

WITHOUT GHETTOISM: A HISTORY OF THE INTERCOLLEGIATE MENORAH ASSOCIATION, 1906-1930

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To accept ourselves—even more perhaps to find ourselves—as Jews in the modern world; without ghettoism and yet with a certain distinction. . . . Henry Hurwitz, 1927

I

Scattered at the turn of the century in what one contemporary called “colonies” of the American university system, the Jewish collegians’ lot was an especially difficult one.¹ Not only were co-religionists few and far between, but organizations designed specifically to service the needs of the Jewish student were noticeably lacking. It was no wonder, then, that another contemporary observer found that large numbers of Jewish students “do not wish to be differentiated from their fellow students, some even going as far as to change their names and otherwise attempt to hide their identity.”²

By 1930, however, parents had little or no cause to fear that their student sons and daughters were being alienated from Jewish life during their academic career.³ For those who wished, the campus was replete with a full round of activities guaranteed to fulfil

¹ “Religious Work in the Universities,” *C.C.A.R. Year Book* (hereafter *CCAR*), Volume 6, 1896, p. 85.

² “Religious Work in the Universities,” *CCAR*, Volume 16, 1906, p. 189, and “Religious Work in the Universities,” *CCAR*, Volume 19, 1909, p. 150.

³ See Leon Spitz, “Jewish Life on the College Campus,” *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America*, 1930.

the needs—whether they were religious, intellectual or purely social—of the Jewish student.

Contributing not a little to this situation was an organization known as the Intercollegiate Menorah Association (IMA). Familiar to many as the publisher of the sophisticated *Menorah Journal*, the IMA was also the parent body of a national Jewish student association. At its peak, the IMA touched the lives of hundreds of first-generation native American Jews (and to a lesser degree, those of their more assimilated, German-Jewish cousins) who were entering the halls of Ivy to an unprecedented degree. If, on one level, the story of the IMA can be seen as a study in institutional history, on another more profound level the history of the IMA reflects much of the American Jewish college experience of the first thirty years of this century.

Jewish Identity and the Campus

At the turn of the century, Jews and other immigrant groups were entering the American university system in ever increasing numbers. Their admission to seats of higher learning was facilitated, in no small measure, by the educational innovations effected at the time by such college presidents as Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University and Charles W. Eliot of Harvard University. The relaxation of entrance requirements and a greater reliance on urban high schools to “feed” qualified students into college opened the gates of the hitherto restricted playgrounds of academe to bright and ambitious, if socially backward, students.⁴ Similarly, the traditional esteem placed on education by the Jews

⁴ By the end of the nineteenth century, a movement was under way in educational circles to develop professional schools on the graduate level instead of concentrating solely on the undergraduate college.

In order to guarantee a flow of students into the professional schools, a number of innovations, among them the relaxation of entrance requirements, were instituted. Thanks to such innovations, scores of first-generation immigrants were enabled to study at such institutions as Harvard and Columbia. Thus, one of the by-products of this new trend in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century higher education was the creation of a “Jewish problem.” On this issue, see Laurence R. Veysey’s *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), and especially Harold S. Wechsler’s “The Selective Function of American College Admissions Policies, 1870–1970,” Columbia University doctoral dissertation, 1973.

was of consequence in supplying colleges with their "Jewish problem," all the more as social mobility began to be correlated with one's degree of formal education.

There had always been a few Jews on college campuses throughout the United States, but they were from the middle classes and not visibly Jewish.⁵ Overnight, or so it must have seemed to contemporaries,⁶ the campus was being swamped with an unfamiliar type of Jew. Frequently ill-mannered, speaking bad English and, worst of all, hailing from the lower classes, the Jewish immigrant student, willy-nilly, appeared to shake the foundations upon which America's prestigious colleges rested. His arrival introduced notes of discord onto the campus as its shared vocabulary and homogeneity seemed to vanish in the face of "Polish Jews with anemic faces . . . watching with envious curiosity the courteous indifference of the superior race."⁷

Despite the collegiate tradition of elitism or of "courteous indifference" (which was, after all, too firmly entrenched to be completely overwhelmed by a sudden influx of students wielding slogans of democracy), the alien student was able to participate in some features of the college experience: Jew and Gentile alike could freely meet on the plane of intellectual activities where scholarly and cultural attainment mattered far more than pedigree. The academic landscape offered the interested party a wealth of extracurricular activities, from private tête-à-têtes with professors to intervarsity debates. It was within this sphere that Jewish students found both a niche and a name for themselves.⁸

⁵ See S. Willis Rudy, *The College of the City of New York: A History, 1847-1947* (New York: City College Press, 1949), pp. 173-74, for a brief description of the Jewish middle-class City College student.

⁶ Such perceptions were well grounded in fact. From less than ten Jewish students in the 1870's, Harvard's Jewish element grew to approximately twenty percent of the student population of that school on the eve of World War I. Columbia's Jewish students constituted forty percent of the Morningside Heights campus, while C.C.N.Y., the "Jewish Harvard," was, as its name implied, largely Jewish. See Lee M. Friedman to Henry Hurwitz, August 7, 1936, in the Henry Hurwitz Collection of the American Jewish Archives (hereafter HH); and Stephen Steinberg, *The Academic Melting Pot* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1974), pp. 9, 19-20.

⁷ H.S. Canby, *Alma Mater: The Gothic Age of the American College* (New York: Farrar & Reinhart, 1936), p. 129. See also Rollo W. Brown, *Harvard Yard in the Golden Age* (New York: Current Books, Inc., 1948), pp. 15-16.

⁸ Harry Starr to the author. See also Ruth Sapin Hurwitz, "Coming of Age at Wellesley," *The Menorah Journal*, Autumn, 1950, p. 254.

Still, there seemed to be something lacking in the academic experience of the Jewish collegians of the early 1900's, the nature of which was perhaps best captured and articulated by a number of Jewish students at Harvard. In 1906 a group of some twenty odd Jewish collegians at that university assembled to form what they called the "Harvard Menorah Society," an organization dedicated to "the study and promotion of Hebraic ideals." The club was to push for the recognition of Hebrew studies in the university curriculum; it was to combat the widespread feeling of inferiority among Harvard Jews even as it attempted to erase class divisions between German and Russian Jews; and most importantly, it was to provide the interested Jewish student with a profound knowledge of his background.⁹

As a group of like-minded people, these Jewish students needed a base where they could fraternize while on campus. Jewish fraternities were frowned upon both by Harvard authorities and by Jewish students; indeed, secular Greek-letter societies in general were not tolerated within Harvard Yard.¹⁰ Although de facto segregation existed on campus, as it did everywhere, Harvard's official policy was to encourage mingling. Therefore, a society for purely convivial purposes would not do. Not only would it be regarded as un-American and segregative, but such an organization would work against the melting-pot ideology of President Eliot and, by extension, of Harvard itself.¹¹ In addition, a Jewish

⁹ *The Menorah Movement: History, Purposes and Activities* (Ann Arbor: Intercollegiate Menorah Association, 1914), pp. 1-4, 96.

¹⁰ Fred Greenman, "Resolved, that Jewish fraternities be established at Harvard: Brief and Argument for the Negative," 1914, Harvard Menorah Society papers, Harvard University Archives. This document, a paper for a course in forensics at Harvard College, detailed the history of Jewish campus activities in the Yard from 1906 through 1914. In the course of his argument against the formation of a Jewish fraternity at Harvard, Greenman, a former Harvard Menorah Society president and charter member, mentioned the administration's dislike of any type of secret society. Lest the reader suspect Greenman of sour grapes, his contention was confirmed for me by Harry Starr.

¹¹ Harvard's president was not the only one to go on record as opposing fraternities; the Central Conference of American Rabbis also took a firm and negative stand against them. In fact, a resolution condemning fraternities was passed at its 1913 convention. See *CCAR*, Volume 23, 1913; and "A Supplementary Report on Fraternities," *CCAR*, Volume 24, 1914.

social club would justify the stereotype of the Jew as clannish and xenophobic.¹²

A religious society was also out of keeping with the much touted "university spirit." Although a Newman Club serviced the needs of Catholic students and the Y.M.C.A. those of Protestants, a similar body administering to the needs of the Jews on campus was thought to be untenable. First, largely for economic reasons, Harvard's Jews commuted to school; their religious life, if it existed, was experienced within the home. Second, and more important, given the fact that Menorah's members were by and large relative newcomers to America, it is conceivable that they might have felt that the formation of a religious society at Harvard would jeopardize their newly acquired status of Americans. Accordingly, they eschewed anything that smacked, however remotely, of religion.¹³

The only type of Jewish group, then, acceptable to both Harvard officials and Jews seemed to be a cultural, nonpartisan society. Not only would such a group, conceived along the lines of the

¹² On two occasions—first in an address to the Harvard Menorah Society entitled "The Jewish Physical Idea and Martial Spirit" (December, 1907), and eight years later in an article for *The Menorah Journal* entitled "The Potency of the Jewish Race"—Eliot fell prey to stereotyping.

While applauding the intelligence, strong family ties, and industry of the Jewish people, Eliot decried what he perceived as the lack of physical prowess among them. Although Harvard's president undoubtedly had good intentions, the text of his remarks became known to the press, and a major controversy over his philo-Semitism erupted.

The consequent brouhaha prompted the *New York Evening Journal* to reprove Eliot for his shortsightedness: If he "would make inquiries in his own university," advised the paper, "he will find that the Jews are among the strongest and best developed physically of all those that go to Harvard . . . and in chest expansion, they have excelled." *New York Evening Journal*, January 3, 1908.

¹³ Curiously, a month after the establishment of the Harvard Menorah Society, the opportunity for creating a religious group presented itself. The Department of Education Extension of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the congregational arm of the Reform movement, hoped to establish a religious society at Harvard. After heated confrontations between the newly born Menorah Society and the Union's representative, Rabbi George Zepin, it was decided to have the Union work through the existing campus group, namely Menorah, rather than create its own independent club. On this episode, see Documents Exhibiting the Relationship between the Harvard Menorah Society and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, May 15, 1913, HH Collection—Adolph S. Oko correspondence. See also "Report of the Special Committee on Religious Work in the Universities," *CCAR*, Volume 22, 1912, p. 216.

Deutscher Verein or the Cercle Français, fit into the mold of respectable extracurricular activities, but it would satisfy the needs of the Jewish student in a way that a religious or purely social club could not.¹⁴ By studying Jewish culture, by investigating the historical, literary and sociological roots of the "Jewish condition," Menorah attempted to answer the perplexing questions of its members while providing them with a legitimate base for confraternity.

The posture of Menorahites vis-à-vis their Jewishness is puzzling, since at times they appeared to be gung-ho assimilationists and, at other moments, committed Jews. Were they ethnic Jews, but not religious ones? Were they cultural pluralists, or advocates of Americanization? Part of the difficulty in defining the essence of the club is a function of the inability of the Harvard Menorah Society to come to grips with its identity. Its lack of clear-cut, unequivocal policy statements on the organization's goals reflected the society's openness, a quality which was at once its strength and its frailty. During its early years, Menorah succeeded in gaining many adherents precisely because it was so many things to so many people. When forced to define itself, however, it evaded the matter with disastrous consequences for the organization.

If it lacked a well-developed ideology, the Menorah movement did serve to create what sociologist Milton Gordon calls an "Ethclass" (the division of an ethnic group on the basis of social class, e.g. upper middle-class Jew).¹⁵ Quite self-consciously, Menorah members set out to create a new breed of Jew, one who would not only feel comfortable within the parameters of Harvard Yard, but also at ease within his own. As one Menorahite put it: Menorahites "are boys who write poetry, read Verlaine *but* remember the Friday night candles."¹⁶

¹⁴ That Menorah pursued the right course in eschewing a religious society was borne out by the remarks of one rabbi who regularly came into contact with Jewish collegians. Based on his experience at the University of California, Rabbi M. Friedlander noted that Jewish students, by and large, were averse to the formation of an avowedly religious society. "It seems to me," he wrote, "that the introduction of any reference to religious spirit or anything that is of a religious character might prevent the organization of some student bodies in the universities." Special Committee Report on Religious Work in the Universities," *CCAR*, Volume 23, 1913, p. 216.

¹⁵ Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 51.

¹⁶ Harry Starr to Henry Hurwitz, HH Collection, May 14, 1923 (my emphasis). In many

Whatever its *raison d'être*, the Menorah formula seemed to work. Not only was the number of Menorah adherents rapidly growing in Cambridge, but collegians at such schools as the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia, and City College were setting up parallel organizations.¹⁷ The origins of these self-styled Menorah societies are unknown. What is clear, however, is that all the groups established between 1906 and 1913 were the spontaneous manifestations of the Jewish student's need for an organization through which to express himself as a Jew. There is no evidence to suggest that these early Menorah chapters were created by outside agencies, as was to be the case after 1913 and to a greater extent after 1924.¹⁸ Rather, all the pre-1913 groups were decentralized and had little, if any, contact between one another; whatever bonds existed between them were informal ones. If, as the evidence suggests, no guiding hands planted a Menorah society on the campuses of City College or Columbia, what was there that led to this development? And why did the characteristically Harvard format emerge?

The allure and prestige of the Harvard name may have had something to do with the adoption of the Menorah platform,

ways, Menorah can be seen as the American counterpart to the Wissenschaft des Judenthums movement of the nineteenth century. A response to the pressures of the Emancipation, Wissenschaft hoped to ease the passage of the Jew into modern society by providing him with what were thought to be scientifically derived (and thus mature) insights into his Judaic heritage. Equipped with this armor, the Wissenschaft man, like the Menorahite, could be made to feel equally at home within the modern and the Jewish world.

That Menorah saw itself as the heir to this German intellectual group can be seen in subtle ways—in its stress on lectures, and on the value of study—as well as in more obvious ways. It was hardly coincidental that the most celebrated event of the Menorah calendar was a learned discourse by a renowned scholar, known as the Zunz Annual Lecture.

For Hurwitz's reaction to Wissenschaft, see Hurwitz, "Address at the Opening Session of the Menorah Summer School," 1922, in the HH papers; Hurwitz, "A Memorandum on Menorah Education," *The Menorah Journal*, February, 1919; Hurwitz to Harry A. Wolfson, December 11, 1918, HH papers; Hurwitz to Adolph S. Oko, December 28, 1918, HH collection; and Hurwitz to Adolph S. Oko, July 20, 1936, HH papers.

¹⁷ Jewish student groups had existed at the University of Minnesota as early as 1902, and at the University of Illinois by 1907. See *The Menorah Movement*, *op. cit.*, chapter 1; and "Religious Work at the Universities," *CCAR*, Volume 19, 1909, pp. 150-54.

¹⁸ Although the IMA claimed that all the societies formed after 1913 were spontaneous creations, it is clear that the IMA assisted these new groups in "setting up shop." Similarly, after 1924, the B'nai B'rith-funded Hillel Foundations "invaded" university territory not at the behest of the student body, but at the discretion of the B'nai B'rith administration.

though this is conjectural. Given the respectability of the Harvard Menorah Society, it is conceivable that other incipient Jewish student groups sought to capitalize on the reputation of the Harvard group in forming their own organization.

More to the point, however, is the fact that these early chapters grew in response to the needs of alien students confronting well-established institutions. Spurned by the wealthy non-Jewish and German-Jewish fraternities on the one hand, and hesitant about joining forces with the politically oriented Zionist youth movement on the other, these collegians had no organization through which to experience as a group the shared frustrations of being outsiders; Menorah provided them with one. Whether they truly understood the subtleties of the Harvard Jewish experience did not matter; what did was Menorah's accessibility, its presence on the academic map.

Once a Menorah society was established, it became quite popular. No longer just a haven for campus "have-nots," the Menorah society began to be appreciated for its own merits. Its anti-dogmatic nature appealed to many who might otherwise have been alienated from a society with a strictly political or religious appeal; by virtue of its openness, the Harvard Menorah Society platform alienated no one and attracted many. By the same token, its scientific and dispassionate approach to Jewish history, literature, and philosophy attracted those serious students of culture who might have turned their scholastic energies elsewhere had not such an "enlightened" attitude prevailed.

Whether it was due to the exclusion of Jewish students from organized campus life or to an appreciation of the intellectual qualities of the Harvard Menorah Society, the Menorah ideal caught on. By 1913, eleven Jewish student groups were emulating, as best they could, the experience and techniques of Harvard's premier Jewish club.

As the Harvard Menorah Society, much to its surprise and pleasure, found its ideology and format replicated on major campuses across the country, a few of its charter members began to think in terms of establishing a coordinating, national body to oversee the activities of these eleven chapters. And in January, 1913, after delegates to two regional conferences agreed to the formation of a national office, the Intercollegiate Menorah Associa-



Courtesy of Estelle Wolf

Henry Hurwitz
(1886-1961)

Founder and chancellor of the Intercollegiate Menorah Association
and editor of the *Menorah Journal*

tion (IMA) was born.¹⁹ At its helm was a young man by the name of Henry Hurwitz. One of the founding fathers of the Harvard Menorah Society, Hurwitz eagerly embraced the title of Chancellor of the IMA and in fact was to make the dissemination of the Menorah ideal his life's work.

On the eve of World War One, Menorah's founding fathers could look back upon the last few years with great pride. Not only had their local society become a permanent and established feature of Harvard Yard, but also a catalyst for the development of a national Jewish campus organization of large proportions and even larger aspirations.²⁰

¹⁹ *The Menorah Movement, op. cit.*, chapter 1.

²⁰ In order to broaden Menorah's base, Hurwitz established a number of Menorah offshoots: a Graduate Menorah Society for college graduates; a Menorah Educational Faculty for academicians; and finally *The Menorah Journal*.

Intended as the fund-raising arm of the movement, the Graduate Menorah Society was also to acquaint the American Jewish public with the Menorah ideal through lectures and study groups. On Hurwitz's relations with this body, see Hurwitz to Jacob H. Kaplan, January 11, 1917; Hurwitz to Herbert Lehman, June 30, 1917; and Hurwitz, "A Note on Reorganization," in the Hurwitz-Nathan Isaacs correspondence in the HH Collection.

The Menorah Educational Faculty was conceived of as the official academic branch of Menorah; its members prepared syllabi for Menorah study groups, taught at the Menorah Summer School, and frequently lectured on various aspects of Judaica. If Menorah boasted of its ties with Wissenschaft des Judenthums, it was the Menorah Educational Faculty in particular that sought to keep this connection alive. On its activities, see Harry A. Wolfson, "Our Duties toward Jewish Scholarship," in the Wolfson-Hurwitz correspondence, HH papers; Hurwitz to Wolfson, December 11, 1918, *ibid.*; Hurwitz, "A Memorandum on Menorah Education," *Menorah Journal*, Volume 5, 1919; and Nathan Isaacs, "A New Menorah Phase: The Function of a Faculty Division," *Menorah Journal*, Volume 6, 1920.

Uniting the lay, student, and faculty arms of the IMA was its publication: *The Menorah Journal*. Established in 1915 as a journal "devoted first and last to bringing out the values of Jewish culture and ideals, of Hebraism and Judaism . . .," *The Menorah Journal* was intended to be, and for a while actually served as the medium through which both Menorah members and interested parties could express themselves on Jewish topics.

Through its essays, short stories, art reproductions, and book reviews, the journal spread the notion of a cultural, enlightened Judaism; in the long run, it, and not the network of Menorah societies, popularized the Menorah ideal. The quotation comes from "An Editorial Statement," *Menorah Journal*, Volume 1, 1915. On the history of the journal see Robert Alter, "Epitaph for a Jewish Magazine: Notes on the Menorah Journal," *Commentary*, May, 1965; and the forthcoming doctoral dissertation by Elinor Grumet, University of Iowa.

II

Although the success of the Menorah ideal has already been proved in a number of individual cases, the eruption of World War I brought with it an opportunity for the IMA as a whole to demonstrate the viability of its ideology. The European conflict was a welcome challenge, for it tested the feasibility of cultural pluralism: at long last, Menorah men could prove to the world that one could be both cosmopolitan and patriotic, self-consciously Jewish and American. No wonder, then, that IMA officials were partisans of the war effort, given to long-winded pronouncements on the relationship between Menorah, the war, and American Judaism. In no uncertain terms, the leadership of the IMA viewed the war as "a call to our ancestral heroisms, sanctities and ideals" and itself as "America's partner in an Alliance for Democracy."²¹

If not free from the war fever gripping most Americans, the IMA differed from them in rejecting demands for the submergence of cultural differences. Together with such intellectuals as Randolph Bourne, John Dewey, and Norman Hapgood, the IMA challenged the notion that a "culture of diversity" was an evil force to be exorcised from the midst of America. Rather, the organization proudly maintained that a mature democracy called for the "equality of differences," whether at home or abroad.²²

The War, Zionism, and Menorah

Eager to affirm their ideals, Menorah men threw themselves into the fray. That the S.A.T.C.²³ played havoc with the activities of the Menorah societies mattered little, nor did a marked reduction in the number of capable Menorah leaders. For even as the momentum of their organization was being disrupted by America's mobilization efforts, the IMA continued to applaud

²¹ Henry Hurwitz, "The War and the Menorah Quinquennial," *Menorah Journal*, October, 1917, Volume 3; "A Maccabean Summons," *Menorah Journal*, December, 1917, Volume 3.

²² See, for example, Israel Thurman, "A Plea for a Finer Democracy: Jewish Ideals and the War," *Menorah Journal*, June, 1917, Volume 3.

²³ S.A.T.C., the Students Army Training Corps, was the program whereby colleges and universities trained student-soldiers; it can, in many ways, be seen as the precursor to today's R.O.T.C. program.

Allied war aims and to urge its own membership to participate in the great crusade.²⁴ The *Menorah Journal*, the IMA's house organ, paraded a number of articles on the question of cultural pluralism, while keynote speakers at Menorah dinners never seemed to tire of stressing the affinity between Judaism and Menorahism on the one hand and American ideals on the other.²⁵ In Hurwitz's own words,

If for America now in common with the rest of the world, the Great War is a war for the preservation of democracy, then the very life breath of the Menorah movement is at stake.

Accordingly, Menorah men were urged to enter the lists

Not lukewarmly in platonic loyalty to a faraway ideal, but for absolute self-preservation²⁶

And enlist they did: the American Jewish Committee's Bureau of Statistics and Research, for example, found that the Jews of America, as citizens and as soldiers, were "acquitting themselves magnificently." Not only did Jewish soldiers fight at the front with great valor and determination, but the "contribution of men and means (of the American Jewish community) tends to exceed, by a generous margin, their due quotas."²⁷ The gallant showing of the American Jewish community can in part be attributed to the energetic and impassioned defense of America's war aims undertaken by the IMA in its "Alliance for Democracy."

Even as American Jewry was fervently demonstrating its loyalty

²⁴ See, for example, Bernard Reis to the IMA office, January 1, 1918; Rabbi Jacob Singer to Hurwitz, March 3, 1918, HH Collection; and a December 5, 1918, report on the overall condition of postwar Menorah societies, also in the HH Collection.

²⁵ In addition to such pieces as "The War and the Menorah Quinquennial," *Menorah Journal*, October, 1917, Volume 3, and "A Maccabean Summons," *Menorah Journal*, December, 1917, Volume 3, the IMA published essays on cultural pluralism by such American intellectuals as Randolph Bourne, John Dewey, and Norman Hapgood. See Bourne, "Jews and Trans-National America," *Menorah Journal*, December, 1916, Volume 2; Dewey, "The Principle of Nationality," *Menorah Journal*, October, 1917, Volume 3; and Hapgood, "Jews and American Democracy," *Menorah Journal*, October, 1916, Volume 2.

²⁶ Hurwitz, "The War and the Menorah Quinquennial," *ibid.*

²⁷ See "The Collection of Jewish War Statistics," *American Jewish Year Book*, Volume 20; Julian Leavitt, "American Jews in the World War," *American Jewish Year Book*, Volume 21.

to America, events were shaping up which would ultimately cast doubt on the nature of its allegiance to the United States. In November, 1917, the British government, for a host of diplomatic reasons, issued a statement, known as the Balfour Declaration, recognizing the validity of Jewish claims to a national homeland in Palestine. While the proclamation was replete with ambiguities, later to plague both Zionists and Arabs, the former interpreted it as a major victory for their cause.²⁸ At the very least, the Balfour Declaration made the Zionist cause, once so divisive, less so. No longer the pipedream of a few misguided idealists, a Jewish home in Palestine was now a reality to be reckoned with. Even so ardent a proponent of "America is my Zion" as Jacob H. Schiff, American Jewry's leading philanthropist, was moved to confess profound excitement over the British government's action.²⁹

It was against this background that the IMA held its 1917 Quinquennial Convention. While the war was unquestionably the dominant theme of the gathering, there was no evading a discussion of the recently issued Balfour Declaration. With the recent victory of the Zionists occupying the attention of the world Jewish community, even Menorah, traditionally neutral on political issues, was forced to acknowledge its current preeminence.

After much behind-the-scenes maneuvering between pro-Zionist Menorah members eager to have the cultural society take a stand on the Balfour Declaration (that is, to applaud it) and reluctant administration figures, the IMA resolved to go no further than to acknowledge the action of the British government; it could not, in all good conscience, publicly approve the decision of the British. Justifying its decision on the grounds that a pro-Zionist resolution was "clearly a violation of both the spirit and the letter of the Menorah constitution" and that it would thus jeopardize its cardinal principle of nonpartisanship, the Menorah movement as an organization would only go so far as to thank—or, as the text of

²⁸ On the Balfour Declaration, see Walter Lacquer, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), pp. 204-5; Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1961); and Isaiah Friedman, *The Question of Palestine, 1914-1918* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973).

²⁹ Jacob H. Schiff, "At the Gate of the Promised Land," *Menorah Journal*, Feb., 1918, Vol. 4.

the resolution put it, "hail with gratitude"—the British government for its actions.³⁰

Given the history of the Menorah movement, and the overriding importance attached to the principle of political neutrality by some of its leaders, there is in fact no reason to question that this policy had well served the organization in the past; especially when it came time to recruit new members, the IMA's reluctance to take a stand, one way or another, on the Balfour Declaration is understandable. The reaction of Henry Hurwitz, Menorah chancellor, to the Zionist incident is a case in point.

Though claiming to be a staunch Zionist, Hurwitz was equally as firm in his belief that politics and Menorah affairs did not mix. In his unquestioned adherence to Menorah organizational policy—to its "tradition and trust of nonpartisanship and nonparticipation in political activities"—³¹Menorah's leader was blinded to the new complexion of Jewish life. In his eyes, the Balfour Declaration, like any other political issue, was out of Menorah bounds. While one could study and discuss the event and its implications, the organization as such could not take a stand on it.

Still, the Balfour Declaration was not just another political problem; it was the most momentous event in Jewish history since the Emancipation. Accordingly, the failure of the organization squarely to address itself to the significance of the Balfour Declaration symbolized the degree to which its chancellor and by extension the movement itself were rapidly growing out of touch with the concerns of those students just about ready to enter the university system. It was no wonder, then, that during the next decade, the IMA found it increasingly difficult to recruit new members. While its stance vis-à-vis Zionism had much to do with the postwar decline of the Menorah societies, the nature of the postwar college experience was also greatly responsible.

Frats, Frolic, and the Zionist Ideal

As IMA officials were quick to realize, the postwar college

³⁰ For the text of the IMA's resolution on the Balfour Declaration, see "The Menorah Quinquennial Convention," *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³¹ The Henry Hurwitz-Aaron Schaffer correspondence, HH Collection, documents the Zionist-IMA snafu. See especially Hurwitz to Schaffer, December 6, 1917.

generation was quite different from its predecessors: more frivolous and less inclined towards intellectual pursuits. Or, as one observer put it, intellectual activities had been driven off campus, only to be replaced by "musical comedies, international Bolsheviks . . . and teas at Wellesley."³² Nor was that all. While the postwar collegian was a new breed, the postwar campus was also experiencing some major changes.

As a result of soaring enrollment figures,³³ the traditional homogeneity of the college was in danger of being overwhelmed. To guard against this, the campus subtly demanded of its inhabitants an unprecedented degree of what one historian has called "wholesale conformity";³⁴ the mechanisms for accomplishing this task were twofold. On the one hand, the administration established the quota system as a tool with which to insure a certain measure of homogeneity, while on the other the fraternities were used for "filtering the increasingly heterogeneous campus populations."³⁵

Arrogating to themselves a position as the major campus force, the fraternities set out to define the nature of the postwar college experience: those qualities which made for a successful fraternity brother were also those which made for an enjoyable college experience; those who did not share the values of the frat man found themselves outside the mainstream of campus life.

Yet even those who internalized the values of the fraternity found that there were limits to the openness of the frat house. Jews and Blacks, for instance, were frequently denied entry no matter how assiduously they demonstrated their knowledge of "acceptable" behavior.

As a result of their exclusion from the fraternities, Jews hastened to create parallel institutions. Although Jewish fraternities had existed prior to the war,³⁶ they were not nearly so numerous as

³² Harry Starr to Julietta Kahn, ca. 1921-22, HH Collection.

³³ Between 1900 and 1930, there was a threefold increase in the number of students attending college. "The largest absolute increase in both colleges and high schools took place in the decade of the twenties." See Paula S. Fass, "The Fruits of Transition: American Youth in the Twenties," unpublished Columbia University dissertation, 1974, p. 256. See also Harold S. Wechsler, *op. cit.*, for an in-depth analysis of that trend.

³⁴ Fass, *ibid.*, p. 262.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

³⁶ Zeta Beta Tau (ZBT), the largest Jewish fraternity in America, was established in 1897.

they were following the armistice. Like the Gentile fraternities which they so carefully emulated, the fraternity movement of the Jews flourished during the postwar decade. Columbia had eight Jewish fraternities, while Harvard, allegedly a vehement opponent of Greek-letter societies, had seven; in the large Midwestern state universities, the number of Jewish frats was even greater.³⁷

Nothing, other than his religion, distinguished the Jewish frat man from his Gentile counterpart. One collegian, a non-Jew, had unknowingly pledged himself to a Jewish house. Upon finding out his mistake, the chagrined student wrote: "I was shocked, humiliated and angry, not because my fraternity brothers were Jewish, but because I had not known about it."³⁸ The Jewish "Greek," however, was differentiated from the Jewish "Barbarian," by his social and economic class.³⁹ More often than not, rich Jewish boys dominated the frat house; those from poorer homes were forced to look elsewhere to fulfil their social needs.

Yet the pressures of the peer culture were so strong that the Jewish "Barbarian," by and large, continued to cultivate those traits deemed acceptable by the fraternities with the hope that he might qualify the next year for membership in a fraternity. Those few who resisted such demands—what one Menorahite called the "leftovers"—sought refuge in Menorah society.⁴⁰

With determination, Menorah continued to talk in terms of cultural synthesis. Its appeals, however, fell on deaf ears. For Jewish fraternity men and candidates were not interested in what they perceived to be the sterile and irrelevant aims of the Menorah movement. Rather, they, like everyone else, were captivated by the American dream of material reward (and assimilation). Menorah with its cries of Jewish consciousness hindered that process. Or, as one frat man put it: the methods and aims of this cultural society are "not compatible with a desire to attain success."⁴¹ No matter

³⁷ Greenman, *op. cit.*; and the correspondence of IMA chapters with the national office, 1918-1929, HH Collection.

³⁸ Vincent Sheean, *A Personal History* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co, 1934), pp. 11-18.

³⁹ A "Greek" was a fraternity man; a "Barbarian" was one who was either rejected by a fraternity, or uninterested in joining one.

⁴⁰ Julietta Kahn's memo to Hurwitz, December 4, 1922, HH papers. See also Hurwitz to Horace M. Kallen, March 7, 1921; and Kallen's reply to Hurwitz, December 16, 1921.

⁴¹ Irving Sitt to Julietta Kahn, April 12, 1923, HH Collection.

how hard and persistently Menorah tried to win over Jewish youth—it even went so far as to add smokers and dances to its programs—⁴²it was rebuffed.

In their attempts to conform to and blend with dominant American culture, Jewish frat men eschewed anything that deviated from “conventional” behavior, such as assiduous intellectual activity.⁴³ During the twenties, the grind was shunned by most students, as was the self-conscious intellectual. And no matter how earnestly he tried to dispel the image, the campus Jew had always been regarded as the grind *par excellence*.⁴⁴ During the early years of the century, such a label was not much of a handicap; in the 1920’s it was.⁴⁵ And Menorah, with its emphasis on study and high culture, reinforced that perception of the Jewish student. Consequently, the organization found it difficult to recruit members.

Short of effecting a working arrangement between the Jewish fraternities and the Menorah societies, nothing could be done by the IMA to stem the growing decrease in its membership. Even that solution fell short of the mark: few frat members were sufficiently interested in the work of the IMA to participate in Menorah affairs. Similarly, few Menorahites were sufficiently acceptable to frat men to join in their activities. Occasionally, the two groups did work together to sponsor Jewish campus activities;⁴⁶ more often than not, however, the fraternities refused to cooperate.⁴⁷ It was not long before Menorah societies across the country folded.

⁴² Harry Starr to Julietta Kahn, October 24, 1921, on the importance of adding programs of a social nature to Menorah’s calendar.

⁴³ Robert Angell, *The Campus* (New York: Appleton & Co., 1928), especially pp. 36–42; Daniel Katz and Floyd H. Allport, *Students’ Attitudes* (Syracuse: Craftsman Press, 1931), p. 75; and Fass, *op. cit.*, pp. 327–28.

⁴⁴ H. S. Canby, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 125–29, for an excellent insight into how the Jewish student was regarded by his fellow collegians.

⁴⁵ Fass, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

⁴⁶ Harry Starr to Julietta Kahn, the entire 1920–1921 correspondence, HH Collection; Isador Lubin to Hurwitz, *op. cit.*; and Hurwitz to Mr. Rosenbloom, a Jewish Columbia College student, February 20, 1923, HH Collection.

⁴⁷ Correspondence of IMA local chapters with the national office, 1919–1929, HH Collection; Julietta Kahn’s field reports, 1920–1923, HH Collection; and Hurwitz to Fred Greenman, undated 1922, HH Collection.

If not as threatening as the fraternity movement, the Zionist challenge also upset the equilibrium of the IMA by attracting yet another segment of the Jewish college population. While the fraternities attracted those students eager to share in the American dream of material success, the Zionist youth movement (exemplified by the Intercollegiate Zionist Association and later the Avukah) attracted those who dreamed of being pioneers in another land.

Zionist youth groups had existed prior to World War One, but they were small in number, disorganized, and beset by factionalism.⁴⁸ Lacking recognition (after all, it was not until the Balfour Declaration that Zionism as a movement became respectable), they were in no position to challenge Menorah's hegemony of Jewish campus affairs. Nor, for that matter, did Menorah view them as a threat. Indeed, for a brief spell, the Menorahite and the Zionist worked in tandem.

As the rallying point for Jewish students, a willing IMA did much in the way of enlisting college students into the ranks of the Zionist movement. Louis D. Brandeis, the recognized spokesman for the American Zionist movement, repeatedly depended on Menorah for support in the prewar years. For his part, Hurwitz counselled the Zionist leader on how best to approach Jewish students; jointly sponsored meetings with the Harvard Zionist Society; and invited Brandeis to publish a pro-Zionist piece in the first issue of the *Menorah Journal*.⁴⁹

Hurwitz's enthusiasm for the Zionist cause was, however, relatively short-lived. While he never tired of proclaiming himself a Zionist,⁵⁰ the allegiance of Menorah's chancellor (and thus by extension of the IMA itself) to the movement waned rapidly as Hurwitz began to see in the Zionists a serious threat to Menorah's dominance in Jewish campus affairs.

⁴⁸ Samuel Grand, "A History of Zionist Youth Organizations in the United States from Their Inception to the 1940's," unpublished Columbia University dissertation, 1958.

⁴⁹ The Louis D. Brandeis papers, Zionist Archives, contain a few bits of correspondence between the Zionist leader and Henry Hurwitz. See, for example, Brandeis to Hurwitz, September 6, 1914; Hurwitz's reply, October 4, 1914. Also, Hurwitz to Brandeis, October 15, 1914; Hurwitz to Brandeis, November 6, 1914.

⁵⁰ The author's interview with David Hurwood, Henry Hurwitz's son, and with Harry Starr. Also, Hurwitz to Julian W. Mack, December 25, 1917, HH Collection.

III

An Era Ends

With the proclamation of the Balfour Declaration in November, 1917, the political nature of Zionism acquired a new legitimacy. If some post-Balfour Declaration Zionists were conciliatory and less rigid ideologically in their efforts to unify American Jewry behind Zionism,⁵¹ American Jewish youth more than compensated for the ideological flaccidity of their elders by their own militance. More and more, the leadership of the Zionist youth movement claimed as its own sons those Menorah men, like Horace M. Kallen, who were committed to both Zionism and Menorahism.⁵² With the ardor of devotees, the Intercollegiate Zionist Association and then Avukah called upon Menorah to merge with them. Such overtures, however, were but thinly disguised ruses to take over Menorah.⁵³

The IMA responded angrily to what it perceived as the unwarranted arrogance of the Zionists. Its history of nonpartisanship in political affairs,⁵⁴ in addition to the overriding need to maintain the organization's autonomy (whatever the cost), ultimately placed Menorah in the anti-Zionist camp.

Unfortunately, Menorah's fears of a Zionist takeover were well-founded as the Zionist youth movement made major inroads into the Menorah ranks. By 1921, the number of defections from the IMA was reaching serious proportions as many staunch Menorah chapters turned to Zionism. The Zionist affair at City College of New York was one such episode which seriously damaged the IMA.

One of the original IMA members, City College's Menorah

⁵¹ Samuel Halperin, *The Political World of American Zionism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1961), p. 191.

⁵² Hurwitz to Horace M. Kallen, November 29, 1918, HH Collection.

⁵³ "A Statement from the Department of Education of the Zionist Organization to Members of the IZA," circa 1918, HH Collection; Hurwitz to Horace M. Kallen, December 3, 1918, and Kallen's reply, December 5, 1918, HH Collection; Isidor Hoffman to I. Leo Sharfman, March 21, 1919, and Sharfman's reply, March 26, 1919, HH Collection; Henrietta Szold to Hurwitz, March 3, 1919, HH Collection; Max Rhoades to Nathan Isaacs, June 4, 1926, and Isaacs' response, June 7, 1926, HH Collection.

⁵⁴ Their involvement in World War I was the sole exception. That was viewed by the IMA as a matter of self-preservation and not as partisan politics; Zionism fit into the latter category.

Society, was regarded as a model chapter, second only to Harvard in its strength and dedication to the Menorah ideal. With more than ten study groups, an impressive library, an annual Menorah prize of \$100 for the best-written and best-researched essay on some aspect of Judaica, its own meeting room (the Menorah Alcove), and a regular network of activities, the C.C.N.Y. Menorah was held up by Hurwitz as a society worthy of emulation. By 1921, however, the endless praise of the IMA for this society had turned into a series of indictments: City College men were opinionated and slovenly where once they had been tolerant and virtuous; frivolous where once they had been serious and dedicated men. In fact, so strong was Hurwitz's antipathy to his once cherished constituent that he took steps to expel the C.C.N.Y. Menorah from the ranks of the IMA. What turned Hurwitz's heart was the fact that Zionism had captured the interest of City College Menorah members to the point where they had transformed their society into an avowedly Zionist group.⁵⁵

Fortunately, a schism between the IMA and the City College chapter was narrowly avoided through the efforts of Professor Morris R. Cohen in effecting a compromise between the two. The agreement, enabling Menorah to retain its own identity as a cultural body, was no more than a token gesture. For the Menorah society, as far as City College Jews were concerned, was a chimera.

The success of the Zionist movement in attracting college youths away from the IMA and into its own ranks lies in the fact that Zionism appropriated the aims of Menorah even as it added a few of its own. Both Menorahites and Zionists sought a renaissance of Jewish life and the creation of a sense of Jewish élan. But whereas Menorah was dispassionate and passive, the Zionists were activists. Even those who remained unconvinced of the value of political activism could not help but notice the "academic aloofness" of the IMA; in fact, to many the organization "resembled a mid-Victorian debating society."⁵⁶ Thus, in an age in which college youth disdained intellectual activity, Menorah's standoffishness from "real" life was made all the more salient.

⁵⁵ Henry Hurwitz, "The Menorah Interest," pp. 3-6, discusses the C.C.N.Y. Menorah affair. See also Morris R. Cohen to Hurwitz, September 14, 1921, HH Collection.

⁵⁶ "A Statement from the Department of Education . . .," *op. cit.*, p. 3; Jonas S. Friedenwald, "The Intercollegiate: A Retrospect," *Kadimah*, Volume 1, 1918.

Bewildered and angered by the change in its status, the IMA leadership did not know how to respond to the Zionist threat. Unlike the fraternity situation, there was no give-and-take among the Zionists, no halfway measures. One was either a believer or an outsider. Rather than admit defeat and accept a secondary position within the Zionist youth movement, Menorah preferred its own independence, no matter how lonely such a course might be. If the challenges posed by the IZA and the fraternity movement were not sufficient to daunt Menorah's spirit, the emergence of the Hillel Foundation certainly was. The "supplanting" of the Menorah societies by the newly established Hillel Foundation was reported in the January, 1924, issue of the *American Israelite*, a leading Anglo-Jewish weekly.⁵⁷ If, at the time, more daydream than reality, there was no doubt that the much weakened Menorah faced fierce future competition from the Hillel Foundation.

Established at four Midwestern state universities, the Hillel Foundations attempted to provide the Jewish student with an integrated campus life. Unlike the Jewish fraternity, its membership was open to all Jews, regardless of financial status. And in contrast to Menorah, cultural activities were only a part—and a small part—of the Hillel Foundations' programs; not only did the Hillel Foundations sponsor religious services and study groups, but recreational activities such as socials and athletics were also promoted.⁵⁸

An offshoot of the B'nai B'rith, a leading Jewish fraternal organization, Hillel had at its disposal what appeared to the chronically impoverished Menorah to be an endless supply of funds.⁵⁹ With such financial backing, a rapid spread of what Hurwitz dubbed "glorified YMCA's"⁶⁰ seemed assured.

⁵⁷ Clipping from the January, 1924, edition of *The American Israelite* found in the Hurwitz papers. For reactions to the article, see George Zepin to Hurwitz, January 9, 1924; Sol Goldman to Hurwitz, January 15, 1924; and Hurwitz to Rabbi David Goldberg, January 21, 1924, in the HH Collection.

⁵⁸ Isidor Hoffman, "The State of Our Movement Among College Students," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, Volume 3, 1929, pp. 60-65; and Hurwitz to Louis Kirstein, October 7, 1927, HH Collection.

⁵⁹ Not only did Hillel command funds from the B'nai B'rith but, according to Boris D. Bogen, B'nai B'rith secretary, the Hillel Foundations "received the unequivocal endorsement of American Jewry, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, (and) the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and other Jewish leaders." Boris D. Bogen to D. Wunch, January, 1927, found in the HH Collection.

⁶⁰ Hurwitz to Louis Kirstein, October 7, 1927; Abram L. Sachar to Hurwitz, March 20, 1930, HH Collection.



Delegates to the Menorah Societies Conference
at Brown University, November, 1927

Although it was quick to assure its membership that it would not react passively to Hillel's encroachment on Menorah territory,⁶¹ there was little the organization could do to stop the B'nai B'rith from establishing its own agency. Rather than compete with Hillel, Menorah by 1927 adopted a new tack: talk of a merger between the two organizations became frequent. Such overtures continued well into the 1930's with no results.⁶² In the long run, the Hillel Foundations continued to grow, while the Menorah societies helplessly watched their membership dwindle.

Buffeted about by the indifference of most Jewish college students, the hostility of the Zionists, and the financial strength of Hillel, Menorah was forced to relinquish its position as a major Jewish activity. Although Menorah societies continued to exist on various campuses into the 1930's, they commanded the allegiance of few students.⁶³

IV

From its inception at Harvard in 1906 to the outbreak of World War I, the IMA served as the weathervane by which Jewish collegians oriented themselves. During this decade, Menorah provided the Jewish student with both a sense of élan and a community, and the Jewish students responded eagerly to Menorah activities.

⁶¹ Hurwitz to Jacob H. Kaplan, June 16, 1939; Adolph S. Oko to Hurwitz, May 26, 1924, HH Collection.

⁶² On this episode, see the Hurwitz-Sachar correspondence in the HH Collection. Also, Hurwitz to Sol Goldman, April 22, 1929, and Hurwitz to Goldman, December 17, 1934, HH Collection.

⁶³ Internal financial difficulties, no less than external challenges, gravely weakened the IMA. Whether symptom or cause, chronic fiscal instability plagued Menorah almost from the outset and ultimately dealt the movement its final blow. At first, the IMA was supported by members of the German-Jewish establishment; gradually their support of the association lessened. To compensate for this, Hurwitz, in his capacity as chancellor, devoted more and more of his time to fund-raising with few concrete results. Caught in a bind between angry creditors, spiralling costs, and no redeeming angels, the IMA frequently verged on bankruptcy; the Depression spelled the end of the organization. (One should note, however, that the *Menorah Journal* continued to be published for at least another two decades. It is a testament to the remarkable will and dedication of Hurwitz to the Menorah ideal that the magazine (and by extension what remained of the Menorah movement) continued as long as it did.

Material on the financial plight of the IMA can be found scattered throughout the HH Collection. For one of the most vivid examples of Menorah's fiscal woes, see the Hurwitz-Jacob H. Kaplan correspondence, 1929-1939, HH Collection.

Having the choice of belonging to any number of Jewish organizations—fraternities, Zionist clubs, or Hillel Foundations—the postwar Jewish collegian came to rely on the Menorah less and less. Lacking support on the part of Jewish students (and financial assistance from the adult Jewish community), the IMA was ultimately relegated to a minor position on the college campus.

In the final analysis, however, it is doubtful whether the Menorah ideal could ever have succeeded in winning over the majority of American Jewry to its program. For one thing, those Jews familiar with Menorah goals found them too difficult to fulfil. The creation of a new class of Jew, tutored in both Western letters and Judaica, however laudable an ideal, was (and still is) a tall order. For another, there was no room on the agenda of the American Jewish community for the Menorah ideology in any form. High culture was a luxury the community could ill afford: first the war and then war relief, then Versailles, later the Palestine issue, and finally the immigration from Hitler's inferno shunted Menorah into the corner.

Still, Menorah was a success in a number of areas. Not only did it produce a journal of wit, scholarship, and information, but it also created a sense of camaraderie and pride among Jewish collegians at the same time that it combated the pressures of assimilation among them. Finally, in its emphasis on the study of Jewish culture through modern tools of criticism, Menorah anticipated the current growth of Jewish studies programs in universities throughout the United States.⁶⁴ The ideas that the IMA propounded about Judaism as a culture and as a field for serious and dispassionate scholarship, pioneering though they were at the turn of the century, are now a part of the collective heritage of American Jewish life. For all these reasons, the Menorah movement, in its various manifestations, had an important impact on American Jewry.

⁶⁴ While the current interest in Jewish studies can be seen as a response to the activities of other minorities, most notably the Blacks, the Jewish studies movement can also look to the IMA as its intellectual parent. See the forthcoming book by Professors Paul Ritterband and Harold S. Wechsler on the emergence of Judaica in American universities.