Horace M. Kallen and the "Americanization" of Zionism
In Memoriam

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I.

Horace M. Kallen was a philosopher and educator, a "scientific humanist" and an "aesthetic pragmatist," an extraordinarily wise and compassionate man, who, when he died in February, 1974, at the age of ninety-one, was still active teaching, writing, and publishing. His career had been long and varied, stretching back to the turn of this century when, as a student at Harvard, a young Jewish immigrant "from the other side of the tracks," he first attracted the attention of professors like William James, George Santayana, Barrett Wendell, and Josiah Royce—leaders of their day in American philosophy and thought. The influence they had on young Kallen, combined with his own native intelligence, perceptive empathy, and idealism, gave him the start towards an unusually creative lifetime, combining contemplation and action in equal measure.¹

Kallen's interests were wide-ranging and, though he is usually thought of primarily in connection with his formulation of the concept of cultural pluralism, he had been also a founder and leader of movements stressing ecology, consumerism, and in-

¹ Much of the material in this article comes from three lengthy interviews I had with Horace Kallen in the eighteen months preceding his death, and from previously unpublished material derived from the Horace M. Kallen files at the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. Kallen was a modest man and rarely referred in print to the details of his life. On the other hand, he preserved with great care information relating to his work since his student days at Harvard, and his files are unusually extensive and complete.

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novative education long before these became concerns of our own day. "It takes about fifty years for an idea to break through and become vogue," Kallen remarked shortly before his death. He was fortunate to have lived long enough to see his early concerns validated by the course of time, and to know that scholars are using his contributions of years ago for their continuing interest and stimulation.

THE RIGHT TO BE DIFFERENT

There was another side to Kallen's life, however, one that reflected his awareness of himself as not only an American but also an American Jew. "I have always regarded you as the foremost creative American Jewish thinker who demonstrates by actual example that it is possible to live with distinction synchronously in two civilizations," wrote Reconstructionist philosopher Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan to Kallen in 1952, on the occasion of Kallen's seventieth birthday. Kaplan's appraisal was correct, for Kallen had succeeded in defining and in living his life as an American and as a Jew from his single philosophical perspective of Hebraism, the source, according to Kallen, of both cultures. Hebraism, "individualism . . .; the right to be oneself, the right to be different," allowed Kallen to perceive his "Jewish difference [to] be no less real, worthy and honorable than any other"; in his own life Kallen had learned to overcome his "dumb anxiety" over his Jewish identity by "living and orchestrating it" with the principles of the "American Idea," principles of individual liberty and freedom that he spent a lifetime exploring and teaching. It is from this foundation of Hebraism that Kallen became one of the first active American Zionists, a founder of the American Jewish Congress, a leader of the American Association for Jewish Education, and a behind-the-scenes force in defining the direction of much of American Jewish communal life in the last half century.

II.

Kallen, born in Germany in 1882, came to America as a young child when, in 1887, his entire family emigrated to Boston. Kallen's father was an Orthodox rabbi, and the doctrine and disci-
pline of his earliest years were those of Jewish tradition. Like other immigrant children of his generation, Kallen's first confrontation with America was through the public schools. There he came to perceive a new world, alien from that of his father, and by the time he had reached adolescence, Kallen was ready to reject his Jewish identity as an outmoded tradition, unsuitable and out-of-place in his modern American environment. As part of his move from Judaism, Kallen left home in 1900 and entered Harvard College, where, paradoxically, Barrett Wendell, a "Yankee" professor of literary history, and William James, who had worked out the "American" philosophy of pragmatism, were the primary influences in "re-Judaizing" him.

Both Wendell and James were pioneers within the American turn-of-the-century academic community. Wendell, whose roots in America were old and deep, formulated the first course in American literature to be offered on any American college campus. His version of American literary history emphasized the influence of the Hebrew Bible on the Puritan mind, and traced the role of the Hebraic tradition in the development of American character. Kallen, through his father's influence, had come to believe that the Bible represented only narrowness and bigotry. Now, as Wendell's student, he began to see his heritage in a different perspective; his Jewish origins, from which he had been attempting to escape, suddenly became a valuable means of Americanization. For if the Jewish tradition had, indeed, been the inspiration for the American Founding Fathers and the basis of the "American Idea" of liberty and justice for all, would not adherence to it help him to become a more understanding, and, therefore, a more loyal and patriotic American?

The Reality of Manyness

In 1902, therefore, Kallen became convinced that he had to return to his Jewishness. His alienation from his father, however, prevented him from accepting the Jewish tradition as his father lived and taught it. Kallen continued to reject what he defined as the "Judaist" component of Jewish tradition—the theology, the rituals, the laws and regulations of Jewish observance. Instead, he identified with what he called the Hebraic past of the Jewish people, a Hebrew-Jewish way of thought that
constitutes the distinct culture which binds the Jewish people together. Zionism, the movement to renationalize the Jewish people with its own cultural base, became for Kallen the secular Hebraic ideal through which he could remain within the Jewish community, his way to affirm the past he had nearly discarded by giving it a new definition. The "Jewish idea," as it had come to him from his father, had seemed the antithesis of the freedom and democracy implicit in the "American Idea." Through the Zionist movement, however, the Jews would be able to create a state in the Middle East dedicated to the same ideals of equality that underlay the Declaration of Independence; Zionism would actualize the possibility of extending the Jeffersonian American vision of a free society with the promise of "liberty and justice for all." To be a good American, therefore, implied support of the Zionist aims. Especially, argued Kallen, should this be true for American Jews—with their special attachment to the values expressed in the Hebrew Bible.

Kallen's decision to become a Zionist, however, was not an easy one to make in the American cultural climate of seventy years ago. The demand then was for "Americanization," the renunciation by new immigrants of their own cultural traditions in favor of the values of the great American "melting pot." Teachers, social workers, church spokesmen (including most Reform rabbis), the media, all aimed for an assimilation to conform with the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant norms of the original settlers of this country. No less a figure than President Theodore Roosevelt spoke out against "hyphenated Americans" whose dual loyalties prevented them from being completely patriotic.

Kallen was able to solve this dilemma by referring to the philosophy of another of his teachers, William James. James had refused to accept the proposition that the many are appearance and only the one is reality; this was a "plural" world, he taught, and different versions of it could all be true. This concept of the "reality of manyness" was just what Kallen needed to release him from the attitude that he had to shut out his past in order to accept the present. Instead, Kallen came to see his Jewish roots as a "present, perduring reality" which would join with his other, newer, experiences to form a non-alienated, more whole identity.
Kallen went even further with James's pluralism and applied it to groups as well as to individuals. The preservation of differences constituted the true measure of equality which the Declaration of Independence had set forth, Kallen argued; it was, therefore, in the great American tradition to encourage ethnic communities to retain their distinctive cultures. "As in an orchestra," he wrote, "every type of instrument has its specific timbre and tonality...; as every type has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony, so in society, each ethnic group may be the natural instrument... and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all may make the symphony of civilization." Zionism, in Kallen's eyes an expression of Jewish cultural identity, of "a group personality," seemed ideally suited to be an American, "modern" form of Jewish expression.

It should be noted that Kallen's decision to become a Zionist was entirely a personal, abstract one, not influenced by the Jewish community or by the fledgling American Zionist movement. In fact, Kallen's Zionist position was unique. "The Zionist meanings came to me rather in terms of the American Idea than in terms of what I had learned of Torah at home or in Cheder," he recalled. Thus, when Kallen later became active in the Zionist movement, his approach and stance were different from those whose Zionist motivation emerged from any of the several European Zionist traditions. Significantly, his formulation of Zionism was to appeal most to other American intellectuals who had become alienated from Jewish tradition and who were searching for some other means to regain ties with the Jewish community.

III.

In the years following his own conversion to Zionism, Kallen began to formulate several philosophically grounded arguments by which he hoped to convince other American Jews, then overwhelmingly opposed or indifferent to Zionism, and non-Jews, whose respect and commitment he also sought, of the rightness of the Zionist cause. The most important American

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2 Horace M. Kallen, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," The Nation, February, 1915.
whom Kallen persuaded to become a Zionist was the noted “People’s Lawyer,” later Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis. Until the age of fifty-four Brandeis, though never disowning his own Jewish birth and background, had had little contact with, or interest in, Jewish ritual or the Jewish people. In the year 1910, however, at the height of his career as a leader of groups seeking economic reform, Brandeis consented to act as a mediator in a strike of the New York Clothing Workers’ union. This was his first contact with the new immigrant Jewish masses, and, surprised by the ethical attitudes he found among them, he became receptive to learning more about his people.3

By chance, just about this time, Brandeis was visited by Jacob de Haas, a former secretary to Theodor Herzl who had come to the United States to work for the struggling American Zionist movement. De Haas impressed Brandeis with the Zionists’ fledgling plans to renationalize the Jewish people in their ancient homeland, and Brandeis found himself drawn to this new and interesting cause. Yet his own conviction that “habits . . . of thought which tend to keep alive differences of origin or to classify men according to their religious beliefs are inconsistent with the American ideal of brotherhood” acted as a strong deterrent to any formal affiliation with, or activity for, the Zionist movement.4

A NEW JEWISH NATION

In 1913 Kallen read of Brandeis’ budding interest in Zionism and wrote to Brandeis describing his own ideals and plans for Palestine.

In Palestine we aim at a new state and a happier social order . . . . The foreseeable and avoidable waste and misery throughout all the industrial forms and the injustice throughout all human relations is

3 The best discussion of Brandeis’ pull to Zionism, excluding details of Kallen’s influence of which scholars have been unaware until this research, is in Melvin Urofsky, A Mind of One Piece (New York, 1971).

4 This quote has been attributed to Brandeis on two separate occasions—a 1905 speech entitled “What Loyalty Demands,” and a 1910 interview with the Boston Jewish Advocate. See A. T. Mason, Brandeis: A Free Man’s Life (New York, 1942), p. 442, and Jacob de Haas, Louis Dembitz Brandeis (New York, 1929), pp. 151-52.
hardly worth aiming at . . . [We need] to formulate such a plan as will . . . serve social justice as well as economic gain.

Brandeis responded favorably, suggesting that Kallen submit to him a more detailed memorandum and adding that Kallen’s point of view had provoked “great sympathy.” Kallen sent some of his articles on Zionism to Brandeis and drew up a formal paper, “The International Aspects of Zionism,” which he arranged to present and discuss in person on the eve of a momentous event in American Zionist history, the “Extraordinary Conference of American Zionists” called in August, 1914, to assume responsibility for the world Zionist movement during World War I.5

“The International Aspects of Zionism” incorporated much of Kallen’s Zionist thinking, particularly his concept of the “equality of the different” and the importance, to free men, of maintaining these differences. Kallen argued that a new Jewish nation would revive the Jewish culture; he stressed the importance of an autonomous national state where Jews would be able to express their “ethnic nationality”—their language, literature, religion, philosophy, art—freely and autonomously. He showed how the American Jewish community was in danger of dying without a Jewish national homeland with which it could identify. And he outlined plans for a centralized international organization to work out “a carefully reasoned plan for all practical activity in Palestine.”

These thoughts were new to Brandeis, for most of them were not part of the standard European Zionist ideology with which de Haas, for example, would have been familiar. Their presentation at this time also was crucial. For the Zionists, who had been hoping that Brandeis might be persuaded to accept the chairmanship of the American Zionist Provisional Executive Committee, needed to find some way to help Brandeis reconcile his belief that dual loyalties were unpatriotic with his newly-found emotional attachment to the Zionist cause. Kallen’s arguments appear to have served this purpose.

5 “The International Aspects of Zionism” is an unpublished paper in Kallen’s files, with Kallen’s handwritten notation, “Copy submitted to Mr. Brandeis Aug. 29, 1914.” Details of their correspondence and meeting on the eve of the Extraordinary Conference are in Kallen’s files and are corroborated by the Brandeis papers in the Zionist Archives, New York City.
The effect on Brandeis of Kallen's memorandum, and its contribution to Brandeis' decision to assume active Zionist leadership, can, of course, only be a matter of conjecture. But the fact that shortly after Brandeis became chairman of the Provisional Executive Committee he repeated almost verbatim many of Kallen's ideas in a Zionist philosophy of his own demonstrates, with some certainty, that his exposure to Kallen's thought had made a significant impression on him. Most important, perhaps, was Kallen's cultural pluralist rationale that—in Brandeis' later rephrasing—"multiple loyalties are objectionable only if they are inconsistent." From this new, pluralistic, concept of America, Brandeis was able to identify a kinship of spirit between Judaism and America. No longer "inconsistent" and "disloyal," the Jewish spirit became transformed into one "essentially modern and essentially American." Loyalty to America, therefore, "demanded that each American Jew become a Zionist"; it was the Jews' "duty to preserve and develop further the Jewish spirit." Thus, by the time the Extraordinary Conference met, Brandeis had found through Kallen a way, intellectually, to rationalize his emotional pull towards identification with the Jewish people. Indeed, his seemingly sudden decision to become a Zionist leader would have been unthinkable without his newly discovered reasoning that American Jews, "free from civil or political disabilities and . . . relatively prosperous," should lead the struggle to found a Jewish nation which stressed America's "fundamental law" of the brotherhood of man and "America's insistent demand" for social justice.6

The influence of Kallen's ideas, through Brandeis' statements, went further, however. As Kallen has admitted, "Brandeis took up the ideas . . . and that gave Zionism publicly a philosophical status in terms of what you might call the American faith, and gave it a public force that it couldn't possibly have had from me alone." Kallen, through Brandeis, became the philosopher of an "Americanized" Zionism, the intellectual who worked behind the scenes with a leader whose influence, he felt certain, would remake the Zionist movement in America. Kallen's perceptions

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6 Quotes from Brandeis' speeches are from Louis D. Brandeis, Brandeis on Zionism (New York, 1942), edited by Solomon Goldman as a memorial to Brandeis.
were accurate. From 1914 until 1921, when their insistence on an "Americanized" Zionism forced Kallen and Brandeis to leave the Zionist movement, American Zionism came into its own, reaching a zenith of development not equalled again until the crises attending the founding of the State of Israel in 1947 and 1948. This development, however, depended on more than ideas and words; for Americans like Kallen and Brandeis it depended also on the building of a new kind of Zionist movement, one stressing the organization and discipline necessary for the performance of "duty" and of "social responsibility."

IV.

Brandeis had come to Zionism as a leader of and spokesman for the American Progressive political reform movement. Kallen shared Brandeis' commitment to "Progressive" reform—i.e., socio-political reform which would be effective in advancing the United States to a more just condition of society. Both Kallen and Brandeis believed in science, modernity, efficiency, and expertise. The two of them were ideally suited, therefore, to work together through the Zionist movement to attempt to effect in Palestine the utopia of social justice which seemed to be eluding the Progressives in the United States. To do so, however, they first had to change the American Zionist organization from a weak, underfinanced group, devoted mainly to "polemics and propaganda," to one responsive to the demands they hoped to place upon it. To this end they concentrated on "money, members, discipline" and within a short time were able to exploit the opportunity provided by the war to expand the organization manyfold in numbers, funds and influence. Where in 1914 there had been only 12,000 organized Zionists in America, by 1917 American Zionists numbered 150,000; by 1920, there were 171,000. By May, 1915, the collection of funds had become so well organized that the Zionists, who had despaired of meeting their 1914 budget of $12,000, were able to transmit $350,000 to Palestine; by 1920, more than $1,500,000 had been remitted. Within the American Jewish Community Palestine became the vital topic of the day, and even Jewish leaders like Jacob H. Schiff, who in previous years had roundly denounced Zionism as
anti-American, announced their support of the Zionist cause, though, as in Schiff's case, they could never bring themselves to affiliate formally with the organization.

**ZIONISM AMERICANIZED**

In an important sense, however, the Zionism of Kallen and of Brandeis was not the same Zionism with which the European immigrants, who began to flock to the movement, were familiar. It was an "Americanized" version, "less partisan, more scientific, more historical and more sociological than formulations made at the seat of the Jewish problems-in-crises in Central Europe." The Americans, who perceived in Zionism another form of Progressive reform, "tended toward an attitude less ardent, more contemplative and more businesslike than that of the European." The Zionist movement in America insisted on democratic processes; it began to accent the practical realization of purposes and goals; it substituted action for talk. Especially after November, 1917, when Great Britain issued the Balfour Declaration promising to aid in the "establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people," Kallen, Brandeis, and their "Americanized" Zionist followers believed that Zionism meant the cessation of "diaspora nationalism," the muting of organizational dispute and factionalism, and the turning of all energies towards the upbuilding of a Jewish homeland in Palestine which would be a model of economic democracy and social justice.

In early 1918, under the title "Constitutional Foundations of the New Zion," Kallen published an extended description of the structure of the new state, as he envisioned it. Kallen was convinced that in Palestine, a land with "no complicated or immemorial social structures," an area "fully within the limits of control," the Jews would have a great advantage in building a "genuine creative democracy." Influenced by Robert Owen, a British socialist of the early nineteenth century who held that the key to human progress was in economic, not political, reform,

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7 Kallen, Zionism and World Politics (New York, 1921), p. 131.
Kallen's suggestions concerned themselves mainly with the reorganization of society on the basis of public property, common ownership of the land and of the machinery of wealth production, communal supervision of the production and distribution of all necessary material goods, and an equitable distribution of wealth.

The government of the new Jewish State, a parliamentary system based on the British model, was to concern itself primarily with public defense and education, including medicine, "public defense against disease." To educate for such a society in which a "sense of trust" would replace the "spirit of competition," Kallen proposed a universal system of "progressive" education to encourage "the freest possible play of the child's individuality." There would be also a state militia, to consist of "young men and young women of whose education this work will be a part." "Social control," however, would be minimal, for administration of various professions and groups would be by associations of their own members.

These proposals do not seem particularly shocking or unrealistic today. As a matter of fact, the State of Israel has incorporated several of them. But in 1918 Zionists outside the United States found the assumptions underlying Kallen's suggestions disturbing; they feared Kallen's leap in accepting the premise of a state and were content to plan for what they considered more attainable possibilities—the promotion of a Zionist consciousness in the diaspora with slow, step-by-step progress towards a state. In addition, the world Zionists were dismayed by Kallen's and Brandeis' proposals to extend to all Zionist activity their own emphasis on administrative expertise and modern organizational methods, even if this meant that non-Zionists would be recruited to manage the development of Palestine.

Ultimately this new "Americanized" form of Zionism, despite its successes within the American Jewish community, brought it into conflict with European Zionists who preferred to stress Zionism as a social and cultural communal force rather than to work out definite plans for building a Jewish national homeland and whose "action" often consisted of long intraorganization debates on methods and priorities. Brandeis had indeed taken over "a handful . . . [of] journalists, intellectuals, shopkeepers, and more or less skilled workmen" and, through the application
of an efficient management approach, had transformed the American Zionist organization into a movement that grew immeasurably in size, activity, and prestige. But he had done all this from the perspective of an American Progressive reform leader, using the cultural pluralist rationale which derived from a Harvard-educated scholar whose major influences were those of "Yankee" American philosophers. "Americanized" Zionism was, as its European critics charged, a "Zionism without Zion," lacking in "Jewish heart." Brandeis and others who followed Kallen had become Zionists as Americans, rather than as Jews. Inevitably, their perspective differed from those whose Zionism was a response to Jewish tradition and an expression of Jewish culture.

In 1921 these tensions between the acculturated leadership and the immigrant majority led to the downfall of Americanized Zionism. Between 1919 and 1920 a series of disagreements over World Zionist policy had led Brandeis to withdraw American support from projects of the World Zionist Organization. Brandeis' position incensed Chaim Weizmann, who came to the 1921 convention of the Zionist Organization of America to fight for the program of the World Zionists. Louis Lipsky, the American Zionist leader who supported Weizmann, recalled that at the convention the majority of delegates were "relatives of the Jews of Vilna, of Warsaw, of Bucharest, of Krakow and of Vienna . . . thirsting for his [Weizmann's] words." Certainly, thought Lipsky, the delegates would prefer the Zionist formulations of this man who shared their background to the policies of a "leadership that could not speak to them in the language they understood," a leadership that liked to compare the Palestinian chalutzim with "the Pilgrim Fathers."³

What these recent immigrant masses wanted from the Zionist organization was the same thing they sought in the groups of lantsmen that they organized during this period in great numbers—a way of escaping from the harshness of contact with strangers by finding security through their own, comfortable, ethnic group. But the "Americanized" Zionists had rejected this social and cultural role for the Zionist organization. Their re-

placement, a businesslike emphasis geared towards the swift building of a state in Palestine that would be a model of what efficient planning and scientific management could do, had little appeal to the immigrants, themselves busily engaged in establishing new lives in an unfamiliar land.

As long as the crisis of war persisted, and America was isolated from Europe, Americanized Zionism was able to develop with little opposition. Leaders like Brandeis had such high status within the American community that no ordinary person or group dared challenge their control of the American Zionist organization. With the resumption of normal Zionist activity after the war, however, an alternative to Americanized Zionism presented itself. At the 1921 convention the majority of delegates, influenced by Weizmann, failed to return a vote of confidence in the Brandeis administration. Thereupon Kallen, Brandeis, and the other Americanized Zionists resigned from the Zionist organization. On June 7, 1921, a crucial and highly productive era in American Zionism was at an end.

V.

Americanized Zionism was ultimately to make several contributions to the American Jewish community. As Kallen suggested in his cultural pluralism arguments, it gave American Jews an outlet for their ethnic sentiment, allowing them to participate on equal terms with other ethnic groups of the American pluralistic society. It became a major factor in continuing the traditional concept of the unity of the Jewish people, helping, therefore, to slow down the rate of assimilation in an open society that encouraged it. But as its failure in 1921 showed, the majority of the Jews in the United States fifty years ago were not yet ready to accept a perspective on Zionism which contradicted much of the Zionist tradition with which they had grown up. It was to take the tragic events of the 1930’s and 1940’s in Europe, and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, coupled with a new generation of acculturated, better established, and, therefore, more secure American Jews, before American Zionism became “Americanized” again. Ironically, it was the role that Brandeis had outlined in 1921, the role of fund-raisers for the
upbuilding of the Palestine community, that was to become the role which, since 1948, the American Zionists have adopted as their own.

**Strange Leaders**

Ironic, also, was the fact that it was Kallen's cultural pluralist argument which had been the theoretical underpinning allowing the Jewish immigrants, during the years of the first World War, the freedom to join the Zionist organization without worrying about being accused of dual loyalties. Most American Jews, recent immigrants similar to the majority of the delegates to the 1921 convention, had been reluctant to identify themselves as Zionists before 1914, when Brandeis became the Zionist chairman; it had seemed then un-American and unpatriotic. The Americanized Zionism of Kallen and of Brandeis had made membership in the Zionist organization respectable. Cultural pluralism implied that being a hyphenated American was better than being an assimilated, or "melted," one. Yet these new members of the Zionist organization, men and women of European background who Kallen felt certain could be educated to his vision of Zionism as the real possibility for a better world through the application of intelligent planning, found Kallen's approach to Zionism too American and therefore foreign. Kallen and Brandeis, who had championed majority rule, now found themselves victims of it; the democratic "masses" simply could not follow those strange leaders whose alien background they had come to resent.

Kallen was fated to live long enough to see the creation of his Jewish State, only to perceive it with some disappointment as *Utopians At Bay*. Nevertheless, though after 1921 he never again joined a formal Zionist organization, Kallen continued to work creatively and extensively for Zionist causes in which he believed. A recent example was his membership on the Council of the Kibbutz Management and Research Center, a group that he hoped would serve to foster his dream of a Jewish state which would serve as a vanguard utopian economic and political democracy.

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A few months before his death, in reply to a question on Israel’s impact on American Jewry, Kallen wrote, “There are those who think of Israel as the present phase in an ongoing struggle to embody a historic faith in present fact, who regard Israel as an ideal bet on a future of equal liberty and equal safety under law; but a bet which cannot be a sure thing and nevertheless must have the generous support of American Jews as Americans and also as Jews.” 11 This in 1973 was Horace Kallen’s definition of the Americanization of Zionism, a definition which the majority of American Jews increasingly have come to accept. Kallen’s quiet achievement was to formulate the ideas which made respectable the expression of a Jewish ethnic identity; it was, therefore, he who created the possibility of an American Zionist movement. It is fitting, I think, that this man should himself have here the concluding word.