The
American Jewish Archives
Journal

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The American Jewish Archives Journal

A Journal Devoted to the Preservation and Study of The American Jewish Experience

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Cover photo: Unveiling the gravestones of the JDC emissaries Professor Israel Friedlaender and Rabbi Bernard Cantor in the presence of Rabbi I.M. Kowalsky, JDC representative (with mustache and bow tie). Yarmolintsy, Ukraine. July 5, 1923. Credit: AJJDCArchives, New York

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To Our Readers . . .

As the twenty-first century experience continues to dawn, the twentieth century’s orb—which cast soothing light as well as destructive heat on humankind—slowly sets into the horizon of ages past. This phenomenon provides contemporary historians with an effectual tool to assist them in the work of reconstructing the past: perspective. This inevitable process will spawn new research and innovative analyses that seek to deepen and clarify our understanding of that eventful span of time.

This particular issue of our journal sheds light on the historical development of American Jewish culture during the twentieth century. In an important and pioneering volume on this subject, the historian Stephen J. Whitfield observed that while there are countless examples of how Jews labored to “reconcile the right to be equal with the option to be different” in twentieth century America, “there is no essential American Jewish culture.”1 This volume’s articles by Daniel Greene and Nathan Abrams offer readers two new lenses through which the struggle to mediate Jewishness and Americanism during the twentieth century can be examined.

Greene and Abrams analyze the work of Elliott Cohen (1899–1959), the founding editor of Commentary magazine. Prior to Commentary, Cohen served for a time as managing editor of the Menorah Journal, where his “Notes for a Modern History of the Jews,” were often controversial. There can be little doubt that when a history of the American Jewish press is one day written, Elliott Cohen’s work will play a significant role in the story of American Jewish intellectual life in the twentieth century. According to Howard M. Sacher, under Cohen’s leadership Commentary magazine explored practically every issue of significance affecting the lives of American Jews in the immediate aftermath of World War II.2 Cohen and the remarkable list of colorful authors who contributed to Commentary during those years explored a wide array of intellectual topics, including politics, sociology, and literature. In doing so, these writers gave tangible expression to the ways in which a generation of secularized American Jews negotiated their contending personal identities as both American intellectuals and American Jews. It is in the very suspension of these two ideals that we discover the complex character of twentieth century American Jewish culture.
Documents constitute the heart of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. Our institutional efflorescence is an outgrowth of the AJA's rich and fertile collection of records and documents on North American Jewry. The discovery of new documents that shed light on significant historical events is particularly gratifying, and this journal continues to fulfill the promise of the founding director of the American Jewish Archives, Jacob Rader Marcus (1896–1995): “We seek to ascertain the facts as they actually are; and we desire to promote the study of those materials which will further a knowledge of the American Jew.” In its “Documents” section, this journal demonstrates its commitment to providing our readers with access to previously unpublished records of consequence. In some instances, the documents we publish exemplify a particularly rich genre of historical data that await students and researchers who visit the AJA (and, to be sure, other archival repositories). Other times, the “Documents” section of our journal contains material that enriches or even revises our understanding of various historical events and episodes, as is the case with the documents published in this issue.

Professor Michael Beizer of Hebrew University brings us back to the heinous murders of Professor Israel Friedlaender and Rabbi Bernard Cantor on July 5, 1920. These two men were the first American Jews to be killed while on an official mission to Poland and Russia, which was sponsored by the Joint Distribution Committee. In an impassioned memorial address for the two slain leaders, the renowned Yiddish orator, Zvi Hirsch Masliansky, lamented: “Yisroel, vu-bistu, vu-bistu, akhine Yisroel?” (Where are you, Israel, our brother, where are you?). For more than eighty years, many historians assumed that Friedlaender’s biographer was correct in assuming that “clearer details about Friedlaender’s death will, in all probability, never be obtained.” Beizer’s documentary analysis revisits this assumption by providing fascinating details about the grisly crimes that offer an explanation as to why the facts about these murders may have been deliberately obfuscated in the tragedy’s aftermath.

Finally, we draw attention to Kevin Proffitt’s memorial tribute to Ms. Fannie Zelcer, the late Chief Archivist of the American Jewish Archives. Ms. Zelcer served the AJA for thirty-two years, and it is impossible to summarize her professional contributions adequately. During the time of her employment, the AJA literally grew from a
To Our Readers

relatively small archival holding into the largest catalogued collection of documentary evidence on the history of North American Jewry in the world. Fannie Zelcer’s job description sounds deceptively simple: she was responsible for preserving the AJA’s holdings, organizing them, and making them readily accessible to all those who wanted to use them. The AJA’s archival infrastructure, as it currently exists, was put in place by Fannie (she preferred to be called by her first name). “If it’s here,” she would intone, “I’ll find it.” And she did so time and again.

Yet Fannie’s most memorable contribution was her persona. She proffered succor and support to countless researchers and hundreds of rabbinic students who spent time at the AJA. Chances are those who used the AJA when Fannie Zelcer was the chief archivist left feeling as though they had made a friend for life.

In 1941, Jacob Rader Marcus urged the Jewish Publication Society of America to strive mightily to publish the volumes that “the scholars we have bred and the scholars we have sheltered” would soon be writing.5 Seven years later, with the inauguration of the AJA’s semi-annual journal, Marcus gave birth to a new venue for promoting a knowledge of American Jewish history. As the 350th anniversary of Jewish communal settlement approaches, this journal anticipates making the work of a new generation of scholars accessible—in print and in electronic format—to all those who are seeking a deeper understanding of the American Jewish experience.

GPZ
Cincinnati, Ohio

NOTES
5. Ibid., 105.
Elliot E. Cohen (1899-1959)
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)
ARTICLES

“Israel! What a Wonderful People!”: Elliot Cohen’s Critique of Modern American Jewry 1924–1927
Daniel Greene

Between 1924 and 1927, Elliot Cohen critiqued American Jewish life for the Menorah Journal in a series of twenty-two magazine columns, each titled “Notes for a Modern History of the Jews.” In these columns, Cohen remarked on Jewish life by bringing together already published items from the Jewish press, announcements from Jewish organizations, and bits and pieces from rabbis’ sermons. Cohen never interjected his own voice into this series. Instead, he highlighted contradiction and ambiguity in his source material by carefully and often ironically juxtaposing quotations to construct a fragmented narrative that mocked the prevailing concerns of American Jewish community leaders and rabbis. Moreover, these painstakingly crafted columns sought to disprove American Jewish leaders’ grandiose claims about American Jews’ exceptionalism. Cohen’s columns combated stereotypes about Jews, questioned leaders’ priorities, and intended to capture the lived complexity of Jewish life in America. “Notes for a Modern History of the Jews,” while often humorous or satirical, represented Cohen’s search for “the truth” of American Judaism in the 1920s. In this search for truth, as I argue, Cohen sought to negotiate the meaning of modern Jewish life. In doing so, he exposed Jews’ everyday existence to be both as mundane and as extraordinary as that of their American contemporaries.

Cohen opened his first “Notes for a Modern History of the Jews” column in the February 1924 Menorah Journal with the following stream of previously published extracts:

“The Jews exist to safeguard monotheism for the world.”
—Rabbi Nathan Krass... Joseph Diamond and ‘Whitey’
Diamond have confessed to planning and helping execute the robbery and murder of two bank messengers in Borough Park, Brooklyn. Ellis S. Joseph, the world’s foremost collector of rare animals, has arrived in New York with an assortment of 58 Australian camels, 97 kangaroos, 3 lions, 12 Tasmanian devils, 12 wombats, a leopard, a tiger, and many snakes. Miss Sophia Waldman of the George Washington University Girls Rifle Teams scored 100 in a match with the University of Maryland. Of two thousand actors engaged on the legitimate stage last year two hundred were Jews. The whist team of the Cosmos Club, claimants of the championship of Roxbury and Dorchester (Mass.), challenge any team. Harry Miller and H. Flashner are the captain and manager. Any club desiring games please address the Cosmos Club, care of Jewish Welfare Center, Intervale St., Roxbury. Nathan Rothschild, head of the London branch of the famous banking family, died recently leaving a collection of 70,000 fleas to the British museum.

After contrasting Rabbi Krass’s lofty understanding of Jews’ purpose in life with Jewish criminals, animal collectors, rifle champions, performers, card players, and flea collectors, Cohen continued on for another two pages, juxtaposing quotations on weighty matters of science with stories of Jewish strongmen, incidents of anti-Semitism, and with the “Santa Claus craving” common among Jewish children.\(^1\) Such pastiche characterized Cohen’s work during his tenure as the managing editor of the *Menorah Journal* between 1925 and 1931.\(^2\)

Cohen’s tone of criticism was not unique in his day, nor was the technique of combining already published fragments to create a new whole. Cohen idolized perhaps the greatest American satirist of the 1920s, *American Mercury* editor H. L. Mencken.\(^3\) In the first issue of the *American Mercury*, published just one month before Cohen’s first “Notes” installment, Mencken authored his first “Americana” column, which extracted items from local presses in various states and coupled these items with Mencken’s characteristically biting commentary.\(^4\) Mencken was fiercely iconoclastic in these columns, lashing out at individuals and institutions that violated his strong sense of right and wrong.\(^5\) Cohen moved one step beyond his hero’s technique, removing his own voice entirely and letting the carefully placed press items comment on each other. The technique caught on elsewhere: three years after Cohen’s final “Notes” column appeared, novelist John
Dos Passos used a similar style in his *U.S.A.* trilogy. In sections entitled "Newsreels," Dos Passos combined popular song lyrics, full paragraphs from newspaper stories, and headlines of the day, reflecting the rapid pace and disjuncture common to modern society in the 1920s as well as the vast combination of cultural sources being consumed by modern Americans at any given moment. Dos Passos commented on these "Newsreels": "Everything must go in. Songs and slogans, political aspirations and prejudices, ideals, hopes, delusions, frauds, crackpot notions out of the daily newspapers." Cohen's works reflected a similar desire to include the highest hopes and most amusing and disturbing delusions of American Jewish life.

While Cohen's "Notes" columns surely took inspiration from Mencken and may have foreshadowed Dos Passos's "Newsreels," there is no evidence to suggest that Cohen knew of his contemporary Walter Benjamin's effort to produce a work of history consisting entirely of quotations. In the ideal manifestation of Benjamin's ambition, the historian's charge would be to judiciously combine already existing sources and to let this evidence stand on its own without qualification by the compiler. Cohen employed a similar strategy albeit on a smaller scale, initiating his "Notes" columns three years before Benjamin began to work on his own compilation project. It is doubtful, however, that Cohen ever intended to move beyond his careful collection of "Notes" to actually write a modern history of the Jews. Instead, these *Menorah Journal* columns are, and were intended to be, the final published product of Cohen's efforts.

Cohen's columns deserve attention not only because of his pointed critique of American Jewry, but also because of the form that he adopted to articulate his opinions. As they bear similarity to other literary works produced during the 1920s and 1930s, "Notes for a Modern History of the Jews" also resemble a quintessentially modern form of cultural production emerging in the visual arts during what James Clifford has called the "surrealist twenties." Guided by his
incisive wit, Cohen’s juxtaposition of artifact quotations used authors’ own intended words to carry out a “subversive cultural criticism.”11 Reminiscent of cubism in the way that they take decontextualized “scraps” from already published mass media to compile a new whole, Cohen’s columns also are akin to photomontage. Like photomontages—compositions of manipulated photographic elements that transcend “the limits of the straight photograph”—Cohen’s columns startle the viewer/reader by presenting words in new and unexpected formats. In describing photomontage, curator Matthew Teitelbaum has explained that “by dramatically repositioning various figures and objects, montage suggests new paradigms of authority and influence.” Such repositioning calls into question each individual object and its relationship to the other included elements. “In this sense, among others,” Teitelbaum has asserted, “montage practice is about radical realignments of power.”12 Cohen’s goals in compiling these columns—undermining simplistic stereotypes about Jews, critiquing the American rabbinate, and questioning the priorities of American Jewry as a whole—all contributed to his desire for a “radical realignment” of American Jewish life.

By positioning himself as the compiler of “truth”—after all, he was only quoting others’ words—Cohen sought to expose the false rhetoric endemic to so much of American Jewish life. Seemingly adopting a radically empiricist position, Cohen created through re-use. Although the individual items on their own may have appeared randomly chosen or, worse, worthless, when carefully combined with other printed artifacts they took on a new life more powerful than any critique Cohen ever produced in his own words.

In order to understand the context for Cohen’s “Notes for a Modern History of the Jews” columns, it is necessary first to examine Cohen’s background and earlier writings for the *Menorah Journal.*13 Elliot Ettelson Cohen’s upbringing differed markedly from that of many early-twentieth-century Jewish intellectuals. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, some of whom would come to be known as the “New York Intellectuals,” Cohen was neither raised nor educated in New York.14 Born in Iowa in 1899 and raised in Mobile, Alabama, Cohen, described as a “prodigy from birth,” matriculated to Yale at age fifteen.15

Cohen would later deny that his pedigree gave him a different perspective than his peers, noting that, like many of his
"Israel! What a Wonderful People!"

contemporaries in the New York intellectual scene, "There was only one thing important in my family. Books." Cohen's Jewish upbringing, though, was more complicated than he lets on. His scholarly father, an immigrant to the United States, opened a dry-goods store in Mobile. The elder Cohen studied Jewish texts at home, but also conducted business on the Sabbath. Other tensions between maintaining religious observance and accommodating to American ways pervaded Cohen's childhood home to the extent that he emerged, in the words of historian Lauren B. Strauss, "deeply scornful of both Reform and Orthodox Judaism, charging the first with displaying overweening zeal in imitating the trappings of American life and the second with spiritual stagnation." This dissatisfaction with all branches of religious Judaism, as we will later see, would inform both Cohen's early *Menorah Journal* writings and his "Notes for a Modern History of the Jews" columns.

Despite his denials, Cohen likely experienced his outsider status acutely. As journalist and Cohen's contemporary Midge Decter later suggested (although she remembered Cohen as one year younger than he actually was), "To be a fourteen-year-old who goes to college is traumatic. To be a fourteen-year-old Jew from Mobile who goes to Yale is triply traumatic."

Cohen, then, was probably always somewhat estranged from the mainstream path not only of young American intellectuals, but also of young Jewish intellectuals in the 1910s and 1920s. As historian Paul Mendes-Flohr has written, "It is from this estrangement that the stranger's social objectivity emerges, for objectivity, as conceived by [Georg] Simmel, rests in a normative distance—a detachment from the norms which permits one to discern the formal structure of the relations governed by those norms." Cohen's presence at the same institutions as leading Jewish intellectuals coupled with his simultaneous distance from their more typical Jewish upbringings in New York City, as we will later see, would provide him with just enough social objectivity and distance to effectively and devastatingly critique American Jewish experiences in his contributions to the *Menorah Journal*.

Cohen served as the president of the Yale chapter of the Menorah Association in 1917-18, during his senior year. The Menorah Association, first founded at Harvard in 1906, charged itself with "the promotion, in American colleges and universities, of the study of
Jewish history, culture, and problems, and the advancement of Jewish ideals. The expressly stated mission of the Menorah Association was to foster a Jewish cultural renaissance through both publications and campus-based societies that promoted intellectual Jewish interests. In 1915, the Menorah Association began publishing the *Menorah Journal*, which quickly became the most important English-language journal of Jewish opinion. Within the pages of the *Menorah Journal*, intellectuals attempted to advance understandings of the Jewish past and self-consciously debated the conditions of modern world Jewry.

Cohen's first published *Menorah Journal* article, "The Promise of the American Synagogue," won the award for the best essay written by a member of a collegiate Menorah society in 1917 and reflected his disdain for both the Reform and Orthodox movements. In the essay, Cohen, then only eighteen years of age, argued that Judaism must "appeal strongly to the modern man" or face doom. Orthodox Judaism faced the greatest future danger, Cohen argued, because its practices had become "foreign to modern American conditions." Reform Judaism confronted a different, but "equally gloomy" plight because social functions and charity services had begun to stand in for religious understanding.

Cohen argued that, in order to become more modern, religion had to become more "democratic," by which he meant that Judaism had to find a way to appeal to a larger portion of American Jews, many of whom had the choice to disregard their religious background in favor of assimilation. Judaism could become well suited to this challenge, Cohen claimed, if synagogues and rabbis made some modifications to acclimate to modern conditions. Echoing Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan's rhetoric, Cohen described the ideal synagogue as "the community center of all Jewish activities." And, Cohen emphasized that the most necessary quality for a rabbi was sincerity. Indeed, the successful rabbi to the modern Jew would have to be a sage, a saint, and a proficient executive all rolled into one.

After graduating at age eighteen, Cohen remained at Yale for five years as a graduate student in English. The near impossibility of a Jew gaining an appointment to a university English department in the 1920s probably contributed to Cohen's failure to pursue his dissertation as avidly as he otherwise might have. Cohen left Yale in 1923 and found his niche in New York, where he began to work at the *Menorah Journal* in April 1924 and served as managing editor from June 1925 until September 1931. He later would become the founding
editor of *Commentary* magazine, holding that post from 1945 until his death in 1959.

At the *Menorah Journal*, Cohen nurtured many young writers including Lionel Trilling. Years later, Trilling's wife Diana claimed, "Elliot quickly rescued [the *Menorah Journal*] from the parochialism into which it had settled under its previous editor, Henry Hurwitz. The magazine remained a Jewish magazine but he rid it of its insistent sectarianism and made it into a widely read journal of intellectual opinion."24 Despite Diana Trilling's bold claim, the *Menorah Journal* already had established a distinguished reputation by the early 1920s and did not require "rescuing" when Hurwitz hired Cohen. Nonetheless, the quality of the magazine's content improved during Cohen's tenure. Cohen became a part of a cadre of editors, including Lionel Trilling, Marvin Lowenthal, and Herbert Solow, who brought a profound intellectual vibrancy that the journal had lacked before Cohen's tenure as managing editor. During the seven years that he edited the magazine, the *Menorah Journal*'s focus shifted from reporting on campus-based activities to promoting works by young Jewish artists and writers recruited by Cohen.25

Reflecting on his years working under him at the *Menorah Journal*, Lionel Trilling remembered Cohen as a genius, the greatest teacher he had ever known, and—perhaps remembering his "Notes" columns specifically—as a man obsessed with the "subtle interrelations that exist between seemingly disparate parts of culture."26

Most often, Cohen seized upon the disparate parts of Jewish culture in his "Notes" columns to express his vigorous disdain for the American Reform rabbinate. He had, in fact, critiqued the rabbinate before ever setting foot in the magazine's offices. In 1922, Cohen wrote to Hurwitz regarding the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) annual conference in Cape May, New Jersey: "I wasn’t exactly optimistic when I arrived—but if anyone had told me what the thing was really going to be like ahead of time, I would have branded him as a base slanderer of the Jewish people and the human race in general." Just twenty-three years of age at the time, Cohen claimed to know "pretty exactly" the problems of American Jewry. "And I'd like to get a chance," Cohen rather arrogantly notified Hurwitz, "to tell the three or four other intelligent Jews in this country what I found out." Cohen promised his critique would be "intemperate, malicious[,] violent and altogether impolitic and inconsiderate."27
Cohen had no easy time writing the article he promised, confessing to Hurwitz three years later: “The thing has spoiled my days and haunted my night.” Nonetheless, Cohen eventually produced an article that well articulated his own view of the American Reform rabbinate. He labeled the modern Jewish era “The Age of Brass,” explaining, “By an Age of Brass we mean simply an age that substitutes rhetoric for knowledge, bold assertions for learning, vainglorious pretensions for soundly-based convictions, bluster for strength, and braggadocio for an inwardly felt security.” In the article, Cohen attacked virtually all Jewish leaders as vacuous, narcissistic, and shallow, including those involved in business, social services, and religion. Cohen claimed that he did not want to blame “the present low state of the Jewish life in America” on the rabbis, but, in almost the same breath, indicted the American rabbinate for “a too meek acquiescence in the degradation of the rabbinical function to that of a spokesman—i.e., mouthpiece—of the ignorance, ambitions, and fears of the influential Jewish laity.” As in his earlier *Menorah Journal* articles, Cohen expressed his longing for sincere leadership by the rabbinate. This leadership, in Cohen’s ideal, would emerge as a product of a vibrant intellectual and cultural renaissance that defined the Menorah’s mission.

Cohen also moved beyond his indictment of rabbis in “The Age of Brass” to write a searing critique of American Jewish life. For example, he revealed his distaste for the American Jewish press, which, he argued, uniformly and blindly celebrated Jewish achievement. He mocked the “interminable” American-Jewish weeklies:

> By a logic of which only editors of Jewish weeklies are capable they advance Judaism and promote Jewish-Gentile understanding by printing accounts of how Jacob Dupkin, who once owned only one cart of junk, now owns practically all the junk there is, and of how Hattibelle Levine is assisting civilization by editing scenarios for the Goldilocks Film Corporation.

Cohen claimed that these celebrations of Jewish materialism and achievement came from fully Americanized Jews who had little knowledge of Jewish religion or culture, the things that he argued truly matter to Jewish continuity. The glorification of such empty
achievements led Cohen to stress the need for "a compensatory mechanism" to counteract the utter lack of meaning in so many American Jewish lives.

Where "The Age of Brass" attacked with anger and vituperation, "Notes for a Modern History of the Jews" worked by allusion and humor. As Lionel Trilling later remembered, "[Cohen] loved grace of all kinds, especially the grace of wit, and he himself was the wittiest man we shall ever know." This is especially vigorous praise, considering that Cohen produced these columns during some of Mencken's most productive years at the American Mercury. While Mencken's caustic humor usually came in his own voice, Cohen's came from laborious cutting and pasting of the contemporary sources of American Jewry, including most often the press and rabbinical sermons. Cohen's primary themes—undermining stereotypes about Jews, critiquing the American rabbinate, and questioning the priorities of American Jewry—were repeated over and over again in his "Notes" columns, despite the lack of a coherent narrative in his work.

One of Cohen's overt goals in these columns was to undermine stereotypes of Jews that contributed to anti-Semitism, an urgent task in an era of resurgent immigration restriction, anti-radicalism, and Anglo-Saxonism. The Ku Klux Klan and the notoriously anti-Semitic Henry Ford made appearances in Cohen's first "Notes" installment of February 1924:

"We Jews are happy in America and contented with conditions. We don't care for Ford and the Ku Kluxes. We don't notice them."—Louis Marshall. "Louis Marshall devoted a large part of his annual report as President of the American Jewish Committee to a spirited attack on the Ku Klux Klan."—The American Israelite.

Although the reader's first reaction to such an obvious contradiction may be a disbelieving shake of the head, Cohen's fear about American anti-Semitism underlies this couplet of quotations. As he exposed the contradictions in the rhetoric of one of American Jewry's most outspoken leaders, Cohen also suggested that deflecting attention from the Klan could not mask real anxieties.

Cohen derided not only anti-Semitic organizations in the United States, he also combated specific, often age-old, stereotypes aimed at
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Jews. For example, Cohen followed a quote from a non-Jewish business owner who had “never found [Jews] remarkable for cleanliness” with the following: “The president of the Pennsylvania State Association of Master Plumbers recently said that Jewish young men are the most scrupulously clean in the United States, judging from the amount of shower baths and fixtures sold to Jewish institutions.” In this juxtaposition, the absurdity of the “evidence” for Jews’ superior cleanliness is exceeded only by that of the claim that Jews are dirtier than others. Only if one can believe the premise that sales of plumbing fixtures to Jews “proves” their cleanliness, Cohen has asserted, can one accept the harmful assertion about Jews being a dirty people.

An avid sports fan, Cohen saved his most vigorous attacks on anti-Semitism for the stereotype of Jewish men as weak and unathletic. Nativist sociologist Edward Ross, for example, wrote in 1913 that, “Hebrews are the polar opposite of our pioneer breed,” and described Jews as “undersized,” “weak-muscled,” and “exceedingly sensitive to pain.” Cohen’s columns, in response to such beliefs, are littered with instances of Jewish physical triumphs in track and field, football, wrestling, and boxing. Most common were simple reports of male athletic prowess. In the February 1925 “Notes” column, for example, Cohen included three items consecutively that announced Louis (Kid) Kaplan’s featherweight championship, Abe Goldstein’s loss of the bantamweight championship, and Benny Leonard’s lightweight championship. Cohen most likely focused on Jewish fighters so often in order to emphasize Jewish men’s strength and athleticism, undermining the claim that Jewish men were feminine and weak. Cohen’s focus on Jewish athletic triumph accomplished even more than negating a stereotype in the realm of athletics. For, as Sander Gilman has persuasively argued, the stereotype of Jewish weakness often stands in for beliefs about “Jews’ inability to serve as a citizen.” By highlighting Jewish athletic triumphs, then, Cohen also asserted that Jewish men were potentially as strong as all other American laborers, and, should the call come, would serve in the military just as well as any other American citizen.

Cohen’s combating of anti-Semitic stereotypes is also notable in that it seems to be directed simultaneously towards a non-Jewish readership and towards fostering Jewish pride.

While Cohen targeted many snippets at undermining anti-
Semitism, he directed the majority of his “Notes” columns to attacking grandiose claims to Jewish exceptionalism or to questioning the priorities of his Jewish readership. Cohen opened his June 1925 “Notes for a Modern History of the Jews” column, for example, by contrasting the *American Hebrew’s* declaration of “sound and progressive” American Judaism with press notices about an Easter egg hunt for Jewish children at a temple in Alabama and an intermarriage performed jointly by a minister and a rabbi in St. Louis.43

In a “Notes” column published the previous winter, Cohen quoted Rabbi Stephen S. Wise’s claim that: “Wherever a Jew lives, Judaism is on trial; by every act of the Jew Israel is placed in the balance. Every Jew, Atlas-like, bears upon his shoulders the burden of the whole world’s Jewry.” Characteristically, Cohen found a suitably ridiculous item to “demonstrate” Wise’s understanding of the “burdens” of being Jewish: “Lee Foster Hartman, member of the Mah Jong Standardization Committee, is the author of *Standardized Mah Jong*, the first volume to present the American Code of Laws for Mah Jong.”44 In employing such juxtapositions, Cohen argued that, despite claims to the contrary, Judaism was no more “sound and progressive” than any other American religion, and that the “burdens” of being Jewish, although felt acutely by some, were no more important than the standard rules of a leisure pastime for others.

Although ironic, often damning juxtapositions dominated Cohen’s columns, there was clearly much more to “Notes for a Modern History of the Jews” than mockery and humor. By including disturbing news about Jewish crime, everyday stories of Jewish accomplishments, and amusing items about the responsibilities of writing the rules for Mah Jong alongside with grandiose claims about the well-being of American Jewry, Cohen hoped to represent American Jews as similar to other Americans. Lionel Trilling later explained Cohen’s philosophy: “When it came to the Jewish present, we undertook to normalize it by suggesting that it was not only as respectable as the present of any other group but also as foolish, vulgar, complicated, impossible and promising.”45 Cohen’s attempt to blur distinctions between Jewish Americans and other Americans speaks directly to one of the most urgent issues for intellectuals involved with the *Menorah Journal* during the 1920s. In an era of heightened anti-Semitism and increased suspicion against many ethnic Americans, Menorah intellectuals sought to demonstrate that
Jews could develop and nurture a particular Jewish culture while remaining patriotic United States citizens within a pluralist American society. Cohen's montages served this purpose well by including items about Jews' active participation in such secular "American" pursuits as the Boy Scouts, lifeguarding, and playing the harmonica. Although seemingly chosen at random, Cohen's carefully considered inclusion of such pastimes portrayed Jews as well-acculturated American citizens, some of whom remained interested in Jewish culture and some of whom did not. At all times, though, Cohen strove to reject all claims that questioned Jewish loyalty to America.

Acceptance of a pluralist American society, however, does seemingly contradict Jews' belief in being the chosen people of God. Historian Arnold Eisen has argued that Jewish intellectuals responded to this dilemma of inclusive American pluralism versus Jews' special status by substituting "a secular reinterpretation of chosenness which emphasized the Jew's role as perpetual critic and outsider." Cohen fits this model of a critical intellectual well, always remaining outside of the mainstream. Norman Podhoretz, who became the editor of *Commentary* in 1960, commented on the position of Jewish intellectuals, writing, "They did not feel that they belonged to America or that America belonged to them." And, while Cohen remained outside of mainstream America, his experiences also were somewhat marginal from that of the Jewish mainstream. As historian Alan M. Wald has noted, Cohen and the group of young Jewish intellectuals whom he attracted to the *Menorah Journal* "had set down roots in the Jewish experience, although in a way that kept most distanced from official Jewish institutions and conventional religious practices." Cohen responded to this sense of alienation as a Jewish intellectual by mocking Jews at both extremes—those who claimed Jewish distinctiveness above all else and those who championed assimilation too vigorously. By debunking the beliefs of those at each extreme, Cohen hoped to articulate the possibility of coexistence between American universalism and Jewish particularity.

Even as he hoped to normalize the Jewish experience and thus legitimate Jews as Americans, Cohen continued to criticize relentlessly the priorities of American Jews. Country clubs, fund-raising drives, and Jewish Christmas celebrations were some of Cohen's favorite targets to demonstrate the excessive materialism and waywardness
endemic to American Jewry. The examples are numerous. Consider the following as representative of Cohen’s critique. In a 1924 “Notes for a Modern History of the Jews” Cohen allowed the following item to stand on its own without comment from surrounding snippets: “With four country clubs to its credit, Philadelphia Jewry is certainly entitled to rank as a leading Jewish center.”—Jewish Exponent. Just more than one year later, in an extended quotation from the Kansas City Jewish Chronicle about David A. Brown, an ice and ice cream manufacturer and powerful fund-raiser for Jewish causes, Cohen’s choice of excerpt emphasized American Jewry’s cultural and intellectual impoverishment: “We don’t know how much Talmud Dave Brown knows, or how steeped he is in Jewish theology, but never did any learned rabbi drive home in more understandable language the real and fundamental tenets of the Jewish faith. . . . [Through his fund-raising efforts,] he is going to show every other business man how to be a real, honest-to-God JEW.”

In one of the more absurd juxtapositions included in his montages, Cohen quoted a non-Jewish doctor’s claim that the Jew’s nose “always will be indicative of his superior intelligence, of mature intellectuality, ofsteadfastness and will-power.” Rather than ranting against a pseudo-scientific argument that attributed Jewish intellectuality to the shape of the characteristic Jewish nose, Cohen choose to undermine the idea that Jews were intellectually superior at all. He directly followed the excerpt about the Jewish nose with:

“A party of unusual variety as parties go, was given at the home of Mr. and Mrs. L. Geo. Feinstein, Saskatoon, Sask., on Sunday, March 9th. There were twenty-five married couples each of whom were dressed as children, the men in knee pants, blouses and ribbon ties, the ladies with short dresses, hair ribbons and short socks. A wonderful evening was spent in playing children’s games and dancing. The prize for the funniest ‘boy’ was awarded to Mr. A. Gearman, a youth of 280 pounds and six feet four inches tall. He received a big toy balloon, while Mrs. Jay White, formerly of Toledo, O., was the cutest ‘kid’ and received six suckers. A Dutch lunch was served with the ‘children’ all sitting on the floor of the drawing room. The hostess received her guests in a short shell pink silk crepe dress, short pink socks and a large pink satin bow.”—Toledo
With such outlandish parties occupying Jewish men and women's time, Cohen seems to ask, how could one believe in Jews' "superior intellect," or "mature intellectuality"? And, if such claims were belied by evidence of Jewish adults dressing as children for a "wonderful evening" of entertainment, they also contradicted the doctor's pseudo-scientific claims about the shapes of Jewish noses leading to all Jewry's superior intellect.54

In a column published six months later, Cohen revisited claims about the Jewish nose: "Charles Wolf of Birmingham, Ala., has gone to Dr. Henry Shireson of Chicago to have his Jewish nose remodelled [sic]. 'No one with a Jewish nose,' he says, 'can earn a living in Birmingham; no person looking Jewish has any chance of a position in the public institutions.'55 The stereotype had turned negative. Despite Cohen's claims to its absurdity, prejudice about Jewish appearance remained a central marker of Jewish difference, such that Jews like Wolf resorted to surgery to change their own appearance. Even as he attacked the spurious anti-Semitic belief about Jewish noses, Cohen lamented that many Jewish people not only had taken drastic measures in response to such prejudice, but also may have even internalized these claims themselves.

Jews' excessive and misguided materialism also reappeared often throughout Cohen's critiques. Perhaps one of his most damning indictments of Jewish materialism came in his October 1925 column:

"The synagogue is Judaism's shrine, to which all Jewry can freely come and lift its soul to God. It is not the luxury of the few, but, in spirit of Rab Hana, it throws open its door and proclaims, 'All ye who hunger, come and partake.' "—Rabbi David de Sola Pool. ** * Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur Services, B'Nai B'rith Hall, 9th and Union Streets (Los Angeles, Calif.). Reservations can be made at the B'Nai B'rith Hall, or California Jewish Review. Tickets are now on sale at the following places: Gittelson Bros. Theater Ticket Agencies, Lanhershim Hotel, Biltmore Hotel. Also Rubin's Theater Ticket Agency, Alexandria Hotel. Seats, $5, $7.50 and $10.—California Jewish Review.56

Not only were rabbis hypocrites, but the priorities of American Jewry
had become misguided. The spirit of openness and acceptance that should have characterized American Jewry, Cohen implied, had given way to crass materialism, as evidenced by the prohibitively expensive ticket prices ensuring that only a certain class of Jew could attend temple services on the most holy days of the year.

Finally, Cohen argued that most American Jews were in grave danger of complete assimilation, which Menorah Association members understood as the loss of Jewish cultural distinctiveness. In February 1926, Cohen juxtaposed the following four items to open his column:

"The future of Judaism in America belongs to that branch which accommodates itself best to American life. An American Judaism is in the making."—Rabbi Barnett R. Brickner.

"The Christmas season should mean as much to the Jew as to the Christian."—Rabbi Nathan Krass.

"Jesus and I are spiritual brothers."—Rabbi Alexander Lyons.

"In essence the spirit of Chanukah and the spirit of Christmas are identical."—Rabbi Ferdinand M. Isserman.

Cohen lambasted the erosion of Jewish identity and once again attacked an American rabbinate too willing to accommodate the Christian majority.

Like many who published in the *Menorah Journal* during its heyday, Cohen longed for the development of a more meaningful American Jewish culture. The Menorah intellectuals sought to prevent assimilation by initiating a Jewish cultural renaissance. Cohen realized that this call for a renaissance meant forging a Jewish culture compatible with American freedoms. But how to accommodate American ways yet resist cultural absorption? At this stage in his career, Cohen found it easier to mock Jews' tendency to assimilate rather than to explain how a rebirth of Jewish culture could be achieved. The montage form of critique itself was perfect for exploring others' absurdities, but offered no way to explicate the hard choices between assimilation and revitalization.

Seven years before he began his "Notes" project, and while still an undergraduate at Yale, Cohen had attempted to explain his vision for positive change in his 1917 Menorah prize-winning essay. Most likely influenced by *Menorah Journal* articles by Horace M. Kallen, Randolph

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S. Bourne, and John Dewey, among others, Cohen wrote:

Are we proposing to nurture in each city a culture foreign to the culture of the United States; shall we develop a culture out of step with the general trend of American ideas? A question of this kind is rather absurd. For America, it is generally recognized, has as yet nothing like a definite culture. . . . And the culture of America—a thing of the far future perhaps—will be developed only when the various racial groups within it have given the fullest and best expression to their individual inheritance—and not before. 58

Here, though, Cohen only articulated the precondition for a Jewish cultural renaissance common to many Jewish intellectuals' writing of the era: the belief that the development of a particular American Jewish culture in no way compromised Jews' American patriotism or citizenship.

Not until the late 1940s, when he had assumed the editorship of Commentary magazine, would Cohen explain his vision for a vibrant culture based on intellectual inquiry, a rich understanding of the Jewish past, and careful consideration of the problems of the Jewish present. As editor of Commentary magazine, he wrote: "To a human being, culture is not a luxury. It is a necessity—indeed the deepest necessity. It is not the marmalade added to the bread and butter of daily life. It is, rather, those components of our daily life that provide its hidden and essential vitamins. Lacking these vitamins, our community suffers from all kinds of spiritual diet-deficiency diseases." 59

Jewish culture in America, Cohen wrote, would have to include "religious thinking," and "poetry, fiction, music, and art." Cohen hoped that such a multifaceted Jewish culture would give Jews "something of what our fathers and grandfathers had—the pleasure and the joy of Jewish living." It is crucial to understand that Cohen never argued for a separate Jewish culture within America, but instead advocated an American Jewish culture. He wrote: "People continually ask whether a cultural product is 'Jewish' or 'American,' seeming to assume that these two traditions be mutually exclusive. This is mechanical because it approaches Jewish culture and American culture as if they were two simple physical objects. . . . But the fact about culture, most humanly
important fact, is that it is just in this area of human life that you can be in two places at once."

Even though he spent most of his energy at the Menorah Journal focusing on the shortcomings of American Jewish life rather than articulating a positive vision for Jewish cultural renaissance, it is not difficult to read a positive program into much of Cohen's critique. Jewish participation in Christmas celebrations, for example, was so abhorrent to Cohen because it denied the "pleasure and joy of Jewish living" that he would later advocate in Commentary. Because of his belief that intellect and reason were central to Jewish cultural survival, materialism and complete assimilation into Christian America remained repugnant to Cohen. Despite his obvious exasperation with the Jewish people, Cohen never lost the sense of wit and irony that guided his montage critiques. He closed his final "Notes for a Modern History of the Jews" in November 1927 by simultaneously celebrating and chastising Jews with one well-chosen quote from the Reverend James L. Gordon, who declared: "'Israel! What a wonderful people!""

Many of Cohen's readers, especially the rabbis, were not amused by his columns. Rabbi Horace J. Wolf of Rochester, New York, for example, condemned the "bad taste shown by the publication of such cheap material by a Journal which simultaneously solicited the support of the American rabbinate." Rabbi Wolf promptly cancelled his subscription. Many other rabbis also withdrew their own and their congregational support for the Menorah Journal, citing Cohen's "Notes" column among their many reasons for growing disillusionment. Even Nathan Isaacs, a professor of law at Harvard and one of the most prominent supporters of the Menorah Association, lambasted Cohen, writing, "You know as well as I do how much more you have loved acerbity than accuracy." Cohen continued to edit the Menorah Journal for four years after his last "Notes" column. Between 1929 and 1931, he wrote a recurring feature entitled "Marginal Annotations," publishing under the provocative pseudonym "An Elder of Zion." Here Cohen continued to question the priorities of American Jewish leadership and to mock the prevailing concerns of many American Jews, this time using short episodic parables written in his own words rather than culled from already published material.

By 1931, Cohen's style and vision for the journal distinctly contradicted that of the magazine's editor, Henry Hurwitz.
resigned from the Menorah Journal in September 1931 and harshly criticized Hurwitz for allowing financial considerations and community pressure to sway the journal from printing what was “good” to printing what was “safe.” In his letter of resignation, Cohen restated the terms of his once promising partnership with the journal, and rearticulated his original hope for his “Notes” columns, explaining:

The organized Jewish life, we agreed, was by any decent standard chaotic, futile and sterile. Its leadership was ill-informed and inept; its ideology archaic and confused; its activities a hybrid of atavistic routine and puerile imitativeness; its culture abysmal. It had lost all real sense of the past, and it promised no future. Of course, no magazine, however excellent, we agreed, could remake Jewish life—but a good Jewish magazine might have a certain influence.

Cohen then suggested that, rather than compromise its editorial policy, the journal should “admit defeat, re-affirm the faith, and close up shop.” The notoriously stubborn Hurwitz would have no part in this suggestion. Hurwitz reassumed the helm of the magazine, editing the Menorah Journal until his death in 1961. Although the journal continued to serve as a training ground for many Jewish scholars and refugees hoping to gain entrée into English language publications, the vibrancy of Cohen’s tenure as managing editor was never matched again.

Almost twenty years after his break with the Menorah Journal, Cohen continued to blame Hurwitz and others of his generation for a missed opportunity to forge a lasting Jewish cultural renaissance. Cohen remembered, somewhat bitterly, “Perhaps a little more vision on the part of the communal elders, a little more understanding of the genuine interest and enthusiasm that lay under the surface of the sheer youthful contrariness and chutzpah—perhaps that might have made a difference.” Although his legendary arrogance remained in evidence as he reconsidered his Menorah Journal days, Cohen also begrudgingly admitted that, “It might be not only more tactful but truer to place the chief responsibility for the failure on those giant social and political forces that swept everything under in the 30’s.”

Hurwitz also blamed his adversary, but he did not temper this feeling with any comment about the “forces” of the era. Hurwitz
remained so bitter that, following one angry letter to Cohen six weeks after his resignation, Hurwitz seems to have never mentioned Cohen again. During the heat of their feud, though, Hurwitz accused Cohen of being unfit to edit a Jewish magazine, and bluntly stated Cohen's "chief drawback" as managing editor: "So far as I am aware," Hurwitz wrote to Cohen, "you have not read extensively in Jewish history and literature. In short, you are not at home in Jewish sources.

Hurwitz's attack may be the supreme irony, as Cohen's strategy in his "Notes" columns actually has roots in Jewish rabbinic tradition. In his reconsideration of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi has explained the practice of *melitzah*, or the pasting together of "a mosaic of fragments and phrases from the Hebrew Bible as well as from rabbinic literature or the liturgy, fitted together to form a new statement of what the author intends to express at the moment." *Melitzah*, Yerushalmi has noted, "in effect, recalls Walter Benjamin's desire to someday write a work composed entirely of quotations," dates back to medieval Hebrew poetry, and was adopted again during the *Haskalah*. Yerushalmi has explained, "In melitzah the sentences compounded out of quotations mean what they say; but below and beyond the surface they reverberate with associations to the original texts, and this is what makes them psychologically so interesting and valuable." Contrary to Hurwitz's insult, the "Notes for a Modern History of the Jews" series suggests that, perhaps, Elliot Cohen was more "at home" in Jewish sources and methods than he let on.

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NOTES

2. Although some historians have written about the Menorah Association and the *Menorah Journal*, no single monograph covering its history exists. Even less has
been written about Cohen or his "Notes for a Modern History of the Jews" columns. scant historiography on Cohen also does not put his work into a larger cultural context, which I attempt here.


4. See American Mercury 1 (January 1924), 48–50. Like Cohen's "Notes" columns in the Menorah Journal, Mencken's "Americana" was a recurring feature in subsequent American Mercury issues.

5. Douglas C. Stenerson, Critical Essays on H. L. Mencken (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1987). On Mencken, see also Fred Hobson, Mencken: A Life (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Hobson notes that one of Mencken's goals at the American Mercury was to "laugh at frauds" (243). Cohen certainly shared this ambition. Hobson also has noted that, during the late 1920s, Mencken began to collect quotes that had been published about himself. Mencken published a 132-page book of these quotations, titled Mencken: A Schimpflexikon. (See Hobson, 275.) The Menorah Journal and American Mercury had some contributors in common during this era, notably Waldo Frank and Carl Van Doren.


8. According to Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin's "greatest ambition was to produce a work consisting entirely of quotations." (Hannah Arendt, "Introduction," Illuminations [New York: Schocken, 1968], 4.)

9. Cohen's technique of compiling notes for a history seems to resemble Benjamin's Passagen-Werk, for which Benjamin collected more than one thousand pages of notes between 1927 and his suicide in 1940. (Susan Buck-Morss, The...
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18. Quoted in Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 162. Deeter, married to former *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz, worked as secretary to the editor and later as managing editor at *Commentary*. Cohen was actually fifteen when he entered Yale, but this does not undermine Deeter’s point.


20. Article II of the Intercollegiate Menorah Association constitution, as quoted in *The Menorah Movement: For the Study and Advancement of Jewish Culture and Ideals* (Ann Arbor, MI: Intercollegiate Menorah Association, 1914), 171. Eight years after founding the Menorah Society at Harvard, two of the original members, Henry Hurwitz and I. Leo Sharpman, compiled this source, intended to provide a comprehensive history of the Menorah movement to date. The book contains information regarding the history of the Menorah movement, speeches from college authorities welcoming the Menorah Association to campuses, reprints of speeches delivered at Menorah Association functions, and reports from constituent campus Menorah Societies. (Hereafter cited as *The Menorah Movement*.)

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(October 1918), 280–82. The Menorah Journal published Cohen’s long essay in three parts and under two different titles: “The Promise of the American Synagogue: A Menorah Prize Essay,” Menorah Journal 4 (October 1918) and Menorah Journal 4 (December 1918); and “The Ideal Rabbi,” Menorah Journal 5 (February 1919).


23. See Strauss, “Staying Afloat in the Melting Pot,” 318; Wald, New York Intellectuals, 31. Cohen’s colleagues and some historians have also commented on Cohen’s perpetual writer’s block, although no one has convincingly demonstrated that writer’s block led to Cohen’s failure to complete a doctoral dissertation. Nor has any historian convincingly demonstrated very much about Cohen’s early life at all, and his relative lack of original writing from his youthful days does not make doing so any easier. I am grateful to Nathan Abrams for clarifying my understanding of this point.


26. Lionel Trilling, “On the Death of a Friend,” Commentary 29 (February 1960), 93–94. Norman Podhoretz reflected on this quality of Cohen’s thought as well. Recounting the first time he met Cohen at the Commentary editorial offices, Podhoretz has written: “In the first hour I spent with [Cohen] he jumped from literary criticism to politics, from politics to Jewish scholarship, from Jewish scholarship to the movies, from the movies to sports, and indeed spent a good deal of time trying to find out how much I knew about baseball.” (Podhoretz, Making It [New York: Random House, 1967], 100.)

27. Cohen to Hurwitz July 24, 1922. Henry Hurwitz/ Menorah Association Collection (hereafter “HHMA”) Box 7, folder 15. AJA.

28. Cohen to Hurwitz n.d. HHMA Box 7, folder 15. AJA. (This letter is not dated, but Hurwitz has handwritten “rec’d July 23, 1925” on it.)


34. Cohen, “Notes,” Menorah Journal 10 (February 1924), 82.


37. See, for example, Cohen’s “Notes for a Modern History of the Jews” columns from August–September 1924, February 1925, April 1925, June 1925, December 1925, February 1926, April–May 1926, and December 1926.


39. Levine, From Ellis Island to Ebbets Field, 144–69.

41. Cohen also played on the stereotype by reporting Jewish female athletic prowess. In his April–May 1926 installment of "Notes," for example, Cohen closed with an excerpt about an eighteen-year-old Russian woman, Sonia Witkoff, who "can meet and beat any man in a Greco-Roman wrestling match and is also a serious opponent for any athlete in the world in the weight lifting and long distance running event." The following, and final, item of this installment reads, ""Grand and glorious are the achievements of the Jewess beautiful wherever she abides."—American Hebrew." (Cohen, "Notes," Menorah Journal 12 [April–May 1926], 194.)

42. Determining the readership of the Menorah Journal from the magazine's archival materials is quite difficult. The editors acknowledged that the journal, originally intended for Jewish college students, had become too intellectual for the average Jewish undergraduate by the 1920s. The editors remained committed to reaching non-Jewish readers, although often admitted that they did not know exactly how to do so. The consistent publication of articles by non-Jewish authors, including many academics, suggests that some non-Jews who were interested in Jewish history and questions surrounding Jewish acculturation may have read the journal consistently.

46. Cohen included these three examples at the conclusion of his "Notes" column in Menorah Journal 10 (November–December 1924), 509.
48. Podhoretz, Making It, 117.
49. Wald, New York Intellectuals, 33.
50. Cohen's criticism of Jews' Christmas celebrations abounds in his columns. The most damning of these, published in the February 1926 Menorah Journal, is included later in this article's text. (See note 57.)
54. For stereotypes based on the Jewish nose, see Gilman, The Jew's Body, especially chapter 7, "Are Jews White? Or, the History of the Nose Job."
60. Cohen, "Jewish Culture in America," 413, 415; italics in original.
62. Horace J. Wolf to *Menorah Journal*. January 8, 1926. HHMA Box 62, folder 17. AJA.
63. Nathan Isaacs to Cohen October 27, 1931. HHMA Box 7, folder 17. AJA.
64. Cohen to Hurwitz September 17, 1931. HHMA Box 7, folder 17. AJA.
67. Hurwitz to Cohen November 2, 1931. HHMA box 7, folder 17. AJA.
A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?: The Jewishness of Commentary Magazine
Nathan Abrams

Until a detailed study of the foremost journal of Jewish thought, opinion, and culture in postwar America is undertaken, the picture of contemporary Jewish and American intellectual life cannot be considered complete. Launched by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in 1945, Commentary magazine became one of America's most celebrated periodicals. As a monthly journal on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues, it was not intended to be an in-house organ. Commentary was distinctive for being an institutionally sponsored magazine whose editor was given, in theory at least, complete editorial freedom. Unlike its counterpart, Partisan Review, it was an explicitly Jewish magazine, openly funded by a Jewish communal organization.

Under the editorship of Elliot E. Cohen (1899-1959) and later Norman Podhoretz (b. 1930), Commentary magazine developed into the premier postwar journal of Jewish affairs, attracting a broad, if small, readership (at its peak its subscription was only 60,000), far wider than its Jewish community of origin. Doubleday editor Barbara Zimmerman noted that, although the magazine dealt "with Jewish affairs, it is primarily a magazine of general interest" with an "excellent reputation in this country among the general and not strictly Jewish market." Historian Milton S. Katz added that many Americans "agreed with Commentary's positions. . . its articles elicited a heavy and emotional response from various segments of society. . . [and] . . . its influence clearly extended beyond that of many larger publications." Various administrations, high-level staff, and politicians regularly perused the journal, reprinted its articles, and broadcast them across the world. Successive presidents, in particular Ronald Reagan, often consulted with Commentary's second editor, Norman Podhoretz. As the literary scholar Ruth R. Wisse has put it: "Commentary became the first Jewish magazine in history that speaks to power in the polity at large, while protecting maximally the interests of the Jews."
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Commentary provided the vehicle and voice through which many young, alienated Jewish intellectuals would move back into the Jewish community after World War II. A whole new generation of writers, thinkers, and poets including such figures as Irving Kristol, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Delmore Schwartz, Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Irving Howe, and Leslie Fiedler—gained an entry into American intellectual life via the pages of the magazine. These intellectuals formed the core of a group subsequently labelled the "New York Jewish Intellectuals." As one of the group's central organs, Commentary soon assumed a leading position in American intellectual life from the mid-1940s onwards and later Commentary nurtured a second generation of intellectuals who would complement the first, including Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag, Philip Roth, and Theodore Solotaroff. Commentary has had a profound impact on American intellectual history. According to a 1974 study, "How and Where to Find the Intellectual Elite in the United States," Commentary has had more influence on the thinking of U.S. intellectuals than all but The New York Review of Books and The New Yorker.4

Commentary, however, was far more than just a journal of intellectuals for intellectuals. While its community of writers was broad, embracing academics, professionals, intellectuals, writers, journalists, poets, artists, critics, and politicians, its community of readers was even broader. Thus, it can only be said to be an intellectual journal in the widest sense which, suggested Antonio Gramsci, went beyond the "traditional and vulgarised type of intellectual," such as "the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist," to include every individual engaged in "some form of intellectual activity."5 As Edward Said has put it, "Everyone who works in any field connected either with the production or distribution of knowledge."6 Those who wrote for Commentary were public intellectuals in the manner that Russell Jacoby described: "writers and thinkers who address a general and educated audience. Obviously, this excludes intellectuals whose works are too technical or difficult to engage a public."7

Commentary's influence has always extended beyond its circulation. In a survey of three thousand "prominent Americans" conducted by the polling firm of Erdos and Morgan, Commentary was named third among "most influential" media, print, and electronic, behind the New England Journal of Medicine and Foreign Affairs, but
A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion? ahead of the *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. As a mark of this, *Commentary* also provided a platform for launching many political careers: Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Elliot Abrams, and Carl Gershman were appointed to various positions following influential articles in the magazine. *Commentary* has thus played a significant role in domestic and international Jewish politics, as well as domestic American politics, and still continues to do so today. As William Novak, then editor of *Response* magazine, wrote in 1973:

A great deal could be learned by the study of the magazine since its inception twenty-eight years ago. . . . But such an effort would be, to say the least, an illuminating approach to the history both of American Jewry and American culture in general in the third quarter of the twentieth century.

To this can be added the words of Mark Shechner: "There is no more precise barometer of the state of American Jewry these days than *Commentary* magazine.”

Strangely, however, *Commentary* has been overlooked by historians studying American intellectual history. While it has been widely read and distributed in no less than sixty-six countries, and has informed many histories of post–World War II Jewish life, there has not been a single monograph on it. The scholarship surrounding *Commentary* magazine is still surprisingly and inexplicably thin. Naomi W. Cohen’s history of the AJC, for example, only mentions *Commentary* on a handful of pages and these references are scattered and vague. Many articles may have been written about the magazine, but these tend to be either journalistic (with a political axe to grind) or memoir, with a few scholarly exceptions. Although a great deal has been written about the New York Jewish intellectuals and their publications, most studies have tended to focus overwhelmingly on the magazine *Partisan Review*, which has been detrimental to the study of other, no-less-important journals. But even journals such as *Dissent*, *Encounter*, *The New Leader*, and *Politics* have recently become the subjects of academic studies. Historians of the New York intellectuals examine the magazine briefly, but do so as part of wider intellectual movements, without focusing on the magazine in the depth it deserves. The same can be said for the historians of
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neoconservatism. As a consequence, important cultural and Jewish dimensions of the magazine are often overlooked. Overall, Commentary has not been examined in enough detail and hence the scope and impact of the magazine have not been fully considered. This article will begin to redress this gap by examining how Commentary was a significant journal of Jewish opinion in its early years

EDITORIAL FREEDOM

Unique for a journal sponsored by a Jewish organization at that time, Commentary was allowed to operate with editorial freedom. In every issue of Commentary, the American Jewish Committee printed the following "Statement of Aims":

In sponsoring Commentary, the American Jewish Committee aims to meet the need for a journal of significant thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues. Its pages will be hospitable to diverse points of view and belief, and it hopes to encourage original creative endeavor in the various fields of culture.

The opinions and views expressed by Commentary's contributors and editors are their own, and do not necessarily express the Committee's viewpoint or position. The sponsorship of Commentary by the Committee is in line with its general program to enlighten and clarify public opinion on problems of Jewish concern, to fight bigotry and protect human rights, and to promote Jewish cultural interest and creative achievement in America.

"With a perspicacity rare in voluntary organizations, Jewish or otherwise," wrote Norman Podhoretz (who would replace Cohen as editor in 1960), "the AJC understood that unless the editor of the new magazine were given a free hand and protected from any pressures to conform to the Committee's own line, the result would be a pretentious house organ and nothing more." And, one that no one would read. The AJC had no intention of "doing anything that would parochialize the journal," or limit its appeal, so it granted full editorial freedom to Commentary's editor and staff. Likewise, it never explicitly
intended the magazine to function as a public relations journal or as a forum for its philosophies. This provided the mandate for Cohen, as well as the framework within which he could operate. According to Podhoretz, the AJC wanted a journal “that would be nonpartisan with regard to the often bitter politics of the Jewish community,” envisaging “a kind of Jewish Harper’s, only more scholarly,” or as Time magazine later put it, “a magazine that would exemplify the intellectual dignity of Judaism.”

For Podhoretz, this editorial independence “consisted simply in this: no person except the editor or anyone he might voluntarily wish to consult could read articles in advance of publication or could dictate what should or should not appear in the magazine.” This meant that the AJC concerned itself only with Commentary’s budget, but did not interfere with the content of the magazine. It did so via a Publications Committee that oversaw Commentary, which was largely responsible for the magazine’s business affairs, and responsible to the Budget and Evaluation Committee. The Publications Committee supposedly acted in a purely advisory capacity. Composed of lay members who met as little as once a year, it had no policy-making role, and concerned itself largely with the business and budgetary matters of the magazine. Commentary represented a significant proportion of expenditure and many executive committee members did not unhesitatingly accept it, questioning that spending. It was thus the role of the Publications Committee to defend the magazine at budget hearings, and to ensure that the AJC’s money was well spent. The journal has been seen as a unique enterprise in this respect: no other organization has so generously sponsored a publication and then left it to operate independently.

The AJC’s somewhat broad mandate to Cohen to produce a journal of significant thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues did not require “a Jewish journal” nor one of “contemporary Jewish issues.” Likewise, the definition of “significant” was vague. In his first editorial, Cohen provided his own interpretation of what this term meant:

In the search for light on the basic issues of peace and freedom and human destiny which challenge all mankind, Commentary hopes to be of service. It goes without saying that the best magazine in the world will not solve our problems.
But we have faith that a good magazine can help—by fairness, by searching out the truth, by encouraging fresh and free-ranging thinking, by bringing to bear upon our problems the resources of science, philosophy, religion, and the arts, by seeking out authentic voices and giving them open-house in which to be heard.

In this spirit, and with these aims, to publish the best magazine we know how to, hospitable to the broadest range of worth-while opinion—this is the sole mandate the editors have from *Commentary*’s sponsor, the American Jewish Committee. Few projects have a charter so free, so generous-minded, so full of faith in the value of thinking and decent writing.21

Cohen’s greatest promise, to his sponsor, to his readers, and mostly to himself, was that the magazine would be excellent. “Significant” for Cohen meant striving for *Commentary* to be the best magazine in the world.

**COHEN AND JEWISH CULTURE**

Cohen took advantage of these omissions to produce the type of journal that he—and not necessarily the Committee or the wider Jewish community—wanted to see. In some ways, Cohen had a distinctly unusual upbringing. Although he grew up in a traditional Jewish family, it was in Mobile, Alabama, where his father ran a small dry-goods store, on the borderland between black and white districts. The family lived above the store, and all the children helped out in it, selling textiles, clothes, and shoes to a mixed clientele of blacks, poor whites, Jews, hillbillies, and townspeople.

Judaism was important in the Cohen household: Elliot’s father had been a Talmud scholar in Lithuania, and he stood out in Mobile as a man of Jewish knowledge, committed to secular and ethnic Judaism, as well as Zionism. Books were also important in the Cohen family22 and Elliot was a child prodigy; by the time he was two or three he could already read the newspaper headlines. He wanted to be a writer from the age of six and he would pursue his passion at Yale at the age of fifteen (the youngest freshman in the college’s history), spending four years as an undergraduate. Although he graduated with
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a brilliant record, Cohen felt that academic opportunities would be closed to him, and after five years at Yale's graduate school, he began to look in other directions for a career, eventually turning to literary journalism.

In April 1924, The Menorah Journal in New York City hired him as an assistant editor. Cohen's early career at the Journal was meteoric; by November he had become associate editor and by June of the following year, managing editor, a position he held until he left in 1931. Cohen transformed what was then, some would argue, a parochial college magazine into a highly respected intellectual publication. Cohen left the Menorah in 1931 after falling out with its editor Henry Hurwitz. He wrote freelance for a while, and headed several left-wing, fellow-traveling organizations, but after becoming disillusioned with communism, Cohen took up a position as the director of public information of the New York Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in 1935, a job he hated.

The blueprint for Commentary had already been drawn up while Cohen was at the Menorah Journal; indeed the new magazine's title had been taken from one of its departments. As a young writer, Cohen painted a dark picture of American Jewry, which, despite its charities, its new temples, its countless organizations, was unsound at its roots, built on sham, pretense, and oratory. "Our ceaseless round of Jewish activities," wrote Cohen, "is but an impressive glitter beneath which there shows everywhere the disquieting glint of a baser and more unenduring metal; our vaunted culture is thin gold plate on an indubitable foundation of brass."

The remedy for this "Age of Brass" was a Jewish publication that would emphasize literature, criticism, and the arts. Such a publication would encourage its readers to perceive themselves as both Jews and citizens of the modern world. In doing so, Cohen called for nothing less than a "complete rehabilitation of the Jewish tradition and the most thoroughgoing reconstruction of Jewish intellectual values." According to historian Lauren B. Strauss, "This vibrant new outlook," according to historian Lauren B. Strauss, "was part of Elliot Cohen's attempt to weave a universal intellectual community—including both Jews and gentiles—that would entertain almost any discipline or subject matter that seemed worthy of attention." So, when he was offered the chance to edit his own magazine, Cohen willingly took a pay cut, and joined Commentary in 1945.

Cohen exhibited a fierce identification with America. He believed
that Jewish writers needed to become more involved in American culture. In 1923, Cohen had argued for an approach that did not treat the Jew as a separate entity but as an inextricable element in the matrix of socioeconomic and psychological forces that also influenced others. Again, in 1947, he stated:

We Jews in America will live very deeply immersed in the culture of our general American society. This is not only unavoidable—it is eminently desirable. For Western culture, as we know it,—whatever its failures, and they are great—in its potential the finest human culture that mankind has yet produced.

This belief was transmitted onto the pages of Commentary. According to Neil Jumonville, “More than any theme other than persistent anticommunism, Cohen’s advice about the interaction with American
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culture characterized the tradition of Commentary.”28 According to Norman Podhoretz, this represented Cohen’s “Grand Design to lead the [New York intellectual] family out of the desert of alienation in which it had been wandering for so long and into the promised land of democracy, pluralistic, prosperous America where it would live as blessedly in its Jewishness as in its Americanness, safe and sound and forevermore, amen.”29

Born in the shadow of the Holocaust, Commentary was to be a creative, revitalizing force. In the wake of the devastation of much of European Jewish life, Cohen felt a great responsibility for continuing the common Jewish culture and spiritual heritage. He realized earlier than most that the burden of the Jewish people was upon American Jewry in many ways and he pledged that Commentary would do its share in carrying forward the Jewish heritage. Cohen personally believed in the potential America held for its Jews, that America offered the best opportunity for a harmonious relationship between Jewish culture and the world. He felt America would witness a new Golden Age, paralleling that of medieval Spain, because American Jews had enjoyed an unprecedented freedom there. America was the goldene medinah—the land of opportunity, security, and prosperity. America had solved the problems of anti-Semitism and exclusion. Thus, he trusted that America would become the center and focus of Diaspora Judaism to which all thinking Jews would turn. America would become a New Jerusalem; and just as every Jew faced the Temple Mount, now they could countenance the City on the Hill. While Cohen stressed his “act of faith” in the “possibilities in America,” he also evoked ancient Jewish tradition and the past: “we remain the people of the Book. We believe in the Word.” The old covenant had not been forgotten or replaced; rather it had been revived and renewed in the present. Like its now-defunct predecessor the Contemporary Jewish Record, Commentary would “reach back for the riches of the past” to become a “record, a history, a memoir.” It would memorialize through words. But unlike the Contemporary Jewish Record, Commentary, as its name change implied, would also strive to achieve more than merely to record; it would explain, criticize, and create.30

Cohen envisaged the conception of a new and indigenous Jewish-American culture. He outlined his blueprint: “It will be similar; it will be different. It will be old, it will be new. It will be real, and it have a fresh identity never seen before.” Cohen called for the creation of a
Jewish culture in America that, without confining itself to the traditional bounds of nationalism or sectarianism, would speak to Jews and the rest of the world with the same pertinence as the highest culture of the West. This new culture would be fed by Jewish tradition, and a sense of a common Jewish experience, past and present. Cohen also wanted to immerse himself deeply into the culture of American society because, whatever its failures, it was “the finest human culture that mankind has yet produced.” This new culture would not be distinctive nor separate, a civilization within a civilization, but rather interconnected, a subculture within the larger culture. It would not be assimilative, imitative, or derivative. It would be vibrant. His test was not if something was Jewish, but whether it was good, equal to the best in and highest standards of intellectual and artistic American culture. Cohen sought to marry the best from both cultures. He believed that Jews could fully participate in all aspects of American life as Jews, but this must be based upon a series of negotiations and between Jewish and American culture. With a sense of imagination, Cohen undermined the distinctions and blurred the boundaries between what was and what wasn’t previously considered Jewish.

The extermination of European Jewry, the possibility of a Jewish state in Palestine, the emergence of the United States as a superpower, and the mass relocation of urban Jews to suburbia, bringing them for the first time into close proximity to Christian neighbors, had thrown these categories into disarray and their definitions were up for grabs. American Jews were increasingly defined purely as a religious denomination rather than a separate national group. “We can have good Jewish music that will not sound Jewish,” predicted Cohen. Commentary took a leading role in this redefinition of Jewishness. Cohen did not want a culture born of apologetics, separatism, or mediocrity. He wanted one “that we respect and that enhances our self-respect.” He rejected defensiveness and victim-status. Thus, his Commentary radiated Jewish self-confidence, calling for a positive approach to Jewish history. Commentary became more than just a magazine of contemporary Jewish affairs and current concerns, as Cohen sought nothing less than to produce a new American Jew and American Jewish culture. Commentary prepared the terrain for this culture by announcing that American Jews should be ready for permanence. For Cohen, Jewish culture was necessary in order to provide Jews with a proper sense of adjustment. Jews should feel
comfortable in America, as America was no longer to be regarded as exile because "we—and our children and our children’s children—are here to stay. . . . this is home!"32

Cohen’s dual identification with both America and Jewishness was most clearly demonstrated in the department, “From the American Scene,” one of Cohen’s major innovations. It was devoted to informal and amateur sociological reportage of persons, institutions, places, and events in the American scene, as well as the impact of American society on the Jewish family, its cultural patterns, and its various members—and vice versa. The idea for this department was conceived, although never implemented, while Cohen was at the Menorah Journal, and he carried it with him ever since.

Cohen saw this department as a response to what he perceived to be the general vagueness in current American Jewish thought and social criticism and the lack of expert and precise knowledge of the Jewish scene in its concrete reality. He wanted to redress such abstract theorizing and generalizations by providing concrete details of the daily life of the average Jew and the average Jewish community. The short articles would describe the “true” flavor of American Jewish life, capturing episodes and personalities which could never be reflected in documents or histories. Often, the selections would take the form of reminiscences, frequently from childhood, and almost always dealt with the immigrant experience at a time when it was not yet fashionable to do so. More than any other part of the magazine, it stressed the differences between Jews and other Americans, but not in terms of superiority or weakness. Cohen attempted to maintain a balance between showing the Jewish contribution to American culture without resorting to chauvinism, something he despised and fought at every opportunity. In an introduction to a collection of articles culled from the department and published in 1953, Cohen wrote:

They are written by Jews about Jews. Inescapably, one might think, they would be anxious, defensive, aggrieved, purposeful. Paradoxically, they are not. They aim neither to prove anything, to solve anything, nor to make a contribution to the time or the ages. They are written for enjoyment, and with enjoyment, we guess—and need no introduction.39

As he admitted in the same introduction, the department was close to
Cohen’s heart, and, from its very inception, even closer to the magazine’s purpose. At times, though, despite the surface resemblance to a continuation of nostalgic myths, the articles revealed truths that could not be exposed elsewhere and, as we shall see, often caused great consternation within the American Jewish community.

Cohen operated on two assumptions, both of which turned out to be controversial. First, according to Podhoretz, “He felt it was time to abandon the tradition which had become pretty well solidified in Anglo-Jewish journalism, of self-[con]gratulation and the spirit of public relations that seemed to govern all discourse that Jews were carrying out among themselves, among each other, in English.” Cohen strove to return to what he felt was a more authentic Jewish tradition of frank self-criticism. His second assumption was “the notion that Jewishness was not to be considered—conceived of as a constrictive, or ghettoizing principle; rather that it was to be conceived of as a broadening principle, as a wedge into the world—into the world outside—as a de-ghettoizing principle.” Cohen used his editorial freedom to interpret the AJC’s mandate freely and enthusiastically, as a carte blanche to go searching for articles beyond the confines of the organized Jewish community.

Cohen envisioned a new Jewish American culture, distinct from that of the Old World of European Jewry, and hence provided a forum for intellectuals to explore new, untested, and sometimes shocking visions of secular, Jewish identity. Cohen gave a high profile in his magazine to young Jewish intellectuals, as his Commentary was an attempt to build a bridge between Jewish intellectuals and their community, to overcome their differences and sense of mutual distrust, to lessen the distance between them. It was Cohen’s dream to arrange a reconciliation between the intellectuals and the Jewish community. He succeeded in attracting Jewish intellectuals who had earlier completely dissociated themselves from the organized Jewish community and whom had never previously thought of discussing Jewish subject matter in an impartial, forthright, and serious fashion. Commentary provided a forum in which they could express their Jewishness. As a result, Jewishness became intellectually and culturally respectable within the intellectual community. As Podhoretz put it, many learned to “shake hands in public with their own Jewishness for the first time in their lives.”

At times, however, Cohen’s vision of what a journal of significant thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues
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should look like irritated both the AJC and other elements within American Jewry. The young Jewish intellectuals who wrote for Commentary often scorned what they perceived as the middle class, liberal, bourgeois institutions of the Jewish community. Historian Stephen Zipperstein has noted how Commentary "was suspicious, even contemptuous of any aspects of Jewish life that had in the past appeared to guarantee the culture's viability; and it substituted an uncertain, Jewishly ambiguous diet of Western or Westernized masters (Kafka, Babel, Freud, perhaps also Buber or Ahad Ha'am)."36 The result was that Commentary often discussed Jewish affairs with a tone of detachment, disdain, and contempt. This tone helped to make Commentary unpopular within organized American Jewry, repelling those "public-relations-minded Jewish readers who were used to something more hortatory and self-congratulatory."37

CONTROVERSIES

The first hint of trouble between Commentary and the AJC came at the Committee's meeting of the Administrative Council on April 1, 1947. Judge Joseph Proskauer expressed to his colleagues some reservations about several items in recent issues, which had been widely criticized in the Jewish community, "and have caused some embarrassment to the organization." Two of the offending pieces were book reviews of Gentleman's Agreement and The Plotters in the March issue. Diana Trilling had reviewed Laura Z. Hobson's Gentleman's Agreement (1947) negatively: despite its "highly commendable purpose," she found it "poor—dull, non-dimensional, without atmosphere. . . . peculiarly empty"38 and clichéd. Likewise, William Petersen found John Roy Carlson's The Plotters (1946) to be an inaccurate, badly written, and sensationalistic book on fascism that should have been based on more than fervor.39 The problem with both reviews was that they had taken positions inconsistent with the activities and positions of the other departments of the AJC. So, although the Committee had granted Commentary full editorial freedom, when Cohen exercised it, the Committee grew concerned. Proskauer may have stressed that he had no intention of limiting the editorial freedom of the magazine, he and the Committee, did not want to have to deal with such items of business in the future.40

A far more controversial essay was Louis Berg's "The Americanism
of Adolph S. Ochs: A Guest in the House," which appeared in the January 1947 issue. Berg attempted to destroy what he perceived to be the myth of New York Times editor Ochs. Although Ochs had made the Times respectable and a financial success, Berg regarded him as neither a giant nor a hero, but a conservative, meek man, whose qualities were not innovation but honesty, industry, and common sense administration. On its own, this iconoclastic piece would have caused problems, but when Berg launched into Ochs' Jewishness and Americanism, things got worse. Berg charged that Ochs had made of his Jewishness, "a dynamism of recoil, a positive of the negative, and affirmation in denial." Typical of the upper-class German Jews, Ochs was part of the gentry, totally assimilated, and part of a community for whom "intermarriage with a Polish or Lithuanian Jew would almost have been miscegenation." With few exceptions, he did not even have a philanthropic interest in the Jewish community, and tried to be more American than the Americans. For, while it was understood that every minority and ethnic group would naturally try to further its own interests, Ochs did virtually nothing to further the cause of the Jews. Calling him a "Court Jew," Berg went on to criticize the present owners of the Times, Arthur Hays Sulzberger and Julius Ochs, whose loyalty:

. . . . to their Americanism does not permit them—with or without reservations—to contribute to the United Jewish Appeal, devoted to overseas and refugee aid, and the upbuilding of Palestine. To be sure, the UJA has the support of the chief editorial writer of the Times—but he is not a Jew.

The Jewish heads of the Times had a right to be non-Zionist and even non-Jewish, Berg conceded, but they did not have to be so very anti-Zionist, nor ought they have proposed against Felix Frankfurter's appointment to the Supreme Court on the grounds that it would provoke anti-Semitism. Berg concluded:

Being cautious Jews, they cannot be bold Americans. No household could ask for more proper guests, no lord for better standards. They make excellent public servants, obeying all the rules, leaning backwards to exonerate themselves from the charge of originality or pathfinding. But, by the same token, they cannot lead.41
Not only did the article run counter to the prevailing notions of Jewish public self-congratulation, but Berg had also indirectly attacked the Committee itself, which was the creation in large part of the very German-Jewish “Court Jews” Ochs had excoriated.

In response, Proskauer sent a long and angry letter to Cohen, which was published in the February issue. It was a mistake, he claimed, to have published such an ironic, caricaturing, iconoclastic, and innuendo-laden article. Ochs had “brought glory to the Jewish people,” he had built up a great journal, and had lived a life of integrity and goodness. Berg, on the other hand, was “a Communist,” whose “method is that of the party line, which seeks by this kind of half-truth to make qualities which in their proper setting are virtues, appear, by throwing them out of focus, to be grave and vicious defects of character.” Proskauer personally “deeply deplored” the publication of the article, but found its provocation of “grave dissent and concern” within the Committee and the wider Jewish community even worse (New York Rabbi Nathan Perilman had also described the piece as “a vicious and abusive and personalized attack,” the only justification for its appearance in Commentary being “that it is a comment which represents the thinking of some of our fellows Jews who find themselves not completely at home”).

Controversially, Proskauer reminded Cohen of his proper place within the Committee and just exactly what was meant by the term “editorial freedom”:

I repeat my conviction that Commentary has established itself under your editorship as a dignified, useful, and potent magazine. It is, moreover, my belief that the authority of the editor must not be trammeled by ukase of the publisher. You carry every month the legend: “The opinions and views expressed by Commentary’s contributors and editors are their own and do not necessarily express the Committee’s viewpoint or position.” Yet there are certain limitations which I think the editor should impose upon himself consistent with the fundamentals of free discussion.

The real problem—articulated by Proskauer in private but not in public—however, was that prospective large contributors to the New York United Jewish Appeal (UJA), from which the Committee’s and hence Commentary’s funding was derived, threatened to withhold
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their contributions in protest. Cohen had been issued his first public warning that a certain amount of censorship was necessary to keep the Committee and the chief Jewish philanthropists happy.

Cohen, in turn, felt it necessary to defend his magazine, as well as to justify his decision to print the article. He printed a response from Berg, suggesting his article had been misread and misunderstood, followed by his own explanation:

The editors of Commentary printed Mr. Berg's article... because in their judgment it was a significant discussion of a theory of Jewish adjustment, as the article's writer saw it exemplified in a friendly biography of an important public figure in Jewish life. . . . Our readers understand that we allow our writers latitude of opinion, and that in turn these columns are wide open for the expression of protest, differing opinion, and sharp and violent dissent with the views of any writer. We are glad that Rabbi Perilman and Judge Proskauer have availed themselves of this opportunity. Our faith is that truth and understanding result from this interplay of honest opinion (though obviously there are pitfalls and difficulties in the process); and it is to help truth and create understanding that Commentary exists. 44

In answering, Cohen had lost this round, and besides, it was too late, as the damage had already been done. He was not, however, completely defeated, as he still had powerful supporters within the Committee. At the next meeting of the Administrative Committee on June 3rd, vice president Ralph Samuel rose to defend the magazine. It was not, he reminded his fellow members of the executive board, a house organ, but was "designed to be an intellectual stimulant and to provoke discussion on a high level of matters of Jewish concern." Samuel then pointed to the magazine's general and widespread acceptance in Jewish circles and elsewhere, especially within the Committee's own chapters. Pleading passionately against censorship, Samuel proposed two possible solutions: the removal of the line on the cover "published by the American Jewish Committee," or a disclaimer by the Committee. A spirited discussion of the matter occurred, initiated by Samuel's observation that the exact nature of the agreement between the organization and the magazine had never
really been spelled out. The meeting ended with no plan for formal action and, despite Proskauer’s angry letter, there was general agreement that “whereas certain errors of judgment may have been committed, they were not of sufficient seriousness to justify censorship.”

Cohen emerged to fight another day.

The Berg controversy, however, was minor in comparison to that created by an article penned by Isaac Rosenfeld in October 1949. Cohen should have been forewarned by the Berg episode in general, and Rosenfeld’s review of Nathan Ausubel’s *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore* in October 1948, in particular. Rosenfeld somehow managed to slip in a paragraph about how food in Jewish culture “is surrounded with rituals and taboos,” especially *kreplach*:

> And the Devil is a common element, because *kreplach* is devil’s food. This follows from the symbolism of *kreplach*, which is anal. First, the word itself. The *kr* and *ch* sounds in Yiddish are deeply guttural, produced with a sound of phlegm, and the whole word, even without it’s component Anglo-Saxon pun, is plainly faecal in character. So also is the chopped meat, particularly when the *kreplach* are done. Now faeces, as any child knows, is devil’s food (and adults have given the name of devil’s food to a heavy, moist cake made of darkest chocolate).46

This joke passed by unnoticed by everyone (at least no one commented on it), because Rosenfeld had killed the punch line by explaining it. Nonetheless, he had introduced a kind of speculative, half-humorous inquiry typical of alienated yet interested Jews (and in which Philip Roth would specialize to great consternation more than a decade later), which would spawn a furor the following year. His subsequent piece, “Adam and Eve on Delancey Street,” was a Freudian rendition of the laws of kashrut. The advent of kosher bacon (Kosher Fry Beef), the slicing of which had drawn crowds standing at the window, according to Rosenfeld, “oblivious of the burden of parcels, of errands and of business; no comments are made, they stand in silence, not to interfere with one another’s contemplation, as they followed the course of the slices, from the blade to the box.” How to explain the allure of the spectacle? Rosenfeld argued that the mostly Jewish crowd was actually peeping into the “whole world of forbidden sexuality, the
sexuality of the goyim.” He suggested that food taboos were sex taboos:

*Milchigs*, having to do with milk, is feminine; *fleshigs*, meat, is masculine. Their junction in one meal, or within one vessel, is forbidden, for their union is the sexual act. (The Jewish joke about the man with cancer of the penis bears this out. He is advised by the doctor to soak his penis in hot water. His wife, finding him so engaged, cries out, “Cancer shmancer. Dos iz a *milchig tepple*!—who cares about cancer? You’re using a *milchig* pot.”)

He concluded that the dietary laws were thus injunctions against forbidden sexual practices; the careful circumscription of food mirrored Jewish sexual repression.47

**OBSCENITY, PORNOGRAPHY, AND SMUT**

Unsurprisingly, this offended many within the American Jewish community. The title itself hinted at an intellectual snob looking down upon lower-class Jews, while its use of language was shocking, salacious, and very risqué for 1949. Nathan Ziprin described Rosenfeld’s article as “revolting nonsense” and “as nauseating and perverse a piece as was ever written.”48 The *Congress Weekly* found it “nauseating,” “literary trash” that would gladden the heart of the most rabid anti-Semite. Ironically, the organ of the American Jewish Congress pointed out:

Had that piece appeared in any other publication, the American Jewish Committee would not doubt be busily engaged in devising measures of a nature described as “anti-defamation” and probably investigating whether the magazine could be barred from the mails because of obscenity.49

Jewish columnist Carl Alpert took the criticism one step further: “If Paul Joseph Goebbels or any other arch-anti-Semite propagandist had been engaged by the American Jewish Committee to write an article for its monthly journal, *Commentary*, he could have penned no more defamatory or insulting an article” Alpert “literally gagged at the smut” of “this revolting instance of pure imagination,” and “disgusting
filth," which constituted:

.... the grossest kind of slander on the entire Jewish people.
.... This is obscenity.... pornographic.... It is impossible to maintain any kind of respect for a Jewish periodical which prints this filthy drivel. Nor can any self-respecting Jewish permit his name to be connected in any way with such a journal. Other authors in the same pages are contaminated by association.... Is there a self-respecting Orthodox Jew who can remain silent in the face of this outrage? And if I know Reform Jews, many of them, too, will be nauseated and horrified by this appalling and disgraceful spectacle.... this blatant and vulgar attack on Jews in a responsible magazine.50

Alpert did not see the article as a solitary instance, but typical of an editorial policy that "degrades the Jew and uses filth as a means of insulting Jewish respectability." Alpert was so disgusted that he began a public probing of Commentary in the National Jewish Post from October 7, 1949 onwards.51

Another individual also felt that Rosenfeld's article "was not an exceptional occurrence but rather an extreme incident in a settled policy" of "publishing articles unsympathetic to Jewish religious values":

Unfortunately, many such have appeared in your magazine, written by bright, formally educated, but Jewishly immature individuals who have apparently found in Commentary a sort of psychiatrist [sic] couch to work off their complexes and their Jewish self-hatred. One has but to peruse the issues of Commentary during the last few years to find this to be a continuing pattern containing many deviations from good taste.... depicting offensively sordid and vulgar backgrounds.... containing cynical and unsavory references.

"The periodic reappearance of such articles," he concluded, "tend to form a distorted and unfavorable picture of Jewish life which is both unrealistic and unjust...That your editor has permitted this sort of thing for so long a time, culminating in the Rosenfeld piece, is surely evidence of an insensitivity which is almost unbelievable."52

Louis Finkelstein, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary of
New York, received many letters about Rosenfeld's article. "As you may imagine, it gave me anything but pleasure. I do not understand how Elliot ever permitted such an article to be printed nor how any Jew could bring himself to write it."53 One such letter was from Henry Hurwitz, erstwhile editor of the Menorah Journal and previously Cohen's employer. "Have you read the stories in Commentary which have been pouring ridicule and contempt on the rituals of the Judaism and on Rabbonim?" He called the article a "chillul hashem."54 Hurwitz had fallen out with Cohen in the 1930s when Cohen was still editing the Menorah Journal. Since then their relationship had been cool at best. It further declined when the AJC cut its subsidy to the Menorah Journal soon after Commentary had been launched, and Hurwitz was sure that the Committee was deliberately trying to destroy his magazine.55 Probably attempting to get even, Hurwitz wrote to Rabbi Milton Steinberg of Park Avenue Synagogue, New York City:

Have you by any chance seen the current [October] issue of Commentary? Page 387 is the most utterly appalling page I have ever seen in any Jewish magazine, or in any general magazine.

The whole article... reeks with obscenity and insult to Judaism. But lines 18–24 of the second column on page 387 (which I can't quote out to a stenographer) are the ne plus ultra. It recalls the vilest libels of Hitler and Streicher and Goebbels; and were such anti-Jewish filth to appear in a general paper in this country the Anti-Defamation League, and I suppose the American Jewish Committee itself, would be up in arms. Instead it appears in the Committee's own magazine!56

Steinberg agreed: "And it is everything which you say, as wanton and calloused an assault on decency and the Jewish tradition as I have come upon."57

NEGATIVE JEWS

Steinberg's fury, in turn, led him to deliver a long sermon before his Friday night congregation. He asked whether Commentary was a benefit or detriment to American Judaism. Although he stressed that Commentary had developed very considerable strengths, it had also
"come to display very considerable weaknesses also, negative and destructive traits which tend to neutralize the virtues and to bring into question whether, on the balance, it is more a benefit or detriment to American Judaism." He then sermonized about this "darker side" of the magazine, which had aroused bitterness and hostility in broad sectors of American Jewry, especially among informed and committed Jews. *Commentary* has "disclosed itself as deficient in that ultimate love of Judaism without which no Jewish enterprise can be other than morally bankrupt." He complained that the magazine had studiously ignored some of the most significant elements in Jewish life; that it had consistently given distorted presentation to certain others, no less crucial; and, finally, that all too frequently it takes on an air of condescension and superciliousness towards Jewish matters, including historical Jewish sanctities, and offended Jewish sensibilities. He said that there was an "air of dilettantism and literary dandyism which hovers over *Commentary*" and which "fails so generally to concern itself with the issues of Jewish life." Thus, "to persons who take Judaism and Jewish life seriously" *Commentary* appeared "ivory-towerish," "irresponsible," and "even trivial."88

Furthermore, many Jews of positive orientation towards Judaism have never been invited to write for *Commentary*, instead what he called "negative Jews" appeared in its pages, fostering a "Jewish negativism within American Jewry, indeed a nihilism" whereby "escapist Jews are encouraged in their escapism and loyalist Jews disheartened." *Commentary* had become, in his words, a "paradox"—a Jewish magazine, but "broadly negative to Jewish interests and values." This situation, he observed, was the fault of "the rootless Jewish intellectual; the Jew alienated from yet drawn to the Jewish faith, tradition and people; ambivalent toward them, that is to say, loving and hating them at the same time; indeed simultaneously approving and despising his own personality for its irretrievable Jewishness." He concluded with a call to arms:

Should *Commentary* persist in its course to the present, slighting positive elements in Jewish life, or distorting them, or sneering at them, and this despite the mounting chorus of protest, in which this sermon is but one voice, then we shall have no alternative except to assume that the hate is incorrigible, that the publication therefore is regrettably the
enemy of our souls as Jews. We shall then have no choice except to do it battle with all the force at our disposal.\textsuperscript{39}

Podhoretz described Steinberg's speech as an attempt to "kill \textit{Commentary}," by issuing a "decree of excommunication" from his throne in his cathedral on Park Avenue. Steinberg also circulated what Podhoretz called "a pastoral letter throughout the diocese," urging his "parishioners" and those related to them, not to give any money to the AJC because it was supporting such a "horrendous enterprise."\textsuperscript{60} Steinberg's ire may have been aroused by the fact that some years before he launched his anti-\textit{Commentary} campaign, his book \textit{A Partisan Guide to the Jewish Problem}, was described in the magazine as being marked by "a deficiency of rigorous thought" and a "somewhat facile philosophy" that was committed to print before it was properly thought through.\textsuperscript{61} As Podhoretz put it: "Hell hath no fury like an author unfavorably reviewed."\textsuperscript{62}

\begin{section}{FALLOUT AND FALLING OUT}

Cohen felt the need to apologize publicly and it was the only article for which he wrote an apology in the magazine. In his apology Cohen admitted to "a lapse in editorial watchfulness," which he deeply regretted.\textsuperscript{63} In a private letter to M. L. Isaacs, dean of Yeshiva College, Cohen wrote: "There are always limits to which editors can go in editing writers, especially those of Mr. Rosenfeld's seriousness and conviction; we try in \textit{Commentary} to give the widest possible latitude for the expression of authors' opinions, whether or not we agree with them." He accepted that some passages may have been misunderstood and "should have been recast" and "certainly there is one anecdote that was both gross and pointless and should have been eliminated. The editor slipped, and he is sorry for the offense."\textsuperscript{64} This was a surprising response from Cohen as he fiercely and jealously guarded his editorial freedom, often losing his short and fiery temper doing so. As if to compound the insult, AJC President Jacob Blaustein wrote a formal complaint that Cohen published in the magazine. Blaustein was personally incensed by the article and furious that \textit{Commentary} had offended so many Jewish sensibilities. He openly rapped Cohen over the knuckles, and clearly warned that such behavior was never to be repeated: "I feel certain that your
In response, Cohen's friends within the New York Jewish intellectual community initiated a letter-writing campaign against the Committee. Dwight Macdonald wrote that Blaustein's letter was a "tasteless" example of "the power of the purse to give a public spanking to an editorial board," serving "notice that henceforth the editors have, under duress, agreed not to print articles" that might offend the AJC's sensibilities. Mary McCarthy suggested Blaustein's pressure was akin to "the ukase of a warden in a house of correction," warning: "There can be no editorial freedom for Commentary in the future if Mr. Blaustein and his co-officials are not, in their turn, subjected to public censure for this excess of administrative ardor."

Irving Howe called it "subvention" and was "disturbed," as he could see no reason for an apology. Even former Record editor, Philip Rahv, termed it "medieval." This reprimand from the AJC had been so severe that Cohen felt cowed into submission, and he extinguished any public discussion of the matter. He distanced himself from the protests of his friends, refusing to publish any of them, meekly stating: "After a good deal of discussion here, we have decided that little constructive good would be served by reopening the controversy at this point." Rosenfeld's article had created probably the biggest problem between the AJC and Commentary, almost leading to Cohen's dismissal. Thereafter, he seemed to have heeded Blaustein's warning, on Jewish affairs at least. Although Commentary did print other articles at odds with AJC sensibilities, after the controversy caused by Rosenfeld's article both the Committee and Cohen were far more cautious and circumspect.

CONCLUSION

In 1931, Henry Hurwitz wrote to his former employee, Elliot Cohen, advising him that "responsible editorship" of a journal like the Menorah Journal required:
A certain immersion in Jewish studies, besides a sympathy with Jewish life far deeper than a critical interest in the contemporary Jewish scene. Hence, unless you are prepared to devote far more time to Jewish studies, your own life's vocation would seem to lie elsewhere.

Although Cohen's vocation returned to an editorship of a Jewish magazine, he evidently ignored Hurwitz's advice, which might have saved him a great deal of trouble later on in life. In the same letter, Hurwitz asked Cohen: "What would you like Jewish life to be?" Perhaps, some eighteen years later, he was finally answered. The publication of various articles, culminating in Rosenfeld's piece and its aftermath, tell us that Cohen's, and thus Commentary's, attitude towards Jewishness and Judaism was unconventional, intellectual, often disdainful, definitely insensitive, contemptuous of organized Jewry, and hence unafraid to push boundaries or dissent from communal norms.

Why did Cohen print such articles and did he consider the potential aftermath before hand? It is clear that Cohen tested the extent to which he could go, pushing boundaries to their limits, seeing how far he could promote new and untried visions of Judaism. Or, perhaps, being well schooled in internal Jewish politics, Cohen knew what the reactions would be and he was deliberately antagonizing the Jewish establishment, whom he despised from his fifteen years spent in the wilderness as the publicity director of the New York Federation of Jewish Philanthropies.

Finally, perhaps he used such items as a gesture of defiance and autonomy, to establish Commentary's editorial independence from the AJC, knowing precisely that no Jewish agency would allow this sort of thing to be printed in a "house" magazine. To answer the question posed in the title: Commentary was a Jewish journal inasmuch as Jews sponsored it, Jews wrote articles in it about Jews, and Jews read and complained about it, but its relationship to Jewishness and the Jewish community was far more complex than that.

Nathan Abrams teaches American History at the University of Southampton, and is currently writing a book about the history and impact of Commentary magazine. The author would like to thank Daniel Greene, Richard King, Fred Krome, Lisa Magloff, Bill Novak, and Hugh Wilford, for their useful help, comments, and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. Research for this article
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NOTES
13. Most of the studies of *Commentary* have tended to be of article length: Bernard Avishai, "Breaking Faith: *Commentary* and the American Jews," *Dissent* 28: 2 (Spring 1981); John Erickman, "Commentary, the Public Interest, and the Problem of American Jewish Conservatism," *American Jewish History* 87: 2 and 3 (June and September 1999): 159–81; Allen Graubard, "From *Commentary* to *Tikkun*: The Past and
American Jewish Archives Journal


20. I am grateful to Steven Leder for pointing this out in his "Commentary Magazine, Its Form and Content," AJA.

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22. Cohen was named after George Eliot, probably for her sympathetic representation of Jews in Daniel Deronda. Later in life he would change his name to Elliot.


28. Jumonville, Critical Crossings, 64; see also 61–63.

29. Podhoretz, Making It, 130, 134–35.


35. Podhoretz, Making It, 133; see also Naomi W. Cohen, Not Free to Desist, 263–64.


37. Podhoretz, Making It, 134.


40. Minutes of the Administrative Council, April 1, 1947, AJC, YIVO.

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43. Minutes of the Administrative Council, April 1, 1947, AJC, YIVO.
45. Minutes of the Administrative Committee, June 3, 1947, AJC, YIVO.
51. Carl Alpert to Members of the American Jewish Committee, October 24, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
52. M. Rotenberg to John Slawson, November 10, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
53. Louis Finkelstein to Henry Hurwitz, November 3, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
54. Henry Hurwitz to Louis Finkelstein, November 12, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
56. Henry Hurwitz to Rabbi Milton Steinberg, October 20, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
57. Rabbi Milton Steinberg to Henry Hurwitz, October 23, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
59. Ibid.
60. Podhoretz, Speech in Chicago (1968).
64. Elliot Cohen to M.L. Isaacs, October 18, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
66. Dwight Macdonald to the Editors of Commentary, December 13, 1949; Mary McCarthy to Elliot Cohen, December 14, 1949; Irving Howe to Elliot Cohen, December 18, 1949; Philip Rahv to the Editors of Commentary, December 19, 1949, Dwight Macdonald Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University.
68. Henry Hurwitz to Elliot Cohen, November 2, 1931, HHMA, AJA.
Who Murdered Professor Israel Friedlaender and Rabbi Bernard Cantor: The Truth Rediscovered

Michael Beizer

Right under my window some Cossacks were trying to shoot an old silvery-bearded Jew for spying. The old man was uttering piercing screams and struggling to get away. Then Kudrya of the machine-gun section took hold of his head and tucked it under his arm. The Jew stopped screaming and straddled his legs. Kudrya drew out his dagger with his right hand and carefully, without splashing himself, cut the old man's throat.

—Isaak Babel, “Berestechko,” Collected Stories

In July 1920, two emissaries of the Joint Distribution Committee of American Funds for the Relief of Jewish War Sufferers, which was later renamed the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC, AJJDC, or the Joint), Professor Israel Friedlaender and Rabbi Bernard Cantor, were killed in the territory of the Ukraine while on a mission to distribute relief among the Jews who were victims of war and pogroms.

The Jewish population of the Ukraine suffered tremendously in the course of the hostilities that took place for six years following the beginning of World War I. After the revolutionary upheavals of 1917 and the German occupation in 1918, these hostilities developed into a civil war between the troops of the Ukrainian Directory, the Voluntary (White) army of General Anton Denikin, the Bolshevik Red Army, and numerous local gangs. According to various estimates, the number of Jewish victims of war and violence ranged from 50,000 to 200,000. As many as 200,000 children were orphaned. And up to half a million Jews were left destitute.
Established in 1914 to provide relief for Jews who had suffered from the pogroms, the Joint started its work in Poland under the guidance of Dr. Boris Bogen who arrived there in February 1919. With him was an Overseas Unit, which subsequently grew to include 126 people, among them experts in sanitation, child care, and economics. Members of the unit wore United States army uniforms.

A JDC special commission arrived in Europe in January 1920 and attempted to secure the Soviet government’s permission to enter the Ukraine to assess the situation of Ukrainian Jews and render them urgent assistance. The commission was comprised of Judge Harry M. Fisher of Chicago, Max Pine, a Jewish labor leader from New York, Professor Israel Friedlaender, and Morris Kass. Judge Fisher and Mr. Pine decided not to wait for permission, and in March traveled to western Volyn and Podolia, which had been occupied by the Polish troops in the summer of 1919. Professor Friedlaender remained in western Europe. “The situation which the two commissioners found upon entering the stricken region was indescribably terrible.”

On April 20, 1920, an agreement was signed in Warsaw between the head of the Polish state Josef Pilsudski and Simon Petlura under which Poland recognized the Directoria as the supreme power in the Ukraine in exchange for concessions of Eastern Galicia and Western Volyn. A Polish offensive in alliance with the Directoria troops immediately followed. Although they captured a sizeable part of the right-bank Ukraine and on May 6 entered Kiev, in June of the same year they had to retreat under the onslaught of the Red Army.

The most extensive and cruel pogroms were carried out by the troops of the Directoria in 1919. The Poles and the Bolsheviks also staged Jewish pogroms but at much greater intervals and with less brutality. In September 1920, the revolutionary council of the First Cavalry Army commanded by Budenny disbanded one of its divisions that had engaged in pogroms.

Polish occupation of a large piece of the Ukraine presented opportunities for the JDC unit to offer relief to a greater number of Ukrainian Jews. Early in May two members of the unit reached Kiev, namely, Dr. Charles Spivak, Special Commissioner for Health and Sanitation, and Captain Elkan Voorsanger. They found the plight of the Jewish population appalling, including 20,000 penniless refugees and 10,000 orphans with no one to take care of them. Spivak and Voorsanger gave local Jewish leaders 3,000,000 rubles to be used for relief and sent four railway cars with essential items from Warsaw to
Meanwhile Professor Friedlaender also decided to proceed into the section of the Ukraine still occupied by Poland, that was shrinking as the Red Army was advancing. He went to Volyn and Podolia with Meyer Leff and Morris Kass. Besides distributing relief, Professor Friedlaender attempted to prevent the retreating Polish troops from victimizing the Jewish population. In some cases he succeeded. He also wanted to meet General Pilsudski, commander of the Polish army, and ask him to order his men to refrain from committing atrocities against local Jews. In Kamienets-Podolsky he met Rabbi Bernard Cantor, who was distributing JDC funds among local Jewish relief committees. On July 5, 1920, Friedlaender joined Cantor who was returning to Lvov via Proskurov and Tarnopol. A Jewish leader named Grossman of Tarnopol, went with them. They set out at six in the morning but as they were approaching the shtetl of Yarmolintsy, their car was attacked by men of the Red cavalry unit that had broken through the frontline taking control of Yarmolintsy for several hours. The three passengers (Friedlaender, Cantor, and Grossman)—mistaken for Polish officers and a landowner—were killed but the chauffeur escaped. On the following day the Polish troops again entered Yarmolintsy and it was only on July 9 that the Red Army captured it for good (Documents 5 and 6).

Friedlaender (1876–1920) was born in Kovel (Volyn) and educated at Berlin and Strasbourg universities. He was an expert in biblical and medieval Arab literature as well as a Jewish historian and public figure, holding the position of Professor of Biblical Literature and Exegesis at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He was married to Lilian Ruth Bentwich with whom he had three sons—Herzl, Benzion, and Daniel Balfour—and three daughters—Carmel, Judith-Susannah, and Nachomo Joy. He belonged to the American Jewish elite, was affiliated with a score of Jewish organizations in the U.S., and was a member of the JDC. He was also an ardent Zionist (as evidenced by the names he gave his sons) and a romanticist striving to be a hero of his people, not merely an armchair scientist. He sought danger. His personal participation in distributing the JDC relief in the Ukraine was not part of his duties, but he could not possibly be refused a trip to eastern Europe. According to Dr. Meyer Leff, who worked with Friedlaender in the Ukraine, “The tragic end of Professor Israel
Friedlaender shocked, but did not altogether surprise his many friends, especially those who were associated with him in his perilous mission. . . He was ready to die for his people."

Rabbi Cantor (1892–1920) was only twenty-eight years old when he was killed. His service record was not as impressive as that of Professor Friedlaender's and he was not part of the elite. He came from an Orthodox family with many children and owed the fundamentals of his religious education to his father and brother-in-law. Later he studied at the University of Cincinnati, the University of Chicago, and at Hebrew Union College. Before his trip to Europe he was rabbi at the New York Free Synagogue and had some experience as a social worker. While in Lvov "he was engaged to be married to a very handsome and intelligent young lady," Ms. Irma Abramovich from a respectable local family.

Even against the background of tens of thousands of Jewish victims in the Ukraine, the death of these two people was of special significance. Never before had JDC employees who were American citizens been killed while discharging their duties. Later it happened only once, on August 16, 1967, when the Joint Executive Vice-Chairman Charles Harold Jordan (1908–1967) was killed in Prague. The fate of Professor Friedlaender, a renowned scientist holding a high position in Jewish public circles and with influential relatives and friends, has attracted the attention of historians and journalists since his death.

Yet from the outset, the circumstances of the murder were distorted by the press both due to the inaccuracy of the information coming from a place so far away as well to political biases. An editorial in the New York socialist newspaper Forverts of July 13, 1920, played an important part in this "information war." The editorial unequivocally refuted the information that the JDC emissaries had been killed by Red Army men and stated—without offering any evidence—that the murderers were Poles, or some of Petlura's men wearing Red Army uniform, or bandits with whom the chauffeur conspired. It was even hinted that the Polish authorities might have been involved:

It's nonsense. Nobody will believe that Bolshevik soldiers attacked Dr. Friedlaender's car while not a single Bolshevik soldier was around and could not be there at the moment of the murder. Only Polish troops could be there. And if someone
believed the story that the attackers were indeed wearing Bolshevik uniforms, then he would have to infer that they were men from the Petlura gangs or bandits of some other Ukrainian gang leader who often wear the same uniform as the Bolshevik soldiers. However, there is no need for suppositions of this kind when the main suspect is the chauffeur himself. His account about the Bolsheviks and of how he escaped arouses strong suspicion that it was he who killed [the emissaries], alone or together with other Poles, for the purpose of robbery or for some other reasons.

The question remains whether the chauffeur made up the version about Bolsheviks himself or he was prodded by someone else; after all, the best way to shift the suspicion away from him was to invent the story about the Bolsheviks. Therefore, in its news item on the murder The New York Times could find no better heading than "Red Bandits Killed Dr. Friedlaender. "The main thing here is that the emphasis is on the word "Red," which makes it unnecessary to look for the true murderers.

We strongly doubt that given the situation in Poland and in Ukrainian regions occupied by Poland, it will be possible to learn the truth about the murder. And if the chauffeur were a Pole, which is quite possible, the chances of uncovering the truth are very slim indeed. The annals will show that it was the Bolsheviks who attacked the car and committed the murder. Whatever angle you look at it from, this is the most convenient answer for political reasons.

There are some who believe that Polish government officials are involved in the murder. It is possible that some Polish official circles feared that Professor Friedlaender might come away with an unflattering report on the attitude to Jews in Poland. We cannot examine these fears in earnest because we have no evidence to substantiate them. 14

As this passage shows, the editorial was purely political, namely, to clear the Bolsheviks of suspicion inasmuch as the newspaper’s editors and readers favored the Bolsheviks over the Directoria troops or the Poles. 15 The Bolsheviks were said to be the only force protecting the Jews against pogroms. 16 Since the official American stance was anti-
Bolshevist, the publication of any unfavorable information about the Bolsheviks was interpreted as anti-Soviet propaganda in Jewish socialist circles and therefore refuted.

This was not the only such case in American history. During World War II the Jewish public gave a similarly hostile reception to Ismar Elbogen’s historical monograph *A Century of Jewish Life*, in which the responsibility for pogroms against Jews in the Ukraine in 1919 was placed on the Red Army along with other armies. It was the reason for the second edition of the book being “revised.”

The *Forverts* was not alone in calling the chauffeur's testimony into question. Employees of the Joint Overseas Unit did not trust it either. Their suspicions were based, first, on the fact that the chauffeur remained alive while the rest were killed, and, second, that he did not urge the Polish solders whom he encountered to rescue the Americans, but instead convinced them to avoid the battle and return to Dunaevtsy. Further, it appeared suspicious that he did not immediately tell the JDC’s representatives in Kamenets what had happened although he spent the night there on his way back home to Lvov. In addition, his testimony was at odds with the testimony of a Polish army officer whose car picked up the chauffeur not far from the murder scene. Leo Gerstenzand, the JDC worker who interrogated him in Warsaw, told him straightforwardly: “I have two things against you. That you, being a Jew, did not tell the Captain to see what happened and did not tell exactly that there were two soldiers there, and that you did not step in at the Committee's and give your account there.” In fact the driver was simply terrified and did everything possible not to return to the scene of the murder. He realized, of course, that he left his passengers in the moment of mortal danger, and thus preferred to avoid meeting with Dr. Leff.

It must be pointed out that newspaper publications distorted not only information related to the killers of the JDC emissaries (although this was the main point), but also other circumstances of the murder, such as its date, place, motives, number of victims, presence or absence of eyewitnesses, and other details.

The Joint could not institute an investigation in the shtetl immediately, as the hostilities still continued. Yet shortly afterward, on July 21, a commission representing the JDC was dispatched from Kamenets-Podolsky. The commission questioned witnesses and
compiled ten protocols. The results of its work were formalized in a report that confirmed beyond any doubt that Bolsheviks were responsible for the murder and refuted any participation by the chauffeur in it (see Document 5). The commission's report was compiled on September 26 and sent to New York via Bucharest in late October. Meanwhile a memorial meeting for Friedlaender and Cantor was held at Carnegie Hall, New York City, on September 9. Cyrus Adler, the acting president of the JTS, who spoke there cautiously said: "They were shot down by men wearing the uniform of the Bolshevik army." It was an irony of fate that included in the agreement to rent Carnegie Hall was a paragraph obligating the JDC not to use the Hall for Bolshevist propaganda.

What happened to the Yarmolintsy Report later is not quite clear. Obviously, it was brought to the attention of the JDC leaders and other prominent Jewish personalities. This is clear from the correspondence of George Dobsevage (Dobsovitch), secretary of the Publication Committee of the Jewish Publication Society, and Cyrus Adler, who was active on that committee. Dobsevage prepared a review draft of the Friedlaender-Cantor Memorial Volume, intended for distribution among journalists, and sent it to Adler. The draft called the murderers "bandits." On reading the draft Adler pointed out in his letter dated January 11, 1921: "On the first page I have marked the phrase 'of bandits.' There is not the slightest doubt but that these two men were killed by soldiers of the Bolshevik army. As a matter of fact, the Bolshevik authorities have expressed regret at the death of those two men, stating that they were mistaken for Polish spies." The wording of the draft was changed to: "death at the hands of Bolshevist soldiers who mistook them for Polish spies." In 1940, a HIAS official reported to Ben-Zion Friedlaender, who lived in Chicago, that 'Red partisans' mistook his father and Rabbi Cantor for Polish officers.'

It is possible that access to the Yarmolintsy Report as well as to other documents from the Joint Archives was in the past limited but not closed. At any rate, Herman Bernstein's The History of American Jewish Relief, written in 1928, gives a correct account of the murder based on this document. Oscar Handlin, who wrote a book about the JDC, confirms Adler and Bernstein: "They had been shot by Red Army soldiers. . . ."

Thus, the JDC leadership investigated the murder and arrived at the truth. It also succeeded in obtaining an official expression of regret
from the Bolsheviks and compelled them to institute a search for the murderers who nevertheless were never apprehended. The JDC made every effort to provide for the families of the dead—collecting large sums of money for them, locating and sending Friedlaender’s widow her late husband’s personal effects, both those captured by the Bolsheviks in Yarmolintsy and those left behind in Europe—as well as to perpetuate their memories. At the same time, there is reason to believe that the JDC did not want to have the Bolshevik responsibility widely publicized and risk being libeled as an organization fanning anti-Soviet sentiment in the U.S. at a time when it was starting to provide relief to Soviet Jews on a large scale. On June 17, 1920, Fisher and Pine, who represented the JDC, signed an agreement with the Soviet government to establish the Jewish Public Committee for Aid to Pogrom Victims functioning under Soviet control (Evobshchestkom), also known in its Yiddish abbreviation as Idgezkom. This was the channel through which relief from American Jewry began to reach Soviet Russia. Wide publicity given to the Yarmolintsy Report could have adversely affected fund-raising among those parts of American Jews who had a favorable view of the Bolsheviks and encouraged the JDC’s relations with the Soviet government. After all, the JDC was the union of three organizations, one of which, the People’s Relief Committee, was socialist. Rabbi Judah Magnes, a sympathizer to the Bolshevik revolution, who was influential in JDC, was also hardly in favor of publicizing the report. Aid to pogrom victims was the priority at the time, especially since it had transpired that the murder of Friedlaender and Cantor was a tragic mistake.

The Yarmolintsy Report and its accompanying documents were never published and the Forverts version of the murderers as either Petlura’s men or the Whites or just bandits in disguise became entrenched in the public mind. A memorial article about Friedlaender in The American Jewish Year Book, 1921–1922, mentions anonymous “bandits” as the murderers. The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia speaks of “the Ukrainian bandits.” Louis Finkelstein, the author of the entry, who was related to Friedlaender by marriage, did not mention the real murderers. The Juedisches Lexikon, published in Germany, claims that “the pogromist mob (Pogrompoebel)” murdered the two. Encyclopedia Judaica in its entry on Friedlaender gives the party of bandits version while in its entry “American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee” one can read about a “White Russian gang.” The
"bandit" version has been borrowed from the *Encyclopedia Judaica* by the contemporary Jewish encyclopedias in Russian. In his book *My Brother's Keeper*, Yehuda Bauer claims that Friedlaender and Cantor were murdered by Ukrainians. Baila Shargel's book on Friedlaender, *Practical Dreamer*, is inclined to accept the "disguise" version put forward by the *Forverts* and ignores the Yarmolintsy Report. The author even contends that "the details about Friedlaender's death will, in all probability, never be obtained."

One may speculate whether Friedlaender's widow, Lilian, who was in close contact with Cyrus Adler and Judah Magnes, knew about the Yarmolintsy Report. In any case, it appears that the results of the Yarmolintsy Report never became known to her children. This can be gleaned from a letter written by Friedlaender's son Herzl of Chicago to John C. Colman, JDC Board member. Herzl's letter is quoted in Colman's letter to Ralph Goldman, Executive Vice-President of the AJJDC, dated July 20, 1981. Herzl had only a guess as to who might have shot his father but no definite knowledge of it:

> No definitive opinion has ever been given as to the persons responsible for the act [the murder].
>
> I have heard that it might have been on the orders of General Petlura, a recognized anti-Semite, who was planning a pogrom and did not wish to be interrupted or observed; that it was the work of bandits who maybe knew that father and Rabbi Cantor were carrying gold for relief purposes; that Polish or Russian soldiers—regular or renegade—might have mistaken the uniform he was probably wearing (he possessed one as a Major in the U.S. Army, I believe) as that of the enemy.
>
> My own guess—and that is all it is—comes from very recently reading some applicable history. It seems that on July 4th and 5th of that year (1920) the Red Army launched a massive surprise attack against Poland. The military movement was on a long front, which might well have included either directly, or for support and assembly purposes, the precise area in which the automobile and driver being used were traversing. They may, therefore, have been considered as possible spies with a shoot first and ask
questions later order. Certainly the Russians would not want to take any chances that the surprise offensive would be noted too soon. A catch to this hypothesis is that we have always been under the impression that the driver escaped.37

This is the first publication of documents related to the murder of Friedlaender and Cantor. Its purpose is to bring clarity to the issue. The primary published document is, of course, the Yarmolintsy Report. The records of the questioning of witnesses (in Yiddish, Ukrainian, and Polish) on the basis of which the report was written are not published for lack of space but are taken into account in my analysis of the report. Also published here are the testimony of the chauffeur and the records of his cross-examination, Dr. Leff’s report, and the cover letter to the Yarmolintsy Report by Alexander Landesko. I have also included a page from Herman Bernstein’s “The History of American Jewish Relief,” written in 1928, which has not been published and itself has become a historical document.

Documents 1, 4, and 6 are cited in their original form. Document 2 is a translation from the Polish, Document 3, from the German, Document 5, from the Yiddish. All these translations, which were made in 1920, have been collated with the originals. Geographical names and the names of people have been regularized (according to the Russian standards) and obvious distortions in the text corrected. A Russian translation of the Yarmolintsy Report discovered in the Kiev Archives was used when collating the texts.38

A comparative analysis of the source materials warrants the following conclusions regarding the circumstances of the murder and its press coverage:
1. Scene of the Murder

Most of the documents and newspaper reports are unanimous in placing the scene of the murder of Friedlaender and Cantor on the highway leading from Kamenets-Podolsky to Proskurov, at the entrance to Yarmolintsy or near it, in the vicinity of the village closest to the shtetl known as Sokolovka.

2. Date and Time of the Murder

The murder took place between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. on Monday, July 5, 1920, or on 19 Tamuz in the year 5680, according to the Jewish calendar.39 Due to the confused reports coming from Warsaw on the
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first days after the murder, the dates cited in the press differed: in the *Jewish Chronicle* and *Forverts* it was July 7, and in *The New York Times*, July 8. The newspapers referred to the statement made by Felix Warburg, the JDC chairman who had obtained erroneous information from the outset, and to the chauffeur. In his report, the chauffeur gave the true date (Document 2) but three weeks later he first said at the cross-examination that the murder had been committed on Sunday, but later on corrected himself (Document 3). The JDC Treasurer thought that the murder date was July 9.

Especially misleading are the inscriptions on the gravestones at the Yarmolintsy cemetery (see below), which indicate July 10, 1920 (24 Tamuz, Shabbat), as the date of death. In May 1923, the JDC Moscow office sent sketches of these gravestones to the New York headquarters for Herbert Bentwich, Friedlaender's father-in-law I. M. Kovalsky, the new JDC representative in Kiev, who ordered the gravestones and attended their unveiling on the fifth and not on the tenth of July 1923, as the inscriptions on the gravestones indicate, did not correct the mistake. It is unlikely that in the three years that passed between the murder and the stone setting it could have been erased from their memory.

3. Witnesses to the Murder

Document 5 establishes that besides the chauffeur there were other witnesses to the murder. A peasant standing near his house saw the Americans' car being stopped by Red Army men, the passengers rushing away, and the Red Army men shooting them. Another peasant—in whose yard Friedlaender was killed—was indoors when the murder took place, but a few minutes later came out and saw three dead bodies. Dr. Rykhlo of the local hospital testified that other peasants had also seen the murder but the version they told him was somewhat different. At the interrogation the chauffeur also said that there were witnesses to the murder, and added: “After [an] armistice is concluded I’ll request the local peasants to testify about the occurrence.” To the direct question: “Have you seen no one on the road?” he answers: “On the contrary, I saw peasants from the town.” In his first statement he also mentioned the presence of witnesses (see Documents 2 and 3).
(Courtesy of Michael Beizer)
The Truth Rediscovered

(Courtesy of Michael Beizer)
American Jewish Archives Journal

The matter of the witnesses also had a pragmatic aspect: to obtain insurance for the dead. Herbert Bentwich addressed Julius Goldman on this matter in particular and he answered that “the [insurance] Company should be asked to be as reasonable in their demands as may be possible, as I fear it will be rather difficult to obtain evidence in the required technically legal form.”

4. Who Were the Murderers?

The fact that the murders occurred before the Reds had permanently captured Yarmolintsy made it possible for Forverts to claim that they could not have been the murderers and that the chauffeur’s story was a fiction. The day before, on July 12, the Forverts told its readers an intriguing detail—that the car had been captured by three masked (!) bandits. On July 16, the Jewish Chronicle wrote of three men wearing Bolshevist uniforms. A week later the same paper skipped the word “Bolshevist” and said: “by three men in uniform.” On July 25, The Jewish Relief News (New York) published by the American Jewish Relief Committee (a part of the JDC) told its readers about “ten armed bandits,” and later, on August 15, about “Bolshevist bandits.” The New York Times reported: “by bandits” (July 11), but later, on July 16, specified: “by Bolshevist bandits.” Evidently, the newspaper saw the two notions as synonymous because elsewhere in the same issue there was this addition: “It is a significant fact, however, that the robbers were in Bolshevist uniform—another illustration of the impossibility of distinguishing between Bolshevism and brigandage.”

Document 5 confirms the testimony of the chauffeur that Friedlaender and Cantor were killed by Red Army cavalry men, in all probability from the First Cavalry Army under Semen Budenny’s command, which had launched an offensive against the Polish-Ukrainian forces in this area (see Document 6). On October 12, 1920, the Jewish historian Semyon Dubnov, who was in Petrograd at that time, learned from the noted Zionist Yakov Klebanov that Friedlaender had been killed and robbed by no others than the Reds.

5. Motives of the Murder

The main cause of the murder was mistaken identification. Everything points to the fact that the soldiers did not know what the
U.S. Stars and Stripes looked like (one of the passengers was displaying it), nor could they identify a U.S. Army officer uniform, and therefore had no idea whom they had stopped. They told their commanding officer and the onlookers that they had killed Polish officers and a landowner (see Document 5). That was why they did not shoot the chauffeur (according to Dr. Rykhlo's testimony); the chauffeur was not a serviceman and they did not place him in the exploiter class. That Friedlaender and Cantor started running could have been their fatal mistake. Had they not done so they might have had a chance to remain alive.

Doubtless robbery and anti-Semitism could also have been motives. The Red Army men stripped the dead bodies naked and took all their belongings. However, attributing the attack on the JDC emissaries to the robbery motive alone, as did some publications, in particular The New York Times, was an overstatement. This version was based on the unverified information received from Warburg that Friedlaender and Cantor had a large sum of money with them—$400,000. The New York Times wrote: "Conditions in the Ukraine are such that financial aid can be distributed only in cash, and therefore both the murdered men carried large sums with them." As Meyer Leff pointed out in his report, Friedlaender and Cantor actually had no American money with them at the time of the murder. Rather, they only had a few thousand Polish marks and Russian rubles. Dr. Leff, who was in Kamenets-Podolsky when they set out from this town on their last journey, surely knew how much money they carried. His testimony is corroborated by Document 5, which says that the Red Army men were giving children the captured Polish marks (they could not make use of them themselves) and gave some of the captured things to local peasants. In his speech at the Carnegie Hall Cyrus Adler likewise stated: "They had no considerable funds with them."

Anti-Semitic motives also must be excluded. The Red Army men probably did not even realize that their victims were Jewish because
their appearance was drastically different from the Ukrainian Jews.

6. The Forgotten Third Victim

When Jechiel Lisawoder and Mathias Sigal, members of the inquiry commission investigating the murder, requested people from the Yarmolintsy community to assist them in their mission, the first reaction of the assembly was surprise that they were talking about the murder of only two men when actually "they had found and buried three." In the course of the investigation the commission had established that the third victim was a man of about sixty and that the upper tooth plate and a right-side truss were found near his body (see Document 5).

Dr. Leff's report revealed the last name of the third man: Grossman of Tarnopol. In a letter to Felix Warburg, Julius Goldman described him: "The latter [Grossman], I wish to state right here, was an old gentleman of 73 years of age and a man of wealth and standing in the local Community, which they had just visited." In the testimony of a Polish soldier who attended the funeral of the murdered, three dead bodies are mentioned (see Document 5). Bernstein also notes that "they also shot Mr. Grossman, the Russian Jew who was in the car" (Document 6). There was no mention in the American press of a third murdered man. Nor can any information about him be found in the memorial book about Friedlaender and Cantor or in Bauer's and Handlin's books about the JDC or in Shargel's biography of Friedlaender or in the relevant encyclopedia articles. The death of a local Jew who was not an American aroused no interest.

7. The Burned Car

Friedlaender and Cantor used a Fiat on their last journey. The car
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was moving slowly, not more than 25 verst an hour because it had “blew out” tires and there were no tires to replace them (Document 3). A horseman could easily catch up with it. Therefore the travelers stopped when ordered and did not even try to escape although the command “Halt!” came from behind and the road ahead was not blocked (Document 1). At the interrogation the chauffeur testified that the Bolsheviks had set fire to the car, saying that he had seen the smoke coming from the car from a distance of half a verst away. He invented the story of the burning car to justify his unwillingness to return to the murder scene, even to retrieve the car. The JDC employees and the Jewish press did not trust his testimony in essence, yet they believed his lie about the burning car even though the soldiers had no time to set it on fire while the chauffeur was running. Details of the burned car, coupled with the story of masked robbers in disguise and a large sum of stolen money, fueled the imagination and was reminiscent of a Wild West movie. The burned car figured in the Forverts and Jewish Chronicle reports. Leff’s report mentioned the testimony of a Polish soldier who saw an “overturned car” (Document 1).

Actually, however, the car was not burned; it was not even seriously damaged by the Red Army men. They only made peasants push it into a yard, planning to recover it when the Red Army entered Yarmolintsy. According to the testimony of the peasants, however, the first to seize the car were Polish soldiers (Document 5). As it later transpired, it was Directoria soldiers who were the first; the Poles took it from them and returned to the JDC Warsaw office early in 1921. The JDC New York headquarters gave up the idea of transporting the car to New York as a memorial of the dead. The Warsaw office was instructed either to use the car if still in a suitable condition or to sell it.

Documents:
Document 1. [Dr. Leff’s Report], July 14, 1920.
Document 2. Account of the Attack Near Yarmolintsy (Statement of the Chauffeur), [July 8, 1920].
Epilogue: The Fate of the Dead Bodies and of the Graves

The JDC's initial intention was to bring their bodies to the United States. As early as July 13, the Forverts reported that "preparations are underway to bring the bodies of the two martyrs here." A week later Julius Goldman wrote to Felix Warburg from his Paris office: "We shall endeavor to recover the bodies of Prof. Friedlaender and Doctor Cantor and shall make such disposition of them as their relatives may direct." It had turned out, however, that the bodies were already buried at the local cemetery. Besides, to bring the bodies from the Ukraine was not an easy thing to do, as Podolia had been captured by the Bolsheviks and the matter had to be negotiated with them. Numerous gangs were still plaguing the area. In reply to the request of Friedlaender's widow Lilian to exhume Friedlaender's remains and bring them to Palestine for burial, the Joint's secretary Albert Lucas followed the advice of Dr. Frank F. Rosenblatt who cabled from Tallinn in December 1920: "Soviet authorities in principle have nothing against [it]. Owing [to] various technical difficulties [I] advise execution plan be deferred several months and not before my personal visit Ukraine and grave. That region [is] still infested by various bandits." Meanwhile it came to the attention of the JDC Warsaw office that "the body of Mr. Grossman... had already been removed by his sons who live near Yarmolintsy."

In 1922, the JDC's negotiations with the Soviet government about the exhumation of Friedlaender's and Cantor's bodies and transporting them to the U.S. were evidently resumed. This time the negotiations were interrupted at the request of Friedlaender's widow, who before that, after long hesitation, had moved to Palestine. She
wrote to Cyrus Adler: “On no account do I wish them [the remains] removed to America. There might be a time when I might consider their removal here, but it seems much more likely that they will remain where they are.” Lilian was not sure whether she was going to stay in Palestine and wanted to erect a temporary tombstone on the grave of her late husband. “Of course, the final arrangements cannot yet be made for I may either decide to remove the body to Palestine if I settle here permanently,” she added in the same letter.

The Joint did as the widow wished. In 1923 modest monuments were erected on the graves of its two workers. The ceremonial unveiling took place on July 5, the anniversary of their murder according to the Gregorian calendar, attended by a representative of the local authorities, local Jewish public figures, and the Kiev JDC representative. A Jewish businessmen from the nearby shtetl Dunaevtsy spoke at the ceremony and expressed his confidence that “the black hands” of “the butcher” will be punished. He refrained, however, from saying openly who the murderers were. The Joint paid for designing and installing the monuments, which cost fifty-five dollars. The wrong dates of death were inscribed.

Years passed and the graves of the JDC emissaries were forgotten. The Ukrainian province was declared off-limits to foreigners. In 1938, the JDC, or rather its branch, the Agro-Joint, had to close its office in Moscow, and its senior employees, who were Soviet citizens, were put behind bars or executed. The Jewish population of Yarmolintsy dwindled as Jews migrated to larger USSR cities, and almost all of those who remained were killed during the German occupation. The cemetery was neglected, most of the graves damaged and covered with earth, and the tombstones smashed or stolen by local people. Friedlaender’s and Cantor’s monuments either collapsed or were knocked down, overgrown with moss and covered with litter. The photographs on the monuments were missing. In the postwar Soviet Union, the JDC’s activities were banned and the Joint itself was seen as an American intelligence organization, something like a CIA branch. Therefore the Joint could not visit the graves and take care of them.

In the 1970s, Herzl Friedlaender made inquiries about the place of his father’s grave and the answer he received was that it was in a military zone into which foreigners were not allowed. “And I had the wish to visit the grave site and maybe arrange to have the remains
moved to Israel. A fantasy, I suppose!” he wrote.

In 2000, while working with Friedlaender and Cantor’s file in the AJJDC Archives, I came across sketches of the monuments made in 1923. Having learned that there were still remnants of the Jewish cemetery in Yarmolintsy, I asked the Kiev branch of the Joint to check if the monuments had escaped destruction. Igor Ratushny, director of the Khmelnitsky Hesed Besht charity organization supported by the Joint, visited Yarmolintsy with his colleagues and, guided by the sketches he had been sent, found their remnants at the cemetery. In July 2001, on the 81st anniversary of Professor Friedlaender’s death, at the request of his relatives and with the assistance of the JDC, his remains were moved to Jerusalem and reburied with due ceremony on the site of the Bentwich family on Mount Scopus. The remains of Cantor were left in Yarmolintsy at the request of his relatives and his tombstone restored.

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NOTES

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8. In publications and archive documents Cantor is often referred to as “Doctor” although he had only a master’s degree.


12. Julius Goldman to Felix M. Warburg, July 12, 1920, AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 4165. In August 1920 she emigrated to the U.S. and became Irma May (Reel 8, frames 488, 2894.)

13. Friedlaender was the son-in-law of the well-known British Zionist, Herbert Bentwich. Friedlaender’s widow Lilian left for Erez-Israel after her husband’s death. Her sister Carmel married Jewish Theological Seminary Professor Louis Finkelstein. Her brother, Norman Bentwich was General Attorney in Palestine in the initial years of the British Mandate. Her elder daughter Carmel married Shimon Agranat, who later became the President of the High Court of Israel. Friedlaender’s sister Maryla was married to another JTS Professor Boaz Cohen. Rabbi Judah Magnes, a prominent public and political figure, was a close friend of the Friedlaenders.


16. This thesis was constantly used by the Bolsheviks themselves in internal propaganda. Mikhail Kalinin, Chairman of the RSFSR All-Russian Central Executive Committee, said in his address at the Second Conference of the Jewish Sections in 1919: “The Jewish petty bourgeoisie must know that only Soviet power will protect it against pogroms.” (Zhizn natsional’nostei (The Life of Nationalities), 1919, No. 23, 2).


18. There were three soldiers present, not “two.” Document 3.

19. Memorial Meeting [for] Israel Friedlaender [and] Bernard Cantor whose lives
were sacrificed July 5, 1920, in cause of Israel and in the service of humanity. Carnegie Hall, New York City, September 9, 1920, AJJDC Archives, Reel 8, frame 339.


21. AJJDC Archives, Reel 8, frame 409.

22. AJJDC Archives, Reel 8, frame 422.


24. Bernstein, 271. Bernstein was known as anti-Communist (Szajkowski, 192). It is hard to say whether Bernstein’s book on the JDC remained unpublished because of political considerations.


26. See Document 6 following this essay. It should be noted that the regret of the Soviet authorities was never made public in the USSR.


34. Bauer, 12. It is worth noting that in the introduction to his book Bauer mentions Bernstein’s manuscript, in which the true story of the murder is given.

35. Shargel, 35.

36. Herzl returned from Palestine to the United States around 1930 and was executive of the Jewish welfare agency in Chicago (Ginzberg, 121).

37. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frames 3974–75.

38. The State Archive of the Kiev Province, collection R–3050, inventory 1, file 197, 6–7.

39. In Document 5, the time is 9 a.m. in the morning, in Document 2, it is 11 a.m. In Document 3, 10–11 a.m. The original of Document 5 gives the date in the Jewish calendar, the translation gives the Gregorian.


41. *New York Times*, July 11, 1920. The article says “Last Thursday,” which would have been July 8.

42. From JDC Treasurer, July 23, 1920, AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 4012.

43. For the sketches of the gravestones, see AJJDC Archives, Reel 8, frames 535–36. See also Yair Sheleg, “After 81 Years, He Rests in Peace,” Ha’aretz, July 13, 2001.

44. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frames 535–36, 543–45. See also Secretary of the London Federation A. M. Kaizer, letter to the Joint (NY), May 9, 1923, Bogen’s letters.
to New York, May 9 and September 19, 1923.

45. The facts cited looked weighty enough for me to initially accept the date on the headstones as the true date and the officially recognized date as erroneous. This is precisely why July 10 was indicated as the date of the death of Friedlaender and Cantor in the JDC Memorandum that appeared on July 2000.

46. Julius Goldman to Felix Warburg, July 19 [7]. 1920. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 3959.

47. Foroerts, July 13, 1920.

48. The publication of this detail shows to what extent Foroerts editors ignored the real situation in the Ukraine at that time, for criminals could very well do without masks as they were actually never tried and punished.


51. Simon Dubnov, Kniga Zhizni (A Book of Life), (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie 1998), 450. Friedlaender translated and promoted the publication in the West of Dubnov’s books on Jewish history in Russia and Poland.


54. AJJDC Archives, Reel 8, frame 3959.


56. “The commander asked if the car was damaged and the answer was negative.” (Document 5).

57. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frames 4449, 4491–92.


59. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 3959.

60. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frames 4040, 4047, 4051.

61. Kovalsky, to JDC (NY), October 22, 1920, AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 4398.

62. Cyrus Adler to Felix Warburg, November 6, 1922. AJJDC Archives, Reel 8, frames 531–33.

63. Photographs of the Unveiling Ceremony, AJJDC Archives, Reel 8, frames 543–46.

64. AJJDC Archives, Reel 8, frame 541.

65. AJJDC Archives, Reel 8, frame 534.


67. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 3955.

Document 1: Dr. Leff's Report, July 14, 1920

Professor Friedlaender and Dr. Cantor left Kamenets-Podolsky six o'clock Monday morning, July 5, 1920. With them was a Mr. Grossman from Tarnopol. They went in a Fiat, which was operated by chauffeur Singer of Lemberg. They were going to Lvov by way of Proskurov. The following morning, on July 6, the Polish Garrison was hurriedly evacuating Kamenets-Podolsky, and it was rumored that on the previous day there was a rebellion of the peasants against the Polish power at Yarmolintsy. A little later, a Jew from Dunaevtsy came to inform me that two Americans were killed near Yarmolintsy Monday morning.

I hurried to the local military headquarters where I was told that the chauffeur Singer was brought there the previous night. It was related that Russian soldiers attacked his party near Yarmolintsy Monday morning; that he alone escaped; that the chauffeur left for Galicia in the automobile of Capt. Kulwiec of the 6th Polish Army by way of Skala; that a detachment of soldiers in a military automobile was ordered to the place of the accident and that news was expected in a few hours. I wanted to proceed to Yarmolintsy but my chauffeur refused to take me to Yarmolintsy for fear of the Bolshevists. An hour later the Chief of Staff told me that the detachment could not reach Yarmolintsy, but that on the way they were told by various people that two Americans were killed the previous morning by Bolshevists. I asked the chief to allow me to go to Yarmolintsy in a military automobile but this could not be granted for military reasons. Meanwhile, our chauffeur warned me that unless we would leave Kamenets-Podolsky within an hour he would leave us. Mr. Kass and myself then decided to try to reach Yarmolintsy through Proskurov via Galicia. On the way we stopped in every town to enquire the whereabouts of chauffeur Singer. At Borshchev we found an automobile squadron that had passed through Yarmolintsy the previous night and the soldiers told us that the local peasants told them of the death of two American officers and that Yarmolintsy Jews took the bodies away on Monday. Near Chortkov our automobile broke down and we had to proceed to Lvov by Railway. At Stanislav I tried to communicate with our Lvov office and the American Consul by telephone without success. Mr. Kass remained at Stanislav with the automobile and I proceeded to Lvov. I arrived there ten o'clock (p.m.) Wednesday, July 7. I went to the Red Cross immediately and found
the office closed. Miss Abramovitch, (Dr. Cantor's fiancée) whom I met in the street, went with me to the Red Cross home. I told two Red Cross officers what happened and asked them to lend me or rent me an automobile to proceed to Yarmolintsy, but they told me that they had only one Dodge which they thought could not stand the strain of the trip. They expressed regret in not being able to help me in any way. I then went to the Polish Commandant, Col. Linda, and asked him to help me obtain a military automobile. He was very kind, and sympathetic. He explained that under the existing military conditions it was impossible to grant my request, but he told me that there was still one automobile left in Lvov, which I could buy. I bought the automobile about one o'clock (a.m.) July 8, Thursday morning. We then found that the tubes and tires were requisitioned and it was impossible to get others. I went to the Red Cross home to get tires, tubes and an American Flag. A young officer was up, expressed his regret that there was no material in the house and that the storehouses were inaccessible at that hour. He stated that all he could do for me was to give me the only flag left in the house, size 2 x 2 inches. I asked him to report to the Chief that it was very urgent to get me what I demanded as we were anxious to leave at once. I explained to him the urgency of the case, that it was possible that the two Americans were lying there wounded without medical assistance. He went up and came down and told us that he was sorry but could not help us.

At three o'clock we woke up Commandant Linda and asked his aid in the matter. He explained that he could do nothing until the following morning, as he had no power over the Automobile Department. The following day, after much trouble, we succeeded in straightening out the formalities at three o'clock. Meanwhile, Mr. Kass arrived with the broken automobile. He was very anxious to accompany me, but for obvious reasons, I preferred to go with Mr. Sybert, who volunteered to go along with me. In the morning I found chauffeur Singer who told me that as they were passing a village three kilometers before Yarmolintsy, Professor Friedlaender and Dr. Cantor told him to stop. He then heard shouts from behind "Stoy." Presently, three Russian soldiers came up to the automobile and began to point their guns at the passengers. Professor Friedlaender and Dr. Cantor went out on one side of the automobile and the chauffeur and Mr. Grossman on the other. The chauffeur told the soldiers in Russian that
these were men of an American mission that these men were not military men, that they came to help the poor with bread and clothes, and they should be allowed to go. The soldiers were still pointing their guns, and Professor Friedlaender and Dr. Cantor began to run. The soldiers then went after Professor Friedlaender and Dr. Cantor. He then utilized the opportunity and jumped over a fence from where he saw that the soldiers fired and Dr. Cantor fell. The soldiers also fired at the chauffeur but he escaped. At that moment he heard the sound of an automobile coming towards Yarmolintsy. He jumped in front of it, stopped it and made it go back. At Dunaevtsy he related this to the Commandant who sent a detachment of soldiers to Yarmolintsy ordering Singer to go along. Singer refused to go on the ground that he was a civilian. Later he was taken to Kamenets-Podolsky and he reported to the Chief of Staff but did not report to me because he heard that the Americans already left Kamenets-Podolsky. He did not want to go back with the soldiers to Yarmolintsy because he did not want to risk his life (#).  

We arrived in Tarnopol that evening. At the headquarters we were told that staff of the 6th Army left Proskurov and was expected at Tarnopol that night. We waited and succeeded in talking to the Chief, Col. Kesler. The following day, July 9, at 1 p.m., he advised us not to go to Proskurov as the Bolshevik Army was then between Proskurov and Tarnopol that a sanitary train was attacked by the Bolshevik cavalry the previous day and that the wounded were afterwards terribly disfigured by the peasants. We nevertheless decided to go ahead as far as we could and asked him to give us the necessary papers. He sent an officer with us to Lt. Stombolsky of the Intelligence Department. The officer recognized me from a previous meeting at Proskurov and told us that our trip was superfluous as there was no doubt left but that the Americans were killed and that we could get the testimony of an eye witness from a member of his staff, by the name Stefan Rausz. The latter was warned in the presence of his superior officer to be careful, as his testimony would be scrutinized and that he would probably have to appear before high officials and this matter was of international importance. He then gave the following testimony in German and in Polish:

On Monday morning, July 5, 1920, I was traveling in an automobile from Novaya Ushitsa to Proskurov. About three
kilometers before Yarmolintsy, I noticed from some distance, several people moving around a stationary automobile. Among those people, I recognized one who had a beard and glasses, in a uniform similar to yours. They were pursued by the soldiers. At that moment, I was stopped by a man (the chauffeur of the Americans) who told me to return as the Bolshevists were shooting. I had no force with me so I turned back, taking the man (the chauffeur of the Americans) along. Later in the day I passed that place with soldiers. We met Bolshevik cavalry and fired some shots at them. I believe that one was hit, and all ran away. I then saw that the auto was overturned and three dead naked bodies were lying near it. Later, a second Lieutenant and Sergeant of the Dowodstwo Etapu Dunajowzy went in that neighborhood and were told by the people that two dead Americans were found there. (##)

We obtained an American flag from Major Munday of the A.R.C. [American Red Cross]. He acted like a real man. We decide to try to get into Yarmolintsy or to get as near Yarmolintsy as possible by way of Gusyatin. We arrived there the same night, Friday. The military commander could give us no information, as they had no communication with Yarmolintsy. Practically all of them had heard of the atrocity and a good many of them told us various details. One related that the Bolsheviks retained the American dollars and distributed only the rubles and marks (###); another related that the Bolshevik commanding officers was [sic] very angry and reprimanded the soldiers for killing the Americans, and a Sgt. Jacob Dronk of the same Garrison stated that he had heard from a Pole Priluzki that the Americans were killed with cold steel. It was also related that the Jewish community wanted to photograph the bodies, but that the only Jewish photographer in town was afraid to do so for fear of the Bolshevists. Mieszyslaw Gostowski, Depot Commandant of Yarmolintsy, told us that the Bolshevists raided Yarmolintsy Monday, killing the Americans, and pillaging the hospital, and that they were driven out the following day, that the Poles retained the town until Friday night when they were obliged to withdraw, that he had with him a soldier by the name of Jan Szpakowski who saw the dead bodies in the cemetery. Szpakowski was called in and in the presence of the officer, he was told of the gravity of his testimony and warned
I, the undersigned, Private of the 3rd Regiment of the Kielzi raon[??], [?]th Company, Jan Szpakowski, declare that Friday, July 9, 1920, I saw on the Jewish cemetery of Yarmolintsy the corpses of three men which a Jew who was with me, the name of whom I do not know, told me were the Americans who were murdered near Yarmolintsy, on Monday, July 5, the same Americans who were going from Kamenets-Podolsky to Proskurov. I went to the cemetery because I was anxious to see the bodies of the murdered Americans of whose death I heard before. As far as I know the Americans were lying all three in a grave, covered only with a board since Tuesday and that the Jew, who at my order showed me the dead bodies, only lifted the boards and I saw that their faces were covered with blood and it was impossible to recognize them (S) Jan Szpakowski

Counter-signed Misczyslaw Goskowski

We then proceeded in the direction of Yarmolintsy, but three kilometers away from Gusyatin we were stopped by the last soldiers who were just returning from a battle with the Bolshevists, several of whom were wounded, and told us that the Bolshevist Army in full formation was only a few kilometers away. We then were compelled to return.

(signed) Meyer I. Leff
July 14, 1920
Warsaw, Poland

#The chauffeur makes the impression of an extremely nervous and frightened individual and his statement is apparently not entirely correct in details.

## This Stefan Rausz did not speak of any shots fired at the Americans, that he only saw the Americans moving around the automobile and the soldiers pointing the guns at them, while according to the chauffeur's testimony he heard the shooting and saw Dr. Cantor fall.

### Professor Friedlaender and Dr. Cantor carried no American
money and they had only a few thousand marks and rubles with them.

I wish to go on record as stating that in all my dealing with the higher Polish officials I have met sympathy and willingness to help in any way possible.

NOTES
1. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frames 3960–63.
2. "Halt!" in Russian.
3. The "#" character is used for Leff's footnotes, as it is in the original.
4. According to Document 2, he had two chauffeurs and four telephone operators.
6. Must be Prilutzki.
Appendix to Dr. Goldman’s Letter # 220
(Translated from the German by Maximilian Hurwitz)

Account of the Attack Near Yarmolintsy
(Statement of the Chauffeur)

At six o’clock in the morning Dr. Cantor, Professor Friedlaender, Mr. Grossman of Tarnopol, and I set out from Kamenets-Podolsky in the direction of Proskurov. Against my will!

Towards eleven o’clock, while passing through a village near Yarmolintsy, we were fired at from the rear. By order of the American commissioners I stopped the automobile. We alighted and stood alongside the car. Three Russian soldiers approached with guns leveled at us and, halting in front of us, pointed their guns at me.

As I know the Russian language, I tried to explain to them that we were not soldiers, but neutral American commissioners, who wished to help the poor. The three armed men made no other reply than “What! Americans!” (“Tchto! Americantsy!”) When Dr. Cantor and Prof. Friedlaender saw that my words had produced no effect, they began to run away and immediately the three Russians fired at them. I availed myself of the opportunity, jumped over a fence and took shelter behind some houses, although the Russians fired at me, too. While running I looked back and saw Dr. Cantor press his hands against his chest and fall. What happened afterwards, I do not know. Everywhere small groups of peasants and their women were looking on.

Reaching a barn, I begged two women to conceal me inside. They refused. I began to hide in the hay, but noticed that the women were watching me. Knowing that they would betray me, I shoved one of the peasant women and she fell, while I ran on through the village in the direction of Kamenets.

While running, I heard an automobile approach. I ran to the highway and halted an army motor truck, which carried a captain, two chauffeurs, four telephone operators, and a few civilians. I told them what had happened and the captain ordered that I return to Dunaevtsy and report the matter to the military authorities. In Dunaevtsy I reported the case to the local commanders, Captain
Ferenz and Lieutenant Kazak. They sent a detail of soldiers with two motor trucks to the scene, and I had to go along. On the way we met many gendarmes and soldiers, who told us that there were very many Bolsheviks there. After I was disarmed, the ensign let me go back. On my way back I met a first lieutenant in charge of a supply train and related to him all that had happened. He told me that a peasant had come from Yarmolintsy and reported that two plundered corpses were lying alongside of an auto. I rode to Kamenets in a motor truck, and got some food at the station from the Swiss relief mission, as I was without any means whatever (my blouse, cap, letter-case, money, and license were left in the automobile). Early in the morning I reported the case to the General Staff at Kamenets, and then we proceeded to Tarnopol, and from there by train to Lvov.

It happened at eleven o'clock, a.m., Monday, July 5, 1920.

Signed: Filip Singer.

Lemberg, Jagiellonskagasse No. 20.

NOTE

1. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frames 4375–76.
Mr. Prylucki [P]: When did you start out? Did you go with them from Kamenets? At what hour?
Chauffeur [Ch]: We started out on Sunday at 6 p.m.²
P: Why do you write in your report that you made the trip "gegen meinen willen" (against my will)?
Ch: Yes, I wrote so, I was afraid and I told Mr. Cantor that I should beg very much that we should not drive out there. We started out at six o'clock from Kamenets.
P: How did it happen? Before Yarmolintsy? What is the name of the village?
Ch: It is a small village, a suburb, I don't know its name.³
P: Well, how was it?
Ch: It was ten or eleven o'clock when we drove out. We had reached the village. Suddenly a shot was heard. I did not hear the shot, because the motor worked loudly. The gentlemen began to cry out. I saw a smoke and hence I conclude that it was a shot. Some one shouted: "Stop!" I stopped, I looked around and observed three arm [sic] men. Of course that moment we jumped off the car.
P: Who, we?
Ch: The three of us and one civilian. We stood at the left of the motor. The civilian jumped off on the other side. The armed men jumped up to a distance of three paces in front of us. I asked them (quotes in Russian): "What do you wish, this is the American mission which is helping the poor people." One of them said some foolishness and fired a shot.
P: What do you mean by a foolishness? What foolishness.
Ch: I don't want to repeat it now. I am embarrassed.
P: All right then, what happened after?
Ch: They fired at me.
P: What do you think? Did they shoot to frighten you [or] to make a hit?
Ch: I have no means of knowing that.
P: Are you writing about that shot in your report?
Ch: I think I did write, but I don't recall, I was so unnerved.
P: But you remember well about the shot?
Ch: After armistice is concluded I'll request the local peasants to testify about the occurrence.
P: You remember well that they fired the shot while you were standing?
Ch: Yes, then I saw that we won't make any headway with them. My gentlemen went behind and began to run away in the direction of Proskurov. I kept on standing. They began to fire. I escaped over the wattled hedge, over a fence, it was a hedge made of wattle as usual in the country. They began to fire on me. While I was running away I looked around and saw Mr. Cantor grab hold of his chest.
P: How could you see when the fence was there?
Ch: The fence was low.
P: Have you seen no one on the road?
Ch: On the contrary, I saw peasants from the town.
P: Have you beaten anybody on the road? Didn't anyone stop you?
Ch: I just struck one woman. I ran thru the village. No one stopped me.
Mr. Gerstenzang [G.]: Were the peasants, whom you met on the road, armed?
Ch: They were not, they belonged to the local population.
P: Then you saw three soldiers? How were they dressed?
Ch: They were in Russian uniforms.
G: What do you call a Russian uniform?
P: Maybe you can describe how they were dressed.
Ch: In gray military cloaks, lambskin caps, long swords and muskets. They belonged to the infantry.
G: Do you know how the Denikin4 soldiers are dressed?
Ch: I don't. I only knew that in winter the Russian army wore such caps.
P: What happened next?
Ch: I heard a noise. At the start I did not see if it was an automobile or the telegraph wires. I kept on running further to Gusienice.5 I noticed an army motor truck in which sat a captain, an assistant, and other people.
G: How far was this from the place of the occurrence?
Ch: It was about a verst.6 I stopped the auto and told them about the misfortune. The captain replied that we would go to Dunaevtsy and report at the military post.
P: Then you stopped their car? Could you see their car?
Ch: No.
P: Don't you remember the name of the officer whom you stopped?
Ch: I don't know, I think he is in Lvov, he could have been found, perhaps.
P: When did it happen?
Ch: On the 5th, on a Monday.
P: You say that the Polish automobile that you stopped couldn't see your automobile and yet the officer in his report writes that he saw the automobile and even quite closely. He says he saw your automobile, he saw the Americans and saw the Bolsheviki who chased after them. And you say, you couldn't see anything. The officer writes in his report: "At that moment the chauffeur came and said that the Bolsheviki were firing and that we should return."
Ch: It is out of the question, impossible.
P: The officer says, that at the time you stepped up to him, he saw the soldier run after the Americans, one of them had a beard, probably Friedlaender. It is important that you recollect well. You are testifying one way and he another way.
Ch: This is out of the question, impossible.
P: How much time elapsed from the time that you saw Cantor drop down to the time that you stopped the military car.
Ch: I don't know for a certainty, but more or less three quarters of an hour.
P: What explanation do you give, why the Bolsheviki did not look for you?
Ch: I am not sure, maybe they did.
P: Have you long been a chauffeur?
Ch: Yes, long.
P: Of what nationality and of what religion are you?
Ch: Jewish, and also of Jewish religion.
P: Later on, when you left Dunaevtsy, you did not want to travel in the same automobile.
Ch: I traveled for six verst. The automobile was an army car. The officer said he was going on to wage war and ordered me to get off the automobile. There I met a lieutenant. A peasant said that he first saw two dead bodies lie, now a third one is lying there too.
P: Did they have a weapon?
Ch: Mr. Cantor had a revolver. But of what good that? We met general
Romer and he told us that we could make the trip.
P: And you had no weapon.
Ch: No, no weapon.
G: And what would you have done had you had a weapon?
Ch: With a weapon much can be done.
G: Why did you jump off the car?
Ch: We all jumped off. We stood up around the motor. What could I do?
P: Still, maybe you will explain, why the officer saw the automobile and you did not?
G: How many automobiles did you stop?
Ch: Only one automobile.
P: You said that they had been shot. How can you tell, when you saw nothing?
Ch: Why just as one falls so does the other.
P: How many people were on the automobile?
Ch: Six persons.
G: You, being a young man, knew that you were driving social workers. You meet six armed men in an automobile and you couldn't tell them to drive with you in that direction to beat off those soldiers from them.  
Ch: I couldn't give orders to the captain, he could have understood for himself that he should have to drive there.
G: But you could have requested them.
P: Would it not have been better had you told him to drive there—that one had already fallen? Why, he could have been only wounded and not killed.
G: Did you notice that he was killed?
Ch: They were firing a good deal.
P: Why didn't you beg the captain to beat them off?
Ch: That though [sic] didn't occur to me. I felt very foolish at the time.
P: You meet a motor truck with six soldiers. If bandits were noticing six armed soldiers in an automobile they would run away. Did you tell the captain that there were three soldiers there?
Ch: The captain said that it might be necessary to make the trip there, but the soldiers began to tell him, that maybe there were more of them there and were dissuading him. The captain said that in that case we would ride to the military post to report.
P: Who first started to run away, Friedlaender, Cantor or you[?]
Ch: That's what saved me, that those gentlemen began to run away
first.
P: Were you dressed in civilian clothes or as you are dressed now?
Ch: In civilian clothes, not in this suit.
G: You say it was hot and you claim that they were wearing military
cloaks and ran.
Ch: Yes, they ran.
P: Then this happened around eleven o'clock?
G: Did you speak in Dunaevtsy with the Jews?
Ch: I couldn't even get near to Jews.
P: And later you arrived in Kamenets. Did you report in Kamenets to
Dr. Leff?
Ch: I was too unnerved. We began to pump in (take on) benzine
(gasoline) at the station. The military officer (captain) told me the auto
had driven of an hour before. Here Dr. Koppelman also drove up.
G: When did you see Dr. Koppelman for the first time? He was not on
that auto which you stopped on the causeway? He is a young man.
Ch: Yes, a brunette, Jacob Koppelman, I think.
G: We are returning to Dunaevtsy, but here is a question.
P: Well, when you came to Dunaevtsy, what did you do there[?]?
Ch: They said it was nonsense to ride there. They said there were
2000-3000 Bolsheviki. The refugees rode to Kamenets. So, for the
second time I returned at 4-5 p.m. I found the motor truck. We waited
till midnight. Dr. Koppelman stepped into the same auto. We drove
from Kamenets to Tarnow.
G: When you were there at the captain's, how many persons were
there?
Ch: The telephone service, the lieutenant, about ten persons were
there.
G: There was no Jew there? You are sure you spoke with no Jew?
Ch: Only while I drove to Kamenets Dr. Cantor said to one Jewess, a
refugee, she should come alone [sic]¹⁹ that we would travel together.
That Jewess I saw later in Dunaevtsy. I spoke with her—near the
military post. And she went away.
G: How long did you talk to her? There were no civilians, Jews? Did
they hear what you spoke with her?
Ch: There were perhaps some Jews from Dunaevtsy. They heard. One
Jew traveled on an army automobile, then I drank tea in his house in
Dunaevtsy,¹¹ I was altogether without means.
P: Where did you see him?
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G: So you drank tea in his house? What is his occupation?
Ch: I don’t know. He traveled to Proskurov.
G: Was the captain there? Two chauffeurs?
G: But you understand, our concern is to furnish as much material in this affair as possible. In the meantime, we have you and two other officers. And that Jews were in the car. This will furnish us with plenty of material.
P: You don’t know what his name is?
G: If you saw him would you recognize him?
P: How much time did you spend at his house?
Ch: About two hours.
G: Don’t you think that being a co-worker of the JDC your first duty was to step into the office in Kamenets and notify them of the occurrence?
Ch: I informed by telephone the Relief Committee in Kamenets, that an automobile should come and fetch me.
G: What you did in Dunaevtsy, I am not interested in. You make a trip to the bureau, why didn’t you yourself do it? You knew that Mr. Friedlaender was there and the Committee is interested in this news.
Ch: As soon as I came to the staff, they all knew it already.
P: But it was your duty to go there.
G: And why didn’t you go there? I can’t understand.
P: Did you hear the question? Were you very depressed or just crazy?
Ch: I was very crazy. I drove to Tarnopol and gave an account to Mr. Parnass.
G: What did they do there? Why, from Tarnopol it is near to Proskurov.
Ch: About ten verst.
G: Can’t you explain in any other way what you say in your report, that you made the trip "gegen meinen willen" (against my will).
Ch: Everyone said, that the gentlemen with me should not make the trip. I explained to Mr. Cantor that he should not go, I said that the Bolsheviki were there. He laughed. The same his fiancée and her mother said.
G: Did they make trip together with you?
Ch: To Tarnow.
G: I have two things against you: (1) that you, being a Jew, did not tell the captain to see what happened and did not tell exactly that there were two soldiers there, and (2) that you did not step in at the Committee’s and give your account there.
P: Are you handy with a gun? Had I been in your place I could have done a lot.
Ch: What could I alone do? Later still some peasant ran up to us and said that one soldier had been killed. Polish soldier.
G: You say the automobile was burned? How do you know that?
Ch: We saw the smoke.
G: Was this far away?
Ch: Half a verst, we were constantly looking backwards.
G: Why do you judge that the officer couldn't see them and why do you judge, that this smoke came from the automobile? The smoke could have come from a chimney.
P: Had they been Bolsheviki they would have taken the car for themselves.13
G: If the bandits wanted to stop you from the behind, why should you have stopped at all?
Ch: That was just the fault of the gentlemen.
G: I would have stopped only had the blocking of the road been in front of the car.
Ch: I stopped at the order of the two gentlemen at about fifteen paces away.
G: How could they be fifteen paces away?
Ch: [sic] Why this was an automobile, wasn't it?
Ch: It was hot, the tires blew out, we rode slowly, twenty-five verst a minute. (an hour?—Translator).
P: Didn't they say anything before they fired the shot? That's strange. Just try to recall.
Ch: They didn't say anything except that word.
G: Now the examination is closed. At four o'clock you will go with Mr. Rubenstein to the American consul for the final examination.

NOTES
1. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, #33, frames 3964–72. For the source in Polish see: Reel 7, frames 4338–47.
2. Should be 6 a.m.
3. The name of the village was apparently Sokolovka (see map).
4. By the time of the incident the Denikin's army was already defeated by the Reds, its remnants retreated to the Crimea and joined the forces of Admiral Wrangel. Denikin resigned.
5. The location is not identified.
6. One verst measures about 1.07 km.
7. According to the evidence of Birman, who was in the car (Document 5), the officer could not see the Russian soldiers. He could lie in order to explain why he had given an order to return to Dunaevtsy without trying to save the Americans.

8. The explanation could be that the soldiers decided to spare the driver as being not military or upper class (see evidence of Dr. Rykhlo, Document 5). The driver could not admit that, as he was afraid to be suspected of collaborating with the soldiers. For the same purpose he claimed: “They fired at me.”


10. Should be: “along.”

11. It was Birman (Document 5).

12. Must be three.

13. Being on the enemy’s territory the soldiers could not take a slow car with them (it was dangerous), and most probably could not drive.

14. Should be “P” or “G.”
American Joint Distribution Committee
Romanian Office
Alexander A. Landesco, Regional Director

Bucharest. October 25, 1920
Str. C. A. Rocotti[?], 32

Joint Distribution Committee
20 Exchange Place
New York City, U.S.A.

Gentlemen:
Enclosed are reports made by Mr. Mathias Sigal, a member of the J.D.C. at Kamenets-Podolsky of an investigation made by himself and Mr. Jechiel Lisawoder, upon the very scene, of the facts in connection with the martyr's death of Prof. Friedlaender and Dr. Cantor.

Four photographs accompany the report.

The reports were handed by Mr. Sigal to our Committee at Chernovitsy which asked me to forward same to you.

The reports are, of course, of the very highest authenticity and of paramount historical value in connection with the sad event to which they relate.

Please, acknowledge to me the receipt thereof.

Respectfully
[Signature]
(Alex A. Landesco)
Regional Director for Romania J. D. C.

Enclosures.

NOTE
1. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 4401.
REPORT

The Commission to Inquire into the Killing of the American Relief Commissioners Prof. Israel Friedlaender and Dr. Bernard Cantor. The Commission Consisted of Jechiel Lisowoder and Mathias Sigal.¹

Acting upon the instruction of the Committee, we, the members of the Commission, set out on July 21, 1920, for Yarmolintsy, Podolia, the scene of the fatality. Stopping at Dunaevtsy, on the way to Yarmolintsy, we inquired whether there were any persons there who had any information bearing upon the event, and were directed to one Mayer Solomon Birman. Questioned by us, he related the following:

On Monday, July 5, at about 9:00 a.m. an automobile, flying the American flag and proceeding in the direction of Yarmolintsy, passed Birman's house.² Shortly afterwards Birman also left for Yarmolintsy in a Polish automobile carrying troops. On approaching Yarmolintsy, they noticed a man run toward them in the distance and motioning them to halt. When he drew nearer, he told them that he was the chauffeur of the machine in which the American commissioners had been travelling from Kamenets toward Proskurov. When they arrived in a village before Yarmolintsy, three soldiers attacked the automobile and murdered the commissioners, although the latter protested they were Americans. He, the chauffeur, succeeded in escaping. On hearing this, the soldiers immediately returned to Dunaevtsy, taking along the chauffeur. The latter stayed all day in Birman's house, and in the evening departed for Kamenets together with the same Polish soldiers (for details see Protocol No. 1).³

Arriving in Yarmolintsy on July 22, 1920, we (i.e. the members of the Commission) requested the representatives of the local kehillah council⁴ and JDC relief committee to call a joint meeting of their members. Our request was forthwith granted. At the meeting we explained to those present the nature of our mission and asked them for their cooperation in investigating thoroughly and gathering evidence regarding the killing of the American relief delegates, Prof. Israel Friedlaender and Dr. Bernard Cantor. The meeting assigned four men to assist us. Thereupon we proceeded to take the testimony of
persons who were the first to reach the scene of the murder and who had looked after the burial of the victims. Right here a few of those present expressed surprise that we were talking of only two victims, when, as a matter of fact, they had found and buried three. To this we replied that the Kamenets committee knew of only two relief delegates who left Kamenets that day for Proskurov, namely Prof. Israel Friedlaender and Dr. Bernard Cantor, and that the inquiry would establish the identity of the third one.

Mendel Wachsman, a member of the Yarmolintsy kehillah council, testified that on Monday, July 5, between ten and twelve o’clock in the morning, a Bolshevik patrol passed through the town. Immediately afterwards rumors began to circulate that on the Kamenets turnpike road, not far from the township (or borough) hall, three slain Jews were lying, and that they were American relief delegates. Wachman and Jacob Grosser, another member of the kehillah council, proceeded to the spot where the bodies were lying. On the way thither they met a group of peasants, who upbraided them for bothering about the slain “Poles.” “The Poles,” said the peasants, have done us enough harm, and it serves them jolly right.” Approaching the bodies, we pointed to the sexual organs as proof that the victims were Jews, not Poles, whereupon some of the peasants expressed regret. On closer examination, Mendel Wachman and Jacob Grosser, saw that there were three victims. One a man of 60, was lying on the right side of the road, near the house of the peasant Petro Cossack, and close by the body was found a set of artificial upper teeth. The second, a young man of twenty odd years, lay on the other side of the road, close by the house of the peasant Urina Liss, and near him were found the following papers: (1) a pass dated Lvov, June 27, 1920, and good till July 10, 1920, made out to the name of Bernard Cantor; (2) the blood-stained part of a check, made out to the same name; and (3) a receipt for two thousand marks, to the same name. The third victim, a middle-aged man, lay in the yard of the peasant Stepan Bisvostchik. People who stood near the body said that they recognized it as that of one of the American commissioners who had passed through Yarmolintsy a number of times.

Abraham Fingerut, another member of the kehillah council, testified that he and two other kehillah council members, Isaiah Ferdman and Beril Kleinman, having obtained permission from the authorities to bury the victims, conveyed their bodies in two wagons
The Truth Rediscovered

to the town and left them in the small synagogue (Beth ha-Medrosh), where they remained over night, Israel Malken and Noto Scheinbarg acting as a guard of honor. Early the following day (July 6, 1920), the victims were buried at the Jewish cemetery at Yarmolintsy.

On the body of the victim who was found in the courtyard of Stepan Bisvostchik, the following objects were found: (1) a cockade; (2) a strip of a shirt with a mark on it; (3) gold cuff buttons on one side of which were engraved the initials "I. F."; and a Magen David on the other side; (4) an epaulette with initials "J. D. C."

On the body of the old man a truss was found.

After listening to these reports, we (i.e., the members of the Commission) showed those present the photographs of three American relief delegates: Dr. Leff, Prof. Friedlaender, and M. Kass. They pointed to the picture of Prof. Friedlaender as that of the victim found in the yard of Stepan Bisvostchik. With this, the meeting adjourned. (For further details see Protocol No.2)

On the following day we proceeded to question all those who knew something or other about the tragedy.

Stepan Bisvostchik testified that early that day he was standing near his home and watching the Bolshevik patrol which had arrived. Soon the soldiers ordered every one to go indoors as a Polish armored car was coming. He obeyed and went into the house, closing the door behind him. Presently he heard the noise of an automobile coming to a halt, and this was soon followed by the report of several guns. A few minutes later he opened the door and saw the body of a man lying in his yard and two more bodies on the road. The Red Army men were stripping the slain men of their clothes. They also ordered the neighbors to drag the machine into Bisvostchik's yard, and this was done at once. The machine remained in his yard a couple of days until it was taken away by the Poles. (Stepan Bisvostchik refused to sign any paper.).

Doctor Rikhlo, the superintendent of the township hospital for epidemic diseases, related that on Monday, July 5, at about 10 a.m., a group of Red Army soldiers came to the hospital to search the place for Poles. Finding one sick Polish soldier, they took him out to the courtyard and shot him. They also suspected him [the doctor] of being a Pole, but thanks to the intercession of local peasants, who insisted he was a Russian, they let him go. Then the Red Army men went to the shtetl. He, Dr. Rikhlo, remained standing on the balcony of the
Presently he saw an automobile coming up the Kamenets road. One of its passengers, who sat beside the chauffeur, was waving a large American flag. After it passed the hospital and advanced a short distance in the direction of the town, he saw it halt and then heard several shots. Peasants coming from that direction afterwards told him that the Soviet soldiers had stopped the machine, ordered the chauffeur to step aside, and then shot the passengers. The peasants' children had Polish marks in their hands, given to them by the Reds (for further details see Protocol No. 3.)

Andrei Kolbasuk, who lives opposite to the place where the murder occurred, reports that early that day he had been summoned to the township hospital. Arriving there, he found that Red Army soldiers were after the physician, insisting he was a Pole. The peasants who were present succeeded to convince them that the physician was a Russian. Thereupon the soldiers left the hospital and set out in the direction of the town, while he, Kolbasuk, went home, stopping beside the gate of his house which is hard by the highway.

Soon an automobile came up the Kamenets road carrying passengers who were [sic] military uniforms. When the machine had reached a point opposite the house of his neighbor, Stefan Bisvostchik, it was stopped by a volley fired by Red soldiers who were concealed in the ditch at the roadside. The travelers jumped out and began to run. Then the soldiers got up and fired after the fleeing men. One of the travelers fell near the yard of Petro Cossack, another near the yard of Urina Liss. The third, pursued by a soldier, tried to run into the yard of Stepan Bisvostchik. As he reached the gate, he turned around and seized the soldier's gun. The soldier wrested the gun from him and struck him a blow in the chest. The traveler succeeded in running a few feet into the yard, but was soon struck down by a bullet. The soldier then rushed up to the fallen man and sabered him. The chauffeur, as soon as the machine came to a stop, escaped through his (Kolbasuk's) garden in the direction of the neighboring woods (for further details see Protocol No. 4).

Isaak Reider related that early that day he stood on the turnpike road in Yarmolintsy, watching the approach of the first Bolshevik mounted troops. When they drew near, they asked him the way to the railway station. He showed them the way and they rode off. A couple of minutes later several of them returned and inquired after the road to Kamenets, as a Polish car was coming that way. Shortly after they
were gone, several shots were heard. One of the riders then returned, got hold of a cart and went back. Presently the cart returned laden with things. By this time rumors already began to spread that the American Jewish delegates had been murdered (for further details see Protocol No. 7).  

Welvil Polyak relates that early that day he was standing in front of his house. Presently a mounted soldier drew up and asked him for a drink of water. When the water was given to him, the rider remarked in Russian: “Well, we’ve just fixed up a Polish automobile full of bourgeois.” (For further details see Protocol No. 7).

Ephraim Korn relates that he was standing that day near the house of one Pek. With him was an officer of the Red Army. Presently a rider drew up and reported that on the Kamenets road an automobile carrying two Polish officers and a landowner had been intercepted and its occupants shot. The officer inquired if the machine had been damaged, and was told it hadn’t. Shortly afterward, Korn saw a small wagon coming up the Kamenets road, loaded with leather satchels and other things. The same rider rode up to the wagon and told the Red soldiers that gathered how he had held up the automobile and killed two officers and a landowner, that were riding in it. He added that one of the victims had defended himself heroically, even seizing his gun. When Korn learned that the victims were American delegates, he hurried to the scene of the murder. There he recognized the victim who was lying in the yard of Stepan Bisvostchik as one of the American delegates who had passed through Yarmolintsya a number of times (for further details see Protocol No. 6).

Don Hoylman relates that the day before the murder an automobile flying the American flag drove up to his house. One of the occupants inquired where Aaron Polaner lived, as they had some money for him. Hoylman sent for Polaner. Before the latter arrived, a local Jew named Isaiah Ferdman said to the American delegates, “Why are you leaving us? They’ll kill every one of us.” One of the travelers, an elderly man in civilian clothes, replied, “Don’t worry, you are being taken care of.” The next day, when rumors began to spread that the delegates had been killed, Hoylman went to the place of the scene of the murder, and recognized one of the victims as the elderly [sic] man who on the day before had the above conversation with Isaiah Ferdman (for further details see Protocol No. 8).  

We also succeeded in obtaining the original of the report made by
the township authorities, which contains a detailed description of the bodies (see Protocol No. 10). 28

As it was established that the Soviet soldiers had immediately after killing gathered up all the papers and other belongings of the victims and returned to the front, passing through the neighboring villages on their way, we went to the nearby town of Sharovka and also sent men to the surrounding villages, in order to look for papers and other articles. As a result, a number of papers and articles of the slain delegates were collected (see Protocol No. 9). 29

On Monday, July 26, 30 we arranged a memorial meeting near the graves of the martyrs, in which the whole town of Yarmolintsy participated. Arriving at the cemetery, we made efforts to ascertain the exact grave of each victim. As there was some doubt about it, we questioned all who had taken a direct part in the burial: Chaim Shimcho Lipschitz, aged 45; Gershon Epstein, aged 24; Samuel Bander, aged 22; Mendel Gegrschgorn, aged 18; Jacob Bechor, aged 60, the sexton (shamos) of the cemetery; 31 Aizik Falberg, aged 24; Kalmen Geller, aged 49, a cantor. All these agreed as to where each of the martyrs was buried. After the cantor chanted the "El Mole Rachmim," we described briefly the lives of the martyrs. The people wept bitterly. Lastly we took photographs of the graves as well as of the meeting, and then the people went home. We also had the scene of the tragedy photographed. 32

On the basis of the aforesaid material, we have established the following:

1. That on July 5, 1920, there were killed in Yarmolintsy, Podolia, (a) Professor Israel Friedlaender; (b) Dr. Bernard Cantor, and (c) an unknown man, about 60 years old, and clad in civilian clothes. (Note by the translator. It has since been ascertained that the third victim was one Grossman from Tarnopol, Galicia.)

2. That the unknown victim had the day before the tragedy, been traveling in the American automobile with Dr. Cantor in the direction of Kamenets. This is shown by Hoylman's statement (Protocol No. 8)

3. That they were killed by a Bolshevik patrol. (Protocols 2, 3, 4, 6, 7)

4. That the Bolshevik soldiers killed them because they took them for Poles. (Protocols 4, 6, 7)
5. That the chauffeur had no share whatever in the murder. (Protocols I, 4)
6. That the money and other belongings of the victims were carried off by the Bolshevik soldiers. (Protocols 2, 6, 7)
7. That the automobile, somewhat damaged, was shortly afterwards taken away by Polish troops. This is shown by the account of Stepan Bisvostchik.

To complete our account, we find it necessary to add, that at that time the front was located at Derazhnia, Podolia, some 60 versts (about 40 miles) from Yarmolintsy, Proskurov, and also the surrounding towns, was still in the hands of the Poles and Ukrainians. On July 5, 1920, the day of the tragedy, a detachment of Bolshevik cavalry, breaking through the front, suddenly appeared near Yarmolintsy and this produced a panic in the whole region. After staying a few hours in Yarmolintsy and vicinity, during which time the tragedy occurred, they departed. The following day Polish forces appeared in Yarmolintsy and the neighborhood, where they remained until Friday, July 9, 1920, when Yarmolintsy was finally occupied by the Bolsheviki.

The above is a true copy of the original.
Executive Committee of the Kehillah of Kamenets-Podolsky.

(Sgd) P. Pressman, Secretary.
(Seal of the Kehillah)
Kamenets-Podolsky, September 26, 1920.

APPENDIX

List and Brief Description of the Protocols Accompanying the Report
Note by the Translator. As the substance of these Protocols, which are in the nature of signed statements by individuals, is given in the Report, wherein they are constantly referred to by number, I did not think it necessary to give a full or even abridged translation of them. Instead I list them and give a descriptive title to each of them.
Protocol No. 2. Report of the Joint Meeting of the Kehillah and
American Jewish Archives Journal

Local Relief Committee of Yarmolintsy, July 22, 1920.

Protocol No. 3. Statement by Dr. Ivan Rikhlo, Superintendent of the Township (Volost) Hospital for Epidemic Diseases.
Protocol No. 4. Statement by Andrei Kolbasuk.
Protocol No. 5. Statement by Sheva Blifeld.
Protocol No. 7. Statement by Isaak Reider.
Protocol No. 9. List of Articles and Papers Found Near and on the Victims.

NOTES

1. In the Yiddish source “District Relief Committee” is referred to as District JDC Committee. JDC is written with Latin letters. AJJDC Archives, Reel. 7, frames 4402–10. This is the 1920 English translation of the Yiddish source (see the same file, frames 4411–19). The report is based on ten protocols (see the same, frames 4420–45, and their English translations: frames 4455–76). Names in the translation are often Americanized (see List of Names). For a Russian translation of the documents (somewhat shortened), see: State Archive of Kiev Region, collection R-3050, inventory 1, file 197, pp. 6–7. The translation was registered at the Information-Statistical Department of the Kiev Commission of the Evobshchestkom in June 16, 1921. The translation is written in very peculiar Russian, sometimes to the point of incoherence.

2. In the original: 19 of Tamuz, 5680. Actually, the original says “9 p.m.,” but the source says “in the morning.”

3. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 4421–22. I use the word “protocol” here instead of “document” (as it is in the English text), first, because the word “protocol” is used in the Yiddish (Ukrainian, Polish) sources, and, secondly, the word “document” is reserved for the documents of the present publication.

4. Words in italics are not in the translation, but they are found in the Yiddish source.

5. In the original: Waksman.

6. In the source: 19 of Tamuz, 5680.

7. The source is using a Russian word “volost” which generally means a small rural district. In slang it means the building of the volost authorities. Protocol No. 4 says that it was a former building of the volost authorities. Protocol No. 4 says that it was a former building of the rural authorities, which was occupied by a hospital. (Reel 7, frame 4433).

8. In the original: Groiser.

9. In the original: Bizvozchuk.

10. In the original: the 20 of Tamuz, 5680.

11. I. F. stands for Israel Friedlaender.

12. In the original the spelling is Lev and Kats.

4429–30.

15. In the Yiddish source and in the Protocol No. 3: militiaman.
16. In the Protocol No. 3: “[They] wanted to shoot me too, because I begged them not to kill the sick Pole, but the peasants interceded.”
17. In the Yiddish: “on the porch.”
18. In the Yiddish original and in the Protocol No. 3, they are referred to as Red Army soldiers.
19. Should be “wore.”
20. The Protocol 4 (In Russian) adds: “The stopped because, as it turned out later, its part was damaged by the bullets.” (AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 4433-34).
21. Protocol No. 4 adds: “fell being shot and then was sabred.”
22. Protocol 4 calls it a wicket gate.
24. In the original and in the Protocol No. 6: Korin.
25. In the source: where a Red Army commander was quartered.
26. In the original: Dan Hoylman.
27. AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 4040.
28. For the original in Ukrainian, see AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 4044–45.
29. For the original Yiddish see AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 4041–54.
30. In the original, the 11th day of Av, 5680.
31. In the original: gravedigger.
32. The translation here probably is not exact. In Dr. Leff’s Report (Document 1) it is said that the local photographer refused to take pictures of the bodies at the funeral for fear of revenge from the Bolsheviks.
33. Maximilian Hurwitz, translator.
34. For the original Yiddish, see AJJDC Archives, Reel 7, frame 4423–28.

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VI.

That during this period of crisis, the JDC workers literally took their lives into their hands is shown by the tragic fate of two representatives, Professor Israel Friedlaender and Rabbi Bernard Cantor. Rabbi Cantor, a member of the Overseas Unit, had come from Lvov with funds for distribution among the communities in the path of the Russian advance. Professor Friedlaender was a member of the special commission sent to the Ukraine, whose other members were Judge Fisher of Chicago, and Max Pine of New York, who had visited the Ukraine in the early days of the Polish invasion, while Professor Friedlaender had remained in Western Europe, making efforts to enter the country by way of Russia. Later, Professor Friedlaender also decided to enter the Ukraine by way of Poland and insisted on bearing his share of the dangerous work at the front. Accompanied by other JDC workers, he went into the newly occupied districts of Volyn, which were at the time being terrorized by raids of detachments of Russian cavalry under the leadership of General Budenny; the population of this region were [sic] unfriendly to the Polish invaders, and naturally looked with suspicion upon anyone who came into the country under the protection of the latter.

When Professor Friedlaender reached the city of Kamenets-Podolsky, he found that Rabbi Cantor was there engaged in distributing funds to Jewish committees in anticipation of the misery through which they would have to live after the Polish evacuation would cut them off from the JDC help. Professor Friedlaender, who was very anxious to find the headquarters of General Pilsudski, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish troops, in order to appeal to him to warn the Polish soldiers against perpetrating anti-Jewish excesses, which the professor feared were likely to accompany the retreat of the Polish army, joined Rabbi Cantor who wished to return to Lvov. It was early in the morning of July 5, 1920, that Friedlaender and Cantor started on a journey, which turned out to be their last. They were accompanied by an elderly local resident, a Mr. Grossman, who was bound for his home in the country. At about ten o’clock the
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automobile carrying the three men passed through a village lying about two miles from the town of Yarmolintsy. This place, though about forty miles in the rear of the Polish front, had been visited that morning by a Russian cavalry detachment, and a patrol of three of the cavalrymen was still in the village when the Americans appeared. These raiders advised the peasants to go indoors, "as a Polish armored car was coming," according to the affidavit of a local inhabitant. They then lay down in a ditch along the road and fired at the car. The chauffeur stopped the automobile and managed to escape. The raiders seized the two Americans and, after a brief but ineffectual argument between them and their victims, shot the latter dead. They also shot Mr. Grossman, the Russian Jew who was in the car with Professor Friedlaender and Rabbi Cantor. The bodies were stripped and nearly all their belongings were taken by the assassins. Several hours later, after the raiders had left the neighborhood, the local Jews took the bodies of the martyrs to Yarmolintsy and buried them in the Jewish cemetery in that town.

The news of the tragic event profoundly stirred American Jewry, bringing home to them the frightful conditions under which their brethren abroad were suffering. Meetings to commemorate the death of the two martyred messengers of the American Jewish community were held throughout the United States. The largest of these was held at Carnegie Hall in New York City under the auspices of the JDC with the participation of the leading Jewish organizations of the country. On July 5, 1923, the third anniversary of the death of the two representatives, Mr. Kovalsky, then heading the JDC workers in Kiev, unveiled two tombstones erected over the graves of the fallen Americans at Yarmolintsy, in the presence of JDC workers, of representatives of the Jewish community, and of the local authorities.

For a long time there was an insistent demand for the apprehension and punishment of the murderers. The United States Department of State instituted an investigation of its own. The Kamentz-Podolsky Committee of the JDC sent a special commission of inquiry to the scene of the murder after the Bolsheviki had occupied the territory. From the testimony of the Polish soldiers who passed through the neighborhood shortly afterwards, and from a subsequent investigation and report made by the Soviet government, it was established that the marauders had mistaken the American relief workers for Polish officers. Later, when the JDC commenced its relief
activities in Russia and in the Ukraine, the Soviet government made a search for the culprits, which turned out to be fruitless.

NOTES
1. Should be “was.”
2. One can see from this passage that Bernstein was acquainted with the Yarmolintsy Report.
REVIEW ESSAYS

Racism in the United States


James E. Westheider

One of the paradoxes that have long intrigued American historians is how a nation could be founded on Enlightenment beliefs of individual freedom and natural rights and yet simultaneously embrace the virtual antithesis of these ideas in the form of racism and religious bigotry. Two new books, George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, and Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, look at the issue from different vantage points, but both help illuminate this seminal and often disturbing conundrum.

Fredrickson, the dean of comparative history, examines the origins of racism and the rise and fall of what he terms "overtly racist regimes," in the American South, Nazi Germany, and post–World War II South Africa. The term "racism" itself only dates from the 1930s and its exact definition is often hazy and unclear, but it involves more than just traditional xenophobia or religious intolerance—phenomena which Fredrickson terms "culturalism." For the purposes of the study he defines racism as "when differences that might otherwise be considered ethno-cultural are regarded as innate, indelible and unchangeable," and expressed in the practices and institutions of a given culture. He argues that no true equivalent of modern racism existed in the classical or early modern Christian world, and that it is a relatively modern development dating from the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries and originating "mainly if not exclusively" in the West. Its historical roots were first religious—Christianity—and then secular in the form of the Enlightenment.
Anti-Judaism was endemic to Christianity before the fourteenth century, but it was bigotry based on religious not biological differences. Jews were not considered inherently inferior because the “stigma” could be erased through conversion. But this began to change in this era in Spain regarding the Jewish “Conversos” to Christianity and the belief that these “New Christians” were incapable of truly becoming Christian due to blood and heritage. This was illustrated for example, in the doctrine of “Limpieza de Sangre” or “purity of blood,” where only those of “pure” Christian ancestry could become conquistadores or missionaries in the New World.

Religious bigotry may have laid the groundwork but the rational thought of the Enlightenment was a necessary precondition to the rise of a racist ideology based on physical typology. Its egalitarian ethos created a problem, but also a solution for those wishing to exploit or scapegoat a particular group; if equality is the norm, then the “other” needs to be proven to be an exception to the norm and unworthy of full equality. The scientific principles of the Enlightenment also provided their justification. If plants and animals could be classified and placed in a hierarchal order, so could human beings. As early as 1776 Friedrich Blumenbach placed human beings in “races,” but the father of anthropology was more interested in scientific order than in justifying racism, and it was not really until the emergence of, first, Social Darwinism, and then eugenics that racists had seemingly plausible and acceptable explanations for racial inferiority.

It was in the twentieth century that both color-coded and anti-Semitic racism reached their fullest ideological and institutional development and produced these “overtly racist regimes.” What distinguished these regimes from societies that also tolerated or fostered bigotry was an official, state sanctioned and enforced ideology that was explicitly racist. All had laws banning interracial marriage, legalized social and economic segregation, and exclusion from public office, and voting if the state in question was formally democratic. Moreover, racism in these societies is always “nationally specific” in that it is linked to a search for national identity and cohesion. Designating blacks as inferior and “other” helped foster a sense of unity and nationalism among whites in South Africa and the American South, for example, whereas Jews played the same role in a newly created German Empire in the 1870s and 1880s. Fredrickson
also asks why overtly racist regimes developed in only three nations despite the prevailing racist and bigoted notions present throughout the world. He has found strong historical roots and a persistent belief in established stereotypes to be two key underlying factors. Interestingly, in all three the racialized “other” were scapegoats and blamed for national defeat and humiliation: African Americans for the demise of the Confederacy, Africans for the Boer War, and Jews blamed for Germany’s loss in World War I.

The Enlightenment principles of equality did eventually help undermine these racist regimes, as did the horrible excesses of the Holocaust. Hitler, Fredrickson remarked, gave racism such a bad name that future neo-Nazis would deny that the “Final Solution” ever occurred rather than attempt to justify it. Following World War II the emerging cold war and decolonization did much to hasten the decline of racially based discrimination in the American South and finally in South Africa. The fall of these overtly racist regimes suggests to Fredrickson that they may be a thing of the past, but racism itself obviously remains an active force.

In American Crucible Gerstle argues that in the United States the Enlightenment principles of equality, individual rights, and representative government are embodied in what Michael Ignatieff has called “Civic Nationalism,” and claims that the impact of Civic Nationalism in promoting freedom and democracy are indisputable. But this belief has clashed with another “potent ideological inheritance” that of “Racial Nationalism,” which sees America in ethno-racial terms: a people bonded together by common ancestry, skin color, and with an inherited predisposition towards representative self-government. Both of these creeds are imbedded in America’s most crucial documents such as the Constitution and both have been powerful forces in shaping the United States in the twentieth century, influencing everything from the Progressive movement to immigration reform. Symbolic of the interaction of these two forces is the American “crucible” or melting pot, which offers the opportunity of assimilation and inclusion to some but historically has often limited it to those of European ancestry.

Gerstle’s focus is on twentieth-century liberals because they were the “most influential architects” of that century, and while committed to the core principles of Civic Nationalism also incorporated Racial Nationalism into their political philosophy and policies. The most
important were Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt whose presidencies reshaped the United States into the "Rooseveltian" nation.

The Spanish-American War in 1898 marked the birth of this new nation. The United States in the 1890s was a nation deeply divided along ethnic, racial, religious, and class lines, and many, such as a Theodore Roosevelt, argued that war would be the crucible that united a fractious nation into an "American Race." Indeed, Roosevelt's "Rough Riders" appeared to be the living embodiment of the melting pot, with native born and immigrants, urbane New Yorkers and rough hewed cowboys, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews all serving together in the same regiment as Americans. Gerstle argues that war in fact would serve as a crucible transforming immigrants and their children into Americans as illustrated in both World War I and II. But this expression of Civic Nationalism would also embody aspects of Racial Nationalism in that even in the liberal Rooseveltian nation, full inclusion was reserved largely for whites.

The melting pot was just part of Theodore Roosevelt's "New Nationalism," his program for a new United States announced in 1910. Borrowing the term coined by journalist Herbert Croly, he envisioned a nation bound together by collective ideals of liberty, equality, and justice and not necessarily bonds based on ethnicity or religion. It also would need a more powerful federal government to promote and protect these values and if necessary "discipline" its enemies. It was Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism that became the basis for modern
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liberalism, a "key episode" in the history of Civic Nationalism and one that would influence three generations of liberal reformers for the next fifty years.

Theodore Roosevelt's intellectual and political heir was his distant cousin Franklin Delano Roosevelt; FDR's "New Deal" would embody the very essence of the Civic Nationalist creed, and in the process, complete the creation of the Rooseveltian nation. The Great Depression and then World War II would allow FDR and his New Dealers—many of whom cut their political teeth as "Bull Moose" Progressives—to construct a powerful liberal state that could regulate capitalism, provide for the poor and disadvantaged, and still build a military capable of defending it from aggression and competing ideologies.

The rise of Civic Nationalism and liberalism and its dominating influence throughout much of the twentieth century was in many respects a reaction to a series of perceived threats to national order, such as the rise of modern corporations, a new tide of immigrants largely from eastern and southern Europe, and radical ideologies such as socialism and communism. In dealing with these issues, however, the specter of Civic Racism often influenced the answers. Beginning with the Immigration Act of 1917, the immigration "problem" was solved by a series of laws that reduced immigration into the United States by 85 percent and virtually eliminated immigration from Asia and southern and eastern Europe. The regulatory state that protected the principles and goals of the liberals would at times become the disciplinary state and seek to root out and suppress its detractors, as it did during "red scares" after both world wars. But even these triumphs would also ironically prove to be a boon to Civic Nationalism. Many ethnic groups whose loyalty at times was questioned would embrace it and the melting pot to combat Civic Racism and to show their commitment to being Americans—often at the expense of their own ethnic heritage. The cartoon hero "Superman" was created in 1938 by two Jewish artists, Jerry Siegal and Joe Shuster, but is emblematic of Civic Nationalism. Superman is an immigrant but he is "Americanized," with an Anglo-American name, Clark Kent, and lives in Kansas, the rural heartland that stands for "truth, justice, and the American way."

The elimination of racist immigration restrictions and the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the American South in the 1950s
represented triumphs and a high watermark for Civic Nationalism. Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, D.C., in 1963 was replete with its dogma and the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 destroyed the legal foundations on which Racial Nationalism rested. But at the height of its success, the Rooseveltian nation was beginning to crumble. A rising group of black militants who rejected Civic Nationalism and conformity for Black Nationalism and cultural diversity, and a morally ambiguous war in Vietnam undermined its core beliefs and led to its demise by the 1970s. The late 1970s and 1980s were a time of drift and anxiety for the United States, and since then, both conservatives, in the form of Ronald Reagan, and liberals have sought to revitalize America with two bold but radically different programs. The left has attempted to re-establish the earlier sense of community by embracing multiculturalism, and the right by promoting "family values," religion, and a confrontational foreign policy. This has led to a culture war that Gerstle predicts could bitterly divide America for years to come. He also contends that the emergence of Bill Clinton and his presidency in the 1990s has provided yet a third hybrid alternative, drawing on the values of equality and diversity of the left, and the patriotism and sense of national obligation of the right. Ultimately it may produce a new liberal state, but one fundamentally different from the old Rooseveltian nation.

*American Crucible* is based largely on previous scholarly work and contains little in the way of primary research. Its value is in Gerstle's intriguing and ambitious new interpretation of the so-called "American Century" and the place of these two conflicting principles—equality versus inequality—in Western society. The book, along with Fredrickson's *Racism: A Short History*, will likely take its place next to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Edmund S. Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom*, and, a handful of others as the key works on such an elusive and provocative topic.

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The Paper Chase


Stephen J. Whitfield

Little more than three decades ago, the Constitutional friction between security and liberty had to be resolved when the front page of the *New York Times* headlined material from a secret “Vietnam archive.” The result of the revelations that were disseminated on June 13, 1971, was a First Amendment crisis: was the press permitted to disclose top secret documents about a war that was still raging? The affirmative answer provoked so many furtive but brazenly illegal reactions by the Nixon administration that it flamed out three years later. Daniel Ellsberg instigated these extraordinary events, and has retraced them in an engrossing personal account, published within a year of Tom Wells’s mammoth, acerbic biography. It is a story that cannot be separated from the noteworthy role of Jews in American public life.

By taking seriously the ideal of popular sovereignty, Ellsberg denied that statecraft is the monopoly of the executive branch; and the release of classified information was his way of preventing the nation’s leaders from lying about what they were doing. Exposure to the hidden motives for the intervention in Vietnam was a duty that Ellsberg did not want the public to duck. That meant using the press. The decision to publish excerpts from the Pentagon Papers belonged first to Arthur Ochs (Punch) Sulzberger, the scion of the Jewish family that had invented the most influential and admired of twentieth-century
American Jewish Archives Journal

American newspapers. In 1971 the bravery of the young publisher of the Times proved to be as impressive as anything done by the Flying Wallendas. Had Sulzberger submitted to the demands of the Department of Justice to suppress the Pentagon Papers, however, managing editor A. M. (Abe) Rosenthal intended to resign in protest; and other top editors might well have joined him. By fighting a Federal injunction in the name of an independent press, Rosenthal’s boss enhanced the meaning of the Bill of Rights—thanks to a Supreme Court case that was strikingly entitled New York Times v. the United States.

Neither Secrets nor the biography of Ellsberg has much to say about this part of the story. But the Constitutional victory of the Times was due to the tactical adroitness of a law professor at Yale named Alexander Bickel. He had been born in Bucharest, the son of an eminent Yiddish literary critic, and had arrived on these shores at the age of fourteen (picking up English as his fifth language). During one legal wrangle over the Pentagon Papers, the U. S. assistant attorney general glared so fiercely at Bickel that he whispered to a colleague: “I think he wants to have me deported.” Bickel conceded that Congress could make a law abridging freedom of the press, but insisted that the circumstances of 1971 did not warrant such suppression. By abandoning an absolutist standard, he got the Court to let the Times’s own editors ascertain what is fit to print; and eventually they ran fifty pages on the Papers.

Jews were also conspicuous in the political struggle against the intervention in Indochina, and Ellsberg gave copies of the Papers not only to newspapers but also showed or gave documents to antiwar academics like Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn. When Ellsberg was prosecuted for disclosing unauthorized material, he was represented by progressive attorneys like Leonard Boudin and Leonard Weinglass; and Barbra Streisand’s willingness to sing for the defense fund would place her on the White House “enemies list.” But how Daniel Ellsberg himself became worthy of inclusion on such a list, and indeed of placement near the top, is a destiny that could not have been foreseen; and that experience—the path of political opposition—is the subject both of Secrets and of Wild Man. Once so hawkish on Vietnam that he would call himself “a possible defendant in a future war crimes trial,” Ellsberg converted himself into a dove who gave seven thousand highly classified pages to nineteen daily newspapers.
By xeroxing the Pentagon Papers, the forty-year-old specialist in decision theory made a decision that altered the course of American history.

All four of Ellsberg's grandparents had immigrated from Tsarist Russia by the end of the nineteenth century, but his own parents deviated from the historic pattern—familiar to readers of this journal—by becoming Christian Scientists. Their family was still Jewish, Harry Ellsberg assured his son, except for religion; and therefore the faith that Daniel Ellsberg would grow up to repudiate was not Judaism but Christian Science, which he found too bizarre to accept. As a Harvard undergraduate, he did attend Sunday brunches at the Hillel Foundation, but (according to Wells) the primary motivation was to maximize encounters with the opposite sex. No evidence of any further connection to formal Jewish life has surfaced. A first marriage began with Episcopalian vows to a bride whose father rose to brigadier-general in the U. S. Marines (the outfit whom Lenny Bruce labelled "heavy goyim"). Ellsberg's second wedding ceremony was Presbyterian, even though his new father-in-law was Louis Marx, a Jew who had made a fortune in toys (most famously the yo-yo). Burnishing a reputation for brilliance, Ellsberg reached the top of the national security nomenclatura in the 1960s.

From figuring out more efficient ways to win the Vietnam war, he underwent a transformation, articulating the moral resistance to the war. That made Ellsberg something of a pariah outside the boundaries of legitimate dissent; and the result was a trial that was in itself unprecedented. Never before had anyone ever been prosecuted for a leak; administrative penalties had previously been applied to indiscreet bureaucrats. Never before had anyone been indicted under the Espionage Act for passing along classified documents to a newspaper, and not to a foreign power. But Nixon was furious at "that son-of-a-bitch Ellsberg," who, if convicted, could have been sentenced to 115 years in prison (later reduced to 105 years). The hostility that the defendant endured was bipartisan; what Ellsberg did, former President Lyndon B. Johnson opined, was "close to treason." Even Louis Marx believed that his son-in-law deserved jail, and refused ever to speak to him again, or give a penny to his defense. Ellsberg's own father was by contrast supportive of his son, despite loyalty to the GOP so ingrained that Harry Ellsberg voted for Nixon in 1972.

That ballot was in fact cast for a crude bigot; Nixon was the only
occupant of the White House ever to lace conversations with persistently anti-Semitic remarks (taped for the benefit of posterity). When first told that Ellsberg might have leaked the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times, Nixon preferred to call him “Ellstein,” and wondered: “Well, we don’t know. It’s either Ellstein or [Morton] Halperin or [Leslie] Gelb.” The last two, the chief authors of the secret study, were possibly the only Americans who, besides Ellsberg, had then read it in its entirety. Nixon, who once conjectured that Alger Hiss must have been half-Jewish (he wasn’t), warned two aides in the Oval Office that the administration was “up against an enemy, a conspiracy,” which required the “use [of] any means. Is that clear?” So in 1972 Cuban thugs were hired to turn an antiwar rally in Washington into violence by beating up both Ellsberg and radical attorney William Kunstler, but were prematurely hauled away by the police.

To plug the leaks that Ellsberg had exposed, the White House created an illegal “special investigations unit,” which G. Gordon Liddy proposed to name ODESSA (for the secret Nazi organization formed to keep the S. S. intact after World War II). Called the Plumbers instead, these operatives were so eager to play hardball that they burglarized the office of Ellsberg’s former psychiatrist, hoping to find incriminating material. But so elaborate a cover-up for the Plumbers was needed that justice was obstructed. By 1974 Nixon had to resign to avoid impeachment, and soon nearly all the President’s men were jailed. Were there an Italian edition of Ellsberg’s memoir, its title would be literally translated as Segreti, a reminder of who disrupted the Democratic primaries in 1972 so that the weakest winner—Senator George McGovern—would be left standing to face Nixon. Donald Segretti gave even dirty politics a bad name. In 1973, when John Ehrlichman, a key Nixon aide, was caught trying to bribe the judge in Ellsberg’s trial, it was abruptly terminated.

Even though Ellsberg can’t really be classified as Jewish, the intense faith that he exhibited in literacy is. The RAND analyst who had scored a perfect 800 on his verbal SAT’s in high school gambled that a war might end if the words of the Pentagon Papers—all 2.5 million of them—were properly deciphered. In the summer of 1971, he and Sulzberger and Bickel were invoking the same right—the right of the people to tackle a dense, long, demanding text. And just as Edmund Wilson had once remarked on “the very strange work” compiled as the Talmud, so that “there seems to be no other way of
really finding out what is in it" except to "settle down to reading it through," Ellsberg wanted his fellow citizens to plow through the forty-three volumes and to perform an act of critical interpretation. Although the Bantam edition of the *Times* reports and selected documents sold close to one-and-a-half million copies, it is doubtful whether most of the purchasers accepted Ellsberg's challenge; nor was the rampage in Indochina notably decelerated. But a besieged President did strike out wildly at a "conspiracy" in which "the sonofabitching [sic] thief is made a national hero... and the *New York Times* gets a Pulitzer Prize for stealing documents. . . . What in the name of God have we come to?"

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Phil Brown is on a mission. Raised in the Jewish hotel life of the Catskills in the summers of the 1960s and now a sociologist at Brown University, Brown has set out to preserve the rapidly fading Borscht Belt milieu in a collection of reminiscences, photographs, and memorabilia. In 1993, after an extended absence from the region, Brown took a trip up to the Catskills resort area of Sullivan County, New York, finding a terribly dilapidated landscape, with shuttered, abandoned buildings. Unmowed fields replaced former lawns, overtaking empty, cracked pools, tennis courts, and the foundations of burned buildings. The speed with which the once-vibrant region has fallen on hard times is truly remarkable, and given the importance Catskills vacations once had in American Jewish culture, and indeed on all of American culture, Brown has set out to “save the Catskill legacy.” In 1995, he helped establish the Catskills Institute (www.brown.edu/Research/Catskills_Institute), dedicated to doing just that. Organizing an annual history of the Catskills conference in the mountains, collecting reminiscences, both written and oral, and any Catskills-related documents he can find, Brown has now dedicated nine years to the very important work of preserving the special Jewish Catskills culture.

*In the Catskills* is an edited volume of material Brown has found particularly useful. It includes remarkably various works, including an excerpt from Brown’s own book on the mountains, *Catskill Culture: A Mountain Rat’s Memories of the Great Jewish Resort Area* (Temple University Press, 1998). Here one gets a sense of the very personal nature of this task for Brown. With his parents now passed away, Brown is searching for connections to his childhood, his lost family, and to a region so transformed in recent decades as to give only the barest of indications of its former energy and glory.

Some of the other pieces in this collection follow Brown’s pining style, including the two original essays here, Arthur Tanney’s romanticized memoir, “Bungalow Stories,” and Jerry Jacob’s “Reflections on the Delmar Hotel and the Demise of the Catskills.”
Other memoirs include those of Tania Grossinger, raised at the famous Grossinger's Hotel, and Irwin Richman, who combined his personal memories of the bungalow colonies of the Catskills with considerable research to write the book excerpted here, *Borscht Belt Bungalows: Memories of Catskill Summers* (1998). Although many of the pieces are nonfiction, only one, excerpted from Abraham Lavender's and Clarence Steinberg's *Jewish Farmers of the Catskills* (1995), is truly scholarly.

Several of the pieces here are snippets of larger works of fiction. Parts of Abraham Cahan's famous novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), are included, as is an excerpt from Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar* (1955) and a very brief excerpt from a much less well known novel, Reuben Wallenrod's *Dusk in the Catskills* (1957), which describes Jews vacationing in the mountains during World War II. Also included are passages from two very fine recent novels: Terry Kay's *Shadow Song* (1994) and Eileen Pollack's *Paradise, New York* (1998). In their own ways both these recent novels speak to the same issues driving Brown's larger project—the rediscovery of something lost, the recapturing of the mountains' uniqueness, and the realization that reminiscence is really all that is left.

This collection says much about the Jewish Catskill culture, capturing the centrality of food, music, comedians, and community in the mountain resorts. Many of the pieces clearly indicate the importance of the Catskills to the lives of those who visited them regularly, particularly during the apex of the region in the 1950s and 1960s. And the broader significance of the Catskills resorts is not lost on Brown, who notes, "the Jews created in the Catskills a cultural location that symbolized their transformation into Americans: their growth into the middle class, their ability to replace some anxiety with relaxation, their particular way of secularizing their religion while still preserving some religious attachments and ethnic identification" (13–14). Clearly the Jewishness of the Catskills resorts allowed New York Jews to mediate the distance between their growing Americanness and their diminishing distinctiveness.

Brown has done a service in bringing these pieces together, and one hopes that readers will be encouraged to seek out the sources of these excerpts. While Brown nicely groups the pieces by topic, including "Romance," "Entertainment," and "Religion," his
promiscuous mixing of fiction and nonfiction, his failure to fully introduce the sources of the works and their authors, and the awkward chronological skipping through the book (which goes on without comment), all suggest Brown's very limited goals for the book. Scholars hoping for a critical analysis of the Jewish Catskills will not find it here, or in Brown's first book on the mountains, for that matter. This is pure reminiscence, complete with the limited vision of memory, romanticizing, and hyperbole of people looking back on lost childhoods. Those who experienced the Catskills culture in its glory may find much of interest here, much truth, and much to smile about, but outsiders hoping for a more scholarly presentation may be put off by Brown's own romantic assertions concerning this "magical place."

"Miracles! The Catskills are full of miracles," Brown writes (20). Perhaps we can forgive the excesses here, and the near absence of scholarly analysis, just as we can forgive those who fail to speak the whole truth about those who have recently died. The Jewish Catskills Brown knew as a child have disappeared, and he will collect as much information about them as he can. Perhaps another generation will take a more critical stance.

David Stradling is an assistant professor of history at the University of Cincinnati. He is currently at work on a book concerning New York City's long relationship with the Catskill Mountains.

In *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina*, Leonard Rogoff examines Jewish life in Durham and Chapel Hill from the colonial period to the present. Acknowledging that “Southern,” “Jew,” and “small town” are unstable terms, this work shows that small-town southern Jews fashioned a cultural identity as Jews and as southerners through constant negotiation and reinvention. While kinship ties and institutions allowed them to maintain their Jewish identity, for example, the “Jewish church” helped them fit into a predominantly Christian southern society that valued religious institutions.

The Jewish community in Durham and Chapel Hill developed slowly, with a more permanent community forming in Durham between the 1880s and 1920. Rogoff begins his study with a brief overview of Jewish colonial settlement in North Carolina, where the Jewish population was relatively small and transient, compared to states such as Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia that offered more inviting commercial prospects. Residents maintained their Jewish identity primarily through family, mercantile, and religious links to Savannah, Charleston, Newport, and New York. Eighteenth-century German Jewish immigrants to the area participated in civil society as merchants, primarily as sellers of dry goods, because they lacked an agrarian heritage.

Although early settlements in North Carolina were modest and transitory, Rogoff views Durham-Chapel Hill as “a prototype of the east European settlements that emerged throughout the region with the rise of the industrial New South” (3). In the 1880s hundreds of east European immigrants were drawn to the area by industrial cigarette production. Eventually, however, these immigrants could not compete with the Bonsack machines that tobacco king James Buchanan Duke bought to roll and cut cigarettes; the machines produced in one day what hand rollers produced in a month. Although many rollers returned to New York when they were forced out of the factories, the story of the brief sojourn of these tobacco workers aligned Durham Jews with the city’s main industry and minimized their difference from other Durhamites. Despite assertions, however, that “a century later
academic historians, the popular media, and local citizens, both Jewish and Gentile, pointed to [the Jewish tobacco workers] as the founders of the Durham Jewish community’’ and “the story [as a dramatic narrative] appealed to both Jews and southerners,” Rogoff cites little evidence that non-Jews also viewed this tale as one of Jewish inclusion in the community (50–51). Evidence from both sides of the story would enhance the argument.

As the area’s Jewish community became more settled in the first two decades of the twentieth century, residents established institutions to unify and sustain themselves. The primary community institution was the synagogue. Even east European Jews, who were initially ghettoized in an ethnic enclave (seeking the comfort of Yiddish-speaking landsmen and having limited options because of poverty) on the margins of Durham and thus participated in few civic associations, maintained synagogue membership. In time Jews also created local societies (such as a Chevra Kadisha or burial society) and affiliates of national Jewish organizations (such as B’nai B’rith). The community likewise supported an Orthodox congregation, Zionist and philanthropic organizations, and secular sports and social clubs. Such varied associations allowed Jews to sustain multiple forms of Jewish identity while maintaining a cohesive community. Durham Jews also participated in the town’s economic life, a first step in integration. Rogoff points out that in comparison to urban Jews and to their non-Jewish neighbors, Durham Jews were atypical in their degree of self-employment in trade and commerce.

In part because of these religious and cultural organizations, southerners respected their Jewish neighbors. Rogoff writes: “Durhamites saw southern virtues in the Jews: they were a religious, family-oriented, hardworking, law-abiding people” (70). Jews and Christians alike sent their children to Sunday school, and “Jewish institutions took culturally blended forms that minimized differences” (312). Jewish immigrant upward mobility also was consistent with the ethic of progress and uplift in the New South. To succeed, Jewish businessmen cultivated goodwill, and by custom southerners extended hospitality. In addition, Durham’s Jews were too few and too accommodating to be a threat to the existing social or political order, as compared to the turmoil that large immigrant populations triggered in locales such as Boston or New York.
Rogoff points out that small-town German and east European Jews differed from their counterparts in large urban centers. Small-town Jews mixed more readily and managed to overcome religious and ideological differences. For example, ideologically opposed Zionist-groups Mizrachi and Hadassah cooperated in Durham, where female members of both groups traveled together throughout the city selling trees for Palestine. Durham Jews did not experience the social and religious tensions between Germans and east Europeans that tore apart urban communities. Family ties and a common heritage of Yiddishkeit (ethnic Jewishness) united the small town.

Citing probate documents, real estate deeds, citizenship records, tax rolls, newspaper accounts, and oral interviews, Rogoff provides a rich portrayal of the Jewish community in Durham and Chapel Hill. The work would be further enhanced, however, from a more extensive discussion of the particularity of this location. As adjoining towns with two significant universities, Durham and Chapel Hill were somewhat unusual in composition because of the diverse faculty drawn to the area and the relatively large numbers (compared to the overall city population) of students during the academic year. Such factors perhaps contributed to the area’s Jewish growth, which differed from that of eastern North Carolina towns such as Goldsboro, Wilson, Jacksonville, and Lumberton. As Rogoff points out, some of these latter towns closed their synagogues as Jewish populations declined after a century of communal life. In addition, city maps would enhance the reader’s perception of spatial relationships between and within each city (for example, locating the east European enclave with respect to downtown Durham). Despite these minor issues, Rogoff’s thoughtful examination of the tensions involved in maintaining religious and ethnic tradition while acculturating to America augments our understanding of the southern Jewish experience.

Aleisa Fishman recently completed her Ph.D. in American history at American University. Her dissertation explores Jewish identity and consumer culture in post–World War II suburbia.

From the 1960s through the 1980s, the American response to the plight of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany was one of the most intensely debated subjects in Holocaust studies. Attempting to explain the failure of U.S. refugee policy as well as of the country’s subsequent response to genocide, scholars examined relevant aspects of American politics, government, and society. They debated whether the Roosevelt administration should, or could, have done more. They examined the pivotal role of the State Department and the recalcitrance of a Congress reflecting the xenophobic and isolationist sentiments of depression-era Americans. These studies brought to light an enormous amount of documentation that significantly enhanced our understanding of these issues. Yet some of the most contentious elements of these interpretations were not the basic facts of what was or was not done, but rather the motives of those affecting, making, or implementing crucial policies. Within this debate over motivation, few interpretive issues caused as much disagreement, and occasionally animosity, as the influence of anti-Semitism in the formation and implementation of policy. For most of the past decade, however, these facets of the American response to the Holocaust have been overshadowed by the ongoing discussion regarding the failure to bomb the rail lines and gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In her recent study of U.S. Consuls in Nazi Germany, Bat-Ami Zucker not only shifts the focus back to the earlier refugee controversy but she once again places anti-Semitism in the forefront.

Earlier studies of refugee policies, particularly those related to the State Department, have long acknowledged the importance of consuls in determining the fate of Jewish refugees. Indeed, suspicions and charges of anti-Semitism among consuls date back to the refugee crisis of the 1930s itself. But before Zucker, no scholar specifically studied this crucial group who exercised sole authority to issue visas to the United States. They were the gate-keepers who, she repeatedly reminds us, determined initially the difference between freedom and oppression for some and, in the long run, even life or death for others. Zucker readily concedes that, ultimately, other forces, institutions and individuals actually created the restrictive immigration policies, which
the consuls were legally (and perhaps also in terms of their careers) obligated to obey. Nonetheless, she argues persuasively that within the confines of law, policy, and even instructions from the State Department in Washington, consuls still constituted a critical component in the general process of obstructing Jewish attempts to find refuge in the U.S.

Consuls exercised considerable discretion in interpreting and administering general policies as well as specific clauses in the law. Inherently antagonistic to Jewish refugees, often making arbitrary decisions regarding their status, these consuls bear major responsibility for ensuring that even legally allotted immigration quotas remained unfilled while tens of thousands of German Jews desperately sought refuge.

Zucker's extensive archival research covers the U.S. consuls in Berlin, Hamburg, Stuttgart, and post-Anschluss Vienna, though she occasionally also refers to the attitudes and decisions of consuls in Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. Within the Third Reich, only consuls in these four cities could issue immigration visas, and these consular districts also contained the largest concentration of German and Austrian Jews. But the book ultimately provides far less on the actual actions and motives of these consuls than one would expect of such a study. Zucker devotes a substantial part of the work to the specifics of immigration law and policy as well as to the societal, political, and institutional contexts in which the consuls functioned.

The first third of the book covers the very familiar territory of Nazi persecution of Jews, anti-Semitism in America, passage of the 1920s restrictionist immigration laws, and the refugee crisis of the 1930s. Interwoven throughout these early chapters are virtually all the major points Zucker argues about consuls, the law, and refugees throughout the rest of the book.

In the next third, Zucker provides more detailed explanations of the various legal categories into which refugees might fall, distinguishing between non-immigrant aliens, non-quota immigrants, and quota immigrants. Here, too, much of Zucker's information directs attention away from the consuls and toward the laws themselves, policy decisions in Washington, or the response of persistent, though frustrated, Jewish and liberal organizations to refugee policies and interpretations of the law by consuls. However, where Zucker does provide examples of consular attitudes and
activities there is strong evidence supporting her contention of consuls' obstructionism, occasionally beyond that even promoted by their State Department superiors. For example, the categories of nonimmigrant aliens (especially temporary visitors) and non-quota immigrants (ministers, professors, students, etc.) offered avenues of potential escape outside the strict immigration quotas imposed by law. Yet, vacillating between arbitrariness and inflexibility, consuls proved as relentless in interpreting these classifications to the disadvantage of Jews, and in making unreasonable documentation demands on them, as they were when deciding on visas for quota immigrants. And the most effective instrument at the disposal of consuls processing quota immigrants was the vague, elastic clause in immigration law regarding anyone “likely to become a public charge” (LPC) intended to keep immigrants from becoming an economic burden to America. While throughout most of this period the LPC provision remained the main obstacle for most visa seekers, it was augmented, in some respects surpassed, in 1940 by concerns over potential immigrant threats to national security in a wartime crisis. Thus, as a greater need arose for refuge for more Jews from Nazi Germany restrictions became even tighter.

Although toward the end of the book, Zucker focuses more on the actions of consuls themselves, we still do not learn much about them other than they were callous. By this point the book also becomes exceedingly redundant. Nevertheless, here Zucker does furnish convincing examples to demonstrate that much more could have been done to save refugees, if only consuls had different attitudes toward them. She shows that individual consuls and vice-consuls did, in fact, exhibit a more humane approach and overlook technicalities to facilitate the issuance of visas in various categories. She also argues that circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that the callus resistance to Jewish refugees manifested by most consuls was rooted in anti-Semitism. Even those consuls who displayed sympathy for the plight of Jews regarded them, in one form or another, as a danger from which these diplomatic gate-keepers must protect America.

Although adding more details on immigration laws and policies as well as more examples of consular activities, most of what Zucker presents is not fundamentally new. Still, the evidence underlying her challenge to those historians who underestimate or discount anti-
Semitic motivations among consuls is probably much stronger than she cautiously indicates. Further research into consuls in other parts of Europe, especially during the 1920s when they blatantly expressed their anti-Semitism, should strengthen her case even more.

Joseph W. Bendersky is Professor and Chair of the Department of History at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond. He is author of The "Jewish Threat": Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich Princeton (Princeton University Press, 1983) and A History of Nazi Germany (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield, 2002).
Paul Charles Merkley's *Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel* holds no punches in his analysis of Christian organizations toward the State of Israel from its birth in 1948 to the present day. Merkley, an ardent Christian Zionist and evangelical, lauds the dominantly pro-Israel stance of the evangelical Christian movement while he rails against the generally hostile attitudes toward Israel prevalent among liberal Christian organizations. Merkley provides critical analysis in an area seldom studied in great depth among scholars, and he writes with a verve that enlivens his prose and engages the reader. Although it would be difficult to measure Christian attitudes among millions of Christians around the world, Merkley focuses almost solely on organizations for his information including the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, as well as many other Christian associations. More problematic, however, is Merkley's blatant partisanship for the Zionist cause which leads him to belittle his opponents' views on several key issues without enough analysis to justify such dismissals.

Merkley opens his study with a brief review of Israel's founding in 1948, and the reaction by Christians (primarily American Christians) to this development. Like many other scholars, he argues that the unique circumstances leading up to the establishment of Israel, namely world sympathy over the Holocaust and the thousands of homeless Jews lingering in Displaced Persons camps throughout Europe after World War II, led to a situation where most Christian organizations accepted or at least tolerated the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine. Merkley finds that this relative consensus among many Christian organizations, however, quickly crumbled in the years following Israel's birth.

For the next five decades, Merkley contends liberal Christians (a term he never adequately defines) tend to criticize Israel to the point where they "feel free openly to question the wisdom of bringing Israel into existence in the first place" (24). In contrast, Merkley argues evangelical Christians "generally approve of Israel's performance as a nation over the first half-century" (24). He properly acknowledges exceptions to his claim when he cites Reinhold Niebuhr's favorable stance toward Israel and the two organizations he helmed to win early
Christian support for Israel: the American Christian Palestine Committee and the Christian Council for Palestine. This concession is important, and Merkley should include more exceptions than Niebuhr. Other leading liberal Christians worked diligently for Israel's creation and survival including American Federation of Labor President William Green and Congress of Industrial Organizations President Philip Murray. Merkley should acknowledge the larger number of liberal Christians such as these who played a seminal role in aiding the establishment of Israel.

Nonetheless, Merkley makes a compelling case that in the immediate years following statehood, most liberal Christian organizations as well as the Catholic Church adopted a hostile attitude toward Israel. One organization Merkley highlights, the World Council of Churches (WCC) serves as his representative body for Christian liberalism as it constitutes an attempt by hundreds of Christian churches worldwide to develop a united Christian Church. Created in 1948, Merkley argues the WCC became influenced by liberation theology during the 1960s in an attempt to appeal to academics and scholars. Merkley takes a dim view of its influence on western academics as well as the WCC, where he contends it led to the "explicit adoption of Third World rhetoric and Marxist-Leninist insights on imperialism" (32). With this newfound liberation theology, the WCC came to adopt a critical attitude toward Israel while championing the Palestinian cause. Merkley implies that this attitude infected much, if not all, of liberal Christian attitudes throughout the world, yet he rarely acknowledges the view held by these Christians as well as many Arabs that Israel represents western imperialism in the Arab world's backyard. Surely, this issue needs to be addressed in more depth than simply dismissing as ludicrous the perception held by millions of people that Israel is an imperial, western presence in the Middle East.

In stark contrast to liberal Christians and Catholics, Merkley presents evangelical Christians as the backbone of Christian Zionism, ardent supporters of Israel and its policy. Although Merkley finds anti-Zionists within the evangelical movement, they are the exceptions rather than the rule. Moreover, he insists, many evangelicals look at the success of the Orthodox Jews in enforcing religious observances within Israeli society as a positive alternative to the American model of the "radical" separation of church and state. Of course, within this analysis of the relationship between evangelical
Christians and Israel, Merkley rejects a key concern among many Jews within Israel and abroad. For these Jews, the sole reason behind evangelical support for Israel relates to the fulfillment of End Times biblical prophecy whereby the return of all the Jews to Israel means the second coming of Jesus, and the fulfillment of scriptures. Merkley finds this explanation a canard that unfairly lumps all evangelicals with End Times pamphleteers. However, Merkley fails to address the other suspicion many Jews hold with regard to evangelical Christian support for Israel—namely the concern that their support for Israel exists solely because they wish to see all Jews emigrate from their countries, ending any Jewish presence in those countries.

The rise of Christian Zionism has led to a remarkable change in American politics. Republican politicians now rival their Democratic colleagues in their unquestioned support for Israel. This comes in direct response to the intense pressure of the evangelical influence on the party, which demands Israel be supported in its policies. This development within American politics has become so prevalent, Merkley contends that the Christian Zionist movement “has been a more constant political resource for Israel than the Jewish vote” (195). Undoubtedly, Israel’s government has grown to appreciate evangelical support so much in the last three decades that the Israeli government has done much to appease their sensibilities. In one instance, Merkley notes the Israeli policy of prohibiting cinemas to carry movies judged to be offensive to the religious feelings of Christians (Monty Python’s Life of Brian being one such film banned during the 1970s). Typical of Merkley’s particularly partisan writing, he fails to mention the criticism of such a policy; which constitutes outright censorship by the Israeli government to satisfy a political ally.

When it comes to Israel’s policies towards Christians living in Israel, Merkley finds that Israel can do little wrong. He notes that in the last fifty years, Israel is the only country in the Middle East where the Christian population has increased while everywhere else in the Middle East, the Christian population has decreased, in many cases dramatically. This proves for Merkley another example of Israel’s positive attitude toward the Christian community while most of the Arab countries treat their Christian communities with contempt. Additionally, Merkley hails the peace and relative order under the Israeli government with regard to the numerous Christian communities within Israel. Prior to 1948, Merkley notes, violence and
riots broke out among the Christian communities quite often. Yet many Christians in Israel and in the surrounding Arab countries criticize Israel. Merkley contends this criticism has more to do with a desire by many Arab Christians to relate to their Arab Muslim neighbors or due to a fear of persecution by the Muslim majority. According to *shar'ia* law, a Muslim should be executed for converting publicly to any other religion. Merkley notes western scholars focus on the “Basic Law” which historically protected Christian and non-Muslims living in Muslim countries, yet the law of *shar’ia* paints a more complicated picture, one in which many Christians may fear revealing their faith. Furthermore, since many Middle Eastern Christians of western denominations adopt a hostile attitude toward Israel, western churches tend to also adopt negative attitudes toward Israel in an attempt to appease their congregants.

Merkley spends some time analyzing Islamic attitudes toward Christianity in general and presents a picture of cultures in conflict. Typical of Merkley, he finds most of the fault for the cultural conflict with Muslims. He notes that “Islamic scholars have maintained a pristine uncritical attitude towards Islamic texts in all arenas of public discussion.” (109). Conversely he laments, “They are assisted in this by the readiness of Western scholars to join in on denigrations of the imperialistic record of the Christian West.” (109). Merkley delves into Islamic tradition and finds hostility toward Christianity and Judaism that is unlikely to ever be overcome. In one instance, Merkley refers to the Khudaibiya agreement, where Muhammad made a temporary peace agreement with non-Muslims until he was not strong enough militarily to destroy them. Merkley charges that Arafat has adopted this philosophy towards Israel whereby he engaged in the peace process, but knew he would unleash a violent struggle once he believed he had the strength to do so.

Such polemical accusations make Merkley’s work a controversial one that creates as many questions as it hopes to answer. He never shies from expressing his beliefs throughout the book, allowing the reader to recognize where the author is coming from. A more judicious approach, however, may have provided a more balanced perspective, one that could expound his contentions while better acknowledging the opposing point of view.

Adam Howard completed his dissertation on American Labor and the establishment of Israel at the University of Florida.


As the twentieth century was coming to a close, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History on the Mall in Washington mounted an exhibition highlighting aspects of class, race, and ethnicity in the decades before and after the Civil War. “Communities in a Changing Nation: The Promise of Nineteenth Century America” focuses on three very different communities: factory workers and owners in Bridgeport, Connecticut; African Americans in the South Carolina low country; and Jewish immigrants in Cincinnati.

Without in any way denigrating the first two, this review will, understandably, restrict itself to the Jewish exhibition, and to the excellent book, more than an exhibition catalogue, written by the curator of that segment, Susan H. Myers, who holds the C. Malcolm Watkins Curatorial Chair at the museum and heads its division of social history.

The scope of the handsome, oversize, profusely illustrated book, both replicates much of the exhibition and supplements it. A brief eight-page introduction about immigration is followed by thirty-one pages on Jewish immigration to America. These provide a useful context for the twenty-seven pages on "Cincinnati, Ohio: 'A sort of paradise for the Hebrew,'" which form the core of the book. There is a one-page "Afterword: An American Success Story." Endnotes are provided but there is no bibliography. There are also—librarians take note—eight transparent envelopes tipped in or pasted on containing removable facsimile paper artifacts, including a baggage check from New York’s Castle Garden immigrant depot; a “Lady's Introductory Ticket" to a “Purim Masquerade Ball” of 1882; and a $250 stock certificate in the Phoenix, a Jewish Men’s Club in Cincinnati.

The Jewish life that is pictured is largely a bourgeois life, concentrating on those “who began with little capital” (75) and paying
little heed to those whose only capital was their labor. The one Jewish person depicted who was a worker, the immigrant glazier Louis Stix, became a dry-goods merchant in Cincinnati (22). The only persons shown actually working are South Carolina millhands employed by a Jewish-owned firm.

To be sure, Jewish Cincinnati with its largely Rhenish and Bohemian roots, was highly entrepreneurial, and museums, with their dependence on material culture, tend to privilege those whose possessions survive. Poor folks don’t commission portraits, and one of the strong points of both the exhibition and the book are the painted and photographic representations of a number of Jewish Cincinnatians, including its two most prominent nineteenth-century rabbis, Isaac Mayer Wise and Max Lilienthal.

There is an impressive treatment of Judaism, including such personal ritual items as a tallit (prayer shawl), and phylacteries, the latter donated by the founder of this journal. Many other Cincinnatians also loaned appropriate artifacts, as did the American Jewish Archives and several other Jewish institutions. There is also a facsimile of a front page of Wise’s weekly, The Israelite, and views of the exterior and the interior of the wonderfully ornate Plum Street Temple. Impressive in the book, the illuminated interior in the exhibition is stunning.

Both the book and the exhibition are most worthwhile and represent a significant contribution to public understanding. It would be useful if the exhibition were to travel to Cincinnati and other appropriate venues, where it could be supplemented by items from local collections and be the occasion for lectures on local Jewish history.

Roger Daniels is Charles Phelps Taft Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Cincinnati. His most recent book is Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882 (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) notes with great sadness the passing of Fannie Zelcer on May 29, 2003, at the age of 80. Fannie Zelcer was the chief archivist of the American Jewish Archives from 1958 to 1989.

Fannie took an indirect route to the American Jewish Archives and to her career as an archivist. Born in Cincinnati in 1923, she attended the city’s public schools and the University of Cincinnati. During World War II Fannie served in the U.S. Army Air Force, rising to the rank of sergeant. Following her service, Fannie returned to Cincinnati, working at a variety of jobs and then beginning a family. Not formally trained for the archival profession, Fannie developed the talents she would later use at the AJA during these years: refining an attention to detail and a knack for organization, together with an ability to lead. As Dr. Gary P. Zola noted, “The skills Fannie acquired [during this time] conjoined with her own personal qualities to create a take-charge woman—a person who knew how to get things done.”

With these experiences and skills in place, Fannie became the AJA’s second chief archivist, succeeding Selma Stern-Taeubler. During Fannie’s tenure she helped guide the AJA from a fledgling institution to a world-renowned repository. Working with a small staff—and sometimes single-handedly—Fannie was responsible for the full-
range of archival duties. She worked in collection development (overseeing more than a five-fold growth in the size of the AJA’s collection), cataloged, preserved and processed its materials, and refined a system of bibliographic control over the AJA’s holdings that was unmatched in the detail and access it provided to researchers and patrons.

Fannie’s work and influence transcended technical archival matters, for she was, in many ways, the public face of the AJA. Working in accord with the vision established by the AJA’s founding director, Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus (1896–1995), and in conjunction with her colleagues, Associate Directors Stanley F. Chyet (1931–2002), and Abraham J. Peck (b. 1946), Fannie cultivated and implemented a philosophy of personalized service that became the hallmark of the institution. Disdainful of pretense or sophistry, Fannie helped establish the American Jewish Archives as a “people’s archive.” Bringing both a professional commitment and personal devotion to her work (she often called the AJA’s many Hollinger boxes of materials her “children”), Fannie cultivated an atmosphere where work and service were performed without ostentation or excessive regulation—practices that she believed hindered research and stifled congeniality.

Fannie assisted and befriended thousands of researchers during her career. This included many generations of Hebrew Union College students who either worked for her as student assistants or utilized the AJA for their studies. It was a testimony to the atmosphere she created that many of these students became lifelong friends, who, in later years, would regularly call or visit Fannie to tell stories, update family matters, or swap memories, long after they went on to careers in the rabbinate or academia.

One of Fannie’s favorite stories (and she was a great storyteller) related how Dr. Marcus once quizzed his students on what they should do when they went to the American Jewish Archives to research their term projects. “That’s easy,” one of the students replied, “I’ll just go ask Fannie.”

Fannie loved this story. It represented her greatest pride: that she made an impact not only as an archivist and a professional, but most of all, that she touched people’s lives. Fannie Zelcer was energetic and forthright. She always strove for the best in herself and in those around her. She was loyal to her friends and zealous in defending causes and principles she felt were right and true. She was fiercely
dedicated to Judaism and to her Jewish identity. Most of all, Fannie embraced her family—her husband Ralph, her children Rhonda and Marilyn, her grandchildren Matthew and Katie, her sisters Yetta and Shirley, and her entire extended family—with a love that was unconditional and everlasting.

Fannie Zelcer’s passing is a tremendous loss for the American Jewish Archives and for all of us whose lives she touched. We, and those who succeed us, are proud to follow in her footsteps. We will always remember Fannie with love, devotion, and respect—for the work that she did and for the life that she led.

May her memory be always for a blessing.

Kevin Proffitt, Senior Archivist
American Jewish Archives
The Educational Advisory Council
of
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