
American Zionism and American Jewry: An Ideological and Communal Encounter

Evyatar Friesel

It is almost as difficult to determine who is a Zionist as it is to define who is a Jew. In the present article the following definition is suggested: a Zionist is a Jew who believes that Jewish statehood in the Land of Israel is a necessary condition for the life of the Jewish people in the social and political circumstances of the modern world. That definition is less than the one favored by many Israeli Jews, who declare that a Zionist is a Jew who settles in Israel. In the first formulation, aliyah is desirable, but not indispensable. On the other hand, the definition offered involves more than the one preferred by many Diaspora Jews, who see themselves as Zionists, support the existence of a Jewish state, but recoil from considering it an indispensable condition for Jewish life in the modern world.

Taken together, the three definitions mentioned cover almost all American Jews. Indeed, today most American Jews are apt to say that it is “natural” for a Jew to be a Zionist, however defined—which is an illusion. As late as the 1950s, such distinguished scholars as Oscar Handlin and Will Herberg were still describing Zionism in the United States as a phenomenon typical of the perplexities of second-generation American Jews.¹ What happened is that American Jewry underwent a process of “Zionization.” The aim of the present essay is to describe that process. We will be dealing with a development that took a long time and had nothing casual about it—even more, it was far from easy.

Zionism was a movement with a well-developed ideology—some would even say overdeveloped—with a clear and well-defined idea about the situation of the Jewish people in modern times. Zionism explained what was wrong with modern Jewry; it proclaimed an aim that should turn wrongs right again; it defined the cultural, economic, and political means to attain those aims. All these ideological con-

cepts—the critique against modern Jewish reality, the negative attitude regarding the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, the plan to bring about the territorial concentration of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel, aliyah, and many other concepts—they all reflected a Jewish situation that was essentially European.

But these were terms of reference that fit neither Jewish realities in the United States, nor Jewish aspirations there. Consequently, it was only to be expected that American Zionism, supposedly relating to American Jewish conditions, would develop in a new direction. Indeed, when somebody tried to understand American Zionism with European-related concepts, American Zionism literally turned un-understandable. Everyone who does research in the history of American Zionism ultimately gets used to those memoranda of European envoys, *shlihim*, dating from the beginnings of the century and continuing over the decades, despairing about the strange internal processes of that strange being, American Zionism.²

* * *

From the beginnings of the movement in the United States, American Zionists were confronted with the problem that many of the European-originated components of the Zionist idea failed to arouse an answer among Jews in the United States. As one example among many, let us consider *sh'lilat-hagaluth*—the negation of, or despair with, Galut—so central a component in European Zionism. It is known that among European Zionists thinkers, *sh'lilat-hagaluth* was not an ideological element of uniform character. As a component of the Zionist idea, it had a certain weight in political Zionism of the Herzl school—where it was a major factor—and another weight in cultural Zionism of the school of Ahad Ha-Am, where its influence was slighter. However we consider it, in America it had no weight whatsoever. American Jews, certainly of the older, “German” type, but not less of the younger, “Russian” type, had come to America to rebuild their lives there, their own lives and the lives of their children and grandchildren. As an ideology based on the negation of European Galut, Zionism had a certain attraction even in America. But if it was supposed to apply to America itself, it was a hopeless proposition. For almost all, America was not Galut. America was the land of liberty, the blessed land, or, in Yiddish, *die goldene medine*, “the golden land.”

In its ideological development in the United States, Zionism had eventually to deal with three problems. First, while remaining attuned to the hopes of the Jewish people regarding the Land of Israel, it also had to affirm Jewish life in America. Second (and this problem developed from the first), it had to formulate its acceptance of Jewish life in America from a point of view still Zionist, and in positive terms. And third, it had to respond to the two first problems in a way that remained somehow attuned—or at least not too greatly in contradiction—to the basic principles of general Zionist ideology, which were fundamentally geared to the European Jewish reality.

The process of formulating answers to these three questions, which went on for many years, is the theme of the present article. It represented an ideological effort whose social and ideological components are definable, and which was obviously rooted in the specific characteristics of the American Jewish community. It developed along two paths that will be explained here. One path was a specific ideological development inside the American Zionist movement that brought about the gradual building of bridges between the movement and American Jewry at large. The other path came from the opposite direction: certain developments among the leading strata of American Jewry that brought them close to the hopes of Zionism—especially the kind of Zionism being explained by many American Zionists. In other words, there are two trends we will be dealing with: the Americanization of the Zionist idea, and the “Zionization” of American Jewry. It was a process of rapprochement in which the two sides—the Zionists and the non-Zionists—played an active role.

The Americanization of Zionism

One major issue of the debate in modern Jewry regarding Zionism was the conflict of interests and loyalties that the Zionist program seemed to pose for those Jews who aspired to integrate in the general environment. Keen to become part and parcel of the cultural, social, and political life of their respective countries, aware that much remained to be done, by Jews and non-Jews alike, to attain that goal, these Jews feared that Zionism might create one more obstacle for their hopes. The debate between Zionists and “integrationists” about what was termed the question of “dual loyalty” turned into one of the

sharpest internal discussions in modern Jewry, and it flared up everywhere, in Central and Western Europe, but also in the United States: “But speaking as an American, I cannot for a moment concede that one can be, at the same time, a true American and an honest adherent of the Zionist movement,” wrote Jacob H. Schiff—perhaps the outstanding figure in American Jewry in his day—to Solomon Schechter, in 1907, criticizing the latter’s adoption of Zionism.³ Schiff went on, commenting about certain figures that Schechter had described as being good citizens and good Zionists:

The men whom you mention by name may have, or may have had as far as they have passed away, a thorough conviction of a deep attachment to this country, but if they are honest Zionists—I mean if they believe and hope and labor for an ultimate restoration of Jewish political life and the re-establishment of a Jewish Nation, they place a prior lien upon their citizenship which, if there would be a possibility for their desire and plans to become effective, would prevent them from maintaining allegiance to the country of which they now claim to be good citizens.⁴

American Zionists were highly aware of the problems caused by accusations such as Schiff’s, and tried whenever possible to refute them. But it was not until Louis Brandeis became the leader of the Zionist movement that a compelling answer was formulated—compelling not due to the originality of the argument but because of the authority of Brandeis himself. If the man who was shortly to become a member of the Supreme Court of the United States proclaimed that the allegation of dual loyalty was without foundation, what was there still to be argued?

Let no American imagine that Zionism is inconsistent with Patriotism. Multiple loyalties are objectionable only if they are inconsistent. A man is a better citizen of the United States for being also a loyal citizen of his state and of his city; for being loyal to his family, and to his profession or trade; for being loyal to his college or his lodge. Every Irish-American who contributed toward advancing home rule was a better man and a better American for the sacrifice he made. Every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine, though he feels that neither he nor his descendants will ever live there, will likewise be a better man and a better American for doing so.⁵

But Brandeis went further: not only was Zionism a legitimate phenomenon in American life, but there was an identity of ideals between Americanism and Zionism.

There is no inconsistency between loyalty to America and loyalty to Jewry. The Jewish spirit, the product of our religion and experiences, is essentially modern and essentially American. Not since the destruction of the Temple have the Jews in spirit and in ideals been so fully in harmony with the noblest aspirations of the country in which they lived.⁶

Consequently, said Brandeis, Zionism was also a moral obligation, a matter of "noblesse oblige," for every self-identifying American Jew.

Indeed, loyalty to America demands rather that each American Jew become a Zionist. For only through the ennobling effect of its strivings can we develop the best that is in us and give this country the full benefit of our great inheritance. The Jewish spirit, so long preserved, the character developed by so many centuries of sacrifice, should be preserved and developed further, so that in America as elsewhere the sons of the race may in the future live lives and do deeds worthy of their ancestors.⁷

Other Zionists close to Brandeis elaborated the same position in different ways. Julian W. Mack, the president of the Zionist Organization of America from 1918 to 1921, argued that Zionism did not and could not involve any dual allegiance in the political sense, and that politically American Jews owed loyalty only to the United States. He and others stressed, like Brandeis, the moral meaning and social message contained in the Zionist program.⁸

The American Cultural Zionists

The new line of Zionist thought just mentioned dealt with the question of Zionism in its relation to American general society, or, the American Zionist as American citizen. But there was a second and not less important question to be answered: Zionism in its relation to American Jewry. In other words, if American Zionism rejected the negative position about Jewish life in America, what constructive vision of American Jewry did it suggest? This matter, which was certainly not less complicated or important than the first one, was dealt with by a different group of American Zionist activists and intellectuals. Their ideas were basically elaborated over a short period, the years 1903 to 1911, although they underwent additional refinements at a later time. Israel Friedlaender deserves to be considered as the most important figure of this group. Others were Judah L. Magnes, Harry

Friedenwald, Solomon Schechter, Max Schloessinger, and several more. Later, Mordecai M. Kaplan became the best-known exponent of these ideas. Most of these intellectuals were connected in one way or another with the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. All of them were influenced by the ideas of Ahad Ha-Am, although they also introduced changes in his thought. The approach they elaborated deserves to be called American Cultural Zionism.⁹

The American cultural Zionists stressed the importance of creating a national Jewish center in Palestine whose spiritual and intellectual influence should be felt all over the Diaspora. But they added an American component to their cultural Zionism. The future of the Jewish people, they stated, would be based on two major centers of Jewish life, one in the United States, the other in Palestine. Israel Friedlaender "pointed out that the conception of Zionism, such as expounded by Achad Ha-Am, can very well be harmonized with the view of those who are working for the upbuilding of a Jewish centre in America."¹⁰ American Jewry should participate in building up the Jewish center in Palestine, the country that had remained the geographical and spiritual basis of the historical consciousness of the Jewish people over the centuries. As explained by Friedlaender:

The great danger which threatens American Judaism is provincialism. By cutting itself gradually away from the other Jewries of the world, American Judaism may become an isolated limb, just as Judaism in France and in England have already become, and shut off from the national Jewish organism, will wither and die. To eliminate this danger, it was necessary to establish a "spiritual center" in Palestine, which should form the connecting link between all the Jewries of the world and in this way safeguard the existence of the Jewish national home.¹¹

The Jewish center rising in Palestine would again create original Jewish culture and thought that would inspire Jews everywhere and contribute to a spiritual renaissance of the Jewish people along national lines. *National* meant cultural-national, not political-national. Jews were political citizens of the different countries where they lived, although they belonged also to one common historical entity, to one people. The most succinct, yet highly accurate, definition of the aims of American cultural Zionism was elaborated later on by Israel Friedlaender: "Zionism plus Diaspora, Palestine plus America."¹²

In their ideological set-up, American cultural Zionists chose to ignore two major components of classical European Zionist thought. One was the principle of *sh'lilat-hagaluth*, "negation of the Diaspora," a matter we have already mentioned. The other was not less interesting: American cultural Zionists almost did not mention anti-Semitism, which was considered so major a factor in the upsurge of Zionism in Europe. Let us remember that those were years—the first quarter of the twentieth century—when anti-Semitism was quite familiar and quite worrying in the United States too. It is worthwhile to note that among the major organized bodies in American Jewry at that time, no other group gave as little attention to anti-Semitism as the American cultural Zionists.

Furthermore, the American cultural Zionists also added a very significant ideological element to their position. Although referring constantly to *Ahad Ha-Am*, they were equally influenced by many of the ideas of another important thinker of modern Jewry, Simon Dubnow, the father of Jewish autonomism. Dubnow took a much more socially oriented approach to Jewish life and Jewish communal activities than *Ahad Ha-Am*. More than that, Dubnow took a positive attitude toward Jewish existence in Diaspora—except that in the case of the American cultural Zionists, Diaspora had a limited meaning; it meant *America*. About the future of Jewish life in Europe, and especially in Eastern Europe, the American cultural Zionists were doubtful indeed.

The two ideological trends we have mentioned, one "outer-directed," the other "inner-oriented," shaped the American Zionist position. The corollary was a very ambitious one: being interested in American Jewish life no less than in Jewish settlement in Palestine, American Zionism formulated nothing less than a view about the self-definition of developing American Jewry along Zionist lines, which meant, of course, *American* Zionist lines. As we shall see, the influence of the circle of Zionist activists inspired by these new ideas was immediately felt in the major centers of American Jewish activity. Zionists began to appear as dedicated activists in different American Jewish organizational enterprises created during these years that actually had little to do with Zionism. A significant part of the activists in the New York Kehillah, founded in 1909, were Zionists, as was a large part of the faculty of the recently reorganized Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Zionists even appeared in the fortress of Reform Judaism,

the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. They declared there that Reform Judaism should adopt the Zionist credo in order to survive, and ended by causing a crisis that brought about the dismissal, in 1907, of three teachers from the College—three out of ten, almost one-third of the faculty.¹³ Later on, Zionists were prominent in the most impressive of all American Jewish initiatives of the World War I period, the American Jewish Congress.

The Change of Attitude Among American Anti-Zionists

It is usually thought that the Columbus Platform of 1937, established by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, marked a change in the attitude of the American Reform movement regarding Zionism, toward a position that, if not positive, was at least neutral.¹⁴ In fact, more than indicating a new position, the Columbus Platform signaled a process of change. The change of mind in the Reform movement, from the extremely negative resolution against Zionism adopted in 1897, was a very gradual development.¹⁵ It is true that in the early years of the century there were leading figures in the Reform movement who were already either unhappy with the existing anti-Zionist line or were declared Zionists. One of the founding fathers of the American Reform movement, Rabbi Bernhard Felsenthal, was a Zionist. The president of the CCAR from 1910 to 1912, Rabbi Maximilian Heller, was a very active member of the Federation of American Zionists.¹⁶ Nevertheless, until the 1940s a sizable part of the Reform movement and especially of its rabbinate—perhaps even the majority—was lukewarm, indifferent, or even antagonistic toward Zionism.¹⁷

Perhaps the Reform movement was not even the main sector in American Jewry where the modification from anti-Zionism to non-Zionism took place. It seems that the changing mood in Reform Jewry did not originate inside the movement itself, but rather reflected new positions evolving in American Jewry at large. During the first half of the twentieth century, there were at least three other groups in American Jewry where new considerations of Zionism were being elaborated.

One sector was the second-generation Jews, the children of the East European immigrants, already Americanized, working hard for their

social and economic improvement. They were as keen as the older German part of American Jewry about their American identity, but their interpretation of its meaning and of the subtle interplay of rights and duties it imposed on their Jewishness was rather diverse. For them, Zionism was as natural as anti-Zionism had been for the German strata. They were now the majority of American Jewry, and they established trends and dictated attitudes in congregations and communities. Their Zionism was no longer the Zionism of their parents; we may well assume that the Americanizing trends in Zionist thought were, in their eyes, highly attractive.

A second group, quite close to the first (but certainly not identical), was the religious Conservative movement in American Jewry, established in 1913. Its conception of Judaism (and of Jewish life in America) was developed at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where, as mentioned above, the American brand of cultural Zionism also had its origins. Zionism of the Americanized type was part of the Jewish self-definition of the Conservative movement, a fact whose importance was not only spiritual or ideological. American Jewry was gradually organizing itself along religious lines, into three main movements. The fact that one of them, the Conservative movement, was Zionistic per definition, established a broad and convenient channel for the penetration of Zionist ideas and interests into the American Jewish community.

The third group was, from an ideological point of view, perhaps the most interesting of all. A careful observation of attitudes toward Zionism shows that among the older, German strata of American Jewry there were many whose opinions regarding Zionism were far from similar to those found in the religious leadership of the Reform movement. Some of these Jews were among the most distinguished figures of the German-Jewish establishment in the United States.

When in 1907 Jacob H. Schiff severely rebuked Solomon Schechter for his Zionist declaration,¹⁸ none other than Schiff's closest associate in American Jewish activities, Louis Marshall, chose to express a divergent opinion. Marshall, it should be remembered, was a prominent figure in the newly established American Jewish Committee. Religiously he belonged to the Reform movement, and (like Schiff) was a leading member of Temple Emanu-el. Now, in an open letter to the editor of the *American Israelite*, the prestigious Reform weekly, he wrote:

. . . I cannot forgo the opportunity of inquiring in my individual capacity, whether you really deem it wise to attack Zionism with the malevolence and acrimony which you and others have occasionally evinced? . . . I am not a Zionist, and probably will never become a convert to Zionism, but I cannot fail to recognize the movement as one of tremendous importance, worthy of serious, patient and sympathetic study and investigation. . . . It has given birth to a manly Jewish consciousness, in refreshing contrast with the apologetic attitude which precedes it. . . . Political Zionism does not appeal to me, because in my judgment (though it may prove an erroneous one) it cannot be productive of practical results and will lead in the end to bitter disappointment.

And further on:

I am acquainted with many Zionists, whose Americanism cannot be successfully challenged, who are patriotic sons of the soil on which they were born. . . . To them Zionism is a dream, entirely consistent with their American actuality . . .¹⁹

An examination of Marshall's other utterances shows clearly that his opinions about Zionism were undergoing further development. "I am not a Zionist, certainly not a Nationalist. I am a Jew from conviction and sentiment . . . and as I grow older, the feelings of love and reverence for the cradle of our race increase in intensity," he wrote to Nathan Straus, in 1914.²⁰ In later letters, from the 1920s, he kept repeating that he was not a Zionist nor a Jewish nationalist. Nevertheless, he was drawn to activities that had a clearly Zionist or Jewish national character. The most outstanding of these initiatives was his participation in the enlarged Jewish Agency, which after many discussions and quite a number of near-failures, was formed in the summer of 1929.²²

One who did become a Zionist was Jacob H. Schiff. It happened in 1917, under the influence of the Balfour Declaration and the growing misery of East European Jewry, toward the end of the First World War. "Greatly more than I did when I first ceased my opposition to the Zionist Movement, do I feel now that the creation of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine is most desirable," he wrote to the anti-Zionist Reform rabbi David Philipson, in September 1918.²³ Schiff had long negotiations with the leadership of the American Zionist organization about becoming a member of the movement, which came to naught, mainly because of Brandeis's misgivings.²⁴

Marshall, Schiff, and with them the Strauses, the Sulzbergers, Cyrus Adler, and several other dignitaries, who together represented the

most active and articulate part of the German segment of American Jewry, represented the closest to a national leadership that American Jewry produced during the twentieth century. Although most of them belonged to the Reform movement, it seems that they were much more dynamic and open-minded in their reactions to trends and ideas in American Jewry than the rabbis who formed the religious leadership of Reform Judaism, many of them educated in the traditions of the German Reform movement. Diverse attitudes about Zionism were found in the same families. Nathan Straus was active in Palestine in the years before 1914 and defined himself in a way vaguely Zionist, while his brother Oscar was an anti-Zionist. Cyrus Sulzberger was a member of the Federation of American Zionists, while his uncle, Mayer Sulzberger, was active in the American territorialist movement. More than by ideologies, these men were activated by the necessities and the possibilities of Jewish public life in Palestine, but foremost in the United States. It was on that level, Jewish organizational initiatives in the United States, that a highly significant meeting between the American Zionists and the non-Zionist American leadership took place.

Zionists and Non-Zionists Meet in American Jewish Enterprises

Looking back, it appears that the American Zionists were extremely aware of the significance that the new direction of their Jewish communal activities held for American Jewry. When Judah L. Magnes gave up the position of secretary of the Federation of American Zionists in 1908, in order to concentrate on the formation of the New York Kehillah, he could not have been more explicit about his motivation.

I feel that I shall be abler to do more for our Federation and our movement if I am relieved of the duties which have been mine during the past three years. Our Zionism must mean for us Judaism in all of its phases, Zionism is a complete and harmonized Judaism. Nothing Jewish, whether it be the Jewish land, the Jewish language, the Jewish religion, the Jewish people, can be foreign to a Zionist.²⁵

Magnes's attitude was typical of those American Zionists who had adopted the cultural tendency. Others, such as Louis Lipsky (whose

Zionist position went more in the political direction), were critical both of the New York Kehillah and of Zionist participation in it.

On the theory of "going into the communities," or on the theory of Hebraic culture being essential if Zionism is to make any headway, a number of our influential Zionists have adopted a *golus* [Diaspora] program which absorbs them and makes it impossible to concern themselves with direct Zionist work. . . . It is a fundamental assumption of our movement that assimilation cannot be permanently checked in *golus*; that a national culture on national soil is the only alternative to the submergence of the Jews as such. But these friends have gone ahead, taking with them many of the rank and file, who have tackled the tremendous problem of education, communal organization, Hebraic culture among students, etc. Their activities have resulted in immediate loss to us of persuasive personalities.

Lipsky wrote this in 1914.²⁶

Lipsky was, of course, fighting a lost battle. By 1914, most American Zionists of whatever ideological orientation, together with the Poalei Zion activists (who usually kept apart from American Jewish "bourgeois" initiatives), were beginning the huge public effort toward the creation of the American Jewish Congress. The most far-reaching vision of the Congress was formulated in 1914 by Louis D. Brandeis: "The Congress is not an end in itself. It is an incident of the organization of the Jewish people, an instrument through which their will may be ascertained, and when ascertained, may be carried out." And further on: "The Congress is not to be an exalted mass-meeting. It is to be the effective instrument of organized Jewry of America."²⁷

It took the non-Zionists time to adapt to the Zionists, both to the aims of their Jewish public activities and (especially) to what might be seen as the Zionists' "style": the fact that the Zionists acted on a broad popular Jewish front, while the non-Zionists' preference was for discreet ways of influence. Commenting on the Yiddish press of New York, Marshall wrote to Solomon Schechter, in 1915, that "where unity and harmony should prevail, they sow the seeds of discord. Where calmness and self-control are required, they froth at the mouth. Where secret councils are indispensable, they demand mass-meetings, Jewish congresses, and loud vociferation. Men who should know better are carried away by this insanity."²⁸

Additionally, there was a significant segment in the older Jewish community that fought strenuously against the new influences chang-

ing the direction of American Jewry. Several of their representatives were members of the American Jewish Committee, in whose midst they tried to avoid what they considered the pro-Zionist attitudes of Marshall and others. The position of the Committee regarding Zionism, from its foundation in 1906 until the Ben-Gurion—Blaustein agreement in 1950, expresses a complex balancing act between the different tendencies inside the organization.²⁹ Several times, in the first part of the century, the anti-Zionist forces in the older segment of American Jewry tried to stop the growing influence of Zionists or pro-Zionists. The 1907 purge of the Hebrew Union College faculty can be seen as one of these occasions.³⁰ An effort to organize the Reform movement's anti-Zionists in 1918 was thwarted by Louis Marshall and Jacob H. Schiff.³¹ And finally, the formation of the American Council for Judaism, in 1942, was the most important effort of the older segment of American Jewry to oppose the by then overwhelming influence of Zionist ideas and activities in American Jewry—Zionist ideas and activities of the "Americanized" type described in this essay.³²

All of this adds to the understanding of the obstacles faced by those among the older leadership of American Jewry who chose the path of collaboration with the Zionists. It was a process that took many years and much conviction, and involved the gradual development of the new ideas and approaches that made it possible. The result was highly rewarding, even if the American Jewish notables who brought it about were hardly aware of the promise imbued in their labors: the maturation of an American Jewish self-definition broad enough to cover almost the whole of American Jewry.

Summing Up

It is worthwhile to note that so many of the trend-creating developments in American Jewry described above, on the ideological level, as well as in the organizational sphere, happened during the first two decades of the century—the period that has been designated as the age of optimism in American Jewry.³³ Patterns established in those earlier years continued at a later period, but the basic discussions about them were not again repeated.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, American Jewry certainly had a view about itself, although that view was still undergoing elaboration. One of its central ideas, shared by practically all sectors of American Jewry, was the belief in the country, its conditions and its institutions, and the hopes about the future of Jewish life in the United States. That belief was most clearly articulated in the writings and actions of the older segment of the community, but it was no less vibrant among the new Jewish immigrants, affirmed and reaffirmed day after day by the very fact of the growing Jewish immigration into the United States.

American Zionists, understanding the necessity to adapt Zionism to the realities of America and to the tenor of Jewish life there, accepted the premises that influenced the community. From a Zionist point of view, this meant a quite complex intellectual effort to adapt the principles of European Zionism—which actually were based on Jewish conditions almost opposite to those in the United States. But American Zionists went further. Riding the tide of Jewish optimism, they labored to infuse into the growing community their own conception about how American Jewry should define itself as a group, what ideological influences it should adopt, and toward what ideals and goals in modern Jewish life it should direct its promising energies. “Zionism plus Diaspora, Palestine plus America,” was the formulation that Friedlaender and his colleagues worked to infuse in the consciousness of the young American Jewish community. The ideological effort of that generation of American Zionists deserves to be recognized as one of the original elaborations of Zionist ideology in a more general sense.

On the other hand, the American Zionists were not acting in a vacuum. They found a community ready to consider their proposals. The meeting between Zionism and American Jewry has been described here as a process which worked in two directions: Zionism that became Americanized, and American Jewry that became “Zionized.” Considered in terms of modern Jewish history in general, that development was quite specific too. There were, it is true, “understandings” reached between sectors of both camps in other countries as well, but nowhere did its course run as deep nor was its influence felt more significantly than in the United States. The process that occurred on the American Jewish side toward its adaptation to Zionism should

be recognized as a creation not less original than the one brought up on the Zionists' side.

At the beginning of the century American Jewry was divided into two main groups, the so-called German and the so-called Russian Jews (a third group, the Sephardis, was small and, although interesting, had little influence). By the 1940s, the difference between both groups had almost disappeared, a result which had been influenced by many factors, including the openness of American conditions and the interruption of Jewish immigration to America after 1924. An additional factor, no doubt, was the elaboration of those ideological frames of reference that were common, if not to the whole of American Jewry, at least to a large part of it. And there seems to be no other value influencing the self-definition of so large a segment of American Jewry than the type of consensus that was created between Zionism and Jewish Americanism in the first part of the century. When in 1958 the Zionist Organization of America reformulated its ideological position toward Zionism and the State of Israel (written, significantly enough, by Mordecai M. Kaplan, the most important follower of the original generation of American cultural Zionists), it was actually the platform of American Jewry, and not only of American Zionism, that was elaborated.³⁴

Much attention has been paid in the present article to the ideological expressions of the rapprochement between Zionists and non-Zionists in the United States. This was mainly because the ideological dimension is easily identified and analyzed. Nevertheless, in the framework of these conclusions it should be stressed that the process happened also on the level of public Jewish activities, Zionist and otherwise. Furthermore, one might suggest that for the dynamics of the interaction between the two tendencies, the realm of public activities was perhaps even more important than the realm of ideologies. It was in the collaboration around Jewish public issues, in the United States and in Palestine, that the relationships between the two groups were developed, tested, fought out, and ultimately proved hugely successful. Behind the meeting between Zionists and non-Zionists in the United States there was an idea, an idea that developed slowly and sometimes even painfully, but which was served—indeed, pushed along—by the practical activities on the American Jewish scene where Zionists and non-Zionists learned to work together.

Lastly, we must ask how American Zionist ideology squared—if it squared at all—with the classical, European-inspired positions of Zionism. One may well wonder. In terms of European Zionist thought, American Zionism might have been considered as the outstanding example of *Gegenwartsarbeit*, of Zionists participating in and influencing a large Jewish community. Nevertheless, the balance that existed in most European Zionist organizations between activities in and for Palestine and local communal interests, was not (or could not be) upheld in the conditions of American Jewry. Geared to ideas and concepts that reflected the adaptation of American Jewry to the general environment, indeed, having contributed so much to the elaboration of these concepts, the balance between Judaism and Zionism in America tipped to the American side.

As already mentioned, European Zionist emissaries had a difficult time discovering what was wrong, in their view, with the movement in the United States. After all, American Zionists almost never gave the broader movement any trouble. American Zionism was and remained a large and relatively disciplined body in the World Zionist movement, even if there was a moment, in 1920–21, when thoughts about secession had been seriously considered. But the moment passed, the great figure capable of bringing it about—Brandeis—was forced out. American Zionism remained in the international organization, a large body, although a rather inert one, with a very low-key commitment to those issues which were vital for international Zionism, issues such as aliyah and a personal participation in the creation of a Jewish National Home in Palestine.

But then, suddenly, that inert mass was capable of arising like a roaring tiger, with unheard of and unthought of energy, able to mobilize hundreds of thousands of followers, Zionists and non-Zionists, Jews and even Gentiles, and to fight for a major issue in Jewish and Zionist life! It was that combination of power and powerlessness, that promise of harnessed energy the key to which was so elusive, that kept European Zionists wondering about American Zionism.

Only from an historical perspective, then, does it become understandable that three conditions had to be lined up regarding a given issue, in order to activate the strength imbued in American Zionism: the issue had to touch a positive chord in terms Zionistic, Jewish-American, and American-American. That was the other side of the

historical meeting between Zionism and Judaism in America. American Zionism had become inseparable from American Judaism, and consequently, from American life in general. Exactly as Brandeis had proclaimed back in 1915, American Zionists were among the best of American Jews, the most conscious, the most dedicated. But such a position had a price: their lack of participation in the development of the Jewish National Home in Palestine. Forty years after the establishment of the State of Israel, the imprint of American Jewry on Israeli society is certainly respectable. But it is much, much less than it might have been—considering the size, the power, and the influence of American Jewry—if American Zionism had not become so deeply American-oriented.

Notes

1. Their opinions are so different from present approaches that they deserve to be quoted. Oscar Handlin's: "Zionism was the outlet, particularly for the second generation. This group was especially perplexed, as all second generations were, by the question of their place in American culture, confused by specific problems of social and economic adjustment, and anxious over the meaning of anti-Semitism. Americans tended to be extremists in the world Zionist movement, in no small measure because they carried into it the whole burden of their worries and fears as American Jews." Handlin, *Adventure in Freedom* (New York, 1954), p. 217. And Will Herberg's: "... the second generation did indeed find itself in two 'civilizations,' but this duality was precisely what it was so eager to get rid of. . . . The characteristic response of the second generation was secularism. . . . Many of them became radicals and 'internationalists.' . . . Others, in a reaction against devaluation, became Zionists; their 'nationalism' was paradoxically also an effort to adjust themselves to America, where ethnic nationalism was a recognized feature of acculturation. Both radicalism and Zionism were second-generation phenomena." Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (Garden City, N.Y., 1960), p. 185.

2. After having pondered over many of such memoranda, it seems that the most impressive piece of that type of literature is the analysis of American Zionism written by Chaim Arlosoroff in 1929, and subsequently published in *Surveying American Zionism* (New York, 1929). Arlosoroff was one of the outstanding political and intellectual leaders of the Zionist movement in his day, head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency from 1931 until his untimely death in 1933. He spent several months in the United States in 1928-29, and his memorandum (actually, a long essay that covered, in its printed form, 35 pages) is one of the greatest examples of misperception I have read in Zionist literature. His conclusion was, typically, that the European leadership should take over the American Zionist organization, reorganize it, and direct it through intervention from outside, as the only way to "save" American Zionism from itself.

3. Open letter, August 8, 1907, *American Hebrew*, August 23, 1907, p. 385; Schechter's statement had also been published in the *American Hebrew*, in December 1906, and brought forth a long-drawn polemic. See "Zionism—a Statement," in Solomon Schechter, *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers*, 2d ed. (New York, 1959), pp. 91-104.

4. Ibid.
5. "The Jewish Problem—How to Solve It," in J. de Haas, *Louis D. Brandeis* (New York, 1929), pp. 170–190.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. *Americanism and Zionism* (New York, 1918); see also the collection of articles by Bernard A. Rosenblatt, *Social Zionism* (New York, 1919).
9. In more detail, see "Ahad-Ha'amism in American Thought," in J. Kornberg, ed., *Ahad Ha'am: At the Crossroads* (Albany, N.Y., 1983), pp. 133–141, 195–198.
10. Israel Friedlaender, "Zionism and Americanism," May 13, 1911, lecture, in M. Davis, "Israel Friedlaender's Minute Book of the Achavah Club (1909–1912)," *Mordecai M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1953), p. 205.
11. Ibid., p. 210.
12. *Past and Present* (Cincinnati, 1919), pp. x–xi.
13. See H. Parzen, "The Purge of the Dissents—Hebrew Union College and Zionism, 1903–1907," *Jewish Social Studies* 37 (1975): 291–322.
14. N. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 2d rev. ed. (Chicago, 1972), p. 103. Howard R. Greenstein, *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism* (Chico, Calif., 1981) thinks "that the controversy over Zionism did not reach its zenith with the passage of the Columbus Platform. . . . It was unquestionably a turning point in the reassessment of the merits of Jewish nationalism in Reform circles," but it also sowed the seeds of further discord" (p. 9).
15. *CCAR Yearbook*, vol. 7 (Montreal Conference, 1897), p. xli.
16. See Naomi W. Cohen, "The Reaction of Reform Judaism in America to Political Zionism," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 40 (1950–51): 361–394; E. Friesel, *The Zionist Movement in the United States 1897–1914* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1970), pp. 90–108, 161–168.
17. Howard R. Greenstein, in *Turning Point*, pp. 25–30, describes how much the Columbus resolution was rather a matter of chance than of deep-seated conviction.
18. See above, n. 3.
19. *American Hebrew*, September 20, 1907, p. 488.
20. January 20, 1914, in Ch. Resnikoff, ed., *Louis Marshall, Champion of Liberty*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 708.
21. See his most interesting letter to Julius Rosenwald, February 9, 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 763–764.
22. On the enlarged Jewish Agency, see M. I. Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (Garden City, N.Y., 1976), chap. 8; H. Parzen, "The Enlargement of the Jewish Agency, 1923–1929," *Jewish Social Studies* 39 (1977): 129–158; Y. Eilam, "Birth of the Agency," *Israel Year Book* (1980), pp. 51–58; copious documentary material on the discussions toward the formation of the Jewish Agency is found in the papers of Weizmann and of Marshall: *Louis Marshall, Champion of Liberty*, vol. 2, chap. 7; *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, vol. 12, ed. J. Freundlich, and vol. 13, ed. P. Ofer (Jerusalem 1977, 1978).
23. September 5, 1918, in *Correspondence on the Advisability of Calling a Conference for the Purpose of Combating Zionism* (New York, 1918), p. 5.
24. E. Friesel, "Jacob H. Schiff Becomes a Zionist: A Chapter in American-Jewish Self-Definition, 1907–1917," *Studies in Zionism* 5 (1982): 55–92.
25. *Maccabaeon*, August 1908, pp. 68–69.
26. L. Lipsky, "What Is Wrong with the Zionist Organization in America?" *Maccabaeon*, May 1914, p. 140; see also "What Ails the New York Kehillah," *ibid.*, December 1912, pp. 185–189.
27. "Jewish Rights," in J. de Haas, *Louis D. Brandeis*, pp. 226–228.

28. February 19, 1915, in: *Louis Marshall, Champion of Liberty*, vol. 2, p. 506.

29. See Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist* (Philadelphia, 1972), chaps. 6 and 12. The Blaustein—Ben-Gurion agreement is found in *American Jewish Yearbook* 53 (1952), pp. 564-568.

30. See above, n. 13.

31. See *Correspondence on the Advisability of Calling a Conference*.

32. The development is aptly described in Greenstein's *Turning Point*.

33. See in B. W. Korn, ed., *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus* (New York, 1976), pp. 131-155.

34. Mordecai M. Kaplan, "A Proposed Platform for the Greater Zionism," in *A New Zionism* (New York, 1959), pp. 187-189.

Evyatar Friesel teaches modern Jewish history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is the author of *The Zionist Movement in the United States, 1898-1914*, and *Zionist Policy After the Balfour Declaration, 1917-1922*.