as far as the common interests Jews shared with other excluded and stigmatized groups, in this era individual Jews began in large numbers to show up in organizations, movements, and efforts to change the basic structure of American life. In this period, which coincided with the Progressive era but extended beyond it, individual Jewish women and men and much of the Jewish press began to assume a critical stance toward certain key American practices: racism, industrial capitalism and the suppression of civil liberties, in particular.

The relatively new Jewish defense organizations—the National Council of Jewish Women (1893), the American Jewish Committee (1906), the Anti-Defamation League (1913), and the American Jewish Congress (1918)—strove to improve the status of Jews in America. They did so by various means, each one reflective of the organization's ideology. They met with newspaper editors who used the word "Jew" to

describe criminals. They arranged meetings with theater owners who consistently portrayed Jews on stage in unflattering ways. They sat down with government officials, pleading their case, and testified in front of congressional committees. In a few instances, like that involving Henry Ford in the 1920s, they met behind closed doors with their antagonist and threatened an economic boycott unless apologies were forthcoming.

At moments of crisis, they reached out to those non-Jews in the community whose power, reputation and prestige would help the Jewish cause. For example, in the first decade of the 20th century, in the aftermath of the Kishinev pogroms and in the lead-up to the rise of Nazism, the Jewish defense organizations arranged public meetings in which notable Christian clergymen, university presidents, leaders of the business community, former presidents, governors, mayors, and respected writers were among the speakers. However, they generally did not invite the leaders of America's ethnic and racial minority groups to speak. The public programs sponsored by the defense organizations intended to prove to the American public that Jews were not outsiders or marginal to America. Rather, they sought to convince Americans that the Jews had powerful friends who supported them. That those powerful friends expressed sympathy for Jewish suffering lent respectability to the Jewish political project.

Yet in this era the number of Jews who as individuals joined with other minority efforts increased dramatically. The history of American Jewish involvement with the founding, funding, and support of the NAACP bore witness to that. Notably, many of these Jews also played key roles in Jewish communal institutions. Emil Hirsch, Louis Marshall, Felix Frankfurter and Stephen Wise all participated and led Jewish institutions. But when they functioned within the ranks of the NAACP, they did not invoke those organizations. They worked as individual Jewish men who felt it incumbent to help the cause of civil rights. Their organizations or institutions were not part of their endeavors.

Thus, this stage in the history of Jewish intergroup relations saw many Jews, including Jewish community leaders, participating in bridge-building activities. But the institutions of the Jewish world in which they functioned maintained the historic aloofness that had characterized earlier eras.

On the other hand, that tradition of aloofness was nearing its end. Some of the institutions of the Jewish socialist world actually pioneered in building alliances with other groups. The Arbeiter Ring, for example, invited the black labor leader A. Phillip Randolph several times to address its annual convention. Assisted by a Yiddish translator, Randolph made the case to the assembled group for securing better wages and hours for black sleeping-car porters. Over the course of the

1920s, the Arbeiter Ring passed resolutions endorsing Randolph's work and made financial contributions to his cause. Likewise, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union—not actually Jewish organizations, but almost exclusively so in leadership and heavily so in membership—also contributed money to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first successful African-American trade union. They placed notices in the magazine of Randolph's union, the *Messenger*. Written in Yiddish, the Jewish unions declared that they wanted to extend a hand of support “to our black fellow workers” and “to our exploited Negro brothers.”²⁰

Likewise, the copious amount of attention paid in the Yiddish- and English-language Jewish press to the plight of America's black population and their many achievements despite the pervasiveness of racism served as the harbinger of a new era in Jewish intergroup relations. In an important way, the thrust of Jewish journalism from the 1910s onward on the question of race in America opened the door to the later, post-World War II mode. The Jewish press, the Yiddish papers in particular, consistently linked the name, fate, and metaphors of Jewish life to those of African-Americans. That newspapers called blacks “America's Jews,” that they noted that black Americans lived in “ghettos” and suffered from “pogroms” at the hands of “Cossacks,” was not just a matter of literary inventiveness. They launched a discursive mode that carried into a later and far different era.²¹

For the present purposes, I think that it is enough to note that in the period through the end of World War II, American Jews operated in a Janus-faced manner in terms of intergroup relations. The organizations as organizations maintained their Jewish-only focus and reached out to non-Jews only when those non-Jews had power, influence, and mainstream respectability. Therefore, on the organizational level, they defined the “group” part of intergroup relations to mean the group most likely to help Jews attain and maintain comfort and security. Yet at the same time, individual Jews in large numbers began the process of creating a Jewish presence in the civil rights world. These individual Jews, many of who also maintained a high profile in Jewish affairs, compartmentalized their political lives into a Jewish and intergroup dichotomy. Organizations like the Arbeiter Ring and the Jewish press—the Yiddish papers in particular—operated very differently. They made common cause with others who occupied a far more precarious position in American life and indirectly sought to enhance the status of America's Jews by advocating common concerns. Their actions, however, were more rhetorical than overtly proactive.

This brings us to the penultimate stage in the history of Jewish intergroup relations in the United States. It is the stage that I sketched out at the beginning of this paper as the kind of golden moment in Jewish intergroup relations. It was in this period that not only Jewish defense organizations but also such previously apolitical bodies as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the United Synagogue, the Synagogue Council of America, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and the Rabbinical Assembly all formally endorsed the civil rights effort. For example, they voted in the years before the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act never to meet in hotels that discriminated in public accommodations. They brooked the dissent and discomfort of their Southern constituents in order to make what saw as a moral point. Rabbis and rabbinical students went in the busloads to Montgomery, St. Augustine, Selma, and the other hot spots of the struggle. That a Jew, Rabbi Joachim Prinz of the American Jewish Congress, sat on the stage at the August, 1963 March on Washington, was notable. While he said nothing in his speech to indicate that Jews had a particular political stake in the fulfillment of the demands of the movement—passage and enforcement of sweeping civil rights legislation—his mere presence said much about Jewish intergroup relations. He did, however, draw attention in his address to the fact that he had lived under the shadow of Nazism and that the experience had taught him about the common obligations people in a society have toward one another.

In all of these Jewish undertakings in the world of intergroup relations—the pamphlets and film strips, the lawsuits and the lobbying—American Jews did not hide who they were. They made it clear that they were Jews participating in an effort to push group prejudice to the margins of American life. Yet they never indicated that this effort was about them. They did not emphasize that they, as Jews, had a reason to be involved in this effort beyond morality and concern for America. Their project, as I indicated earlier, was to help create a climate in which group antagonism was kept to a minimum and in which differences in color, religion, and national origin did not matter. The beneficiary, in the largest sense, was America, and if Jews were to gain something they would do so indirectly, they maintained.

To be sure, this was disingenuous. Jews were among the major beneficiaries of the new legal, political, and cultural climate. The first state civil rights act that passed in New York in the late 1940s saw Jews as the major claimants for redress. Jews benefited from subsequent and numerous state laws and then from the 1964 Civil Rights act as they sought admission to elite universities, which through the early 1960s maintained quotas. The case of *Shelley v. Kramer* of 1948, which declared that restrictive covenants were unenforceable, opened up housing opportunities for Jews that previously had been closed.

Notably, the Jewish intergroup relations effort did not just involve the civil rights effort, although that was the key focus of activity. Jews began in the late 1950s to work directly with organizations in the various ethnic communities—Italians, Greeks, Irish, and Slavic—to press for the end of national-origin-based immigration quotas. They lobbied vigorously for the Hart-Cellar bill, which in 1965 replaced the old, hated system with one based on more racially or nationally neutral criteria. The American Jewish Committee's Consultation on Ethnic America brought that institution, which once preferred to work only with those with power and influence, into various grass-roots projects with the many ethnic communities in America's cities.

In all of these, Jews rejected self-interest. They asserted that the immigration issue was purely a moral one, given that potential Jewish immigrants to the United States had been gassed at Auschwitz and other Nazi death camps. Their work with the ethnic communities, which went on in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and elsewhere, aimed to ensure that the white working class not be alienated from the changes in America's race relations.

There is no reason to think and no evidence to suggest that these Jews behaved duplicitously. They seemed to have genuinely believed that an America that did not consider race, religion, and national origin in meting out rewards was in fact a more humane place. One little-noticed text that circulated exclusively in the Jewish world demonstrates the depth of that belief. In 1947, the American Jewish Congress issued a Reading of Remembrance to be read in individual Jewish homes at the Passover *seder*. Distributed nationally through Jewish community councils, the text, written in Hebrew, English, and Yiddish, was an early American attempt to deal with the trauma of the Holocaust. In the English-language version, the text proclaimed, "From the depths of their afflictions the martyrs lifted their voices in a song of faith in the coming of the Messiah, when justice and brotherhood will rein among men."

From the perspective of that period, extending from the late 1940s through the end of the 1960s, they believed, naively perhaps, that they could hasten the coming of that messianic age by working in concert with other groups of Americans. They believed that the time "when justice and brotherhood would rein" would not be facilitated solely by advocating for their parochial interests as Jews.

They functioned in a personal and political climate that was heir to the earlier American Jewish political tradition that eschewed intergroup relations. They had just witnessed, albeit from the comfort of America, a catastrophe whose momentous implications for the Jewish people and the world would become clearer with the passage of time. They lived in the shadow of the Cold War and knew that in tumultuous times Jews

likely could be targeted by those pointing fingers at disloyal and subversive elements. They knew that their ranks included many that had joined and lead groups some considered "un-American." No wonder they felt compelled to balance their participation in the great efforts to change America with assertions that as Jews they had nothing special to gain from such activities.²²

Clearly, this all changed by the late 1960s, which marked the beginning of the fifth and current era in the history of Jewish intergroup relations. The civil rights coalition in which Jews played a key role underwent tremendous reorientation. The cultural implications of the later phase of the movement championed the notion that groups can and should talk about themselves, their concerns, and their interests. The American political scene for the first time made space for the rhetoric of and demands from explicitly ethnically focused groups—Black Power, Chicano rights, native American rights—and the Jews advocated for themselves as well.

Despite this change, much remained from the past. Post-1960s American Jews certainly inherited from their progenitors a commitment to working with others, particularly African-American and labor groups and others adhering to liberal ideals, some notable exceptions notwithstanding. While much discussion took place about the Jewish drift to the right during this period, implying a breakdown of sorts in the older, liberal-oriented intergroup relations approach, Jews nevertheless continued to vote differently than other white Americans. Jewish support for a liberal political agenda and concern for less-privileged Americans is all the more remarkable when one factors in Jews' economic status.

Jews also inherited from the earlier intergroup relations era the urgency regarding working with others. Jewish communal organizations not only have maintained projects with African-Americans, but also built new bridges to the Hispanic and Asian-American communities.

Other crucial elements are quite different, such as how American Jews since the late 1960s have interacted with evangelical Christians. Suffice it to say that the rise of a politically powerful Christian fundamentalist bloc has complicated Jewish intergroup relations. Evangelicals constitute a group with which most American Jews find little common ground on domestic issues. Yet, for their own particular religious reasons, evangelicals have been very supportive of Israel. Likewise, the Orthodox Jewish America that has emerged since the late 1960s has an agenda that differs from that of most American Jews, and Orthodox Jewry has a very different set of ideas about coalitions across group lines that makes the post-1960s era new and unique.

Certainly, what has been unique since the late 1960s, though, is the virtual nonchalance with which Jews label themselves and their projects

as “Jewish.” Jews began to put less emphasis in public on such ambiguous phrases as “interfaith” or “integroup” and instead overtly created “Jewish-black dialogues,” stressing the word “Jewish.” A clear example of this new willingness to go public with Jewishness is evident in one of the umbrella bodies of American Jewry. In the 1940s, the heads of the major Jewish organizations and leaders of the Jewish community councils came together to create a national coordinating body that they called the National Community Relations Advisory Committee. Neutral in tone, the Jewish content of NCRAC’s activities and concerns would be known only to those who attended its meetings and read its publications—that is, only to those who cared to know. In the early 1970s, with the newest paradigm in intergroup relations firmly ensconced, NCRAC transformed into the less mellifluous but more explicit NJCRAC—National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Committee. It was not just that Jews—the professionals and the committed laity—wanted to make the Jewishness of their project more overt, but that they felt they *could*.

The emergence of more publicly assertive expressions of the Jewish stake in the political events was inevitable with the new generations. NJCRAC and other communal institutions were taken over by a generation of Jews with no real memory of World War II. Those who began to teach, lead, and contribute money to the groups either had been children or unborn when America’s Jews learned of the Holocaust. They had not known a time when most Jews were members of the working class or immigrants lacking confidence in their rights. Never had they witnessed Jews in America being excluded from law firms, universities, hospital staffs, and other places of employment. They did not have any personal memories of a time when Jews who felt comfortable enough to enter into mainstream American politics were nonetheless nervous about doing so openly as Jews. They had come of age on the campuses of the 1960s, when assertiveness was valorized. The cultural climate they came to know as students emphasized the positive value of differences. Impatient with their elders, the practitioners of intergroup relations, this new generation of Jewish leaders constructed a new set of Jewish institutions and practices that put the “Jewish” up front and that believed that denying group interest amounted to political weakness.

How long this paradigm—the product of the late 1960s and manifested throughout America in the growth of Jewish day schools, Jewish studies programs, Jewish lobby groups, Holocaust commemorations, and the like—will last is well beyond my expertise as an historian. Suffice it to say that in each era, American Jews kept in place some of the elements of the previous period while changing and

expanding as they took into consideration their evolving place in America.

NOTES

¹ Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

² Hasia R. Diner, *Fifty Years of Jewish Self-Governance: The Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington, 1938-1988* (Washington, D.C.: The Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington, 1989), pp. 50-75.

³ The role of American Jewish organizations in immigration reform has not been the focus of any scholarly study, but even a casual perusal of the annual volumes of the *American Jewish Yearbook*, published by the American Jewish Committee, demonstrates the vast amount of Jewish activity on this and other liberal issues. This annual reference work may be the single best source of information for all aspects of the topic of Jewish intergroup relations, starting with its first edition in 1898.

⁴ See, Naomi W. Cohen, *Jews in Christian America: The Pursuit of Religious Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁵ The most thorough historical critiques of this kind of American Jewish politics and intergroup relations can be found in Eli Lederhendler, *New York Jews and the Decline of Urban Ethnicity, 1950-1970* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002) and Michael Staub, *Torn At the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Additionally, the years from the end of World War II until the end of the 20th century have been studied in the context of Jewish liberalism and its implications for intergroup relations by Marc Dollinger, *The Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁶ Morton Borden, *Jews, Turks and Infidels* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

⁷ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1988); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1896-1917*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); on the Irish case and the centrality of American anti-Catholicism, see, Dale T. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America* (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 1986).

⁸ On this enormous subject, see, Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1993).

⁹ See, Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880, Volume 2, "The Jewish People in America"* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ See Bertram W. Korn, *Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789-1865* (Elkins Park, PA.: Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel, 1961).

¹¹ Hasia R. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915-1935* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

¹² Gerald Sorin, *Prophetic Minority: Immigrant Jewish Radicals, 1880-1920*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985).

¹³ Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: A History of the American Jewish Committee, 1906-1966*, (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972).

¹⁴ Leonard Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home: Antisemitism and the American Jewish Experience*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

¹⁵ Gulie Ne'eman Arad, *America, Ist Jews, and the Rise of Nazism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Eli Faber, *A Time for Planting: The First Migration, 1654-1820, Vol. I, "The Jewish People in America"* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars, New York City, 1805-1973: A History of the Public Schools as a Battleground of Social Change*, (New York: Basic, 1974).

¹⁸ David I. Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, (New York: Knopf, 1997); see also, Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: "Ritual Murder," Politics and the Jews in 1840*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Quoted in, Louis Barish, "The American Jewish Chaplaincy," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 52, 1 (September, 1962.), pp. 9-11.

²⁰ Hasia Diner, *In the Almost*, p.202.

²¹ Hasia Diner, *In the Almost*, op.cit.

²² Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion*, op. cit. provides the most thoroughly researched and analytic analysis of this period and the various dilemmas faced by American Jews in the labyrinth of mid- to late-20th century American politics.