

Jewish Chautauqua, Jewish History, and a Jewish Correspondence School

Jonathan Krasner



Rabbi Henry Berkowitz (1857-1924)
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

By any objective account the Jewish Chautauqua Society (JCS), which was founded in 1893 by Rabbi Henry Berkowitz (1857-1924),¹ was a failure. Berkowitz, a disciple of Isaac M. Wise and a member of the first graduating class of the Hebrew Union College (HUC) in 1883, founded JCS to be “in fact, if not in name, The National Jewish Education Society.”² While it achieved nominal but fleeting success operating reading circles, summer educational institutes, and later educational programming on university

campuses, promoting the understanding of Jews and Judaism among non-Jews, the society never approximated the accomplishments of the Protestant Chautauqua Movement from which Berkowitz had derived inspiration.

Nevertheless, the JCS experiment was a formative chapter in the history of American Jewish education. JCS organized the first national Jewish teachers institute, a correspondence school for religious-school teachers, and was a pioneer in the areas of adult education, textbook publication, audio-visual production, and curricular development. These endeavors served as precursors to subsequent, more successful, efforts to address key challenges confronting the field of American Jewish education.

From the outset teacher training was a central component of Berkowitz’s agenda. Berkowitz had become familiar with the poor state of American Jewish education through his eight-year teaching stint at the Talmud Yelodim Institute in Cincinnati and his tenure as co-editor of the *Sabbath Visitor*, a journal for Jewish youth founded

by Max Lilienthal (1815-1882).³ Raising the quality of education in the religious school, he argued, was “the first and most immediate concern” of his generation of newly minted American-trained rabbis from both HUC and the more traditional Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

He was particularly distressed that many religious-school teachers were trained in Europe. “These were generally men of excellent traits of character and possessed the requisite knowledge,” he admitted. Yet, they were also “grievously handicapped in teaching children born and reared in America, by reason of their defects in English speech and their outlandish mannerisms.” Generally, the acculturated children of German and East European immigrants alike did not respond well to these teachers and their old-world pedagogy. “[T]he European notions of discipline they sought to apply were harsh and ineffectual, breeding resentment in the hearts of the pupils or creating ludicrous situations that often defeated the ends of instruction.” Berkowitz took a particularly dim view of rote memorization, catechisms, and the insistence by many teachers in Reform settings that the acquisition of German was essential.⁴

JCS’s early annual assemblies were essentially summer schools for Jewish educators and knowledge-hungry lay people. A Teachers Institute was organized at the first summer assembly in 1897. For three weeks participants attended classes in Jewish studies as well as pedagogy. Recognized scholars, practitioners, and leading rabbis often conducted the classes. Master teachers were invited to conduct model lessons.⁵

The centerpiece of JCS’s teacher education program, however, became the correspondence school. As early as 1893, teachers were able to avail themselves of a range of course books published by the society in a variety of subjects, including Bible, history, and Jewish literature. The course books were designed primarily for reading circles. Each lesson included a reading assignment, a short outline or list of themes to guide reading and discussion, review questions, and a list of recommended books for further study. By 1910, however, Berkowitz and other members of JCS’s board of directors perceived the need for a

formal correspondence school, with a prescribed curriculum.⁶ Students would submit their work for evaluation and receive certificates upon satisfactory completion of a course of study.

According to Berkowitz's memoir, the correspondence school was designed to serve teachers in small towns and cities outside of the northeast corridor and the Cincinnati vicinity. In 1908 financier and philanthropist Jacob Schiff had established a one hundred thousand dollar trust fund for the training of Jewish teachers at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York. Gratz College, which opened its doors in 1895, also provided teacher training for educators in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. But none of these ventures deterred Berkowitz, as their programs "lay beyond the reach of that great host of those scattered in cities, towns and villages throughout the land." Even the cost of attending JCS's assemblies, which in the early years were held in Atlantic City, was prohibitive for many.

Berkowitz and JCS Vice Chancellor William Rosenau (1865-1943)⁷ looked to successful correspondence school models at the Universities of Chicago and Wisconsin, as well as the International Correspondence School in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Their efforts were spurred by the warm reception that the correspondence school idea received from teachers at the first JCS Western Assembly in 1911. In search of financial backing, they took their plan to Schiff that fall. Schiff hesitated, although there is no record of why he may have doubted the efficacy of the proposal. Ultimately, however, he was won over, and agreed to provide five thousand dollars in seed money to pay for the creation and publication of textbooks. Schiff also contributed a challenge grant of two hundred and fifty dollars towards a twenty five hundred dollar "Maintenance Fund" on the condition that JCS raise the balance by January 1912. Although his gift was modest, Schiff's involvement conferred legitimacy upon the correspondence school and made it easier for Berkowitz and the board to attract further funding. In the first years of the school's existence, Schiff continued to donate two hundred and fifty dollars annually toward the Maintenance Fund.⁸

With funding in hand, Berkowitz and Rosenau assembled a faculty who would be responsible for writing textbooks and correcting papers.⁹ Rosenau was appointed dean of the faculty at the Correspondence School and was responsible for day-to-day administration and textbook editing. Berkowitz formulated the correspondence school curriculum in his 1913 publication *The New Education in Religion* (Jewish Chautauqua Society).

In his memoir Berkowitz claimed that the school opened on November 1, 1915. Yet the JCS minutes indicate that eighteen students were enrolled in the school as early as January 1912. November 1, 1915, probably marks the date by which all of the course materials were published and ready for distribution. Some textbooks, like Berkowitz's *Education of Religion* and Ella Jacobs's guide to teaching Bible in the primary grades, were rushed to publication. Early students used mimeographed experimental editions. The first certificate of completion was awarded to a Miss Flora Daniels of Baltimore, Md., in March 1913.¹⁰

Values Education

The most enduring achievement of the correspondence school experiment was in the area of textbook publication. Between 1913 and 1915 the society published thirteen textbooks. Read today, the manuals' didacticism and underlying pedagogy seem dated. Yet the textbooks are valuable because they shed light on the Jewish educational priorities of acculturated American Jews in the first decades of the twentieth century. The leaders of the JCS and many of the textbook writers were part of a more general Jewish revival movement that got underway in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The next three sections of this article will explore how textbook authors conceptualized and formulated one particular component of the religious school curriculum – Jewish history. Berkowitz and other Jewish leaders of the period considered the teaching of biblical and post-biblical history to be crucial, and granted it a primary place in the school curriculum.¹¹ Through an in-depth analysis of the textbooks' treatment of Jewish history, one can extract the communal values and concerns, educational philosophy, and perceptions of self and others of the authors and their general milieu.

Even before Berkowitz published his *New Education in Religion* and decided to commission the correspondence school textbooks, lectures on pedagogy were prominently included in JCS's Summer Institute programs. Lectures on the teaching of Jewish history influenced Berkowitz's own epistemology. At the 1908 institute David E. Weglein, principal of the Baltimore Normal College and supervisor of that city's Oheb Shalom Religious School, outlined what he believed to be the two central objectives of the teaching of Jewish history in the religious school: the promotion of "Jewish consciousness" – or identity – and the inculcation of morality. Although the language of identity politics would not enter the public discourse until Erik Erikson wrote on the "Identity Society" in the 1950s, Weglein drew upon the analogy of American civics education in the public schools to argue that studying Jewish history, culture, and ritual would enable students "to perform their duties as Jews and Jewesses when they grow into manhood and womanhood."¹²

Weglein asserted that a knowledge of the Jewish past would help students "better understand the position of Jews to-day. For it is only through a knowledge of the occurrences of the past that we can solve successfully the problems which confront us at the present time."¹³ A century earlier David Hume recognized the power of memory to invest a person with a sense of belonging and continuity. Weglein's conception of history as a modern-day sculptor of group memory was hardly novel. The publication in America of Heinrich Graetz's *History of the Jews* ten years earlier, by the Jewish Publication Society of America, had illustrated to many American Jews the power of history to bind generations in a way that ritual observance no longer could. Berkowitz believed that the JPS's edition of Graetz's book ranked among the most important milestones in the history of Anglo-Jewish publishing. Graetz succeeded in fostering within his readers Jewish pride and a sense of "religious consciousness," a sentiment that Berkowitz felt was essential to instill in religious school students.¹⁴ "[T]remendous force ... inheres in tracing the unfolding of a mighty tradition and the revitalization on the part of the student that, as heirs of that tradition, we are carrying forward the latest phases of the longest continuous and heroic history of any people on earth."¹⁵

In relation to the second aim, character development, Weglein extensively quoted from James Anthony Froude's *Essays in Literature and History*, published only a few years earlier,¹⁶ including the historian's contention that the interest in history derives, in part, from its function as an object lesson in the forces of good and evil. Looking once more to the public schools for inspiration, Weglein asserted that educators, prefiguring Froude in their recognition of this particular aspect of history's allure, have chiefly employed history as a vehicle for moral inculcation. "Now, if moral education can be derived from the study of history in secular schools, it needs practically no argument to prove that the moral aim should greatly influence the teaching of history in religious schools."¹⁷

Some of the teachers who read Weglein were probably already using Lady Katie Magnus's *Outlines of Jewish History*, published by JPS in 1890, which doled out a heavy dose of moralizing to its student readers. For others, the elevation of moral inculcation to the level of a primary educational goal represented a departure from an emphasis on rote memorization of facts, figures, and biblical passages. Weglein's treatment of "the moral aim" of education clearly hit a chord with his audience. Speaker after speaker voiced his and her agreement.¹⁸

Six years earlier Dr. Emil G. Hirsch endorsed a similar pedagogical approach in 1902, at JCS's Sixth Summer Assembly. Hirsch had harsh words for the religious schools:

[T]he conviction has deepened that our religious schools are a failure; that far from contributing what they should to the rounding out of character and building up of strong men and noble women through the spread of religious influences, they have operated unintentionally in the opposite direction. For much of the current atheism and arrogant agnosticism parading with stolen plumes, no one source is to be held so greatly accountable as the ordinary religious schools.

Hirsch's solution for this lamentable state of affairs included a reorientation of the Jewish history curriculum. He called Jewish history "the store-house from which we can draw power and inspiration." And if his rhetoric were to be taken literally, he would have teachers promote Jewish consciousness and moral behavior in the most blatant and manipulative of ways. Hirsch recommended that

teachers exploit the stories of Jewish suffering in medieval times for all their sentimental and heart-wrenching value.

It is necessary for us ... to bring our children to the understanding that to be a Jew may mean to be a martyr. Being a martyr confers the distinction of being the redeemer of the world, and every Jew in the mediaeval [sic] age was a redeemer. While suffering he sang his sweetest, he thought his deepest, he prayed his most fervent prayers, and believed, notwithstanding the irony of fate, which seems to accentuate the contrary doctrine, that God reigns and the world is good, that it is a privilege to be a man, and a prerogative among men to be one of the missionary people. Tell that story to the children until their hearts bleed and every nerve tingles, and you are safe against the blandishments among the gods and goddesses that throng the streets crying to our children "Forget the old." Tell that story to the young ones and they will go out and know that in these days to be a Jew is, by comparison, an easy¹⁹ matter, and is withal, whether easy or hard, a crown of distinction.

At various JCS institutes many speakers, including Berkowitz himself, echoed Hirsch's concerns,²⁰ and the association of values education, with the teaching of history, was encouraged in the correspondence school manuals. In her 1915 primer for teaching Bible stories to young children, Ella Jacobs²¹ asserted that "[t]he general object of the work of the Religious School is to develop the heart and soul of the children, to form their characters and awaken their minds to the high ideas of God." In Jacobs's opinion biblical history was particularly well suited to achieve this end.²²

Each chapter of Jacobs's manual outlined a lesson designed for a single class period. The lessons focused on familiar stories from the Hebrew Bible and the Apocrypha. Under the general heading of each lesson, Jacobs presented an "Aim of the Lesson," which involved the inculcation of a moral attribute. The suggested "Point of Contact," and the subsequent summary of the Bible story, were geared to emphasize the moral. For example, the aim of the lesson on the Garden of Eden, predictably enough, was "to show the happiness of obedience, contrasted with the unhappiness of disobedience." Jacobs's account of 3 Genesis, which was designed to be recited verbatim by the students, included the admonition that

While [Adam and Eve] were good and obedient, they were happy. But, alas! One sad day they disobeyed God, and all in their lives changed ... When Eve realized what she had done, she was very sorry. People are often sorry after they have done wrong. Then it is too late to undo it ... Each one of us is responsible for his own actions. We must learn to be strong, and to say, 'No,' bravely and emphatically, when we are tempted to do wrong.

Comparing the relationship between Yahweh and the fabled First Couple to that between a parent and child, Jacobs designed a lesson geared to promoting the obedience of religious school students to their parents, thereby justifying submission in the face of established hierarchies. "God was sorry that Adam and Eve had disobeyed Him, but He had to punish them," she wrote. "In a like manner, a parent feels compelled to punish a naughty child, hoping thus to teach him to be good in the future."²³

Edward Calisch's²⁴ 1915 primer for middle school Jewish history teachers similarly placed a heavy emphasis on moral indoctrination. His lessons' messages were consistent with those in the Jacobs manual, though somewhat more sophisticated, reflecting the age of the students. For example, the lesson devoted to 1–3 Judges was intended "to teach that the safety and welfare of a community depend upon the establishment and maintenance of law and order, and the recognition of constituted authority,"²⁵ a message that provided rationale for the obedience and respect for authority ingrained in the younger pupils.

Only the primer aimed at high school teachers, prepared by Martin Meyer (1879-1923)²⁶ and also published in 1915, dispensed with moral aims for each lesson plan, focusing instead on historical themes or messages. Still, the inculcation of morals was not far from Meyer's mind. In his introduction, he wrote that postbiblical history was just as suitable for values education as biblical history. In particular, he touted its power to "demonstrate the value of Jewish teachings as a basis for conduct and for living under new and ever-changing circumstances." Indeed, Meyer included numerous asides in his text that underscored the ethical message he perceived in the subject matter. For example, he began his lesson on the Spanish expulsion by asserting that "[w]ithin the entire scope of world history, there is no grander example of self-

sacrifice and loyalty to truth than the heroic determination of these 300,000 Jewish exiles ...”²⁷

The correspondence school manuals, with their detailed lesson plans, not only demonstrate the JCS’s promotion of moral inculcation in Jewish history curricula, but also provide an explicit picture of precisely which morals and ethics were taught. Sociologist Peter Berger has written that a society’s nomos, or ordering of experience, is almost always taken for granted. Though it is socially constructed, the nomos is typically fused with what are perceived to be the fundamental designs intrinsic to nature. “Nomos and cosmos appear to be co-extensive.”²⁸ The nomos is typically concretized as a set of morals and precepts, which are legitimized through religion, legal codes, and folklore. With the realization that morality is historically and discursively constructed, the two-pronged task of recognition and deconstruction becomes essential to the cultural historian.

Among the most common themes in Jacobs’ book were obedience and respect for authority. We have already seen that the presentation of the Garden of Eden story was designed to instill these values. The message was reinforced in the tales of Noah, Abraham, and Moses. When teaching the flood story, for example, the manual advises the teacher to justify the disturbing image of God destroying the world, as a “remedy” for the wickedness of humankind. “While this wholesale destruction of all inhabitants of the earth seems dreadful, justice demanded that widespread sin should have full punishment.” As a point of contact, Jacobs suggested that the teacher draw comparisons between the wicked generation of the flood and a child who refuses to wear his overcoat in the rain, or a child who ignores her parents’ warnings not to read by a dim light. In both cases, the consequences (i.e., catching a cold and impairing one’s vision, respectively), which she terms as the “punishment,” are “sure to follow sooner or later.” Jacobs can be accused of perpetrating and thus implanting a degree of callousness. “If pain and punishment did not follow sin, people would easily drift into wrongdoing,” she wrote. One hardly remembers that God’s drastic punishment left nary a human being, save for Noah and his family, to learn the lesson.²⁹

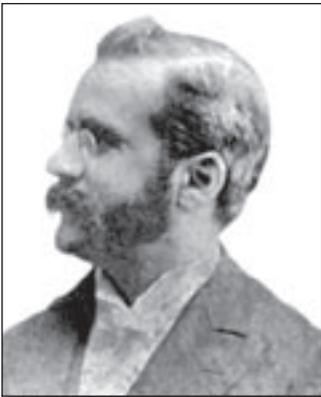
But if the examples seem disproportionate to the magnitude of the scenario described in 6–9 Genesis, the sentiment is clear enough. Jacobs' focus was not on the particularity of the sin or its consequences. Rather, she sought to establish a *nomos*, in which calamity and chaos are interpreted as punishment for misconduct, while right behavior and obedience ensure the maintenance of order. Jacobs's enterprise was fundamentally conservative. Her enlistment of sacred history — as opposed to cosmological mythology or the empirical history associated with the Greeks — to reinforce conventional morality may be viewed as distinctively Jewish.³⁰ But the larger project amounted to an emblematic use of religion. The political implications of her message were hinted at in her statement that “nor should maudlin sentiment be displayed about seeing sin punished.” She went as far as to apply this admonition to a perceived contemporary example of comparable behavior that could lead to moral degeneration: “Nowadays, it often happens that prisoners convicted of the most heinous crimes are made heroes by people with mistaken sentiment and compassion.”³¹ A similar motivation underpinned many of Calisch's lesson plans.³²

Other popular themes in the primers included the endorsement of blind faith in God, the importance of self-control, the sacredness of duty and honor, the necessity to subordinate the individual interest to the common good, the advisability of choosing one's friends wisely, the association of luxury with vice, the redemptive power of repentance, and the celebration of freedom. Many of these themes are interrelated; all of them concern and reflect societal behavioral norms and buttress the legitimating forces that gird socially constructed reality, particularly religion. The goal of the manuals was to impact and effect what Berger calls the “primary socialization” of the child. “In primary socialization ... the individual's first world is constructed ... [T]he world of childhood is so constituted as to instill in the individual a nomic structure in which he may have the confidence that ‘everything is right’ ... If the *nomos* of a society is to be transmitted from one generation to another, so that the new generation will also come to ‘inhabit’ the same social world, there will have to be legitimating formulas to answer the questions that, inevitably, will arise in the

minds of the new generation. Children want to know ‘why.’ Their teachers must supply convincing answers.”³³

American Values as Jewish Values

JCS’s German-dominated leadership considered socialization an all-the-more urgent educational goal given the influx of emigrants from Eastern Europe. Supporters of JCS naturally assumed that the immigrants would look to the more acculturated German Jewish community for educational models,³⁴ and their attitudes toward the East Europeans sometimes dripped with condescension. Frederick De Sola Mendes (1850-1927), the traditional rabbi of New York’s Shaaray Tefilla, told a gathering at the Second Summer Assembly that, when working with the children of immigrants, the primary task of a religious school educator must be “removing powerful poisonous agents, which sap the vitality of the religious plant.” The “agents” he referred to were “first, a certain amount of crude formalism, ceremonialism, call it superstition, if you will ... second, a painful and deep-seated contempt for people and things non-Jewish.” Mendes characterized the typical immigrant home as “so-called orthodox,” where “the punctilious performance of ritual was made, like charity, to cover a multitude of deviations from the path of integrity and sincerity.” Mendes did not exactly blame the immigrants for this predicament. He counseled his audience “not to be hard on our Eastern European brethren; tyrannized, trampled and wronged,



Frederick De Sola Mendes
(1850-1927)
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

their very existence drives them to such lessons.” But the immigrants, he argued, particularly the children, must be weaned from these “crude” characteristics if they were to become acculturated. “We are to rear American citizens out of these legacied children of Russia and Austria; we must cultivate in them appreciation for the best in American institutions and American principles.”³⁵

Significantly, Mendes, Berkowitz, and other Jewish revivalists did not

confer upon East European Jewish culture a special sense of Jewish authenticity. Nor did they see the Judaism they were promoting as watered-down. But American Judaism had become so sufficiently Protestantized and, indeed, Americanized, that Berkowitz and his colleagues saw no conflict between their desires to acculturate immigrants into American society and to encourage their identification as Jews. To be a “good Jew” was synonymous with being a good American.³⁶ At JCS’s Twelfth Annual Assembly, in 1907, educator Ella Mahler instructed teachers that “if our children have been made to love their ancestors for some beautiful traits these ancestors have displayed ... I say we are making better Jews, and when we lead our boys and girls to try and reach the highest standards set up by those Jews of long ago, we are doing our part in making honest, square, loyal American citizens.”³⁷

Reform Jews, who predominated in the JCS, were particularly adamant in their insistence of a lack of contradiction between their religious heritage and American values. As historian Michael Meyer has observed, the American Reform movement found that its sense of mission dovetailed nicely with its own sense of providence. Jews in America were encouraged to resist compartmentalization by America’s lack of an “endemic heritage” and its tradition of religious tolerance and inclusion.

Puritans, Transcendentalists, Evangelicals, Liberals – all clothed American destiny in religious terms, linking it to their own particular beliefs. All of them perceived God’s hand in the shaping of America. So too Isaac Mayer Wise ... could believe that Washington and his compatriots were ‘chosen instruments in the hands of Providence,’ that in its unique environment of liberty the American people would ‘work out a new and peculiar destiny.’ Judaism, Wise believed, would help shape that destiny – the people chosen of old would play their role as part of a people chosen of new.³⁸

One of the most telling ways in which the textbook writers reinforced this sense of shared destiny and lack of conflict between their Jewish and American identities was by drawing parallels between American and Jewish history. To be sure, the use of historical parallels reflected a progressive pedagogical approach to the teaching of history.³⁹ Nevertheless, the precise parallels and relationships that were drawn

are revealing. Calisch, for example, compared premonarchical Israel with colonial America. “Like the colonies before the Revolution, [the Israelite tribes] were not united, except when they came to fight together against a common enemy.” Moreover, the Israelite judge Gideon, who refused to accept the crown upon repulsing Israel’s foes, was compared to George Washington. “When George Washington had won the victory over the English army and established freedom for the American people, he refused to be made king and retired quietly to his home in Mount Vernon ... Thus, too, Gideon taught the people of Israel the lesson ...”⁴⁰

By choosing to compare Gideon with Washington, and by extension, Israel’s past with that of the United States, Calisch was trying to evoke within religious school students the same level of emotional connection with Jewish history and heroes that they were conditioned to feel for American history and heroes. However, the implicit message goes far deeper. JCS’s leaders harbored an enthusiasm for America that approached that of Isaac M. Wise. They shared Wise’s conviction that Judaism and its values were well suited to American values. And they endorsed his suggestion that, in Meyer’s words, “American Judaism ... was the prototype of American democracy.” Calisch might even have drawn inspiration for his analogy between Gideon and Washington from Wise’s *History of the Israelitish Nation*, where Wise makes a similar point.⁴¹ Regardless, Calisch’s manual shared Wise’s Americanist philosophy.

Calisch was not the only writer who drew upon American analogies. In her lesson on Abraham’s trek to Canaan, Jacobs compared the patriarch and his family to the Pilgrims’ voyage to the “new Canaan.” Like Abraham, she wrote, “they left their homes to seek a new country, in which they could secure religious liberty.” The story of Hanukkah provided Jacobs with another opportunity to compare the ancient Jews to the American colonists. In this incarnation, it was Judah Maccabee who was compared to Washington. The Hasmonean revolt against forced Hellenization and the usurpation of the high priesthood were transformed into the archetypal liberation struggle, as the children were meant to be left with the message that both the Jewish and American value systems cherish liberty. Liberty was also

the natural theme for the story of the Exodus. There, Jacobs compared Moses both to Abraham Lincoln, the emancipator of the slaves, and to Washington, the liberator of America from the tyranny of British colonialism.⁴² It hardly needs to be mentioned that the conception of liberty and autonomy as Jewish values is peculiarly American. Indeed, historian Jonathan Sarna sees evidence of the impact of American ideals on American Jewish institutions and religious practices as early as the Revolutionary period.⁴³

With Martin Meyer's manual, the attempt to conflate American values with Jewish values took on a new level of sophistication. Comparisons were still frequently made between American and Jewish history. For example, Ezra the Scribe's religious program was labeled "democratization," and his assembly of the Jews at the Water Gate for a public reading of the Book of the Law was compared to an Evangelical revival meeting. But Meyer did not stop there; he read American values into Jewish history in more subtle ways. The values package that comprised his interpretive lens was quintessentially American, as he championed ideas such as the separation of church and state, democracy, and the tenets of progressivism. His interpretive lens sometimes yielded unconventional interpretations. A prime example was his treatment of the medieval Karaites and Rabbinites. Whereas most textbooks portray Karaite Judaism as a threat to Rabbinic Judaism and make a hero out of Sa'adia Gaon, the best-known rabbinic critic of Karaism, Meyer emphasized the reformation that Rabbinic Judaism underwent in response to the Karaite threat, crediting Karaism with providing an impetus for the Rabbinites to rediscover biblical and philosophical study. The principle that Meyer championed was competition, a hallmark of the American system. In an age of trust-busting, Meyer was particularly sensitive to the drawbacks of monopolies. The lessons extended well beyond the spheres of business or politics. In America, the competitive marketplace encompassed the realms of ideas and beliefs, including religion.⁴⁴

Meyer may have been making an indirect allusion to the relationship between the various Jewish movements in America at that time. He was an unabashed advocate of moderate Reform Judaism. But he made much of the impetus created by the Reformers for the

Orthodox to inaugurate their own reformation. Thus, in Meyer's estimation healthy competition — in the American fashion — can only be beneficial, as religion is compelled to adapt to the needs of the population or risk the defection of its adherents. (Meyer even made a direct reference to the charge that the Reform movement amounted to a modern-day Karaism.)⁴⁵

Another example of Meyer's approach was his championing of separation of powers when discussing the Hasmonean period. He criticized the Hasmonean rulers for assuming both the priestly and juridical functions.⁴⁶

Yet, if the JCS correspondence school manuals endorsed the premise of shared values between Americans and Jews, they did not convey the sense that American Jews felt completely at home in their country. This is not to say that they did not embrace the notion of American exceptionalism, the belief that the United States constituted the most hospitable diaspora that the Jews had ever known. Meyer gushed with optimism about the Jewish encounter with America, which represented for him the culmination of the American Jewish encounter with modernity, a vindication of the experiment of emancipation.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the upsurge of antisemitism and xenophobia in the late nineteenth century deeply disturbed Meyer. But rather than dwell upon it, he engaged in the rhetoric of boosterism, trying to portray the Jews as loyal and contributing citizens. He underscored examples of Jewish patriotism, such as Asser Levy's insistence on performing the responsibilities of a citizen-soldier in New Amsterdam. The story of how Haym Salomon bailed out the Second Continental Congress, and was never repaid, was also recounted. Meyer made sure to point out that "there was a goodly number of Jews in the armies of the Revolution, one of them, Col. Frank, being an aide-de-camp to General Washington." And, of course, he repeated the oft alleged but completely unsubstantiated rumor that Christopher Columbus was of Marrano stock. Meyer stressed that Jews were an "industrious, active group; and while retaining their religious identity, did not fail to take part in the civic and political affairs of the day."⁴⁸

Meyer's boosterism was matched by that of Berkowitz, who published a JCS American Jewish history syllabus on the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the first Jewish community in colonial America. The syllabus was designed to fill a void; at the time, there was no published comprehensive history of the Jews in America. Berkowitz believed that the popularization of American Jewish history would enable "the sons and daughters of American Israel to get the true perspective by which to apprehend the place of our own generation in time and to understand the part we are to play in this great drama of real life." More specifically, Berkowitz wished to convey both to his fellow Jews and to Americans in general that "every concern of the American citizen had during the past two-hundred and fifty years, elicited the ardent and devoted participation of the Jewish people."⁴⁹

The syllabus was divided into sixteen lessons. He provided general topic headings and discussion subjects, as well as an extensive bibliography. His thematic presentation was innovative in its deviation from the usual chronological approach. And his bibliography provided a great service to the layperson, who had no other comparable study tool. His underlying purpose in publishing the guide – promoting the Jew as model citizen – was everywhere in evidence. One need not look beyond lesson titles like "The Jew as Patriot" or "The Jew as a Factor in the Development of the United States."⁵⁰

There is nothing exceptional about the boosterism practiced by Meyer and Berkowitz. "[Public] schools [were designed] to fashion Americans out of the wretched refuse of teeming shores"⁵¹ and rarely focused on stories designed to bolster ethnic pride. Such tales were left for the home, the supplementary school, or informal educational settings. Moreover, in an environment that privileged the melting-pot ethic, a popular way to foster ethnic identity was to stress how successful the ethnic group had been in becoming fully Americanized and how it contributed to the making of America. Even today, in the age of multiculturalism, minority groups often engage in this mode of storytelling.

In an environment rife with antisemitism, populism, and xenophobia, filio pietism designed to highlight patriotic conduct

was an act of justification directed by the writers both to members of their own group and to the general public. By 1915, when the correspondence school manuals were published, there was much concern among Jews about congressional attempts to stem the tide of immigration. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Meyer labored to counter popular stereotypes about the *Ostjuden*. Eschewing the critical tone adopted earlier by Mendes, which was meant for internal consumption by an acculturated Jewish audience, Meyer stressed the immigrants' education, artisan skills, and self-sufficiency. He also encouraged the settlement of immigrants in fledgling agricultural colonies, which was hardly surprising given JCS's coordination of Jewish education programs in two colonies between 1910 and 1920, and the crucial role played by Berkowitz's brother-in-law, Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf, in the promotion of immigrant dispersal through the establishment of the National Farm School in Doylestown, Pennsylvania.⁵²

Conceptions of Jewish History

If Meyer refused to adopt a condescending attitude when writing about East Europeans, bucking an earlier trend among textbook writers, he did agree that the immigrants' Judaism needed to be modernized.⁵³ One of the prominent themes of his primer was the internal conflict between the progressive and conservative forces within Judaism. Lest there be any confusion, Meyer made his own liberal disposition clear in his introduction. The forces of progress within Judaism, he argued, had saved the religion from becoming ossified and irrelevant. The climax of his narrative was the story of Moses Mendelssohn and, what Meyer called, the "internal reformation" within Judaism that followed emancipation. Meyer referred to Mendelssohn as the Emancipator of the Jews ... a man who, in the face of insuperable obstacles, brought relief and light to his suffering co-religionists ... He freed them from the degradation and antagonism that the Jewish Dark Ages had produced. He freed them from intolerance and bigotry, and inaugurated a new era for the Jews.

The granting of citizenship to Western and Central European Jewry and Jewish acculturation were deemed by Meyer to be "the most important epoch in Jewish history since the dispersion."⁵⁴

Meyer's reference to the "Jewish Dark Ages" was clear enough. But in order to make his point explicitly, he constructed his chapter on Mendelssohn so as to use East European intellectual Solomon Maimon as a foil. The result is a casebook demonstration of Froude's claim that history is "a child's box of letters with which we can spell any word we please."⁵⁵ Or, to quote R. G. Collingwood, who put the matter more delicately, "history is the re-enactment in the historian's mind of the thought whose history he is studying."⁵⁶ While acknowledging that the Lithuanian-Polish Maimon was an "unmistakable genius ... dominated by an insatiable thirst for knowledge," Meyer portrayed Maimon as "the direct antithesis" of Mendelssohn. "He led an aimless life wandering over Germany ... flitting back and forth between Dessau and Berlin; seeking through conversion to Christianity his better position." The tragedy of Maimon's life as a misfit, in Meyer's mind, was a testament to the inferiority of the Polish Jewish culture of which he was a product. "The vagrant spirit, outlandish manners and jargon of German-Polish-Hebrew typified the low civilization to which persecuted Jews in Poland had sunk." Maimon's "aimless, purposeless existence without definite aim to give it poise stands in marked contrast to the well-organized, systematic, purposeful life of Moses Mendelssohn."⁵⁷

Only thirty-two years later Moses Hadas would offer a radically different assessment of Maimon. "Roguary is itself a manifestation of human excellence," Hadas asserted. "Before the exodus from the Eastern ghetto became organized, only a resourceful and determined man could find his way to the West, and only a singularly gifted one could win a place in the new spiritual environment."⁵⁸ Hadas' reassessment of Maimon is indicative of a radical shift in the *Zeitgeist*. It is not so much that Meyer took a dimmer view of East European Jewish culture. Rather, it seems that while Hadas viewed Maimon's experience as a tale about the struggle to overcome a disadvantaged upbringing, Meyer could not get beyond seeing Maimon as a representative of his breeding. Meyer saw within the Maimon story a potential nightmare scenario when applied to the contemporary East European immigrants. If the eager immigrants failed to refine their uncouth habits, jettison their Jewish jargon, and adopt a "German"

respect for order, not only would they fail to assimilate, but they would reflect poorly on the established Jewish community, perhaps jeopardizing the German Jews' position vis-à-vis gentile America.⁵⁹

Meyer might have had another reason for disliking Maimon. Like many *Ostjuden* in Meyer's day who viewed Reform Judaism as utterly foreign, Maimon was a religious purist. Either one professed one's faith and followed traditional Jewish law rigorously, or one renounced Judaism entirely, as Maimon would ultimately do. As one scholar recently put it, "Maimon took a stance of either-or ... He was not a reformer of Judaism. In fact, his arguments for excluding a third possibility between orthodoxy and apostasy would later be used by opponents of the Reform movement."⁶⁰

If Maimon's story was a cautionary tale, Mendelssohn's epitomized, for Meyer, the quest of the Jew in America. He overcame great adversity; mastered the vernacular language; succeeded in business; concentrated on self-improvement; and cultivated social and intellectual contacts with his enlightened gentile neighbors, all while remaining faithful to his Jewish creed. Reflecting the moralizing posture of the correspondence school manuals, Meyer made a lesson of the contrast between Mendelssohn's outer appearance and his inner virtue:

How many Jews in America, where the opportunities for education are unsurpassed, are dominated by the same motives as Moses Mendelssohn? His repellent personal appearance failed to discourage him. His character was so beautiful, and his personality so charming, that people forgot his physical traits. Mendelssohn ought to be a pattern for every Jewish boy and girl.⁶¹

Meyer's reflections on Mendelssohn's loyalty to his Judaism should not be minimized. Textbook writers deemed Jewish loyalty a cardinal principle. Although Meyer was an advocate of moderate Reform, and a promoter of acculturation, he had no desire to tear down the religious barriers between Jew and Christian. He condemned Mendelssohn's children for betraying their father's example of "loyalty to his ancestral religion." Whether this denunciation reflected defensiveness in response to those for whom Reform represented a Christianization of Judaism and a stepping stone to conversion is a matter of interpretation. In light of his discussions elsewhere in the primer, it is fair to read within

Meyer's statement a conviction that adherence to Judaism need not be a barrier to success in America. In any event, the established Jewish community, typified by laxity of Sabbath observance and annulment of the dietary laws, needed to cling to some aspect of distinction if it were to maintain its separation from the host culture. Meyer wrote, "Mendelssohn demonstrated a truth that retains its vitality even today, that adherence to Judaism and intercourse with Gentiles are not inconsistent. Each Jew, like Mendelssohn, must reflect credit upon the Jews as one of them; however strong the temptation, renunciation of Judaism must never be made for selfish worldly reasons."⁶² Meyer's unfounded insinuation that Maimon converted can therefore be interpreted as yet another attempt to discredit the disagreeable *Ostjude* and contrast him with Mendelssohn.

A potential blurring of the lines between Jew and Christian deeply troubled the JCS. No particular controversy exemplified this better than that over the celebration of Christmas. Christmas was recognized as a legal holiday in all of America's states and territories by 1890. The holiday's major themes – "generosity, family togetherness, peace, goodwill and sharing" – were universally proclaimed civic virtues, which made the holiday tempting for Jews to embrace. But Christmas had never been fully shorn from its religious roots. Sarna suggests that Jewish responses to Christmas have historically fallen into three categories: acceptance, rejection, and accommodation. Those who accepted Christmas chose to downplay its religious significance or "rationalized their actions as based on religious tolerance, respect for Christianity, and the quest for national unity." The rejectionists questioned whether Christmas could ever be truly secularized and tended to associate its celebration among Jews with assimilation. The revival of Hanukkah in the 1870s, including the modification of its customs to include gift giving, can be viewed as an example of accommodation, although Sarna points out that its celebration did not address the root of the problem: the status of Christmas as a national holiday.⁶³

Applying Sarna's categories, the JCS encouraged educators to steer an accommodationist course. For example, Martin Meyer's lesson on the Maccabees chastised those Jews who celebrated Christmas, but

eagerly propagandized on behalf of Hanukkah. Ella Jacobs adopted a similar approach in her manual.

The celebration of Christmas should be discountenanced in Jewish families. Many Jewish people say that they keep Christmas as a social, not a religious holiday. This is self-deception. As Jews we must frown upon all observances of a non-Jewish festival. It is observed by Christians to observe the birthday of their “God,” an idea which is utterly absurd from a Jewish standpoint. Christmas trees and Christmas gifts are naturally attractive to children. Explain that when others are lighting the lights on their Christmas trees, Israelites should be thanking God for their own Hanukkah Festival, and should be lighting the Hanukkah lamp and exchanging Hanukkah gifts.

An indication of how relatively recently the elaborated celebration of Hanukkah had become prevalent can be gleaned from Meyer’s suggestion to teachers that they brainstorm with their students how Hanukkah might be satisfactorily celebrated.⁶⁴

Meyer’s apologia for Hanukkah is interesting on two counts. First, despite his tacit recognition that the elaborated celebration of Hanukkah was a novelty, he tried to mask this by dwelling upon “the value of traditional customs,” like lighting the *Hanukiya* (Hanukkah menorah). The tendency of reformers to cast their innovations as returns to tradition in order to give them the cover of legitimacy is a time-honored tactic, not unknown to Jewish history. (The archetypal “tradition”-based reformer, of course, was the Judahite king Josiah, who initiated the Deuteronomistic reforms.)

More intriguing is Meyer’s sophisticated anthropological discussion of the origins of both Hanukkah and Christmas, tracing them both back to a primordial winter solstice festival. Meyer invoked *Wissenschaft* scholarship to effectively blunt the allure of Christmas. He hoped that once the holidays were demystified and deconstructed, Jews would see no reason to celebrate the Christian version of a holiday they already possessed. But his argument unintentionally exposed the weakness of the accommodationist approach; it didn’t address the pervasiveness of Christmas in the civil culture and the holiday’s contemporary associations.⁶⁵

Wissenschaft des Judentums was a primary tool in the Reform movement’s bid to be seen as restorationist.⁶⁶ Meyer understood this

well and endorsed Reform innovations and the scholarly methodology that girded them. But unlike the revival of Hanukkah, reforms like the de-Zionization of the prayer book and the abandonment of the dietary laws had little or no basis in classical tradition. It was the reinstatement of rabbinic authority to institute wide-ranging reforms, designed to allow Judaism to adapt to new political and social realities, that nineteenth-century Jewish studies scholars legitimated.

Meyer's presentation of Moses Mendelssohn as the spiritual father of "the Jewish Reformation" presented a problem that he could not completely ignore. Mendelssohn remained an observant Jew and had not abandoned rituals that appeared to be outdated and meaningless. "As long as we have not yet achieved complete certainty," Mendelssohn wrote, "we must, in regards to matters of practice, adhere to the principles according to which we were brought up and which we have received from other men worthy of our respect." Mendelssohn believed the Jewish law "was based upon the eternal truths of reason or remind and awaken one to the contemplation of them ..." When Mendelssohn did advocate ritual reform, such as his endorsement of delayed burial, he built his case with halakhic arguments and rabbinic sources, as well as appeals to reason and contemporary medical literature. The ritual innovation that Mendelssohn had sought had a measure of precedence in the tradition.⁶⁷

Meyer wasn't oblivious to the seeming contradiction. To his credit, he acknowledged that "Mendelssohn was in no wise a reformer in the modern use of the word. He carefully observed all the old forms and ceremonies, though his philosophic viewpoint was greatly influenced by the popular deistic thought of the day." Meyer reconciled the inconsistency by describing men like Abraham Geiger and Israel Jacobson as Mendelssohn's spiritual heirs, much the same way in which the midrash portray's Rabbi Akiba's relationship with Moses.⁶⁸ Mendelssohn, wrote Meyer, "paved the way ... for movements more far-reaching than he could have anticipated."⁶⁹

Meyer's co-option of Mendelssohn allowed him to assert the importance of grounding the reformist enterprise in tradition, an essential endeavor for a man who elsewhere in the same text contended that "the past is the only solid basis for the future. A people which

disregards its past is like a ship broken away from its moorings.” In fact, much of his presentation of ancient and medieval history was designed to achieve this purpose. We have already seen that Meyer considered the ongoing struggle between progressive and conservative forces to be one of the great themes of Jewish history. His text capitalized on every opportunity he could think of to make his point, ranging from the career of Ezra the Scribe – “the founder of modern Judaism” – who Meyer believed founded the synagogue and edited and published the Torah, to that of fourteenth-century French Jewish philosopher Gersonides (Levi ben Gerson) – “a scientist rather than a theologian” – who invented “the first practical telescope, three centuries before Galileo” and “set out with no preconceived opinions, caring little if his conclusions seemed to contradict the Torah.” Meyer contrasted Gersonides favorably with the philosopher’s German contemporary, Asher ben Yekhiel (Asheri), who “exercised a harmful censorship upon the life of his people, as he held the obscurantist position that secular learning was unnecessary and even wrong.” Meanwhile, Benedict Spinoza, the rationalist philosopher who was excommunicated as a heretic in 1656, was recovered and restored to the Jewish fold as “the very embodiment of Jewish ideals of life.” Meyer wrote that while “Spinoza rejected Judaism; unconsciously he was its most loyal adherent.”

Meyer also painted a dreary picture of Judaism during the “Jewish Dark Ages.” Joseph Caro’s *Shulkhan Arukh* “threatened to throttle [Judaism’s] ability to grow and expand ... In no small measure did this new code contribute to the darkness of the succeeding ages in which the Jewish soul seemed threatened with extinction.” The Kabbalah was “a strange combination of religious philosophy, esoteric speculation, exaggerated spirituality, mysticism and later, necromancy ... an essentially irrational and unintelligible religion,” a perversion of Judaism, whose popularity could be traced “to the temporary gloom of Jewish misfortunes.” His bleak portrait of pre-Emancipation Judaism was tactical in that it made Mendelssohn and the reformers seem that much more revolutionary, indeed, Messianic. “Jewish learning was at its lowest ebb” prior to Mendelssohn. His “mighty work broke the shackles which bound Jewish life.”⁷⁰

Of course, the groups most central to Meyer's thesis, excepting the reformers themselves, were the Pharisees and their successors, the classical rabbis. For Meyer, it was essential to illustrate that the rabbis were innovators, reformers who utterly reinterpreted Judaism, saving it from ossification and decay. Recalling the terminology he used in his introduction, he specifically identified the Pharisees as "Progressives," and their rivals, the Sadducees, as "Conservatives." The Sadducees were "strict constructionists" of Torah law, he wrote, whereas "the Pharisees were democratic." The Pharisaic sage Hillel the Elder, who enacted the *pruzbul* and enunciated "the Golden Rule," was lauded for his "liberal views."

Meyer's conception of Jewish history as a struggle between progressive and conservative forces was hardly unique. In fact, his periodization and many of the historical details in his primers were culled (and, at times, embellished) from the pages of Heinrich Graetz's *History of the Jews*, as published by the Jewish Publication Society (1891-1898). Meyer also seems to have derived inspiration from the scholarship of Maurice Harris, rabbi of Temple Israel in New York and a frequent faculty member at JCS's summer assemblies. Harris was fond of comparing Reform leaders like Jacobson and Geiger to Yohanan ben Zakai and his colleagues at Yavneh.⁷¹

Meyer's equation of Reform with progress and the near absence of any discussion of Jewish ritual observance in any of the manuals may have been responsible for their limited appeal. Calisch and Jacobs, who aimed their books at the teachers of younger grades, spared no attempt to use their subject matter to encourage values education, but they seldom mentioned ceremonies and customs. For example, Jacob's manual, which focused on the Genesis and Exodus stories, omitted treatment of the Torah's explicit discussions of Sabbath observance, circumcision, *kashruth*, and prayer, not to mention civil law and the laws pertaining to the construction of the Tabernacle. It is useful to remember that in some of the more traditional schools, young children began their biblical study with Leviticus, rather than Genesis, underscoring the focus of biblical education on teaching *mitzvot* rather than morality.

Although the JCS would ultimately be incorporated into the Reform-affiliated North American Federation of Temple Brotherhoods,

Berkowitz never envisioned the organization as denominationally exclusive. Yet its avid defense of Reform Judaism, and its implicit support for a moderate Reform agenda, probably limited JCS's appeal and may have contributed to its failure as a Jewish educational organization. What would a traditionally sympathetic congregation make of a guidebook that included the following question in its lesson on Hanukkah: "The sense of defilement on the part of the Jews so persecuted keeps them loyal to the ideal of purity. Eating pork symbolizes this to the old Jew. What symbolizes it to the modern Jew?"⁷²

One area where the society appeared to make concessions to more traditional sensibilities was on the subject of Zionism. Perhaps this was because Zionism divided the society's leadership as well as the rank and file. JCS supporters' public struggles with Zionism at the summer assemblies exposed the deep ideological rifts that existed within the Reform movement and the American Jewish community as a whole. Berkowitz and Rosenau, both opponents of political Zionism, tried to transcend the controversy and presented JCS as a big tent where both Zionists and anti-Zionists would feel welcome. Ultimately, however, the society got off the fence and adopted a moderately pro-Zionist stance in its educational literature.⁷³

The sparring began as early as the Second Summer Assembly, in 1898, when Maurice Harris launched into an *ad hominem* attack on Zionists during a lecture otherwise devoted to the Crusades. Comparing Christian crusaders to modern Zionists, Harris not only tarred them with the brush of zealotry, but insinuated that modern, Western Judaism had transcended the religion's more primitive, nationalistic elements, of which Zionism was a manifestation. Referring to Zionism pejoratively as "this craze for Palestine," Harris rebuffed the movement, exclaiming that "our Zion ... is not limited to one place; let us take that fact with us as we march through life."⁷⁴

Berkowitz sat quietly through the spirited debate that followed, but in a 1903 lecture entitled "The Purpose of Jewish Chautauqua," he almost begged audience members not to let their ideological differences tear the society apart.⁷⁵ The summer assemblies continued to provide a platform for a multiplicity of views on Zionism. Considering how

divided the society was on the subject, it seems significant that Berkowitz would choose Meyer, an avowed Zionist, to author the postbiblical history teacher's guide. Meyer's views were well known to Berkowitz; the San Francisco rabbi presented a sympathetic portrait of the Zionist movement in an "Illustrated Address on Palestine" at the Twelfth Summer Assembly in 1908.

Meyer did not conceal his Zionist sympathies in the manual. He commended Zionists for their "splendid work in developing the resources of Palestine," their "remarkable results in the cultivation of the Hebrew language," and asserted that "the practical work in Palestine ... has been of worldwide significance and lasting benefit to Judaism" because it instilled "self-respect" and "pride" into the hearts of Jews everywhere. Meyer's support for Zionism was not entirely unbridled. In an effort to placate the anti-Zionists, Meyer allowed that "so far as a comprehensive solution to the Jewish problem is concerned, Zionism is little short of an absurdity" and stopped short of advocating for an independent Jewish state. Nevertheless, his sympathies were clear, and his lesson on modern Palestine was likely an anathema to anti-Zionist stalwarts.⁷⁶

Why had Berkowitz and Rosenau decided to publish educational material that planted the society firmly within the Zionist camp? It is tempting to see their concession as emblematic of a more general stirring within the Reform movement. Many of the Reform movement's most outspoken early Zionist advocates, including Max Heller, Emil Hirsch, Gustav Guttheil, and Berkowitz's brother-in-law, Joseph Krauskopf, were heavily involved in the JCS. But the society was also supported by rabid anti-Zionists and the ambivalent. Classical Reformers who eschewed expressions of Jewish nationalism still controlled the Reform movement into the 1920s, despite high-profile conversions to Zionism like those of Bernard Felsenthal and Krauskopf. But the expressions of support for Zionism from the nascent Conservative movement, as well as the newfound respectability conferred upon the movement by the ascendancy of Louis Brandeis to the leadership of the Federation of American Zionists, compelled the society to take Zionism seriously.⁷⁷

Perhaps Berkowitz and Rosenau realized that equivocation on Zionism was increasingly untenable, while support for the practical

accomplishments of the Zionist pioneers provided a comfortable middle ground between the political Zionists and the classical Reformers.⁷⁸ Practical Zionism enjoyed the sympathy of the East European Jewish masses and proved less controversial than Herzlian statism to the Jewish establishment. Indeed, even Jacob Schiff, who denounced political Zionism as a chimera from a JCS podium in 1909,⁷⁹ purchased shares in the Jewish Colonial Trust and offered financial assistance to multiple projects aimed to support agricultural and educational endeavors in Palestine.

The JCS Correspondence School: Anatomy of a Failure

With the textbooks printed and the faculty assembled, Berkowitz and Rosenau expressed optimism that the correspondence school would thrive. Yet almost from the beginning the school was beset with problems. Most serious was its inability to attract a committed student body. Enrollment grew steadily between 1912 and 1917. In January 1915, it stood at one hundred and fifty-five students; by September 1917 three hundred and forty-four students were listed on the roster. But these statistics are misleading, as many students were inactive. As early as May 1912, a report to the JCS board about the correspondence school enrollment distinguished students who were doing “earnest, conscientious work” from the rest of the student body. Efforts were made to “eliminate the dead timber” and inactive students were sent periodic reminder letters. But inactive students continued to greatly outnumber active students on the correspondence school roster. Out of the three hundred and forty-four students enrolled in September 1917, only thirty-seven were active.⁸⁰

Concern compelled Rosenau to send a survey to the student body in the fall of 1917 ascertaining the reasons for the high rate of inactivity. Students cited stress related to World War I and a general lack of time. An effort to reorganize the school was made in 1918–19. In an address to the JCS board on January 8, 1919, Rosenau affirmed his conviction that the correspondence school had a real *raison d’être*. He also expressed continued faith in the correspondence method of instruction. He tried to put a positive face on the correspondence school by highlighting its achievements, noting that eighty-six certificates of completion had been granted, and citing the production

of needed textbooks. But he also acknowledged what he termed an enrollment problem. Many of the reasons he cited reflected weaknesses endemic to the Jewish education field. Teachers who were poorly paid or working as volunteers were disinclined to spend the time and money on professional development. As a matter of fact, the only students who enrolled in the correspondence school had their tuition covered by their synagogues and temples. Many religious school instructors were public school teachers for whom teaching religious school was a means of supplementing their income. These teachers had “little time for leisure and extension work.” Rosenau also cited a “preoccupation” with activities related to the war and “concomitant disturbances of the mind resulting in an inability to concentrate on specific intellectual endeavors.”⁸¹

But Rosenau’s proposed remedies suggest that the correspondence school also suffered from a lack of funds and poor management. Rosenau all but admitted that poor oversight on his part might have been partially to blame. More communication was needed between the school and the students. The grading procedure was also problematic. Students were frustrated by the lack of written feedback and guidance on their exam papers, which were all the more important given the lack of direct instructor contact.

The root of the correspondence school’s problems was largely financial. Unpaid tuition dues were an ongoing headache.⁸² Moreover, Berkowitz and Rosenau never succeeded in following up their original fund-raising effort. They grossly underestimated yearly operating costs. By 1916 expenditures were far exceeding receipts. An austerity budget adopted for 1917 made no allowances for advertising or the publication of new books. Thus, when Rosenau suggested in his 1919 address that the school increase publicity through advertisements in the Anglo-Jewish press, promotional literature to be sent to every teacher and religious school in the United States, and promotional tours to communities large and small, he was whistling in the wind. Nor could JCS realistically hope that financial relief could be sought from the religious schools. To be sure, they sorely needed qualified teachers. But given their tight operating budgets, Rosenau’s suggestion that the JCS “communicate with congregations, asking them to raise salaries of

teachers where salaries are paid, or to grant small honorari, as a token of appreciation where extension work in Correspondence school is done successfully by teacher students” was well intentioned but probably unrealistic.⁸³

Among Rosenau’s more practical suggestions was that the JCS seek out organizational or institutional partners, who would, at the very least, encourage their members to enroll in the correspondence school courses and at best co-sponsor the school. JCS had seriously explored a partnership with HUC as early as 1912. But after flirting with the idea, HUC’s board of governors decided to pass. Rosenau then looked to the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods and the National Council of Jewish Women, hoping to “enroll mothers as students.” Rosenau suggested that JCS appeal to a market of Jewishly illiterate parents who despaired at their inability to supervise their children’s learning.⁸⁴

In the end, however, JCS’s board of directors charted a different course. In an effort to boost enrollment, they waved the five dollar matriculation fee, requiring students or their sponsoring institutions to pay only a one dollar enrollment fee. In addition, a donation of one thousand dollars was enlisted from Berkowitz’s son-in-law, Eugene Reefer, for the establishment of an honorarium program. Up to sixteen students would be selected annually to receive honoraria of twenty-five dollars each upon successful completion of three correspondence school courses. The program was to be piloted in the Philadelphia area, where the society’s field secretary, Jeannette Goldberg, would meet regularly with the students and oversee their instruction. It was hoped that if the honorarium program proved successful, the congregations and communities of the awardees would be “easily persuaded to undertake the continuance of these payments as remuneration to the students who have taken the courses. In this manner, the congregations would raise their standards by instituting salaries, which only those could receive who had taken our courses of study and presented our certificates.”⁸⁵

The honorarium program was initiated in 1919. In conjunction with the local YMHA, eight honoraria were offered to students in Trenton, New Jersey, who would attend a teacher’s institute. Awards were also granted to students in Wilmington, Delaware, who initiated

a study circle at their YMHA-YWHA. Berkowitz and Rosenau were so elated by the cooperation of the Ys that they appointed a committee to study the feasibility of a more formal partnership. Alas, the initial flurry of activity and renewed excitement gave way to the reappearance of the perennial problems: financial woes, poor oversight, and a lack of stick-to-it-iveness on the part of students. The retirement of both Berkowitz and Rosenau, the most enthusiastic champions of the correspondence school, from the leadership positions of the JCS in October 1922 may have sunk any further efforts at revival.⁸⁶

A measure of the more general atmosphere of disillusion and despair that pervaded the society during this period was Berkowitz's flirtation, in 1921, with changing the society's name to the National Jewish Educational Association or the American Jewish Educational Association. The board ultimately shot down the idea, wisely seeing little point in advertising old wine in new flasks.⁸⁷ The society would reinvigorate itself through a redefinition of its mission: rather than focusing on Jewish education, JCS put its energies into the education of non-Jews about Judaism.⁸⁸ Efforts to find institutional partners also eventually succeeded. JCS was incorporated into the North American Federation of Temple Brotherhoods in 1939. But the eleventh-hour attempt to revive the correspondence school ended in failure, and the school was phased out.

JCS's efforts to raise awareness about the lack of qualified religious school instructors and appropriate teaching materials were not a complete failure. Better-funded operations, like the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' Department of Synagog [sic] and School Extension stepped into the breach, with more consistent visits to far-flung communities and handsomely designed textbooks. In addition a network of Hebrew teachers' colleges and bureaus of Jewish education arose in Jewish population centers. Ironically, these new endeavors may have contributed to the decline of the correspondence school and JCS's more general Jewish educational efforts.

Conclusion

Why did the JCS fail in its mission to become the Jewish community's premier organization for the advancement of Jewish education? Conceived and brought to life in the same environment and by the same community of Jewish leaders who were responsible for building so much of the communal and organizational infrastructure that exists to this very day, why had the JCS failed to live up to its founders' hopes? Some partial and interrelated answers present themselves from this research: the failure of the JCS to attract the Eastern European immigrants and the desire of the immigrants to build their own educational institutions; the failure to conceptualize and promote an educational philosophy and ideological orientation to Torah, Jewish ritual practice, and Jewish history that could transcend the differences between Reform and traditionalist camps; a perennial lack of financial resources; and the failure of the Chautauqua vision to take hold in an assimilationist, largely apathetic Jewish community.

Despite the failures, however, the JCS's teacher institutes and correspondence schools were significant in that they were precursors to more successful experiments in Jewish education, teacher training, and textbook publication. Moreover, for Jews today who find themselves confronting some of the same challenges that faced Berkowitz and his colleagues, the experiment and the educational materials it produced elucidate much about an acculturated community that was struggling to define a viable educational agenda, which would produce a thoroughly Americanized generation with strong Jewish values and a rooted sense of Jewish identity. Educational leaders will not find a blueprint for contemporary educational initiatives. But their thinking would no doubt be enriched by the historical hindsight that the challenges they face are by no means unprecedented and the solutions they reach for by no means unique.

Jonathan Krasner is an assistant professor of American Jewish history at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Notes

¹ Berkowitz's rabbinical career included positions at Congregation Sha'are Shomayim, Mobile, Alabama (1883-1888) and Congregation B'nai Jehudah in Kansas City, Missouri (1888-1892). In 1892 he accepted a position at Rodeph Sholem in Philadelphia, where he spent the last thirty years of his career.

² Max Berkowitz, *The Beloved Rabbi: An Account of the Life and Works of Henry Berkowitz* (New York: MacMillan, 1932), 189. The appendix of this volume contains an account of the origins and activities of JCS by Henry Berkowitz.

³ Lilienthal was a renowned educator in Eastern Europe before he immigrated to the United States in 1845. He was best known for his attempt to set up a network of state Jewish schools in czarist Russia between 1841 and 1844. A few years after arriving in the United States, he served as rabbi for a short-lived union of German congregations in New York City and also ran an all-day Jewish school. In 1855 he accepted a position as rabbi of Congregation Bene Israel, Cincinnati, Ohio, where he served until his death.

⁴ Max Berkowitz, *The Beloved Rabbi*, 127–8.

⁵ By 1906, due largely to budgetary considerations, the assemblies became more limited in both scope and duration. Regional assemblies took on some of the educational work originally carried out at the organization-wide assemblies.

⁶ "Minutes of the Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1906-1939," January 30, 1910, Microfilm no. 143, American Jewish Archives.

⁷ Rosenau served as rabbi of Temple Israel, Omaha, Nebraska (1889 to 1892). He then accepted a position at Congregation Oheb Shalom in Baltimore, Maryland, where he spent the remainder of his career. He retired from the active rabbinate in 1939 but continued on as rabbi emeritus until his death.

⁸ Max Berkowitz, *The Beloved Rabbi*, 167–9; "Minutes of JCS, 1906–1939," October 17, 1911.

⁹ Although contracts with the textbook writers stipulated that they would be responsible for grading the first one hundred papers received, it soon became clear that the society would require the services of a full-time grader. Rabbi Eli Mayer, Berkowitz's associate rabbi at Congregation Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia, filled this position from 1913 until his departure for a pulpit in Albany, New York, in 1919. Berkowitz's new associate rabbi, Harry Ettelson, succeeded Mayer. "Minutes of JCS, 1906-1939," [date illegible] 1913; May 17, 1919.

¹⁰ Max Berkowitz, *The Beloved Rabbi*, 171; "Minutes of JCS, 1906-1939," January 16, 1912-November 17, 1914.

¹¹ See Berkowitz's curriculum in his *The New Education in Religion* (Philadelphia: Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1913), 111–28. See also Henry Berkowitz, "Closing Address: Second Assembly," *Second Summer Assembly of the Jewish Chautauqua Society: Official Account* (Philadelphia: Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1898), 8; and Isaac M. Wise's oration in the same proceedings (6). Wise voiced their position colorfully: "There are many infidels in the country who know a great deal more about Judaism than Jews themselves do; the reason is because they have not studied

and read and learnt their history; consequently the Chautauqua leads us to better acquaintanceship with the Jewish religion and history. And every intelligent Israelite must confess that it is a school in the right direction.”

¹² David Weglein, “The Teaching of History in the Religious School,” *Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Summer Assembly* (Philadelphia: Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1908), 77-8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ The Graetz translation became the centerpiece of JCS’s Jewish history curriculum for its reading circles. JCS published four course books, prepared by Richard Gottheil and Maurice Harris. For a discussion of the impact of the Graetz translation in America, see Jonathan Sarna, *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888-1988* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 34.

¹⁵ Henry Berkowitz, *Intimate Glimpses of the Rabbi’s Career* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1921), 63.

¹⁶ James Anthony Froude, *Essays on Literature and History* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1906).

¹⁷ David Weglein, “The Teaching of History in the Religious School,” 78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 83-4.

¹⁹ Emil G. Hirsch, “The Jewish Religious School,” *Record of the Sixth Summer Assembly of the Jewish Chautauqua Society* (Philadelphia: Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1902), 18-20.

²⁰ See, for example, Henry Berkowitz, “Personality in Teaching,” *The Tenth Assembly* (Philadelphia: Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1907), 19.

²¹ Jacobs was an educator and communal leader in Philadelphia. She served as principal of the Warner School and on the board of the Jewish Publication Society.

²² Ella Jacobs, *Methods of Teaching the Primary Grades: Course A: Foreword* (Philadelphia: Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1915), 8.

²³ *Ibid.* 6-7.

²⁴ A distinguished liturgist, Calisch served for four years as a rabbi in Peoria, Illinois, before assuming the pulpit of Beth Avodah, Richmond, Virginia, where he spent the remainder of his career.

²⁵ Edward Calisch, *Methods of Teaching – Jewish History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1915), 11.

²⁶ Meyer served as rabbi of Congregation Beth Emeth, Albany, New York, (1902-1906) and Temple Israel in Brooklyn (1906-1910). He then accepted a position as rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco, where he served until his death. Meyer was also a scholar in Semitics and served as a lecturer at the University of California from 1911 until his death.

²⁷ Martin Meyer, *Methods of Teaching – Post Biblical History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1915), 17, 141.

²⁸ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 25.

²⁹ Jacobs, *Methods of Teaching: Course A*: “Lesson VIII,” 3-9; “Lesson X,” 3-12; *Course B*: “Lesson IX,” 3-10.

³⁰ See Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 35.

³¹ Jacobs, *Methods of Teaching – The Primary Grades: Course A*: “Lesson VIII,” 4, 8.

³² See, for example, his handling of David’s flight from Saul in I Samuel, chapters 21–31, in Calisch, *Methods of Teaching – Jewish History*, 15–57, 149.

³³ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 135–6; Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 30-1.

³⁴ Despite the hopes of its leaders, the JCS never emerged as a central force in the education of the immigrants due to a lack of funds and the immigrants’ preference for their own self-help organizations and educational institutions. The former doomed a well-meaning proposal at the 1908 annual meeting to translate JCS’s course materials into Yiddish. It was also responsible for ending JCS’s most successful foray into immigrant education: the organization’s coordination of Jewish education programs for East European Jewish farm colonies in New Jersey and North Dakota between 1910 and 1920. The farm schools succeeded in assimilating the education of the immigrants into JCS’s previously articulated agenda of reaching out to small, disconnected Jewish communities. “Resolutions,” *Thirteenth Annual Summer Assembly* (Philadelphia: Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1909), 149; Peggy Kronsberg Pearlstein, “Understanding Through Education: One Hundred Years of the Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1893-1993 (George Washington University, 1993), 202-22.

³⁵ F. De Sola Mendes, “Some Phenomena of Institutional Teaching,” *Second Summer Assembly*, 30-31.

³⁶ On American Jewish syncretism, see Jonathan Sarna, “The Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture,” *Jewish Social Studies* 5:1-2 (1998–99): 52–79.

³⁷ Ella Mahler, “The Teaching of Ethics in the Religious School,” *Twelfth Annual Assembly*, 90.

³⁸ Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 226–7.

³⁹ See John Dewey, *The School and Society/The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 150-9.

⁴⁰ Calisch, *Methods of Teaching – Jewish History*, 14, 42.

⁴¹ Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 239–40.

⁴² Jacobs, *Methods of Teaching – the Primary Grades: Course A*: “Lesson X,” 7; *Course B*: “Lesson XI,” 4.

⁴³ See Jonathan Sarna, “The Revolution in the American Synagogue,” in Karen Mittleman, ed, *Creating American Jews: Historical Conversations about Identity* (Philadelphia: National Museum of American Jewish History and Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis/University Press of New England, 1998), 14–21.

⁴⁴ Meyer, *Methods of Teaching – Post-Biblical History: First Part*, 59, 64; *Second Part*, 26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, *Second Part*, 194–95, 202–03. Interestingly, Meyer’s tolerance was not extended to the so-called radical wing of his own movement. He called them “extremists” for advocating the abolition of circumcision and the celebration of the Sabbath on Sunday. Similarly, he took a dim view of the emerging Conservative movement. In a gross miscalculation he pronounced its birth to be a stillborn. Perhaps its relative ideological proximity to his own point of view, as opposed to Orthodoxy, made it more threatening.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, *First Part*, 88.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, *Second Part*, 215.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, *Second Part*, 212–15; On the early development of American Jewish historiography, see Robert Liberles, “Postemancipation Historiography and the Jewish Historical Societies of America and England,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 10 (1994), 45–65.

⁴⁹ Henry Berkowitz, *American Jewish History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1905), 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5–9.

⁵¹ Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (New York: Random House, 1996), 14. On the impact of the public schools on East European Jewish immigrants, see Stephan Brumberg’s *Going to America, Going to School* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

⁵² Meyer, *Methods of Teaching – Post-Biblical History: Second Part*, 214.

⁵³ For a discussion of the treatment of East European Jews in late-nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century textbooks, see the second chapter of my dissertation, “Representations of Self and Other in American Jewish History and Social Studies Schoolbooks: An Exploration of the Changing Shape of American Jewish Identity” (Brandeis University, 2002).

⁵⁴ Meyer, *Methods of Teaching – Post-Biblical History: Second Part*, 182–83, 189.

⁵⁵ James Anthony Froude, *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, vol. I (London: Longmans, Green, 1894), 21.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 24.

⁵⁷ Meyer, *Methods of Teaching – Post-Biblical History: Second Part*, 183–4.

⁵⁸ Moses Hadas, ed, *Solomon Maimon: An Autobiography* (New York: Schocken, 1975), ix–xiv.

⁵⁹ On the image of East European Jews in American Jewish textbooks during the immigration years, see Jonathan Krasner, “Representations of Self and Other in American Jewish History and Social Studies Schoolbooks, 77–108.

⁶⁰ Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 20.

⁶¹ Meyer, *Methods of Teaching – Post-Biblical History: Second Part*, 178.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶³ Jonathan Sarna, “Is Judaism Compatible with American Civil Religion? The Problem of Christmas and the ‘National Faith,’” in Rowland Sherrill, ed., *Religion and the Life of the Nation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 153. On the evolution of Christmas, see William B. Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), chaps. 1-5; J. M. Golby and A. M. Purdue, *The Making of Modern Christmas* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); and John R. Gillis, *A World of their Own Making* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 101–04.

⁶⁴ Meyer, *Methods of Teaching – Post-Biblical History: First Part*, 81-2; Jacobs, *Methods of Teaching the Primary Grades: Course A: Lesson XVI*, 8-9.

⁶⁵ Meyer, *Methods of Teaching – Post-Biblical History: First Part*, 81–2.

⁶⁶ For background on *Wissenschaft* and history, see Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis/University Press of New England, 1994).

⁶⁷ Michael Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), 50–1; Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 14–15.

⁶⁸ B.T. Menakhot 29b; see also Louis Ginzberg’s rendering in *The Legends of the Jews*, Vol. III (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1911), 114–15.

⁶⁹ Meyer, *Methods of Teaching – Post-Biblical History: Second Part*, 190–91.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, *First Part*, 45, 55–7; *Second Part*, 72-73, 121, 158–60, 166–9.

⁷¹ See, for example, Maurice Harris, “Yochanan ben Zakkai and his Time,” *Second Summer Assembly*, 15.

⁷² Meyer, *Methods of Teaching – Post-Biblical History: First Part*, 79.

⁷³ On pro-Zionists within the Reform camp prior to the 1937 Columbus Platform, see Jonathan Sarna, “Converts to Zionism in the American Reform Movement,” *Zionism and Religion* (1998), 188–203; Michael Meyer, “American Reform Judaism and Zionism: Early Efforts at Ideological Rapprochement,” *Studies in Zionism 7* (1983): 49–64; Howard Greenstein, *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981).

⁷⁴ Maurice Harris, “The Crusades,” *Second Summer Assembly*, 37.

⁷⁵ Henry Berkowitz, “The Purpose of Jewish Chautauqua,” *Sixth Summer Assembly*, 7.

⁷⁶ Meyer, *Methods of Teaching – Post-Biblical History: Second Part*, 204–06.

⁷⁷ On Brandeis and the American Zionist movement, see Melvin Urofsky, *American Zionism: From Herzl to the Holocaust* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1975); and Allon Gal, *Brandeis of Boston* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). For a different approach, see Ben Halpern's classic essay "The Americanization of Zionism," in *American Jewish History* (September 1979), 15–32.

⁷⁸ On a personal level, Berkowitz and Rosenau continued to oppose Zionism even after the British government issued the Balfour Declaration in November 1917. Both rabbis affixed their signatures to an open letter to President Woodrow Wilson opposing the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine on March 4, 1919. The letter, which three-hundred prominent American Jews signed, was published under the headline, "Protest to Wilson against Zionist State: Representative Jews Ask Him to Present it to the Peace Conferences," in the *New York Times*, March 5, 1919.

⁷⁹ Jacob H. Schiff, "How to Solve the Problem of the Jew in America," *Thirteenth Summer Assembly*, 145.

⁸⁰ "Minutes of JCS, 1906-1939," May 20, 1912-October 16, 1917.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, January 8, 1919.

⁸² In May 1916 the Education Society of Boston, which had agreed to defray the tuition costs of sixty-eight local teachers, suddenly announced that it could not meet its financial obligations and offered JCS a measly twenty-five dollars. Subsequent efforts to contact the Education Society were unsuccessful, and the account was finally closed the following November.

⁸³ "Minutes of JCS, 1906-1939," October 16, 1916; January 8, 1919.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, January 16, 1912; January 8, 1919.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, February 19, 1919.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, March 19, 1919; May 17, 1919; April 21, 1920.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, January 14, 1921; April 20, 1921.

⁸⁸ Gentile-directed education began as early as 1909 with Rabbi Julian Morgenstern's lectures at the Summer School of the South at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. According to Selma Berrol, even growth in this direction remained slow because of JCS's persistent financial woes. See Berrol's entry on the Jewish Chautauqua Society (misspelled "Chatauqua") in Michael N. Dobkowski, ed., *Jewish American Voluntary Organizations* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 206–12.