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On the cover:
These images come from the AJA’s NFTY collection. They include an early logo, NFTY song sheet and photo of NFTY members from the 1946 Convention.


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of philanthropic work in the Jewish public sphere. The centerpiece of the WJC’s activity was its clandestine operation to rescue children from war-torn Europe. The story of WJC’s rescue of thousands of children in Portugal epitomizes the complexity of the debate over the organization’s activity during World War II.

The Founding of NFTY and the Perennial Campaign For Youth Engagement

Gary Phillip Zola

This year marks the 75th anniversary of NFTY, the North American Federation of Temple Youth (originally the National Federation of Temple Youth), the first national association of synagogue youth in American history. The establishment of NFTY in 1939 provides an illuminating case study of how Reform Jewish leaders sought to address the perennial challenge of transforming Jewish youth into synagogue-loyal adults. This article seeks to provide a historical reconstruction of the factors that ultimately led to the founding of NFTY after many years of discussion and debate.

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GARY PHILLIP ZOLA is the executive director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and professor of the American Jewish experience at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. MARC DOLLINGER is Richard and Rhoda Goldman Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies and Social Responsibility, San Francisco State University.

“This stunning new collection of documents...conveys the remarkable breadth and extraordinary diversity of the American Jewish Experience across 350 years. The editors' selections capture the voices of America’s Jews and illuminate their lives through the prisms of business and labor, immigration and adaptation, religion and Zionism, family life and philanthropy, politics and antisemitism. Setting the gold standard for the field, Zola and Dollinger's source reader is indispensable for those teaching modern Jewish history.”
—Pamela S. Nadell, director of the Jewish studies program at American University

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TO OUR READERS...

It has been realized of late that, next to the retrogression of war, the greatest threat to the preservation of modern archival material is overrapid development in peace.

Renowned Jewish historian Cecil Roth (1899–1970) could not have anticipated the invention of email or the proliferation of digitized and born-digital material when he wrote these words more than fifty years ago in a monograph published by the American Jewish Archives, titled *On the Study of American Jewish History*. However, Roth understood well that the quick pace of change—on every rung of society—would be the fundamental impediment to recording, preserving, and, eventually, critically examining the events of our recent past. Roth had a particular interest in the modern Jewish experience, and he singled out American Jewish organizations as embodying this notion of “rapid progress.” His concern about the difficulty of documenting this progress was highlighted by his insistence that the history of these agencies was not only essential to an understanding of world Jewry, but civilization: “The role and contribution to humanity of a body such as the B’nai B’rith,” he writes, “are certainly far greater than those of some of the new sovereign states.”

It has been the role of archives such as the AJA to properly preserve and make available for research the relevant records of our collective past. Organizational records, in particular—such as those of B’nai B’rith, the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the World Jewish Congress (WJC), National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS, now Women of Reform Judaism, WRJ)—will receive increased attention in the next decade with the continued rise (or revival, really) of transnational and comparative history. In his foreword to the American Historical Association’s series, *Essays on Global and Comparative History*, historian Michael Adas notes that “the best recent works on global history also display a far greater sensitivity... to cultural nuances and the intricacies of the internal histories of the societies they cover.” In the field of Jewish history, fleshing out the inherent transnational nature of American Jewish organizations will ultimately lead to a more complex picture of American Jews vis-à-vis other Jewish groups as well as in relation to a larger global community. While much new work based on personal

*To Our Readers*
papers and diaries has focused on familial networks, these stories will need to be embedded in histories of Jewish nonprofits and agency relationships. The macro and the micro will necessarily inform each other.

The three articles in this volume of *The American Jewish Archives Journal* all make use of the organizational records held at the AJA to further populate the map of our global communal history. Jessica Carr explores how images of Palestine were used in the Jewish art calendars of National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS) from the organization’s founding in 1913 through to the creation of the State of Israel. Carr shows how this transcultural interaction affected the organization’s sense of itself, its attitude to the new Jewish state, as well as its place in the broader historical and cultural narratives of gender, religion, and art.

Perhaps the best example of a transnational Jewish organization is the World Jewish Congress, founded in 1936. Zohar Segev, in his article on the organization’s efforts to rescue thousands of European Jewish children through Portugal during World War II, shows how the WJC operated fundamentally as an American Jewish organization on the international stage. While its short-term aims and activities overlapped and conflicted with those of other Jewish organizations operating in Europe, particularly the Joint Distribution Committee, the WJC claimed that its long-term political goals and interests set it apart. Other organizations “were unable to confront the Jews’ existential crisis that began in the 1930s,” Segev argues, whereas WJC leaders “saw no contradiction between their Zionist leanings and activity with the WJC. They fought diligently for the establishment of a Jewish state, while at the same time striving to empower the ethnic identity of Diaspora Jews” (19).

Finally, the AJA’s executive director, Gary P. Zola, marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of what is today the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) with an analysis and discussion of the organization’s founding. The beginning of this organization can be traced to January 1939, when two hundred delegates met in Cincinnati to establish a nationwide outlet for young people to engage in Reform Judaism. However, Zola shows how the conversation surrounding how best to engage youth in the movement started as early as the late nineteenth century. The organization has been a source of leadership development and creative activity for the movement and beyond since its inception. Like WRJ, which today has five hundred sisterhood affiliates
representing approximately 65,000 women worldwide, NFTY has its roots firmly planted in American soil but has grown internationally over the years to include Canada and Israel.

To conclude, in keeping with Cecil Roth’s concern for the preservation of archival material, we have to wonder how history of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century will be written when so much of the digital record has not been preserved due, in no small measure, to the “over-rapid development” of the period. While that large topic is beyond the scope of this essay, a closely related topic should be considered here: As more and more archival material is mounted online in some sort of digital framework, the act of researching and writing global, comparative, transnational histories changes as well. Historians will have to travel less and less to conduct the bulk of their research. The Internet gives the illusion that materials are all in one place. We should not forget that this digital material was once only found in an archive where it was and continues to be, in the words of Roth, “harnessed to the service of scholarship.” While digitization certainly has its advantages, it should also cause us to pay closer attention to the “history” of the digitized material itself, particularly the question of where it was created and where it ended up. Since scholars will be less likely to follow the documents physically, the movement of these records must be kept in mind and followed virtually. Oftentimes the story of how records came to a particular archive is as exciting and fundamental to the story they tell as the “documents” themselves.

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Notes
2For more on this revival, see the new volume edited by Adam D. Mendelsohn and Ava F. Kahn, Transnational Traditions: New Perspectives on American Jewish History (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014).
4For a recent discussion of this topic, see Seth Denbo’s article “Ghosts and Monsters:
Human Scale Digital History at #RRCHNM20 in the January 2015 issue of Perspectives on History, 17–18.
Roth, 3.
Women of Reform Judaism, in cooperation with The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and Hebrew Union College Press, marks its centennial anniversary with the publication of *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Reform Judaism*. This collection of new scholarly essays looks back at its history in order to understand how the hopes and dreams of its founders have come to fruition.

Eighteen scholars offer essays on the spectrum of Women of Reform Judaism’s activities, including their funding of Hebrew Union College during the Great Depression, their support for Jewish education through production of a substantial women’s Torah commentary designed to edify lay people as well as scholars and clergy, their promotion of Jewish foodways and art through publication of cookbooks and support of synagogue gift shops, their invention of the Uniongram as a formidable fundraising tool on a par with the Girl Scout cookie, and their efforts to safeguard Jewish continuity through support of youth activities (NFTY).

Scholars, clergy, and laypeople interested in the history of American Jewish life and the distinctive place of women in American religious history will benefit from the rich insights and perspectives in these essays.
Image 1: Michelangelo's *Moses*.
Picturing Palestine: Visual Narrative in the Jewish Art Calendars of National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods

JESSICA CARR

For the Hebrew months of Sivan and Tammuz 5674 (May–July 1914), the calendar of National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS) depicts Michelangelo’s sculpture of Moses, a work of art housed in the Church of St. Peter in Chains in Rome as part of the tomb of Julius II (image 1). The calendar explains, “Michelangelo’s heroic figure of Moses and the Tablets brings out the chief thought of Shabuoth—the giving of the law.” Sketches of Mount Sinai and a modern pulpit and ark surround the photograph of Michelangelo’s sculpture. The inclusion of Michelangelo’s Moses exemplifies the production of Jewish identity through visual culture that relies on images of biblical life and Palestine. Like their Christian-American counterparts, NFTS members—the auxiliary organization for Reform Jewish women in the United States—valued such images. But while the art calendar allowed NFTS to share culture with non-Jews, it also offered a polemic. Christianity may commemorate the reception of the commandments, but the calendar asserts—as indicated by the association of the sculpture with the celebration of Shavuot—that Moses belongs in the tradition of Judaism, not Christianity. The calendar makes one other change to the representation of Moses: The horns that emerge from Moses’s head on the sculpture in Rome were removed for the Jewish art calendar.

The story of NFTS art calendars begs the question: Where should the Jewish past reside in the Jewish present? A central religious practice in Jewish-American life has been to try to direct Jewish attentions in this matter: to “place” the Jewish past—that is, to understand Judaism as a tradition with material geographical roots. NFTS art calendars printed

1 Though the AJA and its journal have a long-standing institutional and stylistic tradition of employing the term “American Jewish” (as in American Jewish history), the author of this article prefers the term “Jewish American.”
from 1913 to 1948 articulate a narrative of Jewish history that begins in ancient Palestine, runs through Europe, and culminates in the United States.\textsuperscript{3} Even as Jewish culture flourished in Palestine in the early twentieth century, Palestine was valued more for its “pastness” than its present day, which would have rivaled American exceptionalism. In that way, NFTS counters hegemonic Zionism, which values Palestine as the culmination of contemporary Jewish civilization. (This language is borrowed from Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, who defines “contemporaneous” as describing “those in the present who are valued for their pastness” and “contemporary” as “those of the present who relate to their past as heritage.”\textsuperscript{4}) The art calendars thus present Palestine in a way that confers value on the Holy Land within the larger frame of Reform Judaism and American citizenship. In other words, the calendars present Jewish history as a precursor to American history, culture, and politics. That the visual culture of NFTS calendars articulate a counternarrative to European and Zionist visual cultures by use of images drawn from both speaks to the very production of heritage—a process that “adds value to the outmoded by making it into an exhibition of itself.”\textsuperscript{5} By exhibiting images originally produced in European and Zionist contexts, NFTS art calendars recontextualize those images. In doing so, they make two simultaneous implications: that those European and Zionist meanings are outmoded and that a new layer of American Reform meaning exists on top of them.

Because territory was a staple in modern nationalist myths, Americans at large and Jews as a subgroup faced particular challenges in articulating histories that linked them to territories in the way that many of the histories of Western European nations and groups were linked to a place. Americans faced the problem that their nation was a young, new territory: How could they see their nationhood as emerging out of a primordial existence? In the late nineteenth century, as Americans traveled abroad in increasing numbers, travel stories and histories published in the United States sought to make Rome in particular a comfortable place for Americans and white Protestants to build into their stories. White Protestant Americans focused especially on the catacombs as their link to early Christian history. The ornate churches, which also fascinated them, would not have been at home in their narrative, as they were a symbol of Catholicism. The hidden underground catacombs, however, served...
as a powerful metaphor for white Protestant Americans’ understanding of internal spirituality. Those whose tours took them throughout the Mediterranean, including a stop in Palestine, approached integrating the Holy Land into their worldview in a similar way: by incorporating elements of the territory’s history that, even centuries later, point to white Protestant America as the culmination of Christian destiny.

As Jews sought to integrate images of Palestine into their own visual culture and communal memory—reclaiming mythic Palestine for Jewish rather than Christian history and identity—they shared a geographic impulse with their white Protestant American counterparts. By printing Michelangelo’s *Moses* and other representations of the Jewish past, NFTS calendars cultivated a visual culture that evoked Jewish life in America as a safe existence, alongside yet distinct from Christianity. This Jewish identity and visual culture were dynamic, not static; they shifted with the changing images of both Jewish and American culture. Through the art calendars’ images, we see a narrative of Jewish-American identity, from ancient Palestine to European communities to the United States. This narrative links Jews to a primordial nationhood rooted in Palestine and simultaneously articulates a vision of America as the final fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham’s descendants. It is a narrative that parallels broader white Protestant American narratives of culmination in the United States.

Conceptualizing the relationship between “modern Jews” and Palestine played an important role in articulating Reform Judaism, though it was not the sole concern of Reformers. As Michael A. Meyer demonstrates, early reformers of Judaism and ideologues of the institutionalized Reform movement never constituted a monolithic Jewish community. Modern Jews held various notions of Jewish tradition, including contradictory ideas of tradition. In Western Europe and America, many Jews demonstrated what might be called “religious laxity,” to which others responded with more deliberate understandings of which ideas and practices were essential to Judaism and which must be discarded. As American Reform Judaism coalesced into a movement, participants continued to disagree and contradict themselves in their understandings of Reform’s internal and external struggles to make sense of modernity. In understanding Reform Judaism as a movement, then, I follow Meyer in acknowledging the explicitly religious character

Jessica Carr
of Reform. Yet, like Meyer, I also want to emphasize the diversity and complexity of Reform at any given time as well as its dynamism throughout history, including interactions with many other social, political, and religious movements intrinsic and extrinsic to Jewish life, including Zionism, feminism, and aestheticism. Jewish Americans organically reformed Judaism throughout the nineteenth century, and the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) marks a separation of American Reform Judaism from other Jewish-American institutions and movements.8 The third plank of the platform affirms the historical significance of certain parts of Jewish law for the Jewish people’s “mission during its national life in Palestine,” but the platform accepts as binding “only its moral laws,” deeming the rest as irrelevant to modernity. The fifth plank expresses optimism for a coming Messianic era of “truth, justice, and peace among all men” and at the same time rejects Jewish nationalism: “We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.”9 This apparent stance countering Zionism would be visited and revisited over the next decades.

American Reform’s posture toward Palestine as the location of Jewish memory, culture, and politics, of course, was not fixed. The CCAR continued to publish new platforms throughout the twentieth century, which increasingly sought to embrace the diversity within Reform Judaism, including the founding of NFTS in 1913. The sisterhoods that chose to affiliate with NFTS articulated their own point of view of Jewish tradition and its geographical past, present, and future. Their art calendars offer a particular window into how members of NFTS participated in larger questions of Jewish life in America. Beyond explicitly political concerns and prior to the acceptance of Zionism by the American Reform movement at large, NFTS members endorsed images of Palestine and work by artists from Palestine, especially those from the Bezalel school, for their newly founded Union Museum and Jewish art calendars.10

In addition to signifying developments in American Reform and the representation of Palestine, the calendars also were on trend regarding aestheticism at the turn of the twentieth century. For Jewish immigrants and their children, the value of aestheticism centered around the
Historian Jenna Weissman Joselit demonstrates that by the early twentieth century, Jewish-Americans—especially women—expressed a “powerful interrelationship between décor and identity.” Artists, objects, and images of Palestine played a key role in the creation of this Jewish-American material aesthetic. Jewish Americans desired objects that displayed their good taste and American style. Home observance was part of the founding mission of NFTS, and leaders sought to include among these materials not only Judaica but “Judaica plus the knowledge of how and when to use it.” The Executive Committee noted that this was an important goal because so many Jewish holidays were home celebrations. To cultivate this observance, NFTS members focused on goods such as Passover plates, candlesticks, and the Jewish art calendar. The calendar helped cultivate home observance by displaying “a beautiful reminder” of holidays in every home. In this context, sisterhoods sought to “solidify the bridge” between synagogue and home. The art calendar offered the possibility of displaying Judaica in the style that middle-class Jewish-American homemakers sought, it introduced Jewish artists to an American audience, and it offered the dates of holidays as well as Bible readings for Shabbat that cultivated an explicitly religious Jewishness.

The images of the calendars published during the first half of the twentieth century present a pictorial message about Jewish-American identity vis-à-vis Palestine. These pictures give an account of ancient Jewish life in Palestine as a closed chapter of Jewish history. The visual narrative culminates in a claim that America would serve as the future community of Judaism, which also frames the end of the European Diaspora. After the creation of the State of Israel, however, NFTS calendars included images of the newly formed state, which reopened the debate about the Holy Land being a closed chapter as a source of Jewish identity. These new images also created tension with the emphasis on American exceptionalism—an emphasis that had reached a peak during World War II. Since 1913, NFTS art calendars had created a strong visual culture centered around Palestine, which created the space for the tension between these representations of the United States and Palestine. As the organization shared the impulse to represent Palestine with Jews and non-Jews in America during the first half of the twentieth century, it negotiated multiple ideologies and its identity as a Reform Jewish organization in the United States. And later, the increased appearance of
images of the State of Israel after its creation in 1948 would have seemed to be in visual continuity with earlier representations of Palestine, even though images of a Jewish nation-state outside of the United States marked a shift in ideology and identity for NFTS.

Images in Historical Context

Palestine featured centrally as the authentic site of the Jewish past in NFTS Jewish art calendars. All of the extant calendars from 1913 to 1927 depict biblical life in the Holy Land, and the majority from 1929 to 1951 invoke Palestine (although two calendars celebrate ceremonial Jewish objects—one featuring the anniversary of Hebrew Union College [HUC] and the other in honor of the Charleston Jewish community’s bicentennial). This is seen in the biographies of the artists, who spent at least some time in the East, as well as in the subject matter of the images. Technological developments in the nineteenth century altered the possibilities for representing, visiting, and picturing Palestine. Photographs suddenly proliferated, which “made a remote land seem closer and its ‘exotic’ cultures seem more accessible” and “helped to create a shared visual portrait of the Holy Land.” Archaeologists discovered more and more relics of the ancient world, and travel became faster and more luxurious, providing a link but also intensifying the contrast between past and present.14

Studies of Zionism have tended to focus on political influence, fundraising, and the immigration of Jews to the land of Palestine.15 However, images of the Holy Land reveal more about Jewish Americans than about the land of Palestine or the State of Israel. As mythical images of Palestine evolved in America from the eighteenth century to the twentieth, Jewish Americans were “increasingly out of touch with reality back in Eretz Israel.”16 Therefore, scholars of religion have turned toward material culture to give voice to lay people and show the significance of Palestine in America beyond “membership numbers, fundraising income, and favorable presidential pronouncements, as important as these may be.”17 Recent studies, such as those by Ken Koltun-Fromm and Beth Wenger, examine concern among Jewish Americans in the early twentieth century about whether Jewish identities and values would be passed on to the next generation.18 A response to changing social and political situations, the concern for transmission of identity also reveals
the shift away from Jewish law in defining the essence of tradition for many Jews.

The production of material culture has been a central practice for Jewish Americans seeking to pass on something concrete to their children. It has also been a trend in the broader study of American religious history and speaks to larger questions of community, religious thought and practice, and the complicated relationships between religion and nation. The art and artifacts produced by Americans of various traditions show that groups have continuously borrowed forms and ideas from each other.19 Studies have linked Jewish acculturation, gender, and material culture; for example, Joselit, Paula Hyman, and Andrew Heinze use acculturation and material culture as a window into the religious practices of women, which are often missed in studies solely concerned with theology. This scholarship looks at which objects make homes identifiable Jewish and how material culture offers a medium through which Jews can transform themselves and their practices to suit American norms.20 In the visual culture of NFTS as exemplified in Jewish art calendars, Palestine was not just an imaginative fantasy for Reform Jewish women; it was a critical component of their religious identity and cultural engagement in the United States. Repeated viewing of these images helped solidify their identities as American Jewish women.

As a vehicle for harmonizing Jewish and American identity, these reproductions of Palestine allowed Reform women to share common values—such as their very identification with the Holy Land—with Jews and non-Jews alike. Yet the calendars fit Palestine into a Reform worldview, at times functioning to reclaim symbols for Judaism in general or Reform specifically. Interestingly, although the images in NFTS art calendars generally depict either landscapes or men—not women—their production and use did create a space for an organization and leadership that incorporated women into the Reform movement. In the early twentieth century, Reform Jewish men and women rejected Jewish laws that subordinated women. And yet, they were part of a larger American society that, prior to the first wave of feminism, prevented women from assuming traditionally masculine roles, such as heads of congregations. NFTS women creatively responded to the constraints and commitments of Reform Judaism and American culture through the projects of their organization.

Jessica Carr
Space for Women in Jewish History in the Early Twentieth Century

At the start of the nineteenth century, Jews in Europe and America interpreted the public nature of synagogue services and communal Jewish life as limited to men. Although Reform’s reconceptualization of the authority of Jewish law sought to remove barriers to women’s full participation in Jewish public life, men and women continued to struggle to envision new roles for women in Judaism. Moreover, social norms constrained the roles for women across religious traditions in America. Therefore, it is not surprising that women were largely invisible in very early Reform. Generally, Jewish women continued to be unable to take lay or rabbinic leadership roles and were often denied membership in synagogues throughout the nineteenth century, despite reforms in the halakhah. These limits on women’s membership and lay leadership in Jewish communities went beyond what was typical for Christian American women, indicating that Jews were not just copying Christians in order to acculturate. However, like their Christian counterparts, Jewish women became increasingly present in congregational life, “an implicit and persistent challenge to the structure and essence of the institution.”21 Jewish women used the same rhetoric of domesticity that Christian women used, but they faced a different set of challenges. Jewish tradition conceptualized synagogues as public, setting up a clear tension between the rhetoric of domesticity and the efforts of Jewish women to play a greater role in Jewish communal life.

While the role of women in Jewish life had very long traditions, Jewish-American women created new forms of institutional life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, albeit forms influenced by traditional religious associations. Jewish women understood their roles in synagogue and communal life as tied to values deeply rooted in Judaism. But as Pamela Nadell and Rita Simon have argued, “through organized communities of women, they created a culture that enabled them to change the expectations of their proper behavior within [synagogue] portals and expand Jewish women’s public religious roles.” Beginning in the early nineteenth century, Jewish female immigrants formed benevolent societies and other formal and informal groups to aid the sick, perform charity or tzedakah, aid the poor and provide other social welfare, and bury the dead. These groups may have been rooted
even further back in time in German Jewish women’s organizations called Frauenvereine.\textsuperscript{22} Perhaps the earliest institutionalization of Jewish-American women’s benevolent work was the 1819 founding of the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society in Philadelphia by Rebecca Gratz and other members of the Mickve Israel Congregation. Many of these same women would later create a Hebrew Sunday School and institutions for Jewish orphans.\textsuperscript{23}

The large display of women’s work at the 1893 Columbian Exposition inspired Jewish-American women, many from the Reform movement, to found their own national organization, the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW). However, while NCJW sought to unite all Jewish-American women, disputes—such as whether to observe Sabbath on Sunday and how to allocate funds—troubled it from early on. The women who founded local sisterhoods and joined NFTS sought a more explicitly religious organization, focused on Jewish observance more so than were other women’s organizations such as “Sisterhoods of Personal Service” (a Jewish social welfare organization) and NCJW.\textsuperscript{24} When NFTS was federated in 1913, the decision to use the term “sisterhood” over “auxiliary,” “sewing club,” “social club,” or a variety of other terms was deliberate. “It was a modern term that resonated simultaneously with the political themes of the women’s emancipation movement and the spirit of social activism that characterized the Progressive Era.”\textsuperscript{25} From the perspective of NFTS members, their organization was a much-needed alternative to NCJW, but at the same time they were conscious that they should “‘neither disturb nor duplicate’ other Jewish women’s societies.”\textsuperscript{26} In many ways, NFTS drew on the American tendency to express religiosity through organizations, but the members of NFTS saw it as a counter to those who substituted social service for religion.\textsuperscript{27} Gary P. Zola argues that rabbis committed to classical Reform Judaism helped introduce to women the idea of ameliorating society through work in social justice; thus this type of work became the task of Reform Judaism.\textsuperscript{28}

Through organizations in the United States, Jewish women established themselves early on as essential to synagogue and communal life. New organizations addressed the social position of Jewish women in America, who saw not only other Jewish groups as allies and models for public action but Protestant women’s groups as well—clubs such as the Young Women’s Christian Association and the Woman’s Christian Temperance
Union, whose exclusively Christian nature precluded Jewish women’s membership.29 Women’s organizations became central to American religiosity in the early twentieth century, and both Jewish organizations (including NFTS, NCJW, Pioneer Women, Spanish and Portuguese Sisterhood, and Women’s International Zionist Organization) and other religious or nonreligious groups (e.g. Hull House, Settlement House, and other Progressive organizations) proliferated. These institutions were not in the home—they were part of Jewish and American public life—yet women entered institutional life through rhetoric about maternalism and the home.30

In 1913, women from congregations within the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC, now the Union for Reform Judaism [URJ]) formed NFTS (today known as Women of Reform Judaism [WRJ]). This united many sisterhoods that predated the federation and that would at times express skepticism about the benefits of a national organization. American Reform Jewish women and men who created NFTS saw its constituent sisterhoods and members’ acts of caring for the synagogue community as part of feminine norms of spirituality. Such practices included purchasing and using ritual objects, raising funds for HUC, supporting religious education, celebrating new traditions such as Mother’s Day as a fulfillment of Jewish values, contributing to and patronizing a Reform Union Museum, and producing Jewish art calendars. These are the practices I focus on in this study to see the creative ways women reworked their roles in Reform Judaism to construct new spaces in which they could be authoritative.

By participating in a broader American social movement to reconceive the place of women in religion and the public sphere, NFTS provided a bridge between women and positions of Jewish authority. This was true even as the women initially hesitated to formally challenge men’s traditional roles of authority. Rabbis such as David Philipson and George Zepin supported Reform Jewish women in creating a federation of sisterhoods focused on explicitly religious concerns. By creating an overarching NFTS, “sisterhood women sought influence over their own religious lives.”31 NFTS women may have seen their roles rooted in Jewish traditions, but when arguing for women’s representation—such as the institutionalization of women’s suffrage—they turned to broader American social contexts to articulate the call for change.32
NFTS chose to establish itself as an auxiliary organization to the UAHC. At its founding men and women argued for the contributions of women through their traditional, gendered roles in the home. Mrs. Israel Cohen emphasized the integral role of women in modernization, arguing that, “our city [Chicago] is but a replica of what the forces in every hamlet are striving to extract from the cauldron of modern agitation. Need I assure you that the women form no inconsiderable part of these forces… [T]hey have induced changes in education, politics and society.”33 Simon Wolf from the UAHC lauded the sisterhood, saying, “It is conceded that the women of our country are the dominant factors in the development and uplift of religious life…. Religious education and home training are the fundamental principles of good citizenship.”34 NFTS was thus a link between home and synagogue. While motherhood and home life served as foundational values for women in Reform Judaism, NFTS quickly institutionalized new committees and practices that linked the public and home practices of its members.

NFTS projects such as the art calendars allowed for new spaces and forms of authority for women without challenging men’s roles within Reform Judaism. NFTS’s National Committee on Religion chose the images, oversaw the printing, and distributed the calendars for sale. The Committee on Religion sold calendars to individual sisterhoods at wholesale cost (10 cents in 1915), and each sisterhood was responsible for selling its calendars at a requested price (25 cents in 1915). The sale of the calendars for two and a half times the wholesale price allowed each sisterhood to use the calendars as a fundraiser. While local sisterhoods could decide how to use the money, NFTS’s National Committee on Hebrew Union Scholarships helped direct how funds could be used: for local sisterhoods’ discretionary needs but also as “an additional source of revenue to make up for the 25 cents per capita abstracted for the Scholarship Fund”—the minimum required.35 By raising funds for the seminary, NFTS members showed their commitment to men’s training and the rabbinate; at the same time, they established a position of power for themselves by being in charge of every aspect of the calendars. Advertisements for the calendars emphasized their importance in marking domestic space as Jewish and as the specific realm of Jewish mothers. But although the calendars raised funds for contemporary American rabbis, images of the rabbis are conspicuously absent in the stories told through the artwork of the calendars.

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Claiming Biblical History in Visual Culture: The First Jewish Art Calendars

As part of its influence on the Reform movement, NFTS established a visual culture that signified the organization’s Jewish identity by presenting—and thereby transforming—the scenes of Palestine according to the worldview of NFTS members. Central to the development of that visual culture, beginning in 5674/1913–1914 and continuing throughout the twentieth century, NFTS printed and distributed calendars that featured depictions of Jewish prophets and life in Palestine. Many of the images in the early-twentieth-century calendars were of Jewish art produced and distributed by Zionists, especially those influenced by the concepts of Ahad Ha’am, the Hebrew essayist known as the founder of cultural Zionism. The work of Herman Struck and his students at the Bezalel School, the Zionist art institute established in Jerusalem in the early twentieth century, was well represented; several of those images were collected specifically for an exhibition of Jewish artwork at the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901.36 Such artwork was reprinted and circulated, much of it becoming iconic throughout Europe, the United States,
and Palestine. As members of movements outside of Zionism, such as NFTS, constructed visual culture in concert with their identities, they used many of the same images circulated by Zionists, but they adapted them according to their worldviews and movements.

Early NFTS visual culture depicted biblical life, playing with the tension of sharing such images with Christians. For the 5676/1915–1916 calendar, NFTS chose the theme, “The Prophets of Israel.” The cover and calendar pages from that issue depict paintings of Isaiah, Joel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Zachariah drawn from the Sistine Chapel—images that were originally produced for Christian contexts (image 2). These images of ancestral life in Palestine demonstrate comfort in borrowing visual culture from Christians—that they were not Jewishly produced pictures speaks to the unique relationship in America between Jews and non-Jews. Even though the artwork was European, the combined images in NFTS visual culture as well as the interest in making that culture available for mass consumption were American impulses, shared between Jews and non-Jews. As their Christian neighbors produced material that reflected their religions, NFTS art calendars helped create a material Judaism that drew on “European impulses that spread to America”: sentimentalism and romanticism, which “understand faith as an element of feeling rather than rationality”; devotional emotionalism at home, where the calendars would mark space as “Jewish” and thus “sacred”; and industrialization, which facilitated the inexpensive availability of material goods.37

Using Michelangelo’s artwork established a cultural realm for NFTS members vis-à-vis their Christian American neighbors in two distinct ways: (1) it demonstrated commonality through their shared values of art and consumption, and (2) it maintained boundaries by making polemical claims about the function of prophets in Jewish tradition and theology. The prophets are not themes or figures from Christian art that have been reworked by Jewish artists; they are exact reproductions of explicitly Christian artwork that indicate an exchange of symbols and meanings on a Jewish–Christian American middle ground. But printing images of the Sistine Chapel in the Jewish art calendar suggests these images rightly belong to Jewish tradition. They did not even need to be reworked to be properly Jewish; the original images assert the centrality of the prophets in both Jewish history and in Jewish understandings of prophecy over Christianity’s claims.

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The 5674/1913–1914 calendar suggests just such a reclamation of Moses. One of its pages features Michelangelo’s sculpture of Moses from the Church of Saint Peter in Chains in Rome with the explanation that the artwork is “illustrative of Shabuoth.” While both Jews and Christians understood Moses to have received the law on Mount Sinai, Michelangelo or his Christian viewers would not have had the Jewish holiday of Shavuot in mind. Thus this altered the meanings of both Jewish and Christian culture. The very means of acculturating—of becoming like their surrounding neighbors—was also a means of speaking back to that culture and of creating boundaries between Jews and Christians.

Ivan Marcus argues that cultural exchange, shared customs, and polemics were critical aspects of premodern inward acculturation but disappeared with the greater tendency to assimilate in modern contexts when Jews were granted full citizenship. However, the visual culture of NFTS suggests that these complex modes of acculturation characterize both premodern and modern Jewish practice.

For example, NFTS presented figures such as Moses’ mother Jochebed (image 3) in an effort to counter assimilation. Whereas Christianity connected Jesus’s mother Mary to the idealization of motherhood, NFTS found a Jewish alternative in Jochebed to depict maternal love. The importance of establishing such a Jewish symbol is illustrated by Johanna Kohler’s “Report of the National Committee on Union Museum”—a vehicle for requesting sisterhoods to donate funds—in which she directly invokes the intentions to commission artwork from Boris Schatz’s Bezalel School in Palestine for display in the Union Museum and synagogues:

Image 3: Jochebed.
Mr. Schatz has had in mind for a long time an idea for a piece of sculpture which will portray Jewish Motherhood with all the depth of maternal love which is characteristic of the Jewish woman. This work would, in a measure, offset the popular conception of ideal Motherhood as depicted by Christian artists in the representation of Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

The artist believes that maternal love might be typified in the person of ‘Jochebed,’ the mother of Moses, and that the group of sculpture might show Jochebed at the moment of supreme sacrifice, when she is bidding farewell to the infant Moses.40

By supporting Schatz, Kohler supported the representation of the values of motherhood that had been foundational for NFTS. Kohler and Schatz asserted through Jochebed that motherhood was at least as central to Judaism as it was to Christianity. Like the prophets and Moses himself, Jochebed was a figure that Judaism and Christianity share. The place of Jochebed in traditional Judaism serves to emphasize her as a symbol for Jewish women. But the prominence in American national consciousness of the Exodus story in general and Moses specifically, whose story begins with Jochebed’s resistance against the orders of Pharaoh, may also have helped to elevate Jochebed as a symbol for Kohler and Schatz.41 If Jochebed was revered as an excellent mother and a symbol of Jewish women, then Jewish-American women could see their potential as virtuous mothers as rooted biblically and equal to their Christian neighbors. Further, although Schatz and Kohler selected Jochebed as an alternative to Christian symbols of motherhood, Kohler’s suggestion that Schatz’s artwork would depict Jochebed at a moment of “supreme sacrifice” of her child for the good of Israel seems to draw polemically on language typically used by Christians to portray Jesus, Mary, or God the Father.

The substitution of Jochebed for Mary does more than solely adapt Christian symbols by Judaizing them; it inserts Jewish symbols into American culture. In their embrace by NFTS, Jochebed and Moses became a part of American sensitivity designed as a corollary and alternative to Jesus and Mary. Jochebed and Moses were always a part of the symbolic repertoire of Jewish tradition, but Jochebed, especially, was a more marginalized figure in the past. Moses and Jochebed’s significance was heightened beyond tradition through this injection into American culture insofar as Moses became a kind of Jewish Jesus and Jochebed, a Jewish Mary.
Image 4: Artwork of Eduard Bendermann.

Image 5: *By the Waters of Babylon.*
Image 6: The Scribe and Midnight Prayer.

Image 7: Boris Schatz.

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Internalizing the Jewish Past, 1924–1935

A decade later, in 5685/1924–1925, the calendar focused solely on the story of Jeremiah, through the work of German artist Eduard Bendemann. Bendemann, who converted from Judaism to Christianity, had his work exhibited at the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901. He produced The Mourning Jews in Exile in 1831, before his conversion, and Jeremiah on the Ruins of Jerusalem later that decade, after his conversion. His work thus predated Zionism and did not articulate a hope for a Jewish return to the land that the Zionist movement would later seek in connection with a revitalization of Jewish culture. Yet he struggled with the same questions of emancipation and equality to which NFTS and the Zionist movement responded. Although the calendar begins with Jeremiah being called to prophecy, a later image—that of Jerusalem’s destruction—becomes even more central (image 4). The final image actually takes place outside of Palestine (image 5). Psalm 137 in German frames the image: “By the waters of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.” Marked by Bendemann’s German translation rather than the quote in Hebrew, this image subtly links the American Reform Jewish community to German heritage and invokes Germany as a place of high culture. Thus it reminds viewers of Zion while also referencing the progress that the Jewish community has made from this moment in time, suggesting American Reform Jews internalized the best of Jewish heritage, from antiquity to the modern Enlightenment and the Reform movement.

Not all of the calendars produced during the pre-state period depict images of Palestine, though Palestine played a new role for artists who traveled, studied, and occasionally relocated there. Biblical stories from outside of the land were portrayed, as well as other images associated with Judaism, such as photographs of plaques of The Scribe and Midnight Prayer from the 5690/1929–1930 calendar (image 6). That year’s calendar introduces a change in the format as well. Previous calendars were more than twice the size of this one and most likely designed for display on the walls of the home. This calendar, with its cork backing, seems better suited for desk use, though I have not found any first-hand reports of sisterhood members on their own calendar use. Along with the differences in format and artistic subject matter, this calendar...
invokes Palestine in a new way—not obvious in the images themselves but in the lives of the artists. It presents the artwork of Schatz, who was born in Lithuania and moved to Jerusalem to found the Bezalel Art School (image 7). The school played a significant role in the Zionist movement, but NFTS presents his biography and artwork within its own worldview, which does not conform to Zionist ideological or political claims. Though it is not explained in the calendar, he also designed plaques for HUC and several Reform synagogues, thus establishing a tie among contemporary Palestine, American Jewish communities, and a developing visual culture outside of the calendar that would have been familiar to the women of NFTS.

Over the next five years, the calendars continued a similar pattern. They maintained a smaller format and eventually became similar to today’s planners, a format that NFTS continued to use through the end of the twentieth century. Members could carry their calendars wherever they went, marking all of their organizational duties—at home and away—as Jewish and modern. In these later calendars, as in the Schultz calendar, NFTS selected artists born in Central or Eastern Europe, and their biographies describe immigration or travel to Palestine, along with art exhibitions there, as evidence of their excellence. Sometimes these calendars include contemporary images of Palestine (image 8). The pattern of invoking Palestine through images in the calendars, the biography of artists, or both, along with the birth and travel of artists in Eastern Europe, suggest a simultaneous connection to and distance from Eastern Europe and Palestine that may subtly indicate the supersession of America as the future of Judaism. Gazing upon scenes of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon could have assured viewers of the progress of Jewish-American history apart from Jewish national life. The romantic and Orientalist nature of these later calendars evoke both Palestine and Eastern Europe as evidence of grand Jewish pasts that had come to an end. Just as Jewish artists and their artwork moved from Eastern Europe and Palestine to America, the calendars imply, so did the center of Jewish religious practice.

This sense of “Americanness” that NFTS constructed was very similar to that created by its Protestant-American counterparts. American Protestants’ understanding of their religious and national identities was heavily influenced by images of Catholic European life. Artwork

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and photos of Europe as well as travel literature became popular in nineteenth-century American Protestant culture. As Protestants viewed this material culture, they “othered” Catholicism by experiencing it through images of Europe that treated Catholic sites as museums and tourist attractions—relics of Christianity’s past rather than sacred spaces tied to the continuing dynamics of American or European Catholicism. By internalizing these images, Protestants learned about Christianity by glean ing the best of Catholic culture while avoiding what they considered to be Catholic idolatry and discarding through their geographic and chronological distance any negative aspects of the culture.44 Protestants also portrayed Palestine in travel literature, photographs, postcards, and replicas of Jerusalem. As Protestants saw themselves drawing from the best of the Christian past, they also used representations of Palestine to extract the best of ancient Israelite culture to form ideal contemporary Protestant selves.45 The Jewish women of NFTS, then, followed a similar path in creating their Americanness, by predominantly viewing Palestine and Europe as communities and cultures eclipsed by American progress. NFTS calendars authorized a construction of Reform Jewish selves juxtaposed to Jewish life in Palestine and Europe. While some positive essence of Judaism might be extracted from those communities, Reform Jewish Americans’ selfhood was stipulated on their ability to avoid the pitfalls (such as idolatry or ritual anachronism) of their “Oriental” and European counterparts.

Explicit Exceptionalism, 1936–1945

The rise of Nazism further entrenched the representation of Jewish life in Europe as surpassed by Jewish vitality in America. The 5697/1936–1937 calendar features artwork of Hella Arensen. Beyond the biography of Arensen in the calendar, the March–April 1936 NFTS newsletter explains that Arensen was “a young German-Jewish artist who is now residing in the United States.” Encouraging NFTS members to purchase a calendar of Arensen’s drawings of European cities as a gift for weddings and other occasions, the newsletter also notes that purchase of the calendar would give Arensen “encouragement and necessary practical assistance” as a refugee in the United States.46 In addition to several overt statements of the security Arensen could find in America, the image titled Old Jewish Quarter could be taken as a pun: Not only is the
Jewish Quarter “old,” as in well-established for centuries in Germany and other European nations, but it was also already in the past (image 9). Though Arensen painted images of Jewish life from her own experiences, the presentation of these images in the art calendar, along with their description in the newsletter, suggests that Jewish culture in Europe had been eclipsed by Jewish-American culture. The calendar simultaneously reminds users of the success of Jews in America by embodying American values of good taste in material consumption and commenting on the struggles of European Jews. Unlike previous calendars, this calendar did not draw on Palestine, but similar viewing practices—treating Europe, like Palestine, as a land of heritage and thus imposing a sense of its anachronism—were applied here as well.

During both world wars, Jewish-Americans used numerous expressions—from public performances of massive pageants to poetry to military service—to show their loyalty and optimism in American values while simultaneously articulating their sense of the relevance of Jewish history. But nearing the end of World War II, artistic assertions of America’s exceptionalism and NFTS’s commitment to the American nation became even more explicit. No longer implying American triumphalism through the gaze upon representations of Palestine and Europe, a 5705/1944–1945 image explicitly invokes a prayer from the Union Prayer Book over America, as represented by the U.S. Capitol Building (image 10). The prayer reads:

Fervently we invoke Thy blessing upon our country and our nation. Guard them, O God, from calamity and injury; suffer not their adversaries to triumph over them, but let the glories of a just, righteous and God-fearing people increase from age to age.

Enlighten with Thy wisdom and sustain with Thy power those whom the people have set in authority, the President, his counselors, and advisers, the judges, law-givers and executives, and all who are entrusted with our safety and with the guardianship of our rights and our liberties.

May peace and good will obtain among all the inhabitants of our land; may religion spread its blessings among us and exalt our nation in righteousness.

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Image 8: Art and artists of Palestine.

Image 9: Old Jewish Quarter.
Image 10: “Fervently we invoke Thy blessing upon our country and our nation.”

Image 11: “Plant virtue in every soul.”

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This prayer dates to the fourteenth century, and various Jewish communities have altered it to suit their context, such as changing from a monarchy to a presidency. Taken together, this image and prayer assert that, from NFTS’s perspective, “our country and our nation” refers definitively to America, not a Jewish nation. It portrays a complete integration of Jewish and American values, ushering in an era when Jews felt more securely at home in America than ever before. The rays of light exuding from the Star of David onto the Capitol Building suggest not only a connection between the two but that the righteousness of Jewish tradition would influence the future of America as well. Channeling Isaiah, the calendar projects a sense that Judaism would be a light unto America, suggesting a reconception of the Jewish covenant. In other words, here “chosenness,” or the Jewish mission, appears connected to Jews’ ability to join and lead America and a special relationship between Jews and other Americans rather than a more traditional conception of the observation of halakhah and a special relationship between Jews and God.

In the same calendar, another more ambiguous image might leave us with questions over how to understand the nexus among Reform America, and Palestine in NFTS identity (image 11). The text, also attributed to the Union Prayer Book, floats on a white block in the center of the sky, hovering over a farm, stating:

Grant us Peace, Thy most precious gift, O Thou eternal source of peace, and enable Israel to be its messenger unto the peoples of the earth.

Bless our country that it may ever be a stronghold of peace, and its advocate in the council of nations. May contentment reign within its borders, health and happiness within its homes. Strengthen the bonds of friendship and fellowship among all the inhabitants of our land.

Plant virtue in every soul, and may the love of Thy name hallow every home and every heart. Praised be Thou, O Lord, Giver of peace.

The text emphasizes the people of Israel as “messengers unto the peoples of the earth,” yet this prayer was not as definitively linked to the United States as the previous prayer. A single farmer with two horses tills bright green and yellow farmland in the distance, and a dilapidated piece of
modern farm equipment sits in the foreground. Did the farm equipment represent the failure of modernity? A shadow in the foreground falls over the farm equipment, seemingly indicating the darkness of the future of modern technology and perhaps by extension at least certain conceptions of modernity itself. The sun shines as the farmer works the land himself, however, suggesting the possibility for a bright future. How would members of NFTS have interpreted this within their own community? What would have been the forces of darkness and light? Who would have been the country of reference in the prayer, and where would owners of the calendar have imagined this land to be? The image of the Capitol Building and this prayer assert the identity of the nation referenced by that prayer, but we cannot be certain, unless we take the proximity of the two images within the same calendar to be a hint. This is a nondescript farm that could be anywhere (though the rolling hills and gold suggest wheat fields typical of the American landscape), yet the image evokes a typical hegemonic Zionist style that idealizes a return to the land and the peace and stability that would come with it. A value of the land and the peace it offers is a shared principle between American and Zionist cultures, and the utter absence of any markers is striking. Much Zionist artwork is equally nondescript in its portrayal of the land. Like these images, it features images of farms and farmers who could belong to any agrarian society, and the association of images in Labor Zionist artwork as Jewish, much less Zionist, is only made explicit by a small Star of David and information such as journal and organization titles printed on or around the images. The inability to determine the location of the farm or the identity of the farmer thus seems to constitute an intentionally open-ended image. Rather than pinning NFTS to a single political ideology, the calendar authorizes various interpretations by allowing viewers to see the image within the context of their own understandings of Jewishness, Americanness, and Zionism. This strategy allows NFTS and Reform by extension to remain a larger umbrella that could encompass competing political views, and it recurs throughout the movement as the political debate over Zionism heightened in the 1940s.

The Debate over Zionism

Although these calendars feature many images of Palestine, none of the images so far explicitly endorses Zionist ideology, including the
romantic farm image discussed above. An exception proves the rule, but even in this case, the strategy of carefully selecting words and images shapes NFTS’s inclusion of Zionist culture as an attempt to leave the organization open to those who may not have embraced Zionism. The 5698/1937–1938 calendar features artwork from Max Pollak, including several etchings that use similar subject matter to earlier calendars, such as *David’s Tower in Jerusalem*, but also an image of a *haluzah* (image 12), or “pioneer.” This is a central image throughout Zionist culture, representing the Zionist pioneers who prepared the land of Israel for Jewish immigration and national life. A viewer would not have to be familiar with this visual trope to know it was a pioneer in Palestine, as the reverse page of the calendar explains that this pioneer girl lived in a collectivist colony in Palestine and was known as a Sabra, the cactus plant for which children born in Palestine were nicknamed. Even though the calendar invokes an image and discourse shared with Zionist culture, the term “Zionism” is never explicitly used in the description. This reflects a strategy for unity within the Reform movement throughout the 1930s,
when factions could not agree on whether and how American Reform Jews should support a Jewish state. The strategy is demonstrated in this excerpt from “The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism,” the 1937 Columbus Platform of the CCAR:

In the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes, we behold the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren. We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life.  

This is a marked shift from the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, which explicitly rejected any hope for rebuilding Palestine. Here, the 1937 platform calls Palestine a Jewish homeland. Yet it does not endorse Zionism by name nor does it mention Jewish statehood. Instead, it emphasizes culture and spirituality, palatable to a broad range of politics and ideologies. Further, the haluzah in the 5698/1937–1938 calendar looks quite different from the muscular Jews, men and women, who typically appeared in Zionist publications. A small girl detached from farm scenes, factories, or lives of soldiers, she does not embody any of the typical imagery of Zionist nationalism even as she is linked to life in Palestine as a haluzah. We can imagine that even those who supported Jewish settlement in Palestine but not necessarily a Jewish state or hegemonic Zionist ideology could still connect to the image of the haluzah. The careful representation of the girl demonstrates that while Reform members were certainly aware of the debates and divisions over Zionism, they also sought ways to hold their movement together and to find images and language that allowed them to maintain a sense of unity despite their disagreements. Despite not emphasizing Zionism by name, however, the 5698/1937–1938 calendar is still markedly different from earlier images that suggest an end to vibrant Jewish life in Palestine. No such claim could be made about this haluzah, as her work would obviously take place in the present.

Even so, early-twentieth-century NFTS art calendars largely relied on images that portrayed a grand Jewish past in Palestine, and later in Europe, but implied a greater future for Jews in America. Although NFTS did not take an official position on Zionism and typically eschewed all language—“Zionist,” “non-Zionist,” and “anti-Zionist”—that would

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address the issue directly, it did from its first biennial meeting officially support Jewish life in Palestine. It passed a resolution for a “Woman’s Palestinian Day” to raise funds to benefit Jewish pioneers in Palestine. Yet the resolution does not frame this support as a nationalist cause. No mention is made of aspirations for Jewish statehood; rather, the resolution was passed in the face of the negative impacts of World War I on international Jewish life. The link between NFTS and Palestine revolved around a sense of Jewish community interested in humanitarian relief. This created space for a connection to the people and the land of Palestine without necessarily considering the ideological or political consequences of “Jewish pioneers” in Palestine: not necessarily Jews for or against a certain kind of state, they could simply be perceived as Jews, co-religionists, in need.

In 5711/1950–1951, the calendar linked the significance of Israel for Jewish-American identity more strongly than in the past. The biography of the artist, Elinor Mintz, described her visit to Israel from 1947 until her return to the United States shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel as “the most potent influence on her life to date.” Mintz’s *The Workers’ Village* (image 13), included the caption, “With Immigrant Camps In the Distance: And the legend becomes a reality, after the camps they are building their settlements.” Contrary to the depiction of Israel in the calendars of the early twentieth century, by 1950 NFTS had chosen to closely define itself through images of Jewish

settlement in the land of Israel. NFTS members from 1950 might have been able to look back and see how this alignment came out of the patterns and practices throughout the first half of the twentieth century, when calendar images drew on Jewish life in Palestine in various ways, frequently left open the interpretation of images of the land, and always indicated the importance of American patriotism and Jewish-American life regardless of how Palestine was to be understood.

**Conclusion**

Aside from serving as a space to debate and construct how NFTS members understood Palestine, Europe, and America, the calendars reveal various other concerns with which Palestine and politics were always in tension. Women created sisterhoods as spaces for leadership that did not overtly challenge either legal or cultural structures within Reform Jewish institutions. Women worked in ways that helped them define themselves as Jewish subjects, even if many aspects of Jewish tradition were unavailable to them. Thus their ascension to leadership went hand-in-hand with their turn toward new forms of visual culture that relied on Palestine as a motif. This constructed Palestine not only as a political question or as a space for women in NFTS to inhabit but also as an ideal with which to synthesize their many commitments as Jewish Americans.

Three major changes catapulted visual culture into more central importance for the construction of Reform Jewish-American women's identity: technology, shifting roles of halakhah and Jewish tradition in American Reform Judaism, and the development of new women's organizations. Images may always have been a part of Jewish culture, but technological developments in photography and the ability to cheaply reproduce images en masse created a new possibility for the production and circulation of visual culture. Reform's deauthorization of halakhah as the practice of Judaism opened up space for alternative ways of embodying and marking one's Jewish life, especially for women. This, along with broader social changes in the United States, influenced the innovations of NFTS in the organization of Reform Jewish communal life.

By using images of Palestine, NFTS created an overt connection to Jewish history while also practicing a form of Jewishness not structured by halakhah. Through distributing and viewing those images, NFTS women

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could assert their own vision for American Judaism and create roles for themselves within it, at once drawing from and speaking back to Jewish tradition, American culture, and Zionism. NFTS art calendars were thus part of a process in which sisterhood members inscribed themselves as American and part of broader American narratives without compromising their connection to Jewish history. The production of a visual culture in America through materials such as the art calendars thus proved innovative for Jewish culture and American culture by combining the two. The calendars were tangible evidence that one could be both Jewish and American. The increasing centrality of American exceptionalism indicates the comfort that NFTS members felt in asserting that their participation in Judaism not only did not conflict with American citizenship but was, in fact, an affirmation of American values.

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Notes

1 All of the calendars discussed are available at the Klau Library and The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio.
3 NFTS continued to print calendars throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, but I have confined this study to 1913–1948. The 1950–1951 calendar is discussed on pp. 28–29 as an example of the legacy of the pre-state calendars after the creation of the State of Israel. Prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, the land of Palestine (as it was called by Jewish Americans, including Reform Jews) was an especially malleable imaginary space, as it did not yet have an explicit political definition or structure. Reform Jews did not yet have to contend with an officially entrenched national narrative and could even hope to influence the future political structure in Palestine, even as they also sought to shape their place as citizens in the United States.

Abraham Geiger and other rabbis began to attempt to institutionalize in the mid-nineteenth century to counter the authority of Orthodoxy. On the question of Palestine, at the Reform Rabbinical Conference at Frankfurt, for example, David Einhorn—who emigrated from Germany to the United States, where he became a key architect of American Reform Judaism—argued, “The concept of the Messiah is closely linked to the entire ceremonial law,” i.e., halakhah, and that therein lay “the cause for all our lamentations over the destruction of the Temple.” However, he asserted that “now our concepts have changed. There is no need any more for an extended ceremonial law…. The decline of Israel’s political independence was at one time deplored, but in reality it was not a misfortune, but a mark of progress.” Samuel Holdheim expressed similar sentiments at the conference, though he noted that not all attendees were in agreement about the compatibility between loyalty to modern nations and the hope for a restoration of Palestine as a Jewish national home. Furthering Einhorn’s argument, Holdheim asserted, “The wish to return to Palestine in order to create there a political empire for those who are still oppressed because of their religion is superfluous. The wish should rather be for a termination of the oppression.” “The Question of Messianism (1845),” in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, 3rd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 207–208.


For one example, see Reinharz and Raider’s introduction to the section on “Aliyah, Social Identities, and Political Changes,” in *American Jewish Women and the Zionist Enterprise*, ed. Shulamit Reinharz and Mark Raider (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 185.


Remarks of Hon. Simon Wolf, 21 January 1913, 21, Proceedings of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, MS-73, Box A-1, Vol. 1, AJA.

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Jessica Carr


The Untold Story: The World Jewish Congress
Operation to Rescue Children in Portugal
During the Holocaust

ZOHAR SEGEV

The inaugural convention of the World Jewish Congress (WJC), which was attended by 280 delegates from thirty-two countries, took place in Geneva in August 1936. While the organization was new, its ideological roots lay in the transformations experienced by the Jewish communities in the United States and Europe in the wake of World War I and the Balfour Declaration. The purpose of the WJC was twofold: (1) to continue in the tradition of the American Jewish Congress (founded in 1918) and the Committee of Jewish Delegations (founded in 1919) to operate as a voluntary organization representing Jewish communities and organizations worldwide vis-à-vis government authorities and international bodies, and (2) to foster the development of social and cultural life in Jewish communities around the world. Its lead founder and first president was the Reform rabbi Stephen S. Wise, among the foremost Zionist leaders in the United States. 1

The WJC defined itself as an international organization although, in fact, it operated as an American Jewish organization. Its headquarters were in the United States, and its European and South American offices were financed by American sources and supervised by the WJC directorate. This state of affairs had prevailed prior to World War II and became even more prevalent following its outbreak. 2

Studies of American Jewish leadership in the 1930s and 1940s deal extensively with top WJC executives, whose activities are closely examined and often severely criticized. 3 Such criticism primarily addresses the issue of assistance to the persecuted Jews of Europe. A huge volume of scholarly literature exists on the inability of the American Jewish leadership to effect the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust. 4

The outbreak of war and reports of the extermination of European Jewry persuaded WJC leadership and its operatives in neutral European
countries to adopt methods that were very different from the conventional patterns of philanthropic work in the Jewish public sphere. In this spirit they created a streamlined system for gathering information on the acts of murder and extermination in Europe, and they set up a clandestine operation in neutral countries and those under German occupation to rescue Jewish children and facilitate the survival of Jews who had gone into hiding.

The centerpiece of the WJC’s rescue activity was its clandestine operation to rescue children. The saga of these efforts is fascinating, but it has yet to receive the exposure it deserves. Yet the telling of this story is significant not merely because of the importance of its exposure, but also because it epitomizes the complexity of the debate over the WJC’s activity during World War II. The apparatus for rescuing children was set up through a concerted economic, political, and organizational effort conducted by the WJC’s leadership and its rank-and-file members. Despite this extraordinary endeavor, however, only a few thousand children were rescued. While the value of rescuing each child cannot be underestimated, the question remains whether the WJC’s ability to rescue “only” these children highlights failure on the part of the organization’s leadership to rescue a greater number of Jews from the Nazi inferno.

Over the intervening years, criticism of the WJC’s wartime comportment has been reinforced, and the story of the rescue operation has fallen by the wayside in both the organization’s official history and the memory of its members. One may surmise that the WJC’s official historiographers believed that emphasizing the rescue of hundreds of children in Portugal would simply exacerbate criticism of the organization for having saved “only” a handful. By downplaying the saga in the WJC’s historiography, it was excluded from scholarly research as well.

The WJC’s methods of assisting the Jews of Europe remained essentially unchanged during the initial months of the war. Its emissaries in Europe met with representatives of the governments-in-exile and international organizations with a view to transferring food to European Jews, while its functionaries in Washington tried to obtain visas enabling Jews to enter the United States. In addition, meetings were held with ambassadors and consuls of South American nations to obtain passports for Jews in occupied Europe. By contrast, the entry of the United
States into the war and news of the Nazis’ murderous deeds in Europe and plans for the Final Solution led the WJC to introduce dramatic changes to its work in Europe. The immense changes in awareness and organization that occurred can be appreciated in light of the fact that much of the information regarding mass murder and the Nazis’ plans for exterminating Europe’s Jews was collected and dispatched to the United States by WJC operatives in Europe. This news shaped the leadership’s perception of the destiny of Europe’s Jews. Upon learning of the Final Solution, the heads of the WJC stepped up their political endeavors—which deviated from the contours of the public activity traditionally conducted by Jewish aid organizations—as they reshaped the pattern they had employed before learning of the Holocaust.

The Joint Distribution Committee in Opposition

In conducting the operation to rescue Jews in Europe, WJC institutions had to adopt an underground pattern of activity and forge a web of contacts with underground elements in Europe. This was complex and challenging. The WJC was a voluntary philanthropic body unaccustomed to such activity; it was foreign to its organizational culture.

The clandestine activity in Lisbon was conducted by Isaac Weissman, an emissary of the WJC. Weissman was born in Istanbul in 1892 to a family of Russian origin. His extensive business ventures took him to Berlin, whence he escaped with his wife to Lisbon in 1941. The WJC’s leadership recognized Portugal’s singular status as a safe haven for Jewish refugees and therefore sought to appoint an official envoy in Lisbon. Although Portugal had no common border with France and refugees could be transferred to the country only through Spain, WJC leaders believed that the Portuguese regime, unlike its Spanish counterpart, would allow a clandestine rescue operation to function within its territory.

Weissman had been chosen by Gerhart Riegner, director of the WJC’s Geneva office, who was charged with the task of locating a suitable candidate to run the Lisbon branch. It is safe to assume that Riegner took into account that the function of a WJC emissary in Lisbon during wartime would require secrecy. Weissman’s business interests in Cairo, Istanbul, Vienna, and Berlin, and his command of several languages, suited him to the role. He operated as the WJC’s envoy in Lisbon from 1941 until the end of the war. This enabled him to build an extensive

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network of connections with the Portuguese authorities, delegations of Allied
countries in Lisbon, and the British and American intelligence services.

Weissman confronted many difficulties in carrying out his mission. The Portuguese authorities, under the despotic and nationalist regime of Antonio Salazar, conducted a policy of neutrality during World War II but maintained close economic ties with the Nazi regime and sought to prevent Jewish refugees from entering the country.11 Weissman was once arrested, together with his wife, by the Portuguese secret police and released after several days, only following intervention by the British ambassador. An additional hurdle was internal Jewish opposition to the operation in Lisbon, especially on the part of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and Professor Moshe Amzelak, head of the small Jewish community in Portugal. The JDC refused to transfer money for rescue efforts in Portugal, and its local representatives refrained from political activity on behalf of the WJC’s rescue enterprise. Given the economic power and its seniority among American Jewish philanthropic organizations, JDC opposition greatly hindered the work of WJC emissaries in Portugal. Amzelak’s opposition was likewise of considerable political significance, because he had been a classmate of the Portuguese ruler and was a personal friend.12

The JDC was not the only organization that declined to support WJC efforts in the first half of the 1940s. Hadassah also rejected the WJC’s request for funding its activity in Europe. Hadassah’s decision was based on the conviction that the JDC was focusing its activity on Europe and that the WJC should thus apply there for support. Hadassah had made prior financial commitments to the Zionist movement’s rescue endeavor conducted from the United States and was therefore unable to accede to the WJC’s request. In its response Hadassah stressed that its rejection of the request for funding did not stem from reservations regarding WJC activity, but was due to its inability to provide the necessary financial resources.13

The JDC’s objections to WJC activity in Portugal were not merely a power struggle over the two organizations’ control of the care of Jewish refugees in Portugal and Spain. The correspondence between Weissman and the JDC’s operatives in Portugal, as well as the impressions gained by Jewish refugees who lived in the country during those years, indicates that unlike the WJC, the JDC chose to adhere to its philanthropic mission and was totally opposed to the clandestine activity that Weissman had
developed. Amzelak’s opposition stemmed from similar grounds. The JDC and the institutions of the Portuguese Jewish community believed that not only were they unable to undertake underground activity in their capacity as philanthropic bodies, but that if this illegal activity were to be discovered, they would no longer be able to conduct the philanthropic work that in their view took pride of place.

Over time, following the success and expansion of its operations in Portugal and Spain, the WJC’s efforts there could no longer be ignored. As a result, representatives of the WJC, the JDC, and the Jewish Agency reached an agreement at the American embassy in Lisbon in summer 1944. The agreement delineated the work of the three bodies in Spain and Portugal and set up an apparatus for the transfer of information among them. A coordinating committee that was to convene at short intervals to ensure the rapid and free flow of information among the organizations was formed. A similar joint committee was to care for rescued children who had arrived in Portugal. The agreement among representatives of the three agencies was signed long after the WJC office in Lisbon had begun to operate. This affords an additional perspective on the overwhelming difficulties faced by a voluntary philanthropic organization—which lacked the legal authority and practical capacity to compel other organizations to toe its line—in founding and operating a clandestine rescue enterprise.

A letter written by JDC Vice President Joseph Hyman to Stephen S. Wise as the agreement was about to be signed shows that the heads of the JDC genuinely feared that the operation developed by Weissman in Portugal would delay—or even prevent—the rescue of Jewish children and others from France and Belgium. Yet when Weissman’s endeavor in Portugal proved effective, JDC leadership agreed to formalize the relationship between the two organizations and to contribute funding in the belief that a unified effort would facilitate the rescue of more individuals. The American embassy’s involvement in achieving the agreement further indicates that the operation in Portugal had developed to the extent that it merited the participation of representatives of the United States in its regulation.

Despite the agreement, the criticism against the JDC continued in WJC circles. A December 1944 editorial in the WJC’s weekly journal, Congress Weekly, elaborated on the different approaches adopted by
the JDC and the WJC during the Holocaust. The article began by
applauding the JDC for raising tens of millions of dollars toward
assisting the Jews of Europe; it makes clear that this massive fundraising
was crucial because of the dual challenge that confronted American
Jewry in 1944, namely to continue the effort to rescue European Jews
and to care for those who had been and would be rescued. Alongside
its appreciation of the JDC’s fundraising ability, however, the article
harshly criticizes the organization’s methods in Europe. It suggests that
fundraising for purposes of rescue and rehabilitation was a necessary but
insufficient action on behalf of European Jews and constituted only the
initial stage of a comprehensive political endeavor. The article’s author
stressed that such activity demanded ongoing ties with governments and
international organizations as well as new initiatives and ideas, which
often achieved far more than spending millions of dollars. Adding the
political dimension to the activity of Jewish aid and welfare organizations
had always been the correct way to proceed, the article continued, and
had become absolutely vital in light of the dramatic events of World
War II and the immense tasks facing American Jewish organizations
engaged in the campaign for European Jews. According to the article,
the American Jewish effort on behalf of European Jewry could succeed
only through shaping a coordinated strategy that blended philanthropy
with politics. The article’s author believed that the WJC’s willingness to
undertake intensive political action set it aside from other Jewish welfare
organizations, such as the JDC, and enabled it to work optimally for
the good of European Jews. Despite the differences in the nature of the
American Jewish bodies that acted on behalf of Europe’s Jews, the article
viewed cooperation among groups as being of vital importance given
the grave circumstances. The historical responsibility borne by American
Jews required them to transcend their differences and work in unison.
Jews worldwide, especially American Jews, had the right to demand that
the JDC cooperate with other Jewish organizations, such as the WJC, to
work on behalf of the Jews of Europe.

**Laying the Infrastructure for Rescue Operations**

Weissman began his work in Portugal by taking steps to formalize the
legal status of the Jewish refugees there. He approached the Portuguese
police official responsible for refugees and together they came to an
arrangement whereby he, as the WJC emissary, kept a record of Jewish refugees and supervised them. According to this arrangement, beginning in December 1942, the Jewish refugees would be assembled in the town of Ericeira, and those in detention would be released. Alongside this activity in Portugal, international pressure was brought to bear on the Spanish regime to regulate the status of the Jewish refugees there. To this end Weissman held intensive negotiations with Nicolas Franco, who was Spain’s ambassador to Portugal and brother of the Spanish dictator. According to the information he received from the ambassador, Weissman surmised that the precedent created in Portugal had induced Spain to cease returning Jewish refugees to the French border and to grant them temporary refugee status in Spain.

The differences between the JDC pattern of action in Spain and the WJC operation in Portugal are noteworthy. In Spain the JDC conducted strictly philanthropic activity among the refugees, providing the funding to meet their ongoing needs. By contrast, Weissman, as the WJC emissary in Portugal, did not confine himself to caring for the refugees’ welfare; he initiated contact with the heads of the country’s security as part of a political effort that far exceeded the scope of traditional philanthropic work. Thus Weissman’s political activity and efforts to set up a clandestine infrastructure gathered momentum during 1943 and 1944 and would eventually lead to the establishment of the WJC’s full-blown rescue operation in Portugal.21

One of the major concerns for Weissman, WJC emissaries in Europe, and the heads of the organization in the United States was the establishment of a clandestine communications network. In the midst of a world war, it proved difficult to communicate via letters and telegrams. Transfer of information among European countries and between Europe and the United States was exceedingly slow and sometimes altogether impossible. As a philanthropic rather than a government body, the communications structure of the WJC was totally exposed to the intelligence agencies of various nations. It was impossible through its existing communication channels to conduct a clandestine rescue operation, which required the ability to transfer information rapidly and securely. Therefore Weissman immediately proceeded to set up a clandestine system for communication among the WJC’s offices in Europe and between Europe and America. He secured agreements from

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the delegations of the French, Polish, and Czechoslovak governments-in-exile to transfer WJC mail via their diplomatic post bags. But Weissman suspected that even the diplomatic postal channels were exposed to hostile intelligence, so he also took steps to set up the organization’s independent communications procedure. He secured the services of an Argentinean diplomat, who transferred the WJC’s documents as diplomatic post, and an additional courier who secretly—and illegally—dispatched the organization’s documents and equipment vital to the rescue effort. The clandestine system that Weissman established was so efficient that the envoys of governments-in-exile in Lisbon sometimes preferred to send classified information through him rather than through regular diplomatic channels.\(^2\)

Having settled the status of the Jewish refugees in Spain and Portugal, Weissman and the apparatus that he had set up began dispatching food and medication to the Jews of Europe and obtaining information from occupied European countries on Nazi actions against the Jews. WJC documents from the period between the outbreak of the war and the receipt of detailed information on the Final Solution at the end of summer 1942 demonstrate that this was the major issue that occupied the leadership. At the time, the heads of the WJC believed that the orderly dispatch of food to Europe could significantly ameliorate the condition of the Jews there and induce the Nazi leaders to improve their treatment of the Jews. U.S. and British opposition to the transfer of food to Europe based on the fear that it would not reach its destination and would contribute to the German war effort prevented even an initial attempt to set up a comprehensive operation of food transfer to Europe, but it did not stop WJC leadership from persisting in its effort to get food to the Jews in smaller volumes and by indirect means. Even after receiving news about the Final Solution, the WJC continued trying to transfer food to the ghettos and the camps, believing that this was one of the few means of helping the Jews of Europe.\(^3\)

Toward the end of 1943 the French resistance informed the WJC of an extensive German operation to apprehend Jewish children hiding in private homes and Catholic institutions in areas of France under German control.\(^4\) WJC functionaries in Europe estimated that four thousand to five thousand Jews were in imminent danger. Further reports told of the intensified German effort to locate and capture
Jews—children in particular—in Holland and Belgium. A report by Weissman to the WJC’s New York office shows the circuitous route whereby this information reached Lisbon. Weissman told of a Dutch Jew who had escaped from Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria and had managed to reach Portugal via France. He was conscripted by the Dutch government-in-exile and shared whatever information he had with Weissman.

Upon receiving this information, WJC officials approached the French government-in-exile to request that its representatives publicly ask the French population not to cooperate with the Germans in their effort to find children and to instruct the French resistance to take active steps to see that children were not handed over to the Germans. The French broadcasting centers in London and Algeria did indeed put out broadcasts to this effect directed at the population at large and at the resistance in particular. Parallel meetings were held with senior Dutch and Belgian officials, who promised to allocate special underground forces to rescuing children in their respective countries and to try to transfer the children to France as an interim staging post on their way to Spain and Portugal.

The messages arriving from occupied Europe left Weissman in no doubt as to the urgency of investing most of his effort in rescuing children from France and transferring them to Spain and Portugal. He and the WJC leaders concluded that the activity undertaken through the governments-in-exile and the various undergrounds was insufficient, and they therefore set up an independent underground operation to rescue Jewish children in France. To this end Weissman traveled from Lisbon to London, where he met with two WJC leaders from the United States: Nahum Goldmann, chair of the executive committee, and Arieh Tartakower, chair of the welfare and relief committee. The three men held intensive meetings with envoys of the French, Dutch, and Polish governments-in-exile, who promised assistance for the WJC’s rescue machinery. With the support of the governments-in-exile and their embassies in Lisbon, Weissman, Tartakower, and Goldmann also created an independent task force charged with rescuing Jewish children. Members of the group moved clandestinely between France and Spain as they implemented the rescue effort. Most were French-speaking Jews, some with experience in underground activity. Their
number was augmented by the addition of professional smugglers who could cope with the tremendous obstacles presented by crossing from France to Spain over the Pyrenees. Seeking to present WJC functionaries in New York with the profile of a typical member of one of these groups, Weissman described a twenty-four-year-old Jewish man of Polish origin who had lived most of his life in France. In the wake of the occupation he had joined the French resistance and gained extensive experience in operating communications equipment for the underground. He had come to London on a mission for the resistance, and Weissman had recruited him there. In addition, Weissman recruited peasant families on both sides of the border, who were paid to serve as a base for the departure of smugglers and groups of children.28

To establish and run an underground operation in a Europe under Nazi rule would have been a difficult task under any circumstances, but the challenge facing Weissman was particularly daunting—and not simply because of the tremendous obstacles in smuggling groups of children through tens of kilometers of border areas under close military supervision. Contemporary witnesses emphasized that Weissman’s mission was made significantly harder by having to adopt operations and conduct missions far beyond the conventional sphere of such philanthropic organizations.29 A number of questions arose as preparations were being made. To whom did the children legally belong? Could any particular government claim that the children should be under its aegis? And did the WJC have the means to determine the children’s original citizenship and legal status? Those in charge of the operation were severely critical of the governments-in-exile, which for the most part ignored the children altogether once they had been rescued, making no attempt to establish whether these were children of their own citizens even when such an examination was feasible. This lack of concern was particularly galling in view of their assiduousness in attending to their non-Jewish citizens and the dedicated financial resources for the care of their citizens who were refugees or displaced persons. The WJC and other Jewish and Zionist organizations in effect took governmental functions upon themselves because the governments were not concerned with their Jewish citizens.30

The fact that the WJC was merely a philanthropic organization had far-reaching consequences for its ability to function in Europe. Unlike
the governments-in-exile, the WJC was unable to make radio broadcasts to Europe or, as previously discussed, to operate a diplomatic postal service; its emissaries did not enjoy diplomatic immunity or preferential means of transportation during wartime; and the organization received no funding from the Allies. The Jewish philanthropic organizations took care of their brethren in a manner similar to that of the governments-in-exile yet were not granted the economic and organizational infrastructure vital to their ability to operate in Europe.\textsuperscript{31}

**Rescue Gets Under Way**

The operation to smuggle the children out of France began in Toulouse, where local women collected and transferred them close to the border. Because most of the children carried forged identity documents or had none at all, each woman was put in charge of only two children; any more could have aroused suspicion. The children were concealed in the homes of families living near the border; there they waited to be led over the mountains to Spain. Passing through the border region was particularly tricky because an area some 20 to 25 kilometers wide leading up to the border had been declared a “military zone,” within which movement was severely restricted.

In March 1944 the first two groups, each comprising six children, were led out of France. The youngest was a girl of five and the oldest a boy of fourteen. Weissman reported to the WJC’s New York office on the poor medical and emotional condition of the rescued children. Most suffered from various diseases, were underweight because of the prolonged lack of food, and were coping with emotional and psychological difficulties stemming from losing contact with their families and living in constant fear. These children’s stories included the disappearance of parents whose fate remained unknown, loss of contact with siblings, and vague memories of relatives who lived mainly in the United States and Palestine.\textsuperscript{32}

Malka Azaria, a resident of Savyon, a suburb of Tel Aviv, told in 1968 of her escape from France by means of the machinery that Weissman put in place. Azaria was born in Antwerp, Belgium, to Orthodox parents of Polish origin. The family had passed from one concentration camp to another over the four years since Belgium was overrun by the Germans in May 1940. During this period Azaria lost contact with her family, apart
from her eldest brother, six years her senior. At the age of eleven, after a prolonged period of suffering, Azaria reached a Catholic monastery, where she was found by emissaries of the WJC. She continued the tale of her escape over the Pyrenees to the Spanish border. She was part of a small group of children accompanied by professional smugglers. They wore improvised shoes and clothing that was inadequate for the cold mountain air. After an arduous journey they passed the last Spanish border post and arrived at an isolated mountain village. Here they were cared for by a peasant family, sent on to Barcelona for a short while and then to Paco d’Arcos, a holiday resort on the sea near Lisbon. All their physical needs were attended to in the children’s home there, and Azaria emphasized that the staff made them feel at home. In November 1944 all the children in the group set sail for Palestine, apart from a single girl who traveled to Philadelphia in the United States.33

The arduous task of rescuing the children did not end with crossing the border. Since they had entered Spain without the permission of the government, they had to be concealed there as well. Weissman requested the assistance of the American and British ambassadors in Lisbon in asking the Spanish government for authorization for the children to pass through the country. The request was made and authorization was granted. With the assistance of the higher echelons of the Catholic Church in Portugal, Weissman likewise asked the Portuguese government to agree to accept groups of three hundred children at a time. The agreement stipulated that after one group had left Portugal the next group could enter, and that this cycle could continue indefinitely.34

After the first two groups of children had successfully made their way to Lisbon, the rescue operation became ongoing, with some ten children crossing the border each week.35 On average, with fluctuations owing to the weather, some sixty children per month crossed the border between France and Spain, making a total of over seven hundred children, joined by some two hundred parents. While the WJC’s operation in Spain and Portugal was intended to rescue children, its services were also extended to adults who were deemed at high risk and to parents of rescued children. In addition, 1,350 youngsters under the age of twenty were ferried from France to Switzerland between October 1943 and September 1944. The WJC’s Swiss office also transferred considerable sums of money to France, which was used to conceal approximately four thousand children.
in France itself. The endeavor to smuggle, rescue, and conceal children entailed extensive document-forging activity. The WJC offices in Lisbon and Geneva supervised the forging of some eight thousand documents, primarily identification cards and birth certificates. This was funded by various sources and by devious means, making it difficult to arrive at an overall figure. The WJC’s Geneva office estimated the total to be in excess of 18 million French francs.36

The operation in Portugal and Spain presented a severe financial challenge. WJC institutions estimated that the cost of rescuing each child was US$350. The New York office worked extensively to raise funds among WJC members in the United States, other Jewish public bodies, and individual Jewish donors. In addition, WJC was successful at raising funds from non-Jewish organizations such as the American Quakers and the Unitarian Church.37 During 1944 considerable funds were likewise received from the War Refugee Board (WRB), an agency of the Roosevelt administration set up in January 1944 to rescue and assist victims of World War II.38

In the context of a world war, the raising of funds in the United States was merely the first stage of a complex process of transferring money to Portugal. WJC files for 1944 are filled with correspondence between Lisbon and New York detailing the work of European and American functionaries in tracing and transporting funds: seeking the transfer of funds; tracing monies’ circuitous routes; investigating why funds had not arrived; and even trying to obtain the best exchange rates possible.39

To care for the children, a home was established near the coast, some ten kilometers from Lisbon. Weissman’s wife Lily, who managed its operation, related that the staff tried to evoke the atmosphere of a warm family in an attempt to assist the children’s recovery from the trials of their escape and the loss of contact with their families. As part of the rehabilitation process, the children also received schooling at the home. A Jewish refugee by the name of Shlomo Lifshitz was recruited to teach them. Lifshitz was a graduate of the Jewish gymnasium in Warsaw and taught the children a wide variety of subjects. Assuming that most of the children would eventually reach Palestine, particular attention was paid to studying Hebrew.

The topic of Hebrew instruction reveals the difficulty that Weissman and his staff in Portugal faced during the war years in locating a
destination to which the children could migrate. Apart from the conviction that finding a permanent home would be in the best interest of each child, Portuguese authorities permitted only three hundred children to stay in the country at a time. It was therefore imperative to arrange for the children’s migration while the war continued. Weissman and the WJC leadership believed that the preferred destination was the Jewish community in Palestine. Here, they explained, the Aliyat Ha-Noar (youth immigration) organization, founded in Berlin in 1932 to facilitate the immigration of youngsters to Palestine and to take care of their education there, provided a broad institutional infrastructure that had proved its effectiveness in absorbing children directly upon their arrival.40 Aliyat Ha-Noar indeed played a major role in receiving the children and its head, Henrietta Szold, informed Weissman in late 1944 of the arrival of dozens of children from Portugal to Haifa aboard the ship S.S. Guine. In telling the story of one child whose parents had been located in Palestine, she termed the ship’s arrival a “unique event.”41 However, the choice of Palestine did not stem from purely bureaucratic considerations. Weissman and his associates believed that ideological objectives should also play a part in caring for the children. Were they to send the children to other destinations, they would be unable to ensure adoption by Jewish families, which was likely to lead the children to abandon their Judaism. By contrast, their absorption into Palestine would guarantee that they would remain part of the Jewish people.42

The clear preference on the part of the WJC for sending the rescued children to Palestine contrasts with the JDC’s opposition to Palestine as the preferred destination for migration. This disagreement was a major factor in the JDC’s refusal to participate in funding the children’s upkeep in Portugal or their voyage to Palestine.43 As mentioned, the JDC began to cooperate with the WJC’s rescue operation at a very late stage, after the two organizations and the Jewish Agency signed an agreement at the American embassy in Lisbon. The JDC’s refusal to help fund WJC efforts hindered them considerably, because arranging the children’s migration during wartime was exceptionally expensive. Seafaring vessels were hard to come by, and when a suitable ship could be found, the cost of transport was prohibitive. Despite these obstacles, Weissman sent hundreds of children to Palestine and dozens to the United States in 1944 and 1945. In some cases children were equipped with basic
items such clothes and bed linen to facilitate their absorption. Although Palestine remained the destination of choice, children who had relatives in America were sent there. The WJC made a point of publishing the names of the rescued children, along with as many identifying details as possible, to enable families in America to identify their relatives and to allow the WJC’s New York office to attempt to locate families. If contact was established between a rescued child and relatives in the United States, the WJC took steps to reunite them, including handling all the bureaucratic and financial obstacles to migration during wartime.

An Untold Story

In late October 1944, prior to his departure for America to participate in the WJC’s emergency war conference in Atlantic City, Weissman received a letter from Robert Dexter, the WRB’s envoy in Lisbon. Dexter praised the WJC, and especially Weissman, for working to ameliorate the living conditions of the refugees in Portugal and for the rescue operation they had set up there. Toward the end of the letter he referred to the number of children who were rescued through Weissman’s efforts in Lisbon, as follows:

> It is not your fault that this number was not vastly greater, but the hundreds who did come through, whether under the auspices of your organization or in any other way, owe you and the World Jewish Congress a deep debt of gratitude. In view of the difficulties under which you have been laboring here, your accomplishment has been of an unusually high order.

Dexter’s praise was not offered without a context; it should be read against the backdrop of the severe criticism leveled by WJC rank-and-file delegates toward what they saw as the organization’s—particularly its leadership’s—ineffectiveness in halting the Nazi killing machine. This widespread dissatisfaction was unmistakably manifested during the debates at the Atlantic City conference.

The wartime conference of the WJC convened in Atlantic City in November 1944. This was the first international Jewish gathering to take place since the outbreak of the war and was attended by delegates from twenty-six countries. They came from the United States, Palestine, South America, and the European countries that had been liberated from Nazi occupation. Even emissaries who had managed to escape from
Jewish communities in areas that were still under Nazi control attended. Fifteen hundred people gathered for the opening to hear speeches by Stephen Wise and Nahum Goldmann. At the conference, WJC speakers described the overwhelming obstacles that confronted the organization in its attempts to rescue the Jews of Europe—from the restrictions the Allies placed on the transfer of food and money to Europe, to their refusal to attack the German death industry, to the cooperation of many of Europe’s citizens with the Nazis. Alongside these explanations, they presented the brighter side of the picture as they related the steps taken by their organization on behalf of Europe’s Jews: the dispatch of food packages, the assistance rendered to refugees, political activity designed to ease the burden of Bulgarian and Danish Jews, and the rescue of children in Portugal. Yet despite these circumstances, the atmosphere at the conference was one of failure and loss because American Jewry and the WJC had been unable to halt, or at least curb significantly, the murder of millions.

The WJC’s rescue operation in Portugal was proudly mentioned several times during the debates. Yet, as is implied in Dexter’s letter and in the testimony of Samuel Roth (A Jewish refugee in Lisbon who wrote to Leon Kubowitzki, director of the WJC’s rescue effort in Europe), contemporaries knew that, despite the vast financial and organizational effort in Portugal and the exceptional devotion of those involved, only relatively few children were rescued. This state of affairs was evident in Wise’s address at the WJC conference held in Montreux, Switzerland, in June 1948. While Wise, as president of the WJC, was undoubtedly involved in its rescue operation, he ignored it altogether in his address; instead he said, “We failed to save millions of Jews, but we helped to save, in however decimated a form, the Jewish people.”

The difficulty of integrating the WJC’s story of the rescue in Portugal with the scholarly discourse on the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust was compounded by the fact that it was totally excluded from the memoirs of activists in the other organizations that took part in the general Jewish rescue operation, especially those in the Iberian Peninsula. For example, Eliyahu Dobkin, head of the Jewish Agency’s Aliya Department during World War II, wrote of the rescue activities in Spain and Portugal in his book *Aliya and Rescue During the Holocaust Years*: “By contrast, the Jewish Agency authorized immigration permits
for 700 of the 5,000 refugees who escaped to Spain and Portugal via the Pyrenees. Arrangements are currently underway for their voyage on a special ship to Palestine.”51 Dobkin’s terse account totally ignores the efforts of the WJC in Portugal and in fact conceals the rich narrative set out in this article. The manner in which he glosses over the actions of the WJC in Portugal is particularly puzzling given that he himself, as the Jewish Agency’s representative, signed the July 1944 memorandum of understanding between the WJC and the JDC at the American embassy in Lisbon. This proves beyond doubt that he was aware of the organization’s operation in Portugal. A similar picture emerges from a book by Haim Barlas, head of the Jewish Agency’s Rescue Committee in Constantinople, titled *Rescue at the Time of the Holocaust*. Barlas wrote on the book’s title page: “In 1943 the Jewish Agency and the Joint set up rescue centers in Lisbon, Teheran and Shanghai, and emissaries from Palestine operated there too.”52 Further into the book he wrote:

At that time E. Dobkin was sent to Lisbon and Spain and he succeeded in arranging the aliya of Jewish refugees from France who were living in Spain, in particular the aliya of the children, and this facilitated the passage of further refugees to this country. Prior to this the refugees were regularly apprehended by the Spanish authorities, and ran the risk of being handed over to the Nazi border guards.53

Like Dobkin, Barlas was aware of Weissman’s actions in Portugal, as evidenced by the contact between the two men in 1943 regarding the danger of Turkish Jews living in France. Weissman and Barlas led the operation by the WJC and the Jewish Agency on behalf of these Jews, most of whom were saved. Further evidence of the contact between the two can be found in the 1944 exchange of telegrams between Lisbon and Constantinople regarding the fate of four hundred Spanish Jews who were living in Athens.54

**WJC’s Twofold Commitment: Zionism and the Diaspora**

As part of the attempt to shape Jewish historical memory, especially Israeli memory, rescue activists sought to glorify the work of their own organizations while playing down that of their competitors. Examination of the books written by Dobkin and Barlas reveals that they chose to
completely exclude the efforts of the WJC but to mention the activity of the JDC, emphasizing its contribution in the Iberian Peninsula. This strategy may result from the fact that the WJC was not defined as a Zionist organization (although it was not at all anti-Zionist) and that it was in effect competing with the Zionist movement. The WJC’s rescue activities turned the organization from a strictly philanthropic organization to one that required political activity. But the political role and the competition with the Zionist movement contributed to its absence from historiography.55 The JDC, on the other hand, was an entirely philanthropic organization that had no political or ideological quarrel with the Zionist movement. For this reason, mention of its contribution to the rescue operation could not constitute a propaganda or political tool that might detract from the reputation of the Zionist movement.

Despite the critical attitude toward the WJC and the tendency of nearly everyone—contemporaries, scholars, the organization’s official historiographers, and activists belonging to other bodies—to ignore its rescue operation, from the perspective of more than half a century of hindsight, a different evaluation emerges. The significance of the rescue of more than a thousand children and parents who were smuggled into Portugal, and the thousands more who were concealed in France and conveyed to Switzerland by the WJC in 1943 and 1944, cannot be overstated; it sheds a different light on the organization’s entire operation. In this case, the WJC’s leadership and its rank-and-file activists displayed initiative and determination and altogether transcended the accepted boundaries of Jewish philanthropic activity prior to and during the early part of World War II. True, this transformation took time, but any assessment should take into account the need for an organization that operated within the international political system, but conducted largely philanthropic work, to function in an entirely different arena. To make this transformation, it had to construct a system that could work with espionage organizations, smugglers, underground groups, and various governmental agencies. Notwithstanding the vital role that Weissman played in setting up and running the rescue operation in Portugal, credit must go to Riegner, director of the WJC’s Geneva office, for selecting Weissman for the position. Riegner realized that it was essential to match the WJC’s team of activists to the dramatic changes occurring for European Jewry. The documents demonstrate that Weissman could not
have operated as he did without the organizational, financial, political, and moral support of the WJC.

The wartime papers of the WJC provide valuable information on the organization’s activity related to the Holocaust, but their importance exceeds the mere presentation of facts. The great majority of the founders of the WJC considered themselves to be Zionists, with some holding senior positions in the Zionist movement. They saw no contradiction between their Zionist leanings and activity within the WJC. They fought diligently for the establishment of a Jewish state, while at the same time striving to empower the ethnic identity of Diaspora Jews. The organization's founders were well aware of the existence of Jewish philanthropic organizations devoted to the Jews of the Diaspora. Yet the founders of the WJC and its activists during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s believed that since these organizations operated as philanthropies, they were unable to confront the Jews' existential crisis that began in the 1930s. Thus, in contrast to other organizations, from its inception in 1936 to the outbreak of World War II, the WJC involved itself in world and European politics worldwide, at the League of Nations, and with representatives of European governments as it attempted to ameliorate the condition of European Jewry and to create solutions for long-term migration.

The politicization of the WJC activities would be developed to an unusual and singular Jewish ethnic mix that offers an alternative to the conventional patterns of Jewish existence in the modern era. While the leaders of the WJC supported the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, they did not regard it as their foremost objective. They saw themselves as representatives of the Jewish world on the eve of World War II, during the course of the war, and thereafter. And as such they labored for the establishment of a Jewish state and for the revival of Jewish life in the Diaspora as twin goals that complemented rather than contradicted each other.

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Notes

1 The author wishes to acknowledge with gratitude Professor Gary P. Zola, executive director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter AJA), and the entire staff of the AJA for their help in this research. For a general account of the WJC see A. Leon Kubowitzki, Unity In Dispersion: A History of the World Jewish Congress (New York: World Jewish Congress, 1948); Isaac I. Schwarzbart, 25 Years In the Service of the Jewish People: A Chronicle of Activities of the World Jewish Congress August 1932–February 1957 (New York: World Jewish Congress, 1957). For an example of the voluminous works on Wise, see Melvin I. Urofsky, A Voice That Spoke for Justice: The Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).

2 Announcement of the Directorate of the World Jewish Congress in New York, 1 August 1940, MS-361, Box A-5, Folder 2, AJA.


5 For more information about the WJC activities in Geneva and the significance of the Committee for the Relief of the War-Stricken Jewish Population (RELICO) that was financed and operated by the WJC see, Raya Cohen, Between “Here” and “There”: The Story of Witnesses to Destruction: Jewish Emissaries in Switzerland: 1939–1942 (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1999), 127–167 (Hebrew).

6 See, for example, memorandum of the World Jewish Congress submitted to the War Refugee Board, 3 March 1944, MS-361, Box A-68, Folder 2, AJA.

7 Secret minutes of a meeting of Congress operatives in Europe, 6 December 1939 (no location specified), MS-361, Box A-7, Folder 1, AJA. See also the minutes of a meeting in Geneva of WJC functionaries based in Europe, 9 December 1939, MS-361, Box A-7, Folder 2, AJA; the correspondence between Wise and Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles regarding visas, 11 and 19 November 1941, MS-361, Box D-16, Folder 6, AJA. For more on activity in Washington, see activity report, 22 June 1942, MS-361, Box D-16, Folder 7, AJA. WJC envoys continued to operate in Washington during 1943. See the following report, 25 October 1943, MS-361, Box D-10, Folder 9, AJA.

8 The most well-known evidence of this is the 28 August 1942 telegram dispatched by Gerhart M. Riegner, director of the Congress’s Geneva bureau, to Stephen Wise in New York. While Riegner’s telegram is widely cited, it is but one example of evidence obtained through an elaborate information-gathering network that the WJC operated in neutral European countries. See, for example, report from the Congress office in Geneva titled, “The Situation of the Jews in the General Government,” 8 October 1942, MS-361, Box H-287, Folder 12, AJA.

9 See minutes of a top-secret meeting in Geneva of Congress activists in Europe, 6 December 1939, MS-361, Box A-1, Folder 7, AJA.

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10 Weissman’s letter to the Congress’s New York headquarters, 20 August 1943, MS-361, Box H-295, Folder 7, AJA.
12 On the importance and power of the JDC in Spain and Portugal and the difficulties presented by its aloofness toward WJC efforts in these areas, see Haim Avni, *Spain, the Jews, and Franco* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982), 188–196. On Amzelak’s ties to Portugal’s ruler and his refusal to cooperate with the WJC’s operation in Portugal, see Weissman’s letter to the members of the WJC’s executive committee, 19 February 1945, MS-361, Box H-295, Folder 3, AJA.
13 Henrietta (Mrs. Robert) Szold to Tartakower, 12 June 1941, MS-361, Box H-287, Folder 8, AJA. Szold, president of Hadassah’s American Affairs Committee, wrote the letter on behalf of Hadassah president Tamar De Sola Pool.
14 See the following correspondence between Weissman and the JDC’s representatives in Portugal and Spain: Weissman’s letter to the JDC delegation in Lisbon, 19 May 1944; JDC representative’s reply refusing Weissman’s request for support, 21 May 1944; further reply from Weissman noting the JDC’s refusal to participate in the endeavor from the outset, 22 May 1944, all found in MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA. See also telegram from Weissman to Wise informing him that the JDC had refused to join the effort in Portugal and France, 24 May 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA; report by a Jewish refugee on the JDC in Portugal and Spain, 23 August 1943, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 1, AJA.
15 On the JDC leadership’s view that Weissman’s efforts in Portugal were not contributing to the rescue from France of Jews in general and children in particular, see a letter from JDC Vice President Joseph C. Hyman to Wise, 7 July 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 4, AJA.
16 For a copy of the agreement, see 13 July 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 4, AJA.
17 Letter from JDC Vice President Joseph Hyman to Wise, 7 July 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 4, AJA; and New York Section 1933/44 File 897, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, New York (hereafter “JDC Archives”). Hyman’s perspective was not unique among JDC leaders and activists in Portugal. See cable exchanges between the JDC offices in Portugal and New York, 6 July 1944, Section 1933/44, File 897, JDC Archives; memorandum from JDC office in Lisbon to the JDC office in New York, 22 August 1944, Section 1933/44 File 897, JDC Archives. The American ambassador in Lisbon wrote to Washington about the struggle between the JDC and the WJC in Lisbon. See the ambassador’s letter, 10 May 1944, WRB (War Refugee Board) Documents, Dr. Chaim Pazner Papers, Section P.12, File 105, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem.
18 Weissman and the American embassy had a very good collaboration, which was reinforced after the establishment of the WRB. The WRB was an agency set up in January 1944 on the instructions of President Roosevelt to rescue and assist victims of World War II. The Jewish Agency was represented by Eliyahu Dobkin, head of its Aliya Department. The JDC delegate was Robert Pilpel. Weissman represented the WJC. James H. Mann and Robert C. Dexter, members of the American Rescue Committee, participated as observers.

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19. Opinion piece in the *Congress Weekly* by M. Boraisha, 29 December 1944, MS-361, Box A-68, Folder 3, AJA.

20. Ibid.

21. On the process of regulating the status of the Jewish refugees in Portugal, see a summary of WJC activity, no date specified, MS-361, Box H-294, Folder 5, AJA; Weissman’s report on WJC activity in Lisbon, 15 September 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 4, AJA. On the outlook of Portuguese officials regarding the Jewish refugees’ communist tendencies and Weissman’s proposal for a solution, see Weissman’s memoirs, Isaac Weissman, *Facing the Colossi of Evil* (Tel Aviv: Yvne, 1968), 56–70 (Hebrew). On the status of the Jewish refugees in Spain, the ongoing international diplomatic effort on their behalf, and the JDC’s activity in Spain, see Avni, *Spain*, 94–127. The Spanish ambassador to Portugal visited Weissman in early 1943. See the secret minutes of this meeting, 8 April 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA. For criticism of the nature of the JDC’s activity in Spain, see Weissman’s report to Goldmann and Tartakower, 28 July 1943, MS-361, Box H-285, Folder 6, AJA.


23. On the WJC’s attempts to set up an official channel to transfer food to European Jews, see the organization’s report to the Committee for War Refugees, 3 March 1944, MS-361, Box A-68, Folder 2, AJA.

24. For information about the Jews in France during the Holocaust and about the Jewish resistance see, Renée Poznanski, *To Be a Jew in France, 1939–1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000).

25. Lecture by Weissman, 19 January 1945, MS-361, Box D-71, Folder 2, AJA. On Jewish children in churches in Belgium, see a secret report, 18 September 1943, MS-361, Box H-295, Folder 6, AJA. On the hunt for Jewish children in France and a request for a radio broadcast, see Weissman’s telegram to the WJC’s New York office, 20 December 1943, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 1, AJA. For additional information on the number of Jews in hiding in Spain and Belgium, see an internal WJC document, 4 February 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 2, AJA.

26. See the secret summary of Weissman’s reports to New York, 4 January 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 1, AJA.

27. Weissman’s speech, 10 January 1945 (no location specified), MS-361, Box H-295, Folder 3, AJA.

28. Weissman’s report in the *Congress Weekly*, 29 December 1944, MS-361, Box A-68, Folder 3, AJA.

29. See the letter from Samuel Roth, a refugee in Portugal, to Leon Kubowitzki, who directed the WJC’s rescue effort in Europe, 12 June 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 4, AJA.

30. Weissman’s letter to Tartakower, 2 February 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 2, AJA.

31. Weissman’s letter to Tartakower and Goldmann, 8 February 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 2, AJA.

32. For biographical details of the children, see a letter from Lisbon to New York, 7 September 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 4, AJA.

33. The testimony of Malka Azaria delivered to Gershon Elimor (Wilkowski), in Weissman, *Colossi of Evil*, appendix, 158–161. For two more testimonies that tell the same story, see Section 0.3, File 7623; Section 0.92, File 19210, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem.
34Telegram from Weissman to Wise, 7 April 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA. On the condition of the children, see Weissman’s telegram to New York, 9 May 1944, MS-361, Box H-294, Folder 5, AJA.

35See, for example, a report from Lisbon regarding the ongoing arrival of groups of children; Weissman’s secret telegram from Lisbon, 10 April 1944, MS-361, Box H-294, Folder 5, AJA. Similar information is in a telegram from Weissman to Wise, 22 April 1944, MS-361, Box H-293, Folder 3, AJA.

36The total number of children is based on the following sources: telegram from Riegner to Wise sent through the American consulate in Bern, 10 May 1944, MS-361, Box H-294, Folder 5, AJA; summary of the WJC’s rescue operation, 11 November 1944, MS-361, Box A-68, Folder 2, p. 43, AJA. For a very positive assessment of the WJC activity in Portugal, see secret letter from the American ambassador in Lisbon to the U.S. State Department, 2 September 1944, 13 May 1944; letter to the secretary of state, 5 May 1944, Section P.12, File 105, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem.

37For details, see Weissman’s letter to Lady Reading, widow of Rufus Isaacs, first marquess of Reading, 31 March 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 2, AJA.

38On the WRB’s involvement in the rescue operation, see, for example, a secret telegram from the WJC Lisbon office to New York, 19 April 1944, MS-361, Box H-294, Folder 5, AJA; telegram from Weissman to Wise, 22 April 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA; report by Weissman, 15 September 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 4, AJA.

39Weissman’s letter to Kubowitzki, 24 May 1944, thanking him for the transfer of $10,000, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA; telegram from Kubowitzki and Tartakower to Weissman expressing concern that he had not confirmed receipt of $23,000 transferred to Lisbon from New York and stating that they were willing to send additional funds if needed, 30 June 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA. For a recommendation to transfer the money directly to Portugal rather than to Spain owing to the better exchange rate, see Weissman’s telegram to New York, 7 March 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 2, AJA. On the estimate that the cost of rescuing a child was $350, see memorandum to the WJC’s executive committee, 19 April 1944, MS-361, Box H-294, Folder 5, AJA. On fundraising for the rescue of children, see letter, 10 July 1944, MS-361, Box D-71, Folder 2, AJA.

40Weissman’s letter to Wise, 22 April 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA.

41Henrietta Szold’s letter to Weissman, 1 December 1944, MS-361, Box H-295, Folder 3, AJA.

42Weissman’s letter to Wise, 22 April 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA.

43Telegram to Wise, 6 May 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA. On the JDC’s anti-Zionist policy in the Portuguese context, see Weissman’s letter to Tartakower, 19 January 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 2, AJA.

44Telegram from Weissman to Wise, including the names of children who arrived at the beginning of May, 9 May 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA. See also a letter from Weissman to Mrs. Spector of Philadelphia regarding her young sister who was on her way to the United States. Weissman added that, to his regret, he had no information about the parents and asked Spector to inform him of her sister’s arrival in America, 19 June 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 4, AJA. For a report on the voyage of the Portuguese ship Nyassa to Haifa with 750 Jewish refugees on board see Weissman’s letter to Kubowitzki, 25

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January 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 8, AJA. On the cooperation between the WJC and the Jewish Agency in the context of the voyage, see Weissman’s letter to Tartakower, 7 January 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 8, AJA. The British embassy in Spain provided valuable assistance in arranging the voyage. See letter from Weissman’s office to the British ambassador in Madrid, 16 January 1944, MS-361, Box H-294, Folder 5, AJA. On the voyage of an additional ship carrying five hundred refugees from Portugal and Spain, including ninety children, see Weissman’s telegram to Kubowitzki, 24 October 1944, MS-361, Box H-295, Folder 9, AJA. Regarding the transfer of equipment, see Weissman’s telegram to the WJC executive in New York, 19 September 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 4, AJA.

Robert Dexter’s letter to Weissman, 24 October 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 4, AJA.

See the press statement on the conference, November 1944 (no precise date given), MS-361, Box A-68, Folder 4, AJA.

See the summary of the Atlantic City debates, 26–30 November 1944, MS-361, Box A-67, Folder 5, AJA. For harsh criticism of the Allies’ failure to attack the German death industry, see the summary of the WJC’s rescue operation submitted to the Atlantic City conference, 26 November 1944, MS-361, Box A-68, Folder 2, AJA.

See, for example, a copy of Weissman’s report to the conference in Weissman, Colossi of Evil, 127–130; and a summary of the rescue operation, 26 November, ibid.

Samuel Roth’s letter to Kubowitzki, 12 June 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 4, AJA.

Wise’s speech, 27 June 1948, MS-361, Box A-5, Folder 9, AJA.

Eliyahu Dobkin, Aliya and Rescue During the Holocaust Years (Jerusalem, 1946), 53 (Hebrew).

Haim Barlas, Rescue During the Holocaust (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1975), 9 (Hebrew).

Ibid., 104–105.

For a detailed account of contact between Weissman and Barlas about Turkish Jews, see Weissman, Colossi of Evil, 105–107; telegram from Barlas to Weissman about Spanish Jews living in Athens, 5 April 1944, MS-361, Box H-296, Folder 3, AJA.

The Founding of NFTY and the Perennial Campaign for Youth Engagement

GARY PHILLIP ZOLA

In November of 2014, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) announced an ambitious five-year agenda detailing its highest priorities for the upcoming years. One of the key elements of this plan (known officially as the Union’s “2020 Vision”) focuses on ways to “engage, educate and inspire a new generation” of Reform Jewish leaders. This initiative, known as the Union’s “Campaign for Youth Engagement,” aspires to bring about “a significant increase in the number of Jewish youth engaging in Jewish life.” It is, as described by the URJ’s website, an “investment in the future.”

The advent of the URJ’s “Campaign for Youth Engagement” happens to coincide with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of NFTY, the North American Federation of Temple Youth (originally the National Federation of Temple Youth), the first national association of synagogue youth in American history. The factors that spurred a range of Reform Jewish luminaries—rabbis, educators, and lay leaders—to establish NFTY back in 1939 are essentially the same as those that have launched the contemporary campaign. NFTY, like so many American Jewish innovations, is a programmatic response to a persistent concern that the American synagogue might become irrelevant to the rising generation of Jewish youth. Fear that Jewish youth were deserting the synagogue and abandoning their heritage is a familiar theme in the American Jewish experience.

The establishment of NFTY in 1939 provides an illuminating case study of how Reform Jewish leaders sought to address the perennial challenge of transforming Jewish youth into synagogue-loyal adults. This essay seeks to provide a historical reconstruction of the factors that ultimately led to the founding of NFTY after many years of discussion and debate.

Recruiting Jewish Youth

Growing disaffection among Jewish youth has been a topic of concern
since the very onset of a modern, organized, and self-conscious movement to Reform Judaism. Michael A. Meyer, in his *Response to Modernity*, has observed that the early pioneers of German Reform “worried about increasing Jewish indifference among the younger generation.” In America as well, Jewish reformers repeatedly insisted that if the synagogue did not actively address the needs and interests of Reform Jewish life, it would be increasingly difficult to stem the tide of ignorance and indifference that seemed to be overtaking so many in the younger generation.

In November of 1824, several dozen Jewish citizens in Charleston, South Carolina, were deeply concerned about the future of Jewish life in the New World. These pioneers of American Reform fretted over the attenuation of their Jewish youth who, they sensed, found the traditional Spanish-Portuguese liturgy and ritual in the community’s synagogue, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (KKBE), alienating and irrelevant. “As members of the great family of Israel,” they groused, we “cannot consent to place before [our] children examples which are only calculated to darken the mind, and withhold from the rising generation the more rational means of worshiping the true God.” They also believed that their young people’s lack of Jewish literacy made them easy prey for Christian proselytizers. For these reasons and others, the Charleston reformers believed that modernization and liberalization of the worship service would allow their children to relate to the synagogue and would concomitantly reignite the interest of “the younger branches of the congregation” in Jewish life and learning.

Not too many years after the establishment of the Reformed Society of Israelites in Charleston, concern over the future of Jewish youth prompted Rebecca Gratz (1781–1869) and a cadre of dynamic Jewish women to establish a “Hebrew Sunday School” (HSS) in Philadelphia. Just like the Charleston reformers, Gratz and her energetic colleagues were increasingly concerned about the level of Jewish ignorance in the younger generation. If Jewish youth had little knowledge of their heritage, they would not be inclined to support the synagogue as adults. Moreover, these young people would have no way to withstand the onslaught of Christian missionaries who sought to coax them out of the synagogue and into their churches. Gratz and her colleagues believed the HSS would engage their youth and furnish them with the knowledge
they needed “to defend their Jewish beliefs … refute evangelists and … be the religious equals of their Christian neighbors.”

As early as 1854, Dr. Max Lilienthal (1815–1882) called for the creation of “good books for our Jewish youth.” Jewish boys and girls in America were not studying “Talmud and midrash,” Lilienthal declared, and they would not be able to understand this literature that was, he averred, “full of incomprehensible fables and legends.” Noting that Christian groups were investing huge sums of money in children’s literature, Lilienthal urged American Jewry to pursue a similar course and develop tools that would foster within Jewish youth “a love of religion and all our moral duties.”

In 1874, Lilienthal launched a children’s magazine titled Hebrew Sabbath School Visitor. This weekly periodical was part of the popular efflorescence of juvenile magazines that began appearing in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The proliferation of juvenile magazines similar to Lilienthal’s marked yet another new attempt to stem the disaffection of Jewish youth that worried so many rabbis during this particular epoch.

In America during the last half of the nineteenth century, many thought the confirmation ritual was one successful programmatic technique for securing the future loyalty of synagogue youth. One needs only to read the glowing assessments of American Jewry’s confirmation ceremonies during this period to discern the positive effect they had on the confirmands as well as their proud parents. In a jubilant affirmation of confirmation written in 1875, Isaac Mayer Wise boasted that “the [R]eform movement in this country, making the Shabuoth confirmation day, reinstated it again, and made of it a holiday in the strictest sense of the term. We cannot tell how the day is celebrated everywhere, but we know how it is celebrated in Cincinnati.” According to Wise’s account, in the three Cincinnati synagogues wherein confirmation ceremonies were held, “multitudes” participated and “all standing-room was occupied.”

The entire Jewish community, Wise insisted, was “in motion, the promenades [were] alive with smiling countenances, black eyes, blazing gems, silk, broadcloth, etc.” It was, Wise gushed, “as though the golden age had suddenly come back upon us.” The most important benefit of the confirmation phenomenon was, of course, the effect it had on the young people. The confirmands “rejoice … over the achievement won
and the knowledge gained ... [and] the child ... is himself or herself re-confirmed and re-attached to Israel's sacred cause."

Similarly, the enhancement of Hanukkah celebrations at this same time—particularly the advent of Hanukkah youth pageants, young people’s commemorations, and the intentional commercialization of the “Festival of Lights” as an annual opportunity to attract young people to the synagogue—became a significant trend. An 1898 article in the American Israelite provided readers with examples of how Hanukkah celebrations were successfully drawing throngs of young people, together with their parents, into the synagogue in numerous towns, including Las Vegas, New Mexico; Mount Vernon, Indiana; Pensacola, Florida; Newport News, Virginia; Tacoma, Washington; and Columbus, Ohio. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Hanukkah became the vehicle for engaging Jewish youth. As one historian recently observed, the revival of Hanukkah toward the end of the nineteenth century “countered the common perception that young Jewish people felt alienated from religious life.” In contrast to the indifference that many young people exhibited toward synagogue services in general, “hundreds of Jewish young adults donned costumes for the Hanukkah revival, a uniquely exciting event.”

Yet, despite these innovations and efforts, the American Jewish community faced ongoing challenges in its effort to keep young people involved in the life of the synagogue. Toward the end of the century, American Jews took worried note as children of newly arrived Eastern European immigrants appeared to be abandoning the synagogue in alarming numbers. The first American-born Orthodox rabbi, Henry W. Schneberger (1848–1916), asserted in 1892 that the task of keeping Jewish youth connected to the American synagogue was “the burning problem of our day.” Many Reform rabbis shared Schneberger’s concern over the rising generation of Jewish adults. As one reformer conceded, “our houses of worship are deserted.” In 1885, more than two dozen rabbis expressed their views to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) as to how the movement could “assure to the rising generation of Jews such Jewish teaching as will more surely tend to create in them an active interest in Jewish affairs and an earnest participation in the intellectual and moral life of the Jewish community.” At the famous Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference held later that same
year, Kaufmann Kohler pointedly told his colleagues that much more needed to be accomplished. To ensure an American Jewish future, Kohler noted, the rabbis would need to “foster Jewish life, awaken Jewish sentiment, and train the Jewish minds and hearts.”

Rabbi Louis Witt (1878–1950) colorfully illustrated the severity of this problem in 1923, when he described how American freedom frequently lured Eastern European Jewish youth away from their religious traditions, leaving them estranged from synagogue life:

“...For it is so easy for liberty to turn into license! So easy to discard a burden that is after all so heavy and hoary with tradition, so rigid and austere as a discipline! In the Ghetto the Jew was also free, but only within the limits of the Torah: now he is free without any limit—except the policeman! In many a home on the [Lower] East Side may we witness this menace of liberty, this tragic cleft between the old and the new, the parent poring over a “Chumesh”—(Pentateuch), rebuking his son for playing truant from “Schul” in order to attend a prize fight, hearing himself chided by his own flesh and blood as a “greenhorn,” yet having no other recourse than the wailing cry, “Amerikane Kinder”? Is it any wonder that the pious old grandmother in Zangwill’s play, “The Melting Pot,” laments in the bitterness of her soul “A Klog zu Kolombusen!”—a curse on Columbust!

With the end of World War I and the return of many Jewish Doughboys to their home communities, fears over the rampant indifference of young people toward participating in the synagogue and Jewish life in general intensified. The attenuation of Jewish youth unsettled leaders from every segment of the Jewish community and, within the Reform movement, the challenge of encouraging young people to engage with the American synagogue and assume a leadership role in American Jewish life became an even more critical concern.

**Non-Jewish Models of Youth Engagement**

Not surprisingly, American Jews looked to their Protestant neighbors to see if they could find successful examples of youth engagement that could be adapted to suit the needs of the American synagogue. After all, churches, too, wanted to keep their young people involved. Although
examples of church activities designed to meet the needs of young people, like singing classes and youth choirs, begin to appear after the onset of the American Sunday school movement, the great successes of the YMCA and the YWCA played a decisive role in fostering an interest in Christian youth work during the last half of the nineteenth century. Theodore L. Cuyler (1822–1909), an eminent Presbyterian minister, was among the first to establish a prayer group aimed specifically at young people in his church in the late 1870s. Cuyler’s concept for his youth prayer groups instituted three important characteristics that would influence the growth of youth work in American churches and eventually in synagogues, too. First, his prayer groups welcomed both young men and women. Second, he believed the groups needed to meet on a weekly basis. Finally, he insisted that the young people themselves, not adults, should prepare their own weekly devotionals.\textsuperscript{14}

Cuyler’s idea piqued the interest of another minister, Francis Edward Clark (1851–1927), who founded the Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavor in 1881. Clark, a Congregationalist minister, had been active in his church as a child, and he believed that children deserved the opportunity to participate in religious life. He insisted that if young people were not given an opportunity to assume their rightful place within the church, it was unreasonable to expect them to become active churchgoers in adulthood. The Society of Christian Endeavor became wildly popular. Within two years of its founding, there were fifty-six societies and, amazingly, by the dawn of the twentieth century, 67,000 youth-led Christian Endeavor societies had been organized worldwide, boasting a total membership of more than four million. These societies captured the headlines of many American newspapers, and the worldwide conferences the organization sponsored captured the nation’s attention. The Jewish Endeavor Societies that began to appear in the 1890s (mentioned below) were clearly a direct outgrowth of the Christian Endeavor Society juggernaut.\textsuperscript{15}

The impetus to organize Jewish youth also grew out of the new educational and psychological ideas being popularized at this very time by New York intellects such as William Chandler Bagley (1874–1946), William Heard Kilpatrick (1871–1965), George S. Counts (1889–1974), and John Dewey (1859–1952). These progressive ideas stressed the importance of fostering the emotional, physical, and spiritual
development of young people. Youth organizations such as 4-H Clubs, the
Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Camp Fire Girls, and many others all
trace their beginnings to the early decades of the twentieth century.

It is interesting to note that the founders of Reform Judaism's youth
movement were fully aware of the fact that church youth clubs, YMCAs,
scouting groups, and modern educational theories had influenced their
thinking about a Jewish youth movement. In announcing their decision to
establish a national association of temple youth in 1938, the leaders of the
UAHC conceded: “Whether we acknowledge it or not, the general non-
Jewish field of youth work has been the pattern of our development.”16

Early Interest in Youth Work

The idea of establishing a youth auxiliary in the synagogue that was
separate and distinct from the classroom experience may be traced
back to the late 1880s. In fact, only three years after its founding, the
Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) adopted a resolution
proposed by Rabbi Joseph Silverman (1860–1930) in 1892 that called
upon the newly established rabbinical conference to begin planning for
the establishment of “congregational societies for young people.”17 The
CCAR subsequently explored the idea of producing a young people's
edition of its new liturgy, the *Union Prayer Book*, which, the rabbis
believed, would become “a serviceable means of training [the movement’s]
youth for active participation in Congregational worship.”18

In July of 1901, Boston's Adath Israel (known today as Temple Israel)
hosted a symposium that focused on contemporary topics of interest
to Reform Jewry. Two of the papers concerned the community’s urgent
need to engage its young people in the synagogue. Adath Israel’s rabbi,
Charles Fleischer (1871–1942), spoke about the need to support Jewish
students on the college campus and Mr. Herbert H. Kahn, a lawyer
from Indianapolis, told his audience that the American synagogue must
resolve to extend itself toward Jewish young people if it hoped to keep
them in its fold as adults. Indifference to the problem, he said, would
be disastrous:

The Temple cannot expect something for nothing, and if she
deserts the Jewish youth at the time when he needs her most,
if she leaves him to go his own way, she cannot expect him, on
the day of his graduation, a mile out of the religious course,

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suddenly to turn at right angles and make a straight cut for
the Temple!19

A cadre of young Reform rabbis, many of whom were trained at
Hebrew Union College (HUC), began to take a keen interest in youth
work in the early decades of the twentieth century. J. Leonard Levy
(1865–1917), for example, the spiritual leader of Congregation Rodef
Shalom in Pittsburgh, made a special effort to attract young people
to his synagogue. In an essay titled “Give the Child a Chance,” Levy
described his efforts to provide the young people in his congregation
with opportunities to lead worship services. “Find some way in which to
press the child into the service of the Temple; and, if this can be done,”
Levy asserted, “I feel sure that the regeneration of Jewish life would not
be far distant.”20

At this very same time, the CCAR’s Committee on Social and Religious
Union began to focus attention on what was being called “the leak on
top”—the synagogue’s inability to sustain the involvement of young
people. In their 1914 report, committee members suggested two major
innovations to their colleagues in the CCAR. First, they urged rabbis
to change the impression that confirmation was the end of religious
education. Second, committee members reiterated the importance of
the idea that some members of the CCAR had been advocating for more
than two decades: synagogue “clubs” for young people. These “clubs,”
the Committee on Social and Religious Union concluded, should be
“self-governing wherever possible.” The rising generation would be
“stimulated by the pleasure of participation in the club work,” and this
experience would provide young people with a new reason to remain
involved in synagogue life.21

It is important to note that these happenings were concomitantly
influenced by the pioneering Jewish youth work initiatives that were
just beginning to take place in New York. “Young People’s Synagogues,”
composed of youth from various congregations, were established on
the Lower East Side, in Harlem, and even in Philadelphia. The worship
services in these synagogues were Americanized to suit the needs of a
younger generation of Jews. Prayers and hymns were in English, and
young people were encouraged to lead the prayers themselves. The local
press also took note of a similar initiative known as the Jewish Endeavor

The Founding of NFTY
Society. This project offered lectures on a variety of topics relevant to the interests of young people. Yet another such highly successful innovation was the “Young Israel” movement, which offered education classes and meaningful traditional worship services in English in an effort to keep young Orthodox Jews raised on the Lower East Side involved in Jewish life.  

Finally, after World War I, “clubs” or “societies” for young people—particularly the “boys” returning home from military service—increasingly began to crop up in synagogues throughout the country. Although the concept of synagogue youth auxiliaries outside of the Sunday school may be traced back to the late 1880s, it was only after World War I that the number of these “clubs” seems to have reached a critical mass. According to the American Jewish Year Book, by 1927 there existed more than four hundred of these congregational “youth societies.” These auxiliaries differed radically in form and activity, and there was a growing sense that Jewish young people would be energized if these disparate temple youth groups were organized into a unified national association. Ultimately, the efflorescence of these “youth auxiliaries” in Reform Jewish synagogues would provide the movement with the building blocks it needed to establish a national federation of temple youth in the late 1930s.

The Founding of NFTY

In the early 1920s the first calls for the establishment of a national conference of temple youth began to be heard. It was at this time that young, American-born rabbis began to specialize in youth work. As we will see, some of these “youth rabbis” had themselves been participants in a Young Judea chapter, or a Jewish Endeavor Society, or a Zeta Beta Tau (ZBT) fraternity, or even in the Boy Scouts, and these experiences inspired them to create a similar youth apparatus for their synagogue youth.

Rabbi Samuel Schulman (1864–1955) was one of the first Reform rabbis to urge the UAHC to focus its institutional energies on youngsters. From early in his career, Schulman took interest in young people. He was a prominent advocate for improving the quality of Reform Jewish education, especially for elementary school students. In 1911, when the UAHC established a Department of Religious School Publications, Schulman was appointed to the Board of Editors. The
The scope of this department’s work widened considerably over the years and, by 1917, the CCAR had begun a formal partnership with the Department of Religious School Publications that would address not only the dearth of Jewish textbooks but the broad Jewish educational challenges that many Reform synagogues were confronting. This UAHC/CCAR partnership ultimately led to the establishment of a Joint Commission on Jewish Education, which focused its energies on a broad range of educational initiatives, including youth activities. Schulman was a member of this body from its beginning, and he urged that greater attention be given to the educational needs of synagogue youth. On account of his role on the Joint Commission, Schulman would play a pivotal role in NFTY’s founding.25

In 1919, Schulman, then serving as the rabbi of New York’s Temple Beth El, wrote to another young colleague, Lee Levinger (1890–1966), urging him to consider becoming the director of the 92nd Street YMHA, a post that had recently opened. Youth work is “the best work for a young minister today,” Schulman told Levinger, “the revival of Judaism [in America] will come, if it come [sic] at all, from our youth.”26 With hundreds of young Jewish men returning to their homes from their stint in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), Schulman believed that the time had come for the Reform movement to act if it hoped to retain the interest of this rising generation of American Jews.

Soon calls for the UAHC to act began to intensify. In 1923, the twenty-eighth Council of the UAHC met in conjunction with the fifth Assembly of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS) and the first Convention of the National Association of Temple Brotherhoods (NFTB).
One of the featured sessions these delegates attended was titled “The Call of the Synagogue to the Jewish Youth of America.” The first speaker at that conference was Rabbi Louis Witt (1878–1950), who, like Schulman, was a member of the Joint Commission on Jewish Education. Witt, who was serving at the time as the religious leader of Congregation Shaare Emeth in St. Louis, Missouri, grabbed the audience’s attention by bluntly declaring that a more appropriate title for their session would actually be “The Unheard and the Unheeded Call of the Synagogue to the Jewish Youth of America.”

To expose Jewish young people to “the spiritual potencies of our history,” Witt exhorted his listeners, the synagogue “must organize our youth.” “What more urgent enterprise,” he asked rhetorically, “can this Golden Jubilee Convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations undertake…?” Felix Warburg (1871–1937), chair of the session, echoed Witt’s appeal. “No Jew will become a disinterested Jew if you somehow awaken in him a sense of responsibility to do his part for the future of Judaism.”

It was at this same time that Joseph L. Baron (1894–1960), a young rabbi who was then serving a pulpit in Davenport, Iowa, drafted a plan that would eventually become the blueprint for the overall structure and function of NFTY. Baron was thirteen years old when his family emigrated from Vilna to New York City, where he immediately involved himself in a range of youth activities that would shape his future interests. After completing high school, Baron took courses at the Jewish Theological Seminary while he was enrolled at Columbia University, where he earned his bachelor’s degree. 

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Baron's involvement with the Zionist youth organization Young Judea that ignited his deep passion for youth work in the synagogue. Baron was impressed by Young Judea's ability to empower its members and inspire them to assume responsibility for engaging their own peers in the organization's overall mission. He was similarly impressed by Young Judea's structure of affiliated clubs that met periodically in larger conventions, as well as by the organization's emphasis on helping young people create their own community and identity. After matriculating at HUC in Cincinnati, Baron became a Young Judea leader, organizing chapters in Cincinnati and elsewhere. So, by 1920, when Baron completed his rabbinical studies at HUC, he had already amassed a considerable reputation as a capable Jewish youth worker.

Baron quickly realized that young people in small Jewish communities like the one he was serving in Davenport connected with the synagogue much faster than those in large Jewish centers like New York. He also quickly recognized that local synagogues needed to offer their young people more than just a classroom education. Baron observed how the young Jews in his community never associated with one another unless they were together in the synagogue. These young people, he wrote, were “ashamed of their Jewishness,” which led them to date and marry non-Jews. Concern for the future of Jewish life convinced him that Reform Jewish youth desperately needed to experience the value of Jewish community and the benefits of a modern religious life that the synagogue could offer. Relying on his many years of experience with Young Judea and his related youth activities, Baron outlined a plan that would enable the synagogue to become an influential factor for young people at a time in life when their “instinct[s] awaken, when their group consciousness develops, [and] when their idealism and sociability and tastes mature.” If the synagogue could foster these ideals, he concluded, it could become one of the “forces of modern Jewish life and leadership.”

Baron’s plan for the establishment of a national Jewish American youth movement, originally titled “Clubs for Religious Education,” was first presented to the Chicago Rabbinical Association in 1924. The plan proposed that the Reform movement organize “a system of
clubs”—both those that already existed in Reform synagogues as well as new ones that would need to be established—that would “meet in a national conference and establish a larger superstructure.” This national organization, he wrote, would not only exist to provide young people with “Jewish associations” but more importantly it would also impart a sense of “religious idealism” and “provide the opportunity for Jewish service to its members” so as to be “a positive influence on [their] religious growth.” It was these qualities, Baron noted, that would distinguish the synagogue “system of clubs” from all earlier attempts at youth engagement.

Baron outlined a series of specific advantages that his system of synagogue clubs would bring to the rising generation:

- The “burden of responsibility for leading these clubs would be on the young people themselves and not on teachers or adult leaders.”
- The clubs would be voluntary, not compulsory.
- The clubs would nurture the “social nature” that sparks the interest of young people.
- The clubs would teach Jewish “habits” and not just theories. The youth would learn Jewish living by experience.
- The clubs must “allow for the development of personality” with the intention of encouraging future leaders for the synagogue.
- The clubs must radiate “a freer, a more joyous atmosphere” than the classroom.

Baron’s concept was stunningly farsighted. At a time when the “young adults” meant people fifteen to twenty-one years of age, Baron proposed that the movement concentrate its efforts on “juveniles”—i.e., high school youth. His plan even included a motto that captured the essential components of a synagogue youth movement: “Torah, Avodah, and G’miluth Hasadim”—Jewish learning, Jewish worship, and Jewish philanthropy. For Baron, this plan was “the hope for a Young Israel!” He concluded his plan with an enthusiastic exhortation:

Jewish youth … want adventure, want romance, [they] want the heroic. The classroom, as a rule, does not provide for it. It speaks of spiritual values and abstract ideas that are quite remote, often unintelligible, and certainly not gripping. To enthuse the young with the idea of helping in the creation of
a new people, to invest them with immediate duties toward that end, to show them where Judaism is not academic but vital and urgent and immediate, —that is a means of arousing souls and installing new fervor in dry bones…. And perhaps because of this, it will strike with force into the sensitive heart and thirsty soul of our youth.31

Rabbi Tobias Schanfarber (1862–1942), the president of the Chicago Rabbinical Association, forwarded Baron's proposal to Dr. David Philipson (1862–1949), the chair of the Joint Commission on Jewish Education.32 Philipson, in turn, asked Rabbi George Zepin (1878–1963), director of the UAHC’s Department of Synagogue and School Extension, to send Baron's plan to Samuel Schulman. In transmitting Baron’s ideas to Schulman, Zepin admitted that Baron had recommended these ideas to the UAHC long before 1924! Schulman, too, liked Baron's plan, and he promptly invited his younger colleague to attend an upcoming meeting of the Subcommittee on Youth Education to discuss his ideas at length. In circulating Baron’s plan to the members of his subcommittee, Schulman strongly endorsed Baron's basic concept, offering a few thoughts of his own.33

In February of 1925, the Subcommittee on Youth Education voted to bring Baron's plan to the Joint Commission for formal approval. On 10–11 March 1925, the commission accepted Baron's recommendation and authorized Schulman and the subcommittee “to proceed with carrying out the policies mentioned [in Baron’s plan and to] … acquaint the country at large with its conclusions.”34

Coincidentally, while Baron’s plan was circulating through the leadership of the Joint Commission on Jewish Education, another highly influential individual was taking practical steps in an effort to launch a national conference for Reform Jewish youth. Jean Wise May (1881–1972), the daughter of Isaac Mayer Wise, with the backing of the New York chapter of NFTS, had organized a regional youth conference in January of 1924. This successful gathering led to the establishment of the “Union of Temple Young Folks’ League of New York State.” In December of 1924 she sent a copy of the constitution of the newly created League to Zepin. May’s message to Zepin was subtle but clear: If the UAHC was not going to take the lead in attending to the needs of Reform Jewish youth, then NFTS would!
The initial successes of the Union of Temple Young Folks’ League of New York State emboldened May. Appealing to the executive board of NFTS on 18 January 1927, May asked if the national sisterhoods would sponsor the creation of a national “Federation of Young Folks’ Temple Leagues.” The Reform synagogue, she said, seemed to have forgotten its youth. “We’re taking it for granted that by some wizardry they would slip into our adult groups, without an idea of their purposes, or without a whit of training for such a monstrous job.”35 May insisted that the future of American Judaism depended on its winning the “minds and hearts [of our youth],” and doggedly urged the UAHC to “kindle the spark that shall set aflame [their] hearts and minds” by helping them to see that Judaism is “alive, warm, and adventuring.”36

Despite all of these developments, the leadership of the UAHC showed little enthusiasm for spearheading the establishment of a national youth conference. Had it not been for a handful of NFTS stalwarts coupled with the financial backing of NFTS itself, Baron’s ideas could have languished in an ongoing netherworld of deliberation. Taking up May’s appeal in 1927, NFTS established a national committee on Young Folks Temple Leagues with corresponding local committees in each of the local sisterhoods. Reina Hartmann (1880–1953), a future NFTS national president, and Thelma Sachar (1906–1997) assumed responsibility, together with May, for NFTS’s youth initiatives. With the support of NFTS’s organizational prowess as well as its philanthropic backing, Reform Judaism’s drive to establish a national association of temple youth persisted.37

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In 1931, NFTS provided the UAHC with the funds it needed to engage a Director of Youth Activities who worked under the direction of the Joint Commission on Jewish Education. Throughout the 1930s, the director had a daunting assignment: He was expected to (a) help Reform rabbis in their efforts to create youth clubs in their synagogues; (b) persuade UAHC congregations that “youth work was a definite obligation of the congregation”; (c) provide these fledging clubs with programmatic direction and counsel; and (d) visit “as his time permitted” individual youth clubs.38

At this same time, there were other young rabbis in the CCAR who, like Baron, believed that the future of the Reform synagogue and of Reform Judaism in general depended on the creation of a youth organization. Rabbi Philip D. Bookstaber (1892–1964), for example, who understood the value of youth organizations from his days in the Boy Scouts, delivered a major address at the 1931 meeting of the CCAR wherein he warned his colleagues that Reform Judaism desperately needed to establish a national youth conference if it hoped to dissuade young people from abandoning the synagogue.39

By the mid-1930s, the UAHC estimated that there were nearly three hundred “youth clubs” in the Reform movement. The Director of Youth Activities and NFTS worked collaboratively to organize these groups into statewide associations that would meet once or twice a year in a regional conference. These programs were highly successful, and participants returned home with a genuine enthusiasm that their parents and rabbis could not overlook. Pressure mounted on the UAHC to assume responsibility for organizing “young people [in] Reform Synagogues into a national society.”40

The UAHC’s Board of Managers was scheduled to meet in Cincinnati on 11 May 1938. In an effort to pressure the board, Reina Hartmann asked her distinguished rabbi, Louis L. Mann of Chicago’s Sinai Congregation, one of the nation’s most venerable pulpits, to write a letter calling on the Union to assume responsibility for establishing a national association of Reform Jewish youth. In a letter to UAHC President Robert Goldman, Mann urged the Union to “form a NATIONAL FEDERATION OF TEMPLE YOUTHS, [sic] to parallel the work of the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods and the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.” Hartmann may have given Mann the name of the future
organization when she solicited her letter of support. In any event, Mann’s letter may be the first time that an “official” name for the soon-to-be-established youth conference appears in writing.

In his written response to Mann, Goldman confirmed that the Union was now taking the matter seriously. Hartmann came to Cincinnati to address the Board of Managers and, according to Goldman, advocated for the idea of a national youth organization “strongly and ably.” The UAHC was now ready to act decisively; a resolution was being prepared for adoption by the Union’s board at its next meeting in June of 1939. In the meantime, a committee consisting of Union and NFTS leaders had been charged with the task of developing “a satisfactory and practicable plan” for the establishment of a national youth conference. In fact, “it is possible,” Goldman informed Mann, “that a meeting of Youth representatives will be called in connection with the next meeting of the Council to be held here in January.” As soon as this plan was ready, Goldman wrote, it would be approved by the board.

It is difficult to document why the Union’s leadership remained so ambivalent about taking the lead in the campaign for a national youth conference in Reform Judaism. There are, however, a few clues that provide us with some tentative explanations. Clearly, funding this initiative was a serious challenge for the UAHC, particularly during the years of the Great Depression. In fact, had NFTS failed to provide the financial backing that these various forays into youth work required, it is quite possible that NFTY would never have come into existence.

In addition to the issue of funding, it seems that the Union was also concerned that “certain safeguards” be established before it would agree to create the national youth association. A “safeguard” appearing in the minutes has to do with institutional control. The UAHC leadership insisted that despite being funded by NFTS, the Union itself must be authorized to “retain control of the Department of Youth Work … act as the advisor of this new society, and … promote Youth Work throughout the country.”

The thirty-sixth Biennial Council of the UAHC was scheduled to meet in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Sunday through Thursday, 15–19 January 1939. It was decided that on the preceding Shabbat, the UAHC would convene “The First National Convention of American Liberal Jewish Youth.” Youth group presidents, delegates, and visitors were invited
to participate in this historic convocation. A special preconvention publication was issued by the Union concerning the significant role young people play in the future of Jewish life. These essays were written by distinguished rabbinical leaders such as Rabbis David Philipson and George Zepin, as well as by young rabbinical students, such as Phillip Finkelstein and Arthur Lelyveld.

NFTY’s inaugural convention in Cincinnati drew 192 young attendees. There were 71 registrants from Cincinnati and 121 “out-of-town delegates and visitors.” This historic event began with a Shabbat morning worship service held at Rockdale Temple (K.K. Bene Israel), the oldest Jewish congregation west of the Alleghenies. The delegates reconvened for lunch at the Sisterhood Dormitory on the campus of HUC and, after lunch, “the first convention session was called to order shortly after 2:00 PM in the Hebrew Union College Chapel, by Mr. Robert P. Goldman [1890–1976], President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.”

Today’s NFTYites would be dumbfounded by the nature of the program back in 1939. Essentially, the delegates spent two days listening to lengthy addresses delivered by rabbis. Two of the speakers were prominent national figures—Rabbis Samuel Schulman (1864–1955) and Julius Marks (1898–1977). The young delegates may have been better able to identify with the speeches delivered by two recently ordained rabbis, Eugene J. Sacks (1912–1999) and David Polish (1910–1995), who were more or less contemporaries of the attendees. In any case, instead of the interactive programs that typify NFTY programming today, the first NFTYites spent days listening to long and thoughtful disquisitions on the theme of youth and synagogue, prepared by prominent rabbis as well as by their peers.

One discussant, Robert Desberg from Cleveland, Ohio, was asked to comment on Rabbi Sacks’s presentation. Interestingly, the young Clevelander told the convention that he hoped the young people would reintroduce “many colorful ceremonies inadvertently omitted from Reform Judaism.” He also noted that Reform Judaism needed to become “more dynamic.” There was no benefit, Desberg asserted, in asking students to recite a worship service that they knew by rote. He recommended services that “arouse contemplation and stir imagination.” Desberg exhorted his peers to commit themselves to reviving Reform
Judaism through the new organization they had come to establish:

Reform Judaism has too long neglected its youth. It is significant that this is the first Youth Convention.... In youth there is a great potential source of religion; it wants to be religious, indeed it cries out for some good reason “why should I remain a Jew?” True, the youth of today is poorly informed of his race, history, culture and philosophy. Yet the desire remains.... Let us resolve this desire by making our religion more appealing, by reviving the old customs, and let us give it new vitality by making it modern in application.42

Another of the youth delegates, Lenore Cohn of New York City, delivered a truly noteworthy address to the conventioneers. “It is with the highest aims of religion in mind,” Cohn began, “that we have formulated a program for youth. All that we can do, and must plan to do, is inspired by religion.” In her impassioned oration, Cohn appealed to her contemporaries to ensure that their new organization would assist youth in their innate hope to make the world a better place in which to live. Anticipating what would ultimately become one of NFTY’s programmatic hallmarks, Cohn expressed her hope that the new national association would engage in social action. She challenged her Reform Jewish contemporaries to work for peace, for justice, for the betterment of human relations. In a moving conclusion, she spoke to the adults in the room:

Do not be afraid, my temple-minded friends, that we will become agnostics and leave the Synagogue to die a noble death.... [W]e will not forget our past.... Our good will, peace, social justice, philanthropy programs, immature and ineffective as they may seem at times, are making a definite and distinct impression upon us, our neighbors, and the recipients of our efforts.... All I ask is that the Synagogue supply us with a leader, a basis for a program, and adequate meeting facilities. We will do the rest.43

The first convention’s program concluded shortly before 5:00 PM on Sunday, 15 January, at which time an ad hoc executive committee appointed officers and outlined a plan to compose the organization’s bylaws. By the time this post-program meeting adjourned at 7:00 PM, NFTY—the first national federation of synagogue youth auxiliaries in American history—had been officially established. An idea that had

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gestated for more than two decades had been brought into existence in less than forty-eight hours.

In the concluding lines of his keynote address to the young delegates at NFTY’s founding convention, Rabbi Schulman predicted that if the fledgling youth organization successfully fulfilled its mandate, not only would young people continue to attend synagogue, but, more importantly, these youth would cause the synagogue “to live anew.”

To assess the accuracy of Schulman’s assertion, one merely needs to quantify the percentage of NFTY alumni who today occupy leadership roles—both lay and professional—in the Reform movement, or consider the transformative influence that NFTYites have had on Reform Jewish liturgy, music, education, and social action initiatives. This accounting would unquestionably validate that assertion that for seventy-five years NFTY has persistently found new ways to foster “wholehearted loyalty to the synagogue & Jewish ideals.”

There can be little doubt that when NFTY commemorates the one hundredth anniversary of its founding, in 2039, historians will assess the role NFTY played in Reform Judaism’s overall execution of its current “Campaign for Youth Engagement.” It is difficult to imagine how a significant increase in the number of Jewish youth engaging in Jewish life can be attained without a strong and vibrant role for NFTY. As the oldest national association of synagogue youth, NFTY remains to the present day what its founders anticipated: an extremely valuable programmatic initiative that has the potential to meet the perennial challenge of engaging yet another rising generation of American Jews. If that potential is realized between now and NFTY’s centennial, it will unquestionably revalidate Jean May’s deeply felt belief that, once established, NFTY would become an essential educational tool enabling Reform Jewish youth “to brighten the path of humanity through a Judaism, alive, warm, and adventuring.”

Documents

A significant collection of primary source materials documenting the history of NFTY is now preserved at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA), located on the historic Cincinnati campus of Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC–JIR). To view a selection of NFTY documents from the AJA’s collection, please visit http://americanjewisharchives.org/exhibits/.
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Notes

11. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) became the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) in 2003.
13. See Rabbi Louis Witt’s address titled “The Call of the Synagogue to the Jewish Youth of

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17American Hebrew (15 July 1892): 345.

18CCAR Yearbook 8 (1897/98): xiii–xlv. The following year this issue arose again when a paper considering this topic was delivered by Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf at the CCAR meeting in Cincinnati. See “How Can We Enlist Our Young Men in the Service of the Congregation?” CCAR Yearbook 9 (1899): 147–160.


20Jewish Criterion 33, no. 21 (29 December 1911): 5.

21CCAR Yearbook (1914): 75, 78.

22Rabbi Louis Witt of St. Louis makes explicit how much he was influenced by these early experiments in youth engagement. See Witt’s address to the UAHC, Op. Cit., 9317–9322. See Jeffrey S. Gurock, Orthodox Jews in America (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 125–126, 345. On Young Israel, see also Yaakov Kornreich, Joel Saibel, Deborah Hart Strober & Gerald Strober, Young Israel at 100: American Response to the Challenges of Orthodox Living, 1912–2012 (New York: National Council of Young Israel, 2012).

23David Philipson to Samuel Schulman, 20 March 1924, MS-90, box 17, folder 2, AJA.

24Joseph L. Baron, Lee Levinger, and Philip Bookstaber had themselves been involved in youth clubs/activities of one sort or another. See infra.


26 Samuel Schulman to Lee J. Levinger, 4 December 1919, MS-90, box 21, folder 7, AJA.


29 See Joseph L. Baron, “Clubs for Religious Education,” MS-90, box 17, folder 2, AJA.

30 Ibid. Reform rabbis organized themselves into the Chicago Rabbinical Association. Tobias Schanfarber (1862–1942), rabbi of Chicago’s Kehilath Anshe Maariv (KAM) Congregation, was the association’s president. See The Reform Advocate 63 (4 March 1922): 107.

31 Joseph L. Baron, “Clubs for Religious Education,” MS-90, box 17, folder 2, AJA.

32 See George Zepin to Tobias Schanfarber, 3 December 1924, MS-90, box 17, folder 2, AJA. One member of the Chicago Rabbinical Association, S. Felix Mendelsohn (1889–1953), was a member of Schulman’s Subcommittee on Youth Education. Upon receiving a copy of the Baron plan from Schulman, Mendelsohn assured Schulman he had already heard the details of the plan the preceding year when Baron shared his thoughts with the Chicago rabbis. Mendelsohn assured Schulman that he was “heartily in favor of the whole idea.” See S. Felix Mendelsohn to Samuel Schulman, 4 January 1925, MS-90, box 17, folder 3, AJA.

33 It is interesting to note that when NFTY is established in 1939, membership does include those who have finished high school. Baron persists in recommending that the organization be aimed at high school students only. See Samuel Schulman to Members of the Subcommittee on Youth Education, 18 December 1924, and Joseph L. Baron to Samuel Schulman, 24 December 1924, MS-90, box 17, folder 2, AJA.

34 See Report of the Joint Commission on Jewish Education (10–11 March 1925), 13, MS-90, box 17, folder 3, AJA.

35 Jean Wise May, Report of Committee of Young Folks’ Temple Leagues (31 October 1928), 68, MS-73, box A-1, vol. 2, AJA. The League’s constitution outlined several key objectives: (a) “promote the knowledge of Judaism and Jewish culture”; (b) “promote the welfare of the Jewish people”; (c) “stimulate [intergroup] cooperation”; and (d) “cooperate with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.” See also Krasner, “Dreaming Dreams and Seeing Visions,” in Sisterhood, 209.

36 Jean Wise May, “Youth Demands a Living Faith,” Topics & Trends 2, no. 3 (March–April 1937): 3, MS-73, box K-3, folder 2, AJA.

founding president of Brandeis University but, in the early 1930s, he was building a national reputation as a dynamic youth worker who directed the B’nai B’rith Hillel on the campus of the University of Illinois.


40 Robert P. Goldman, Memorandum and Report on the Advisability of Organizing a National Federation of Jewish Youth, Proceedings of the Executive Board (17 June 1939), 33, MS-266, box 1, AJA.

41 Official Proceedings of the First Youth Convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 14–15 January 1939, 10, MS-266, box 1, folder 1, AJA.

42 Ibid.


44 Official Proceedings of the First Youth Convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 14–15 January 1939, 8, MS-266, box 1, folder 1, AJA.

45 The Jewish Youth Circular Letter, no. 3 (February 1925): 1, MS-90, box 17, folder 3, AJA.

46 Jean Wise May, “Youth Demands a Living Faith,” Topics & Trends 2, no. 3 (March–April 1937): 3, MS-73, box K-3, folder 2, AJA.
Book Reviews


Dianne Ashton’s new book complicates a prevalent opinion about the nature and meaning of Hanukkah in American Jewish life and enriches our scholarly understanding of the links between historical context, individual agency, and religious practice. Contrary to the conventional popular view that Hanukkah’s evolution into the commercialized and child-centered holiday we all recognize today unfolded simply as the efforts of American Jews to mimic and compete with the Christmas cultural juggernaut, Ashton argues that American Jews have used Hanukkah celebrations as an opportunity to “insist on their right to be different,” as much as to demonstrate the values and practices they share with their Christian neighbors (14). More than just a history of a holiday, this book highlights the particular contributions of rabbis, composers, educators, publishers, and women’s groups in reshaping and redefining Hanukkah in response to events, trends, and the needs and desires of ordinary American Jews.

Ashton, a professor of religion at Rowan University, mines extensive archival sources in crafting this rich work of cultural history. Songbooks, sheet music, newspaper editorials, theater scripts, holiday how-to manuals, and the organizational records of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods all assist the author in reconstructing how American Jews have variously interpreted and celebrated Hanukkah since the mid-nineteenth century. Following a discussion of the holiday’s ancient Judean origins in the second century BCE and its subsequent development during the rabbinic period, the book follows a chronological progression into the present.

To be sure, Hanukkah’s rise to prominence in the American Jewish calendar has had much to do with its temporal proximity to Christmas and the embellishments to the traditional Hanukkah rituals that this so-called “December dilemma” has inspired. As Ashton notes, Hanukkah falls in the midst of an American holiday season that celebrates family, fellowship, joy, and generosity. By giving gifts, exchanging greeting cards, and enjoying Hanukkah pageants and concerts, Jews could feel
at home in America in December, sharing in the spirit of the Christmas season while eschewing Christianity itself.

The urgent need to come to terms with Christmas is not the only explanation for Hanukkah’s popularity, however, nor does it sufficiently explain why American Jews have modified and modernized this particular holiday to a greater extent than any other. Unlike those of most other Jewish sacred occasions, Hanukkah’s rituals are simple and domestic, designed to be performed at home with family and friends rather than in synagogue under the dominion of rabbis. Accordingly, Ashton argues, individual Jews could redesign, enhance, and introduce Hanukkah customs as they desired, and they often did so in a conscious effort to create fun and memorable experiences for children. The book documents the development of festive communal Hanukkah celebrations, implemented by women and publicized in the Jewish press, as purposeful attempts to instill ethnic pride and emotional security in young American Jews.

Furthermore, like Passover, Hanukkah has offered generations of American Jews the story of “an ancient conflict that could be retold in ways that highlighted [their] own dilemmas” (12). Ashton’s book demonstrates how Hanukkah’s morality tale of religious freedom fighters who withstood tyranny in a campaign to curb the tide of assimilation has provided a useful rhetorical tool in service of various agendas. In the mid-nineteenth century, both religious reformers and traditionalists claimed the mantle of the Maccabees as they debated the merits of innovations and adaptations in synagogue liturgy and ritual. During World War II and the Cold War, rabbis and editorialists linked the Maccabean cause to contemporaneous struggles against totalitarian regimes, invoking a tradition of Jewish participation in battles to preserve democratic values. In the 1980s, the Lubavitcher Rebbe urged his followers to look to the Maccabees for inspiration in their quest to encourage their fellow Jews to rededicate themselves to Judaism. Whereas the rabbis of the Talmud marginalized the Maccabees and their military victory in framing Hanukkah as evidence of divine providence, American Jews returned to their Hasmonean predecessors to legitimize their ideological projects and reassure themselves about their place in American society.

Other scholars, such as Jenna Weissman Joselit and Joshua Eli Plaut, have previously explored Hanukkah’s American transformation into a
major winter holiday, and the arguments at the core of the book will be familiar to readers of Jonathan Sarna and Marshall Sklare. What make Ashton's full-length treatment of Hanukkah stand out are the rich treasure trove of sources she brings to light and the breadth of the study, which tracks the holiday's development from ancient times into the twenty-first century. The several sections devoted to music, both composed and performed in honor of the Festival of Lights, are particularly fresh and compelling, and the book shines a useful spotlight on Hanukkah's central place in American Jewish childhood and education.

The book's chronological structure presents both benefits and disadvantages. Ashton does well to consider the impact of specific events and eras, such as the period of mass Eastern European immigration and World War II, on the ways in which American Jews drew meaning and merry out of their winter celebrations. At the same time, this framework renders some sections of the book repetitive, as Ashton sometimes returns to familiar themes and types of sources across time periods. Additionally, the final chapter on Jewish counterculture and Hasidism is noticeably lighter on actual Hanukkah content than its predecessors are.

Finally, it is a case of both perfect and unfortunate timing that Ashton's book was published a month before the cultural convergence of Hanukkah and Thanksgiving took America by storm in November 2013. *Hanukkah in America* provides useful insights to help explain why Thanksgivukkah was such a significant event, but it is regrettably unable to reflect on it directly. Nevertheless, this book is certainly a welcome and valuable contribution to the fields of American Jewish history and religious studies.

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In a time of Comedy Central, Seth McFarland, Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart, *Book of Mormon*, and *Modern Family* it is difficult to imagine the uniqueness, impact, and popularity of Allan Sherman, the then-cutting-edge comedian, social commentator, composer, lyricist, and performer. Marc Cohen’s book, *Overweight Sensation: The Life and Comedy of Allan Sherman*, does a magnificent job of returning us to those much simpler days, when Vaughn Meader’s best-selling album *The First Family* could affect American politics by lovingly satirizing the Kennedy administration; or Harvard Professor Tom Lehrer could poke fun at everything from NASA to Nazis to New Math in his musical albums; or American attitudes could be swayed by shows such as *That Was the Week that Was* or *The Smothers Brothers’ Comedy Hour*, replete with monologues and political diatribes.

Sherman added one unique and profoundly overt perspective to the great comedic voices of his day: his Judaism. Compared to their census numbers, Jews were vastly overrepresented in the comedy fields of radio, television, and film. Radio in the 1930s and 1940s featured Jack Benny, George Burns, Al Jolson, and Mel Allan—all Jews, but except for Jewish attributes or stereotyped humor, none made jokes expressly about their ethnic, cultural, or religious heritage or beliefs. Writing for Sid Caesar’s *Your Show of Shows* in the 1950s, Mel Brooks, Carl Reiner, Neil Simon, and Larry Gelbart, among others, presented “Jewish-esque” humor, focusing on the New York or immigrant experience rather than the specifically Jewish one. In *Overweight Sensation*, Cohen quotes a 1959 article in *Time* magazine, which notes that political and social commentary humorists Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, and Shelly Berman “joked about father and Freud, about mother and masochism, about sister and sadism.” But not Judaism!

Sherman was different. He took American popular, Broadway, or folk music and gave it witty, almost William S. Gilbert–style humor, accessible and popular yet all drawn from his Jewish or autobiographic experiences. “Frère Jacques” becomes “Sarah Jackman” and “Matilda” morphs into “My Zelda,” with probably his cleverest lyric coming from his version of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” about garment worker Harry Lewis, who was killed in a fire.
“Oh Harry Lewis perished
In the service of his lord
He was trampling through the warehouse
Where the drapes of Roth are stored.”

Witty, all-American, yet culturally honest and inclusive, Sherman was able to take his history and ethnicity and make it everyone’s, Jewish or not.

Cohen creates a personal frame for Sherman’s writing. Sherman’s life was an unhappy one, being overweight, socially isolated, and insecure. He was born in Chicago to a large family of Orthodox Jews who made their livings in the business and music arenas. According to Cohen, “It was a kooky Jewish paradise rich in family attention and love that Sherman never forgot and always longed for. It did not last long” (21). Soon after, the family left Chicago for California where, in two years’ time, Allan’s parents divorced, forcing him to choose which parent he would live with. This experience informed his world view, characterized by the simplicity of a child, as in one of his master works, “Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh,” about a boy “exiled” to summer camp.

One cannot understand Sherman’s humor without reading of his family, marriages, divorces, financial challenges, successes, and many failures. At the University of Illinois, he found success writing columns and sketches for the school’s newspaper, The Daily Illini. That success gave him a level of social success, allowing him entrance to Greek life and standing. As Cohen intuits, Sherman wrote his parody songs to make friends, to gain acceptance in college, and to make a living creatively.

Sherman did gain enough public acceptance and success that he wrote several original Broadway shows with distinguished composers and big-name talent, although only one was produced. Noted composer Albert Hague joined with Sherman to write The Fig Leaves Are Falling, starring Dorothy Louden, who is better known as Miss Hannigan in the original Broadway cast of Annie. The show was a musicalization of Sherman’s life at the time: his divorce, his neighbors, his unhappiness. Combined with the exigencies in his own life—the breakup of his marriage, his extensive use of alcohol and drugs, his career failures—it is no wonder the show flopped.

One special gift that Cohen offers the reader is the abundance of lyrics and parodies included in the book’s appendix. They illustrate even
more clearly the talent with which Sherman was blessed, and they treat
the reader to a lyrical illustration of mid-twentieth century America in
general and the Jewish Northeast in particular. *Overweight Sensation*
provides a captivating view of American popular culture of the era,
including comedy, television, records, night clubs, and theatre. In a
Pagliacci-like manner, this is the story of a brilliantly talented man using
the mask of humor to cover his personal failures and sadness.

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*Libby Garland, After They Closed the Gates: Jewish Illegal Immigration
to the United States, 1921–1965 (Chicago: University of Chicago
Press, 2014), 312 pp.*

For many scholars, 1924 represents a turning point in the history
of American Jewry. That year, after decades of piecemeal measures,
the federal government enacted a national quota system that all but
eliminated Eastern and Southern European immigration to the United
States. For historians, this cutoff marks the transition from one Jewish
generation to another: from immigrant outsiders occupying ethnic
enclaves who threatened the nation’s social and political integrity to a
cohort of young, well-educated and upwardly mobile Jews who became
“white” by the midpoint of the twentieth century.

Libby Garland reexamines this basic historical narrative in her
compelling and meticulously researched book, *After They Closed the Gates.*
Using an impressive array of government and organizational records,
newspaper accounts, memoirs, and first-hand interviews, Garland claims
that the “gates simply did not close” on Jews after 1924 (3). Instead,
Garland argues that an “extensive underground of illegal immigration
from Europe” flowed into the United States from 1924 to 1965 (1). Using
dozens of stories from places as far-flung as Mexico, Texas, and Michigan,
Garland shows how illegal Jewish immigrants, experienced in “finding
ways around restrictive and arbitrary-seeming laws,” often confounded
rigid racial and national categories created by a federal apparatus meant to
manage and enforce the new quota system (129).
Garland characterizes these actions as “cautious and law-abiding” and argues that they intended to portray American Jews as a healthy and patriotic people (87). The author traces how a host of Jewish civic officials and religious leaders worked behind the scenes with immigration administrators to liberalize the quota law; and also how they framed immigrants and unnaturalized aliens as moral citizens in the 1920s and 1930s and long-suffering “refugees” after World War II. Importantly, these strategies divorced Jews from the category of “illegal immigrant” and stunted attempts to argue for immigration reform on behalf of Mexican Americans and Asian Americans. For Garland, this process revealed just how fragile the project remained for Jews, particularly of Eastern European descent, to gain social acceptance and inclusion into the country’s body politic. Garland ends by describing, albeit in a slightly rushed fashion, how the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act overturned the national quota system and imposed limits on immigration from the Western Hemisphere, resulting in an influx of illegal Mexican immigrants to the United States. The law signified, according to Garland, Jews’ “formal inclusion in the nation” and tacit acceptance for the new “mechanisms of restriction and exclusion” (212).

*After They Closed the Gates* makes a strong case that leading Jewish spokespeople and civic organizations framed the issue of illegal immigration in such a way as to expedite this “formal inclusion.” I wonder, however, the extent to which the wider American public registered illegal Jewish immigration as a major national issue. The book details how Jewish leaders debated illegal immigration behind closed doors and in private letters and internal correspondence. Did the mainstream press, major ethnic newspapers, or national elected officials also echo these debates? An affirmative answer would strengthen Garland’s claim that the entrance of tens of thousands (a number that she admittedly estimates) of illegal Jewish immigrants into the United States made them a “matter of both private and public knowledge” and further highlight the broader national significance of Jewish organizational work (147). In a similar vein, I wondered about the specific role that Jewish civic agencies and/or political representatives—in particular Emmanuel Celler, one of the law’s cosponsors, who pops up repeatedly in the book—played in the 1965 immigration act. Garland notes that the record does not reveal any serious concerns from Jewish leaders over the law’s shortcomings. However, I
remain curious about how Jewish representatives conceptualized the 1965 act and the precise nature of their silence over certain aspects of the law. What might these positions tell us about how Jewish leadership in the 1960s and 1970s conceptualized a “Jewish” immigrant past in relation to those of Latino groups? How might this have both reflected and impacted Jewish-Latino collaboration on other political issues at the time?

Still, these questions do not detract from After They Closed the Gates' many contributions to the field of American Jewish History. This is a fine, densely researched book that is a must-read for anyone examining Jewish understandings of race and citizenship in the postwar United States.

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“Reconstruction is largely an unknown time in American Jewish historiography,” Anton Hieke rightly claims in *Jewish Identity in the Reconstruction South: Ambivalence and Adaptation*. “In some respects,” he notes, “there is a wide gap in our understanding of southern Jewry from the period of the Civil War—which has claimed a large share of scholarly attention—to the turn of the twentieth century” (1). Hieke’s work begins to fill this lacuna by closely analyzing Jewish life in Georgia and the Carolinas. His narrow, data-rich focus allows him to debunk commonly held assumptions about Southern Jewish life in this era. Particularly, Hieke’s work questions the perception that during the so-called “German Jewish” period in American Jewish history there was a “considerable group of Jews who identified as Germans among the southern Jewish population” (2). He also challenges the idea that “German Jewish immigrants had been welcomed and integrated into southern society, and that they came to internalize a Southern identity” (2). Arguing against those commonly held assumptions, Hieke contends that there were “much less distinct, more ambivalent categories of identity that prevailed among Jews in the Reconstruction South” (2).
Hieke’s work begins by questioning the German-ness of the German Jewish period in American Jewish history by claiming that it “was never close to being homogenously German” (306). First, he argues that many of the so-called German Jewish immigrants were not actually German. Though by the mid-twentieth century, Jews from Prussian Poland—who comprised a significant number of these immigrants—“had become German Jews,” he notes that “in the mid-nineteenth century, they were still Polish Jews” (22). Moreover, while immigrant Jews made up a significant portion of the Jewish population of Georgia and the Carolinas in 1860, that number had declined significantly by 1880. Thus, he concludes, “the importance of immigration steadily declined over the course of Reconstruction” (41). Because of the strong presence of Prussian- and American-born Jews, Hieke concludes that “the term ‘German Period’ is as incorrect for its theoretical end in 1880, as it is for its supposed beginning in 1820” (309).

Hieke’s work then turns to the concept of “trans-regional mobility, rooted in business” (306), adding to the standard concept of chain migration as characteristic of Jewish migration. “Reconstruction was not an era of larger Jewish immigration from Europe,” he argues, “but rather of migration within the United States” (38). Because “the non-immigrant Jews’ places of birth clearly indicate that residence was never static” (65), he maintains that “Reconstruction might be described as a period of population exchange between the regions of the United States. Business opportunities brought northern and western Jewish businessmen to the South; the bleak prospects of Jewish southerners drove some of them away from the South. In both cases, immigrant and American-born Jews left their home regions” (67). Because of this mobility, he argues that his research “challenges the idea of the South as a distinct and separate region within the United States...” (66).

Building off of the idea of trans-regional mobility, Hieke maintains that the Jews’ identity was also trans-regional, because “they moved freely between the individual regions of the United States” and thus “were not fixed in their Northern or Southern identity, but were indeed utterly ambivalent” (308). Prior to conducting his research, Hieke had assumed that Jews “had been welcomed and integrated into southern society, and that they came to internalize a Southern identity,” but his “findings proved these assumptions wrong” (2). “Unbroken trans-regional
mobility and strong family and business connections outside the South show that life for Jews in the South was never static,” he argues, “but often temporary. This indicates their Southern identity was but one facet in their trans-regional—American—identity” (205).

While Hieke argues that Jews did not possess a fully Southern identity, he also believes that the broader Southern society did not view them as fully white Southerners either. He maintains that Jews “were seen as whites of a different shade but not as members of the core of southern society, which was Christian” (307). Instead, he calls them the “integrated outsider” (164) and suggests that “during Reconstruction, southern Jews were subjected to a welcoming philo-Semitism coupled with a non-public anti-Semitism, i.e., anti-Semitism that is present not only in the private sphere, but also in the undisclosed sphere of private, political and business correspondence”—a concept that he refers to as “covert anti-Semitism” (108). This “non-public, covert, anti-Semitism betrayed the image of southern acceptance and overall integration created by public philo-Semitism,” (307). Thus, like others before him, Hieke questions the notion that there was “a less pronounced anti-Semitism in the South as compared to other regions in America” (151).

Finally, Hieke demonstrates how “the Reconstruction period was a formative one for Jewish religious structures in Georgia and the Carolinas”—inclusive of cemeteries, synagogues, lodges, and Jewish education—that “manifested a permanent Jewish presence” despite the trans-regional mobility (206). While focusing on Reform synagogues in the region, Hieke is adamant that American Reform was not imported by German Jews but was instead a rural American phenomenon—it reached a first peak at the end of Reconstruction, he claims, “when the importance of the German ideas and immigrants had already waned” (305). But the argument of American Reform as an American phenomenon is not new. Moreover, while a focus on institutional life is important to show how Jews began to “settle down,” rather than creating new categories of analysis, Hieke fits the regional experience under study into extant secondary literature.

_Jewish Identity in the Reconstruction South_ presents a very detailed look at Georgia and the Carolinas and makes several particularly important historiographical contributions. Hieke, like others before him, problematizes the concept of a “German Jewish” wave of immigration
to the United States. Moreover, his concepts of trans-regional mobility and trans-regional identity within the United States are also particularly important. How applicable this detailed regional study is to other areas of the South remains to be seen. My guess, however, is that Hieke’s concepts of trans-regional mobility and identity will shape future historiography on the Reconstruction era of American Jewish history.

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Rabbi Richard G. Hirsch’s deeply felt recounting of the development of Reform Judaism in Israel will strike many in the movement, especially more senior members, as a powerful memoir of what it took to establish a massive paradigm shift in Reform attitudes regarding Israel and our place there. With Hirsch, the story is in more than capable hands. His achievements are legend, from serving as president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, to spearheading the Association of Reform Zionists of America (ARZA) and the Reform kibbutz movement. In 1992 he ran against Simcha Dinitz for chair of the World Zionist Organization and lost, if not narrowly, then at least acceptably. Hirsch supporters, including Rabbi Alexander Schindler, saw the election not as a loss but as a victory for the aspirations of liberal Judaism. It sent a message that Reform Judaism in Israel finally had a place at the table (254).

That was not always the case, as this book reminds us. One recalls with discomfort the cool, almost hostile, approach to Zionism of the Reform generation of the early and mid-twentieth century—that is, the remnants of Classical Reform. The American Council for Judaism and its sympathizers considered Judaism a faith community exclusively and themselves “Jewish-Americans,” not “American Jews.” They had influence, and they had the means to peddle that Jewish pathology widely. The angst that defined them, and along with them many Reform Jews who were more moderate, was a gnawing uneasiness at being
perceived as not sufficiently American and, along with it, the dreaded accusation of dual loyalties. One is reminded of the German Jewish crowd of mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century who resolved to be German above all other definitions. Is it any wonder that Herzl found so little sympathy in those areas of Western and Central Europe where the vision of Haskalah had morphed into the reality of full acculturation, even assimilation?

The founders of American Reform sprang from those very German roots, and the generation that followed them into the twentieth century, with notable exception, was nursed of the same mother’s milk of Jewish defensiveness. For every staunch Zionist—for every Stephen S. Wise and Abba Hillel Silver—there were a dozen Leo Baecks, Hugo Bergmans and Nelson Gluecks who were not at all excited about the moledet (homeland). In the late 1960s Hirsch was quoted as saying, “Although Reform rabbis changed their [anti-Zionist] stance in 1937 [with the Columbus Platform] and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations adopted a pro-Zionist position, the Reform movement has yet to embrace the full consequences resulting from the establishment of the State of Israel” (xxi). How true. The old guard was mostly at arm’s length when it came to Israel.

When a new generation came along in the midsixties, at the time of the Six Day War, the Reform-Zionist world was shifting measurably. Still, the lingering message to young Reform rabbis in congregations was clear: What really matters to our people are the values of “prophetic Judaism,” not Jewish peoplehood and certainly not narrow Jewish nationalism. Of course, in due time we came to understand that there need not be a distinction. Some of us found exactly the support we had been searching for in the voice of Dick Hirsch. When he spoke at Central Conference of American Rabbis conventions and Union for Reform Judaism biennials in that very decade it was eye opening—and comforting, too. In his passionate Zionist messages many of us discovered our own muted voices and recognized them as authentic expressions of Reform. It was clear that “Israel had become the center stage for the enactment of the Jewish drama” (xxiv), and in that realization came a new Reform-Zionist empowerment, and along with it a bold generation of Reform leaders—mostly younger—who refused to be left in the dust.
And, yet, it cuts both ways. The question is not only who we are but also what Israel is and must be. As Hirsch writes, “The Jewish state needs a synthesis of Zionism and Judaism” (20). That means liberal Judaism as well as Orthodoxy. But what a tall order that is in a religio-political universe where liberal Judaism has been disqualified by the power of coalition politics and the chief rabbinate. Hirsch discusses the question of officiation at marriages. Non-Orthodox rabbis have had no standing, and many Israelis have flown to Cyprus for secular marriage documentation. The same goes for conversion, as well as immigration under Orthodox interpretation of “The Law of Return,” which leads to the gnawing question, “Who is a Jew?” How ironic that the enlightened thirteenth-century rabbinic authority of Barcelona, Solomon ibn Adret, defined Jewish status with a great deal more leniency than do members of the twenty-first-century Orthodox rabbinate when he offered his famous responsum: “No one has the right to say to a Jew: prove that you are a Jew.” It is painful to recall the ignominious and insulting rabbinical ruling that Ethiopian \textit{olim} of Operations Moses and Solomon would be required to immerse in the Sea of Galilee—a makeshift \textit{mikveh}—to fulfill the halakhic requirements of \textit{giyyur} (conversion), when their ancestors were probably closer genetically to First Temple Jews than were the very Ashkenazi rabbis who sat in judgment.

Hirsch says: “Contrary to the image projected in the Knesset and in the media, this is not only a struggle for vested interests to win rights for Reform and Conservative rabbis. It is above all a struggle to create an open, inclusive democratic society [and] to welcome all who wish to participate in the upbuilding of the Jewish state (95). Some readers may hear echoes of the charismatic young Hirsch in these words: “No geographical boundaries or theological barriers can divide the Jewish people and Jewish destiny” (46). What a warrior for liberal rights and for human rights in Israel he has been.

The first section of the book is mainly subdivided into introductory themes, perhaps the most important being, “Why Reform Zionism is Different.” He answers: Because it is “a vibrant, dynamic movement of progressive Judaism” (12). He does not by any means rule out the Masorti movement and has encouraged and worked closely with Conservative rabbis in Israel, especially Levi Kelman, who founded the very successful Kol HaNeshama Congregation in Jerusalem. Reform and Conservative...
movements in Israel stand shoulder to shoulder in juxtaposition to monolithic and often tyrannical Orthodoxy.

On the subject of the ever-controversial West Bank settlements, Hirsch is unequivocal when he asks: “Do Diaspora Jews have a right to participate in this debate?” He submits that we not only have a right but “an obligation” (58) if Israel is to remain Jewish and democratic. “If Israel does not relinquish the bulk of the West Bank … in favor of a Palestinian state, it will be forced to incorporate millions of Arabs into Israeli society… [and] the Jewish character of the Jewish state will be undermined and could eventually disappear” (59). He addresses the unacceptable possibility of maintaining the status quo indefinitely: “If there is no Palestinian state and the Arabs [on the West Bank] are not given full rights as citizens then Israel will not be a democracy” (63). Both conclusions are self-evident.

Hirsch calls the book’s final part, “Getting Things Done.” Richard Hirsch has certainly done exactly that and, one might easily argue, to an extent far and above any other leader of liberal Judaism.

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History, we know, is written by the winners, and in this way, women are no better than men. The mainstream histories and common understanding of three major movements for change in early-twentieth-century American life—suffrage, birth control, and peace—have been shaped by a largely Christian point of view. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Alice Paul dominate accounts of the long fight for women’s suffrage. Margaret Sanger is nearly synonymous with birth control. Peace is a bit more complicated; within the span of years covered in this book, Jane Adams and Carrie Chapman Catt overwhelm accounts of an international antiwar movement, but as the cancer of Nazism rises in Europe, Jews of both genders become prominent.

Klapper writes to restore Jewish women to their rightful place in these histories as well as to insert women’s activism—from “respectable”
organizations such as the National Council of Jewish Women to renegade leftists and communists—into the panorama of American Jewish life. This is a huge undertaking, requiring industrious use of voluminous American, Hebrew, and Yiddish sources—institutional histories, private letters, and periodicals and newspapers of all positions and constituencies. She pays less attention, surprisingly, to artists and writers—such as Muriel Rukeyser, whose work was powerfully “activist” in many ways—but the act of breaking new ground, as this book does, always points to more to be done.

So, too, do the intriguing footnotes in this book. Far beyond identifying sources, Klapper’s notes encompass huge swaths of recent feminist scholarship on the issues under discussion and act as hints to what else might be uncovered, what other questions might be asked.

So think of Klapper as a cartographer, surveying the lay of the land, marking the parameters, stamping in the names of people and organizations, sketching in the roads and bridges of a most complicated country. The suffrage movement, in her hands, highlights Pauline Newman, Rebekah Kohut, and Maud Nathan, as well as the lesser-known Amy Schwartz Oppenheim, Anita Pollitzer, and Caroline Katzenstein. The section on birth control reminds readers of Emma Goldman and adds Jewish women as consumers and supporters of family planning. When it comes to peace, Klapper does a superb job of tracking women whose lifelong opposition to war is shaken to the core by Hitler.

How difficult it is to disentangle the strands of complexity here. The people in these movements range from socialites to socialists (rarely, though sometimes, one and the same), workers, and housewives. Some belong to organized groups such as the National Council of Jewish Women; others do not. Some, like Maud Nathan, assert Jewish beliefs as the core of their embrace of social justice; others, such as Lillian Wald, do not. Some were observant; others, not. Women worked in several movements at the same time or changed affiliations or shifted focus. So-called “leaders” with antisemitic leanings—Stanton and Paul, especially—still had close Jewish allies. And around it all, the frame of the story, is American life and the evolving issues of assimilation, power, community, and sisterhood.

To her credit, Klapper deftly lays out the complexities and resists the temptation to generalize or simplify. Although it is difficult at times to
make your way through pages dense with acronyms (NCJW, WILPF, NWP, NCPW), frustrating at times to skim details of lives that likely deserve entire biographies, and maddening at times to endure the placid even-handedness that is still the mark of a scholarly voice, no matter. This book is an opening, a gift, an invitation, and anyone who writes on these subjects after her owes the author a massive debt of gratitude for the map she has drawn.

Louise Bernikow was a 2012–2013 Loewenstein-Wiener Fellow at the American Jewish Archives. She is the author of nine books and a popular speaker on activist women’s history. Her new book is about the fight for the vote in New York City.


The conventional belief that Americans have long had the right of “free speech”—that is, the liberty to express themselves wherever, whenever, and about whatever—is a myth. Until 1925, the U.S. Supreme Court held that the Constitution forbade federal regulation of First Amendment liberties but permitted local and state governments to police the so-called “five freedoms.” This is in part why, for most of the country’s history, the range of what Americans could publicly express was quite narrow. Only over the course of the twentieth century, as a result of the work of First Amendment activists and lawyers, did courts gradually curb governmental regulation of speech, ultimately broadening Americans’ legal capacity to express themselves. Despite the hardships and labor involved in transforming Americans’ speech rights—a past in which publishing works such as Lady Chatterley’s Lover and Ulysses landed one in jail—this effort has been largely forgotten and, thanks to the rise of the Internet and the flood of speech that followed, is all but inconceivable.

In Unclean Lips: Obscenity, Jews, and American Culture, cultural historian and literary scholar Josh Lambert highlights one essential transformation within broader changes to Americans’ speech rights: He focuses on obscenity—that is, expressions about sex that were identified as exceeding the boundaries of good taste, respectability, and law. As Lambert illustrates, throughout the twentieth century, Jewish writers, publishers, and lawyers created, distributed, and legally represented
literary publications that the police, judges, legislators, and anti-vice societies identified as depraved, immoral, and oftentimes illegal. Analyzing “obscene” novels and plays, Lambert argues that Jews and Jewishness were central to changes in how Americans identified and understood what constituted acceptable speech. In the context of the relationship between Jews and obscenity, Lambert defines four aspects of “Jewishness”: (1) sensitivity to antisemitism expressed by the championing of sexual liberation and, in some cases, sexual deviance; (2) particular economic responses to social marginalization; (3) illustrations of anxiety concerning Jewish biological and cultural reproduction; and (4) preoccupations with notions of modesty as a method of self-policing.

This book’s four chapters illuminate connections among Jewish writers and publishers, literary works, and definitions of obscenity as legal and cultural standards. Thematically organized, each chapter focuses on one component of Lambert’s aforementioned definition of “Jewishness” and spans chronologically from the late nineteenth century through the 1960s. Chapter one examines plays and novels between the late nineteenth century and the postwar period. It shows how Jewish writers hopefully if naively linked sexual liberation with the decline of antisemitism. Chapter two shows how Jewish writers and publishers produced works that they believed would earn them literary prestige and thereby mitigate their social marginalization. The third chapter explores Jewish anxieties about biological and cultural reproduction in novels of the 1960s and 1970s. Finally, the fourth chapter links the works of early-twentieth-century Yiddish writers with those of late-twentieth-century modernists by showing both groups’ conceptual use of modesty and practice of self-censorship when discussing sex.

This book is well organized, especially given the amount of material analyzed. As he aimed to do, Lambert gives readers an analytical device that they can apply to other twentieth-century American Jewish cultural works. For example, this writer recently saw a production of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Oklahoma! (1943) and wondered if the song “I Cain’t Say No,” sung by a young, coquettish woman disclosing her inability to deny herself the pleasure of men’s company, conforms to Lambert’s proposition that Jewish writers’ advocacy of sexual liberation was a method of combatting antisemitism. “I’m just a fool when the lights are low; I cain’t be a prissy an’ quaint,” the character Ado Annie
coos, singing about her illicit romance with Ali Hakim, a peddler and clear outsider to the show’s setting, pre-state Oklahoma.

This is a well-written, at times playful, book and is accessible for readers who are familiar with some but not all of the discussed texts. Lambert evidently enjoyed reading, thinking, and writing about his source material. His examination of the function of birth control in Saul Bellow’s *The Adventures of Augie March* and Philip Roth’s *Letting Go* is among the book’s most thought-provoking passages. Discussing *Letting Go*, Lambert shows how Roth’s narrative—which involves the marriage of a Jewish man to a Catholic woman, her subsequent conversion to Judaism, their decision to terminate a pregnancy, and, finally, their adoption of a child—reflected communal concerns about reproduction, intermarriage, and racial and cultural continuity.

Lambert’s book constitutes the first effort to understand how Jews were instrumental in the evolution of the legal standard of obscenity and his work reveals profitable future research about Jews and the broadening of First Amendment rights, a literature that is otherwise nonexistent. The lack of scholarly work on this topic is unfortunate because, had Lambert had access to as much, he could have more definitively answered the question that he repeatedly raises and then shies away from—that is, did Jews relate differently to obscenity than non-Jews? Lambert parries at times, but his evidence shows that Jews did have different relationships with obscenity than non-Jews, just as they had different relationships with other speech standards compared with non-Jews. As Lambert notes, this was not because of a uniquely Jewish characteristic but rather because non-Jews identified Jews as such when they spoke. Relatedly, whether identifying Jews’ speech as obscene, libelous, or seditious, some non-Jews—mostly elite, white, Protestants—disliked what some Jews had to say and often tried to silence them by way of prosecution. This is why and how Jewish writers, publishers, lawyers, activists, and others found themselves at the center of legal proceedings about free expression and ultimately became linchpins in the broadening of First Amendment rights. The absence of the broader legal context of speech rights transformation in Lambert’s book obscures Jewish difference and the role of Jews in the expansion of First Amendment liberties generally. But this is a minor criticism of an intriguing work. Ultimately, *Unclean Lips* is a thoroughly researched and thoughtful volume.
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The 82nd Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment, a German regiment that fought for the Union during the Civil War, is remembered by American Jewish historians for its Company C, one of two Jewish companies to battle on the Union’s behalf. Chicago’s German Jews organized Company C, paid handsome bounties to those mustered into its ranks, and held at least three public meetings to display their patriotism before the larger community.

Yankee Dutchmen Under Fire offers a wealth of new information concerning Company C and the larger German regiment of which it was a part. The information is based on sixty-one German-language letters—twenty-six of them private correspondence, mostly addressed to the regiment’s founder, Friedrich Hecker; and thirty-five public letters published in German-language newspapers such as the Illinois Staats-Zeitung. The letters are ably translated into English, introduced, and annotated.

American Jewish historians can learn much from these letters. First, they provide valuable new information concerning the Civil War exploits of the 82nd Illinois, including the part it played in the battles of Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Atlanta, and the march to the sea. Second, the letters reveal more than we have known before concerning Edward S. Salomon, commander of Company C and a hero of Gettysburg—but, as we learn, far from universally beloved and trusted by his men. Following the war, Salomon was one of few Jews brevetted as a brigadier general. Third, the letters add to our understanding of Jewish women’s roles during the Civil War. Chicago’s Jewish women, we learn, provided the 82nd Regiment with its flag (“in the name of the Israelite ladies” [26]) and also dispatched a committee (led by men) to report on conditions at Camp Butler, where the troops trained.

Most important of all, these letters shed light on the complex relationship between non-Jewish German immigrants and their German-Jewish neighbors. The public letters overflow with respect: “our fellow
Israelite citizens are totally imbued with the noble human and freedom loving spirit” (24). By contrast, some of the private letters drip with venomous comments concerning “the creole of Jerusalem” (Salomon), the “sly” character of “these people,” and the “synagogue” (113, 148, 154). The Germans of the 82nd Regiment, of course, were not necessarily representative of all German immigrants, nor were the letter-writers among them necessarily representative of the regiment as a whole. It is nevertheless fascinating to see both sides of the historiographical debate concerning the relationship between German-Jewish immigrants and the larger German immigrant community—those who think that the relationship was good and those who think that the relationship was bad—reflected in this slim volume.

Yankee Dutchmen Under Fire is primarily aimed at students of German-American history. The letters it makes available contribute significantly to our understanding of the wartime experience of the 200,000 German-born Americans who fought in the Union’s ranks. At the same time, the volume also serves as yet another reminder that foreign-language primary sources have been insufficiently explored by students of American and American Jewish life. Many still await discovery.

Jonathan D. Sarna is the Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University, chief historian of the National Museum of American Jewish History, and co-chair of the Academic Advisory and Editorial Board of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. His three Civil War–related books are When General Grant Expelled the Jews, Jews and the Civil War (with Adam Mendelsohn), and Lincoln and the Jews: A History (with Benjamin Shapell).


Anthologies on Canadian Jewry have appeared regularly since 1981 as a means for Canadian Jewish studies scholars to elucidate the extent and depth of Canadian Jewry: The Canadian Jewish Mosaic (1981), The Jews in Canada (1993), and in 2004 The Canadian Jewish Reader. Canada’s Jews is a timely addition to the roster. The twenty-six essays attesting to Canadian Jewish life range from Ira Robinson’s three-page overview of the Atlantic Jewish community to Richard Menkis’
thirty-five-page essay on the state of Conservative Judaism in Canada. There is “inevitable overlap”; however, since “each writer gives a different shape to the materials at hand” (10), the overlap, where it occurs, adds to rather than detracts from the discussion.

Excepting the article on Reform Judaism, the essays were written specifically for this volume. *Canada's Jews* is divided into three sections: section one, “In Time: Canadian Jews and Their History”; section two, “In Space: Jews in Contemporary Canada”; and section three, “In Spirit: The Religious and Cultural Expressions of Canadian Jews.”

Section one, “In Time,” is the shortest section: seven essays and 106 pages. It opens with Pierre Anctil’s brief overview of New France and its famed stowaway, Esther Brandeau, and ends with Frank Bialystok’s depiction of almost seventy years of Canadian Jewish history (the end of World War II to 2011). Between these two, Maxine Jacobson and Steven Lapidus describe Canadian Jewish life prior to 1881: an “idyllic time” when Jews then living and working in Montreal, Toronto, and Victoria really were “just like everyone else.” The essay on Jewish farming communities by Howard Gontovnick demonstrates how farming became one response to “counter the image of the ‘unproductive Jew’” (41, 49–50) as the Jewish establishment and the Canadian government encouraged immigrants to avoid the cities and work the land. Ruth Frager illustrates the extensive difficulties faced by the East European Jewish immigrant to Montreal and Toronto and how these became the catalyst for the development of *landsmanshaftn* and unions. The historic role of Canadian Jewish Congress and its efforts to create a national voice for Canadian Jewry is outlined in Jack Lipinsky’s instructive essay.

Section two, “In Space,” contains ten essays covering 154 pages. Randal Schnoor’s overview of Canadian Jewry’s demography and Harold Waller’s essay demystifying the organizational structure of the Jewish community opens this section. The remaining eight essays cover the variants of Jewish life from the Eastern Seaboard to the Pacific Coast. Ira Robinson presents too brief summaries of Atlantic Canada and Winnipeg, the city once called “The Jerusalem of North America.” Morton Weinfeld’s interesting juxtaposition of the historic language and cultural barriers between Ashkenazi Montreal Jewry and French Quebec, with data indicating that Montreal Jewry has the highest level of religious observance in North America, raises more questions.
than it answers. Yolanda Cohen’s essay on the blossoming Sephardic communities in Montreal notes how their shared French language has created other challenges for the maintenance of their Sephardic heritage. The current state of Toronto Jewry is outlined by Michael Brown, and Ellen Scheinberg’s descriptive commentary is a reminder that Jewish communal life was once vibrant and fulfilling in the small towns north, west, and east of Toronto. Debby Schocter provides a concise history of Jewish communal development (ca. 1880–2000) in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and the North; and Cyril Leonoff and Cynthia Ramsey showcase the nation’s third largest Jewish community, Vancouver.

Section three, “In Spirit” contains eight essays comprising 172 pages. The first two essays provide a glimpse into Canada’s Orthodox Jewish communities: Ira Robinson on Modern Orthodoxy and William Shaffir on Toronto’s and Montreal’s Hasidic communities. The next two essays are by Richard Menkis—the first on Reform Judaism: its history and the adaptation, by American Reform rabbis, to the Canadian Jewish milieu; the second, an intriguing assessment of the status of Conservative Judaism in Canada. The following four essays provide detailed treatments on the culture of Canadian Jewry. Rebecca Margolis articulates the transformation of Yiddish from the “lingua franca of ... an estimated eleven million speakers” to its current status as one “symbolic” expression of Jewish identity (344). Alex Hart’s extensive overview of the Canadian Jewish literary scene introduces English-language novels and poetry from the nineteenth century to 2011. Chantal Ringuet presents the “complex images of Jews and Jewishness” (416) as they appear in French Canadian literature. Loren Lerner and Suzanne Rackover’s essay celebrates more than one hundred years of Canadian Jewish artists and their works, from “vibrant expressionist paintings,” (425) to lithographs, to multimedia creations.

David Koffman has the last word with his closing essay, reviewing the “recent work among scholars of the Canadian Jewish experience” and revealing the many gaps in support (i.e., the lack of interest in “Canadian Jewish studies among Canadian Jews”) (465), and knowledge (i.e., the lack of support for cultural and comparative studies). The book itself falls short in several areas: volunteerism—key to the maintenance of Canadian Jewish communities—was not covered, nor was space made for an update on the status of Canadian Jewish women (the last “in-depth” article being Michael Brown’s, in 2005).
It is refreshing to note that archivists, freelance researchers, and academics outside the established Canadian Jewry fold were contributors to this volume, alongside those scholars well known to readers of Canadian Jewish studies. There seemed to be an intent not to weigh the reader down with footnotes; the section “For Further Study” presented after most of the chapters is an excellent way to invite the reader to step further into the topic. Canada’s Jews has the potential to be a “go-to” resource for Canadian Jewish studies, to be used as a textbook and reference book. It is up to those in the field to promote and encourage its use.

Susan Landau-Chark, PhD., provost of the Metivta of Ottawa, is an educator and independent researcher and writer. Her most recent article is “Canada,” which appeared in The Jewish Emigrant from Britain 1700–2000: Essays in Memory of Lloyd P. Gartner. Her current project is unearthing the presence of Jewish smugglers during the War of 1812.


Mordecai Kaplan may well have been the most important Jewish religious thinker and practitioner of the twentieth century. The opening sections of his first major book, Judaism as a Civilization, reflect his genius and indicate that he understood and was unparalleled in his ability to articulate the challenges that the modern world presented to Judaism. The remainder of that work and his myriad other writings and actions demonstrate that no one was more creatively or tirelessly devoted than he to reconstructing Judaism so that it could meet the trials of the contemporary world. As a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) for half a century, as a pulpit rabbi in both Orthodox and liberal synagogues, as a writer in numerous popular and academic journals, as a scholar of Jewish thought and Midrash, as the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, as editor of the Reconstructionist Journal, as the author of Jewish liturgy, and as a lecturer throughout North America and Israel, his influence on Jewish thought and institutions was immense. His energy was boundless and his broad intellect allowed him to draw on countless sources as the inspiration for his thought and programs. There is scarcely an organization or movement in Jewish life that he did not influence.

Reviews
For decades no one has presented the work of Kaplan more comprehensively or insightfully than Mel Scult. His publication of the Kaplan journals combined with his own expertise in modern philosophy, sociology, and religious thought—as well as his vast knowledge of rabbinic literature and modern Jewish thought and history—have made Scult the premier commentator upon the meaning and significance of the Kaplan corpus. Each of his many previous publications has added to our knowledge of Kaplan. Indeed, so prolific has Scult been in his work on Kaplan that when I first opened *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan* I wondered if there was anything more Scult might have to teach me on Kaplan and his importance. Suffice it to say, he has. Indeed, this book is the work of a mature scholar. It displays the erudition Scult has acquired over a lifetime of research on Kaplan and is unparalleled in its clarity as well as in the breadth and depth of its treatment of Kaplan—his writings, his achievements, and his meaning for Judaism and the Jewish people today and in the future.

Scult begins his study by citing the infamous excommunication the Orthodox Agudas HaRabonim pronounced upon the Kaplan prayer book in 1945 and compares and contrasts his Jewish background and rational orientation with the life and thought of another famed excommunicant of the Jewish community: Baruch Spinoza. From there, Scult takes the reader on an intellectually compelling journey that recounts how Ralph Waldo Emerson, Ahad Ha-Am, Matthew Arnold, William James, and John Dewey all served as seminal intellectual influences upon Kaplan. In chapters that deal with the impact these thinkers had upon Kaplan, one is amazed at his extraordinary ability to synthesize all these diverse persons with the sources of Jewish history and literature so as to create and conceptualize a program for Reconstructionist Judaism in our day.

In explicating these myriad influences upon Kaplan, Scult correctly underscores that Kaplan always envisioned the Jewish people as residing at the heart of Judaism. Kaplan created what he himself termed a “Copernican Revolution in Jewish thought,” for the tenets of modern knowledge meant that a supernatural understanding of Judaism, where a personal God was placed at the center of Jewish faith, was for him no longer a viable position. While many rabbis and laypeople were uncomfortable with these Kaplanian formulations of Jewish faith, Kaplan refused to abandon his emphasis upon the centrality of peoplehood and community—not
a personal God—in his conceptualization of Judaism and Jewish life, and Scult skillfully recounts this trope in his thought in the chapter on “Kaplan and Peoplehood: Judaism as a Civilization and Zionism.”

What is particularly original and insightful about the account that Scult presents is his brilliant and somewhat unexpected portrayal of Kaplan as a religious thinker. In chapters devoted to the Kaplanian view of God; to the topics of theology, salvation, and evil in Kaplanian thought; to the relationship between Kaplan and his JTS colleague Abraham Joshua Heschel; and to his treatment of classical Jewish notions of mitzvot, halakhah, and ethics, Scult demonstrates that the religious views of Kaplan are much more complex and multilayered than one might normally suppose. While Scult acknowledges that Kaplan was a religious naturalist who approached religion with a rationalist bent, he also argues that Kaplan was above all a rabbi—not a systematic philosopher. As a result, his treatment of all the topics mentioned above was not that of a systematic thinker, and the reverence Kaplan had for the traditions in which he was raised allowed him to display frequently profound religious sensibilities and an openness to transcendence that one does not normally associate with him.

*The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan* is a work that will richly reward its readers, scholars and laypersons alike. One will come to understand why Kaplan had such a profound influence upon virtually all sectors of American Judaism during his lifetime and will appreciate why his radicalism and passion remain so relevant to liberal Judaism today. We are indebted to Scult for this comprehensive and weighty book and for the indispensable guidance it offers those who seek to construct Jewish life and thought now and in the future.

*David Ellenson is chancellor of Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion. His most recent book is* [Jewish Meaning in a World of Choice](#).


Studies of Jewish influence on American culture have tended to fall into two camps: (1) those that focus on contributions of specific Jews from the era in question and (2) those that analyze the impact of Jewish texts
and ideas upon American intellectual and political history. Eran Shalev’s *American Zion* breaks from the recent trend of focusing on specific Jews and instead provides an important contribution to this latter camp. In *American Zion*, Shalev argues that between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, a “biblical world of Hebraic political imagination” flourished and then withered away. Tropes, images, and narratives from the Hebrew Bible alleviated anxieties about the limits of human authority and legitimized American federalism and republicanism. Moreover, despite the ultimate decline of Hebraism, the legacy of the United States as a chosen nation of Israelites still lingers today. In making these claims for Hebraism, Shalev seeks to transform our understanding of early American political culture. As such, his work is an important addition to the field of American history and politics.

In the first section of *American Zion*, Shalev demonstrates the various ways that early Americans used the history of the Israelite nation to justify their own republicanism and federalism. Shalev is a master of early American political rhetoric. His previous book, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic*, shows the importance of the classical legacy for early American thought. In the first chapter of *American Zion*, Shalev builds off this base and notices how early Americans adapted and reworked the fundamentals of classical thought through “Old Testament” narratives and figures. Crucially, Shalev believes that biblical republicanism can help explain the apparent mismatch between the anti-authoritarian aspects of American culture and the restrictive nature of classical republicanism. Rather than solely focusing on early American uses of Exodus, Shalev expands his scope to explore how early Americans used Ahasuerus, Gideon, and the curse of Meroz to understand liberty and republicanism. In the second chapter, he explores how early American politicians, clergy, and intellectuals used the “Mosaic constitution” as a template for federalism. Shalev notes the particular utility of the pre-Monarchical “republican” phase of Jewish history for justifying and understanding American politics. The Bible was not as much a blueprint as a tool that the leaders of the American Revolution used to rationalize and legitimize their politics.

In the second section of his book, Shalev demonstrates how early Americans relied on the “distinct language, narrative forms, and
history” of the Hebrew Bible to “formulate a biblical past for America and sanctify their present” (13). As Shalev explains in chapter three, early Americans most commonly accessed the “distinctive language” of the Hebrew Bible via the King James translation, and numerous early American accounts and histories employed a pseudobiblical style to sanctify their stories. Although eventually this baroque style gave way to a more inclusive, democratic discourse, the most famous and enduring legacy of the pseudobiblical style is the Book of Mormon. In chapter four Shalev turns his attention from style to narrative and focuses on the trope of the lost tribes in nineteenth-century American nationalism. Here his argument takes a more religious turn, since, he explains, the “dividends of connecting biblical Israel and America through a unified historical narrative, one in which ancient Israelites migrated [to] and inhabited what would become the United States, were of potentially millenarian magnitude” (150).

In the concluding chapters, Shalev explains why political Hebraism withered by the middle of the nineteenth century. Earlier, he suggested that the midcentury need for a more democratic idiom contributed to the demise of Hebraism; and in chapter five, he explores the paradox of why the golden age of Hebraism coincided not with an increased secularization in American life but rather with a religious revival. Shalev notes that this revival was more New Testament centered than either the initial Puritan migration or the First Great Awakening. This new focus on Jesus, Shalev argues, reflected a desire to employ a biblical language that was more amenable to democracy and political empowerment. Slavery was also key to the shift. While the story of the Exodus from Egypt remained powerful, the narrative began to be co-opted for discussions of American slavery rather than reserved for nationalism. As such, the Exodus narrative became more resonant for a “Black Zion” than an American one.

Most previous studies of Hebraism have not surprisingly focused on the impact of the Hebrew Bible on early American religious thought—for example, Lisa Gordis’s masterful Opening Scripture: Bible Reading and Interpretive Authority in Puritan New England and Sacvan Bercovitch’s groundbreaking The American Jeremiad and Puritan Origins of the American Self. Shalev’s analysis of the importance of biblical Hebraism for American political thought represents a new focus and fills an
important gap in the scholarship. Equally compelling, his interest in the intersection of Hebraism and classicism helps explain how politicians were able to make these crucial discourses speak to one another.

Despite these numerous strengths, *American Zion* feels a bit backward glancing in its methods. Although it has become popular to be suspicious of the narrative of American exceptionalism (something Shalev himself recognizes on page 228), Shalev at times falls back into the search for what is “distinctly” or “truly” American (2, 95, 117). Similarly, whereas many scholars in American studies have aggressively sought in recent years to denaturalize the identification of “America” with the United States, Shalev’s analysis tends to reinforce these boundaries and generally avoids transnationalist arguments. However, perhaps Shalev is merely ahead of the pack, and his neonationalism reflects a new turn in the scholarship rather than a regression. All said, *American Zion* is an important scholarly work that provides a major contribution to understanding the impact of Jewish thought on American political and intellectual history. The book should have great appeal to those intrigued by the American Revolution, American politics, or the impact of Jewish thought on American life.

Laura Arnold Leibman is professor of English and humanities at Reed College. Her most recent book is *Messianism, Secrecy, and Mysticism: A New Interpretation of Early American Jewish Life*.


The subject of this book is Louis Marshall (1856–1929), the lawyer and Jewish leader who dominated the politics of immigration, civil rights, and Jewish American identity during the first third of the twentieth century. Marshall was the most preeminent secular Jew of his day and also his generation’s foremost Supreme Court advocate. Either of those accomplishments would justify a full-length biography; together, they mark him as a historically significant figure who has strangely been relegated to the sidelines in most historical accounts.

M.M. Silver aspires to correct that omission. He comprehensively documents Marshall’s career, reconstructing not only famous incidents but also less well-known events. For decades, scholars have had only two sources upon which to rely: Oscar Handlin’s substantial introduction

The task of chronicling Marshall is a daunting one. His papers at the American Jewish Archives are voluminous and not easy to use. Silver is to be commended for performing the labor necessary to write this book. He follows Marshall’s path from boyhood in Syracuse to nationally prominent lawyer in New York City. Marshall was both lawyer and activist; as Silver concedes, many of Marshall’s accomplishments took place in courts, legislatures, and constitutional conventions. Yet Silver argues that Marshall’s career should be understood in terms of its contribution to the development of “a discernible form of American Jewish ethnicity” (xiii), rather than his impact on the course of American law.

This is an unnecessary dilemma. Just as Marshall consistently believed that American Jews could be both Jewish and fully American, Marshall himself was both lawyer and Jew. To sublimate the professional identity Marshall derived from being a lawyer to a focus on ethnic identity limits the relevance of this biography for legal historians. Marshall represented a current of American constitutional development that the New Deal repudiated. His beliefs in the rights of corporations, the privileges of property, and the assumptions of the era of substantive due process sat at odds with his belief in equal citizenship, his opposition to restrictions on immigration, and his service as counsel to the NAACP. A reconciliation of the two sides of Marshall’s legal thought will not be found here.

The book must instead be appraised for what it contributes to American Jewish history. Marshall left an imprint on nearly every controversy involving the status of American Jews between 1890 and 1929. Silver recounts the signal events in Marshall’s life: joining New York City’s oldest and most distinguished law firm; organizing the American Jewish Committee and his term as its president (1912–1929); brokering various disputes in New York City (the Rabbi Joseph funeral riot, the cloakmakers’ strike of 1910); securing the abrogation of the 1832 treaty with Russia; negotiating the minority rights treaty after World War I; working to help Jews around the world; addressing tensions in Palestine after the Balfour Declaration; and others.
Marshall’s admirers will find much here that reinforces what they already believe. Marshall’s successes are “spectacular,” his failures few and inconsequential. Yet it is precisely because Silver’s account is so comprehensive that one expects more than the lionizing treatments of Handlin and Rosenstock. Yet, like them, Silver cannot detach himself from Marshall’s heroic persona. The creation of the AJC is a triumph of Marshall’s organizational impulses, and contemporary and historical critiques of the AJC are elided (108). Marshall “never really encountered a situation in which legislative or trial processes tailored to his own professional background unequivocally failed” (271). Marshall is somehow able to take control of the renegade movement that produced the rival American Jewish Congress, even though its very existence was a repudiation of him and the AJC (300).

This adoring interpretation will disappoint anyone looking for a balanced, multidimensional portrait. Silver writes of Marshall’s actions during World War I: “It is difficult in some of these instances to sort out whether his or his adversaries’ positions were better vindicated by subsequent events on the Continent and in North America” (249). It is the biographer’s task to do the hard work of sorting and analyzing that enables historical judgment. Silver eagerly takes up this task when Marshall has succeeded and defers it when the results are less complimentary. The Leo Frank case is one example. When Frank, a factory manager, was convicted of rape and murder in Atlanta, Marshall counseled against public protests. Marshall’s insistence on this approach “created a vacuum” where there should have been leadership (257). That is as direct a criticism of Marshall’s leadership style as Silver can countenance.

When Silver discusses the Henry Ford matter, he insulates Marshall from the consequences of his own actions. Silver lauds Marshall for “sentencing America’s ugliest ever eruption of antisemitism to oblivion” (398) (a dubious claim), but the essential context goes unmentioned. Samuel Untermyer, who remained “of counsel” to the firm of Guggenheimer, Untermyer and Marshall, represented a client who was also suing Ford for libel. Marshall ignored his ethical duty to his firm’s client, but he accepted half of the fee Ford paid Untermyer to settle Bernstein’s suit. Since the correspondence that documents a furious argument between the two lawyers over this issue is also housed at the American Jewish Archives, it is curious that Silver chooses not to
acknowledge it. Had he done so, his understanding of Marshall would have greater depth and nuance.

Indeed, an unvarnished portrait, warts and all, should be the biographer’s goal. Silver’s conception of American Jewish identity is deeply bound up in Marshall. He situates Marshall as the heroic protagonist of American Jewish history, but that deprives readers of a realistic appraisal based on evidence that reveals Marshall from all angles. It does Marshall no favor to render him so one-sidedly. Marshall did not always act admirably. He favored the rights of the wealthy and the social elite. He dismissed people he thought wasted his time with petty quarrels, and he shamed people publicly when they crossed him. His failures were just as spectacular as his accomplishments. To improve on Handlin and Rosenstock, a Marshall biography must embrace that reality.

Victoria Saker Woeste, a historian and legal scholar, is Research Professor at the American Bar Foundation in Chicago. Her areas of interest include constitutional law, political economy, and the civil rights movement. She is the author of Henry Ford’s War on Jews and the Legal Battle Against Hate Speech (2012).
On August 26-30, 2015 the AJA will be leading a group to learn about the history of the Jewish community of New Orleans, LA. Participants will have the opportunity to interact with leading scholars in American Jewish history and tour area sites and landmarks first hand.

- Visit historic synagogues including Touro Synagogue and Temple Sinai and discover their own unique stories.
- Explore the New Orleans sights and sounds including the French Quarter, the Garden District, Long Vue House and Gardens, & the World War II Museum.
- Interact with participants and featured scholars as well as special guest speakers on topics such as the origins of Jazz and Jewish women in New Orleans.

Featured Scholars:

Dr. Stuart Rockoff, Executive Director of the Mississippi Humanities Council and a scholar of Southern Jewish History.

Dr. Michael Cohen, Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies at Tulane University, where he holds Mellon and Sizeler Professorships.

Dr. Gary P. Zola, Executive Director of The American Jewish Archives and The Edward M. Ackerman Family Distinguished Professor of the American Jewish Experience & Reform Judaism at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

For more information, please contact Lisa Frankel, Director of Programs for the AJA, by e-mail: lfrankel@huc.edu, phone: 513-487-3218 or visit our website: AmericanJewishArchives.org.

Reserve your place on the trip!
2013 Select Acquisitions

Agudath Achim Synagogue (Huntingdon, PA)
Received from Holly Molo, State College, PA

American Conference of Cantors
Sixtieth anniversary commemorative journal, 2013.
Received from the American Conference of Cantors, Chicago, IL

Anshe Chesed Congregation (Vicksburg, MS)
Video recording of Kol Nidre service, September 2012.
Received from Iuliu Herscovici, Vicksburg, MS

Bardin, Shlomo
Papers of Shlomo Bardin and Ruth Jonas Bardin, together with files on the Jonas family. Included is a 1919 handwritten certificate of Shlomo Bardin's active membership in the Zhitomir section of the DROR Zionist organization; a copy of a 1928 English translation made in Palestine of a copy of records of his birth in Zhitomir in 1898; and a transcription of a letter from Louis Brandeis to Bardin, 20 October 1939.
Received from David Bardin, Washington, DC

Berman, Howard
Personal papers from Berman's youth and student days, up through his career in the rabbinate at congregations in the United States and Europe, including Sinai Congregation in Chicago.
Received from Howard Berman, Boston, MA

Bet Shalom Congregation (Minnetonka, MN)
Received from Norman Cohen, Minnetonka, MN

Acquisitions
Cohen, Paul S.
Additional papers for the Paul S. Cohen Genealogy Collection.
Received from Stephen Cohen, Hightstown, NJ, and Mara Cohen Ioannides, Springfield, MO

Ellenson, David
Received from Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH

Ezekiel, Moses Jacob
Papers, family items, and articles; together with photographs of artwork of sculptor Moses Jacob Ezekiel, compiled by his descendant, Cecil Striker.
Received from Cecil Striker, Philadelphia, PA

Feingold, Max (Chayim)
Collection of journal entries, letters, and notes, in Yiddish, dating from the late 1940s to the late 1950s. The papers chronicle Feingold’s life in Rochester, NY, until 1950; and in Israel after he made aliyah in 1950.
Received from Dena Feingold, Kenosha, WI

Feldheym, Norman
A tribute book issued to Rabbi Feldheym in 1937 by Kol Shearith Israel Congregation of Panama upon “the occasion of his approaching departure for the United States of America.”
Received from Joshua Holo, Los Angeles, CA

Fields, Leo
Papers of Leo Fields, consisting primarily of materials related to Fields’s work with the Institute for Social and Economic Policy in the Middle East at Harvard University.
Received from Leo Fields, Dallas, TX
Friedman, Debbie
And Another Song Will Rise: A Tribute to Debbie Friedman, a recording commissioned by Abigail and Leslie Wexner in memory of Debbie Friedman and in honor of Larry Moses in appreciation for his years of leadership at The Wexner Foundation, 2012.
Received from Elka B. Abrahamson, Columbus, OH

Fromer, Beatrice
Letters from Beatrice Fromer to her daughter Margot Fromer discussing personal and family matters, 1953
Received from Margot Fromer, Silver Spring, MD

Gamoran, Emanuel
Papers, including minutes of the Jewish Education Commission of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, as well as correspondence, play scripts, book lists, and reports, 1928–1957. The material deals with publications of the UAHC, specifically the History of the Jews in the United States.
Received from Daniel Syme, Bloomfield Hills, MI

Gettler, Benjamin
Visible Footprints: The Life of Benjamin Gettler, an autobiography in which the author provides insights into the evolution of some of Cincinnati's largest and most important public and private institutions: the University of Cincinnati, Jewish Hospital, Cincinnati Health Alliance, the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati, and the Cincinnati Street Railway, 2012.
Received from Benjamin Gettler, Cincinnati, OH

Goldberg, Edwin C.
Received from Edwin C. Goldberg, Chicago, IL
Grafman, Milton
Papers and recordings of Rabbi Grafman, including a sermon concerning civil rights, delivered to Temple Emanu-El, Birmingham, AL, on 6 September 1963.
Received from Stephen W. Grafman, Potomac, MD

Hadassah, The Women’s Zionist Organization of America (San Francisco Chapter)
Records of the San Francisco chapter of Hadassah, including membership, programming, and other documents.
Received from Judi Finkelstein and the San Francisco Chapter of Hadassah, San Francisco, CA

Hirsch, Richard G.
Received from Richard G. Hirsch, Jerusalem, Israel

Jewish Chautauqua Society
Received from Steven Portnoy, New York, NY

Jewish Outreach Institute
Records of the JOI, detailing its work in reaching out to intermarried families and unengaged Jews and increasing their participation in Jewish life.
Received from Kerry Olitzky, New York, NY

Jewish Vocational Service (Cincinnati, Ohio)
Records of the Cincinnati office of JVS, including client files, administrative records, and photographs.
Received from Peter Bloch, Cincinnati, OH
Kraut, Benny
*Received from Penny Kraut, West Hempstead, NY*

Lelyveld, Arthur J.
*Received from Congregation Anshe Chesed, Cleveland, OH*

Levin, Abraham I. and Jessica D.
Family papers, including correspondence, invitations, minutes, and programming relating to the Orthodox Jewish Conference on 8–9 June 1898. Together with family correspondence and correspondence with the Bass family, a Jewish family in Austria seeking to immigrate to America; plus news clippings, postage stamps, and a travelogue written by Rose Freed Hertz in 1925 on the dedication of Hebrew University in Jerusalem.
*Received from Treasure Cohen, Maplewood, NJ*

Lorge, Ernst M.
*Received from Michael M. Lorge, Chicago, IL*

Meir Chayim Temple (McGehee, AR)
*Received from Barry Kogan, Cincinnati, OH*

North American Federation of Temple Youth (Northern Region)
Organizational records, including program papers, administrative files, and other documents.
*Received from NFTY, Northern Region, Milwaukee, WI*
North Shore Oral History Collection
A collection of interviews with Russian Jewish emigrés, their American volunteers, and staff of the Jewish Federation of North Shore (Marblehead, MA), which document the experiences of individuals involved with Russian resettlement efforts in the North Shore region of Massachusetts. 1997–2002.
Received from Zelda Kaplan, Beverly, MA

Palnick, Elijah E.
Sermons, 1959–1999, together with a 2013 oral history interview of Rabbi Palnick’s wife, Irene, discussing their lives and Rabbi Palnick’s work in the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama during the 1960s.
Received from Irene Palnick, Delray Beach, FL

Pearce, Stephen
Papers from Rabbi Pearce’s rabbinic career, including sermons, correspondence, photographs, and recordings of services and talks, particularly during his tenure at Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco.
Received from Stephen Pearce, San Francisco, CA

Plaut, Jonathan
Papers of Rabbi Plaut, including those of his father, Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut.
Received from Carol Plaut, Farmington Hills, MI

Posner, David
Received from Temple Emanu-El, New York, NY

Prinz, Joachim
Booklet honoring Rabbi Prinz’s twentieth anniversary at Temple B’nai Abraham, Newark, NJ, 1959.
Received from Clifford M. Kulwin, Livingston, NJ
Randolph, Dan
Dan Randolph Jewish Letterhead Collection, featuring stationery and letterhead from Greater Cincinnati tobacconists and distilleries, 1876–1925. 
Received from Dan Randolph, Cincinnati, OH

Rapp, Michael G.
Records of Rapp’s role as executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council in Cincinnati, 1979–1994. The papers pertain to his work regarding the Middle East and Soviet Jewry. 
Received from Michael G. Rapp, Cincinnati, OH

Reiner, Sherry Levy
Personal and research papers, including writings, photographs, and correspondence. 
Received from Sherry Levy Reiner, Washington, DC

Ringler, Stanley
Personal papers, including articles and brochures reflecting Ringler’s participation in the Israel Labor Movement and Party, as well as issues of religious pluralism, 1983–1996. 
Received from Stanley Ringler, Mevesseret Zion, Israel

Rudensky, Alice
Original poems by Alice Rudensky, mid-to-late 20th century. 
Received from Marla Spanjer, Fort Wayne, IN

Sarna, Jonathan D.
Recording of a lecture by Dr. Sarna recounting General Ulysses S. Grant’s order to expel the Jewish population in his commanding territory on 17 December 1862, delivered at a meeting of the New York Historical Society in New York, NY, 2013. 
Received from Jonathan D. Sarna, Waltham, MA
Scheuer, Simon H.
Personal papers, including correspondence with Teddy Kollek and Jacob R. Marcus; together with correspondence regarding Hiroshi Okamoto, 1970–1978.
Received from Marian Sofaer Scheuer, Palo Alto, CA

Solomon, Hannah
Supplement to the Hannah G. Solomon Family Collection, including papers of Solomon, her daughter, Helen S. Levy, and Levy’s daughter, Frances H.L. Angel.
Received from Philip Angel, Charleston, WV

Stedman, Jon
Research materials, personal papers, and family genealogies compiled by Stedman, of Denton, TX.
Received from Karen Franklin, New York, NY

Sutker, Phyllis
Papers of Phyllis Sutker, former national president of Na’amat USA (formerly Pioneer Women), who served on the American Section of the Jewish Agency and was a major figure in American Zionism in the second half of the twentieth century. Her husband, Cal Sutker, a former Cook County Commissioner, was himself a significant figure in Chicago and Illinois politics.
Received from Sharon McGowan, Skokie, IL

Tanenbaum, Patricia Wise
Pat’s Plan: Recipes and Stories from the Life of Patricia Wise Tanenbaum, 2013.
Received from B.J. Tanenbaum, Hot Springs, AR

Temple B’nai Israel (Kokomo, IN)
Minutes, 1941–1956; dedication program, 1942; correspondence and other papers, 1942–1962; and fiftieth anniversary program, 1992.
Received from Karen Mervis, Kokomo, IN
Temple Emanu-El (Birmingham, AL)
Video documentary of the congregation’s activities surrounding its 2013 centennial celebration.
Received from Temple Emanu-El, Birmingham, AL

Union for Reform Judaism
Audio recording from a 2013 URJ commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech.
Received from the Union for Reform Judaism, New York, NY

Union for Reform Judaism Camp Kutz (Warwick, NY)
Records of this URJ camp, including curricula, study materials, rosters, and other materials.
Received from URJ Camp Kutz, Warwick, NY

Wallach, Benno
Personal papers, sermons, essays, articles, and correspondence of Wallach, a rabbi, scholar and founder of Temple Beth Tikvah in Clear Lake, TX.
Received from Madeline Wallach, Clear Lake, TX

Weiland, Richard
Interview conducted by Gary P. Zola, in which Weiland discusses his passion for civil rights and his activities in establishing a baseball program for disabled children as well as other philanthropic works in the Cincinnati Jewish community, 2 November 2012.
Received from Richard Weiland, Cincinnati, OH

Weiner, Samuel
Declaration of intention for citizenship, 10 April 1885, for Weiner, a resident of Baltimore.
Received from Edward P. Cohn, New Orleans, LA
Witten, Benjamin
Papers documenting the life of Dr. Witten, a chemist from Baltimore. The papers include material on his higher education, career, awards, Jewish community activities, death, and other biographical material, 1916–1976.
Received from Samuel and David Witten, Washington, DC

Women of Reform Judaism
Records, papers, and artifacts of dozens of local WRJ Sisterhoods, compiled as part of the Women of Reform Judaism's Centennial Archival Project.
Received from local Women of Reform Judaism Sisterhoods

Women's Rabbinic Network
Received from Sue Levi Elwell, Philadelphia, PA

Zale, Morris B.
Clippings and articles documenting the business and philanthropic work of Morris B. Zale, founder of Zale's Jewelers.
Received from Leo Fields, Dallas, TX

Zecher, Elaine
Video of Naomi Eisenberg in which she reads a poem dedicated to her mother, Rabbi Elaine Zecher, 2013.
Received from Elaine Zecher, Boston, MA

Zoberman, Israel
Remarks in the Congressional Record, together with photographs and other personal papers, 2013.
Received from Israel Zoberman, Norfolk, VA

Zola, Gary P.
“Hold Fast to This Flowering Staff,” a preordination address delivered to the 2013 rabbinic class of Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 7 June 2013.
Received from Gary P. Zola, Cincinnati, OH
2014–2015 Fellows

The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives welcomes the following nineteen scholars as 2014–2015 Fellows to the Barrows-Loebelson Family Reading Room located on the historic Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion

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University of California, Los Angeles
The Rabbi Ferdinand Isserman Memorial Fellowship

Caitlin Carenen, Ph.D.
Eastern Connecticut State University
The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Fellowship
*American Jewish Responses and Terrorism in the 1970s*

Laura Frank
University of Maryland
The Rabbi Theodore S. Levy Tribute Fellowship
*Jewish Marriage and Divorce in America, 1820–1920*

Rabbi John Friedman
Judea Reform Congregation
Director’s Fellowship
*Classical Reform Rabbis and Christianity*

Barry Goldberg
The Graduate Center, City University of New York
The Rabbi Joachim Prinz Memorial Fellowship
*Jews, Puerto Ricans, and the Struggle for Community Control in School District I*

Geraldine Gudefin
Brandeis University
The Rabbi Harold D. Hahn Memorial Fellowship
*Navigating the Civil and Religious Worlds: Jewish Marriage and Divorce in France and the United States, 1881–1914*
Anton Hieke, Ph.D.
University Halle-Wittenberg
The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Fellowship
Rabbi Maurice Mayer of Charleston, SC

Aaron Hughes, Ph.D.
University of Rochester
The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Fellowship
Jacob Neusner: An Intellectual Biography

David Jacobs
Independent Scholar
Director's Fellowship
A Study of the Constitutions of Early 19th Century North American Synagogues

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New York University
The Frankel Family Fellowship

Nahum Karlinsky, Ph.D.
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
The Starkoff Fellowship
The JDC Between the Two World Wars

Rabbi Matthew Kaufman
York University
The Loewenstein-Wiener Fellowship
Horace Kallen Confronts America: Science, Print Culture, and Jewish Modernity

Dan Lanier-Vos, Ph.D.
University of Southern California
The American Council for Judaism Fellowship
The Making of the Israel Lobby

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The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Fellowship
Hungarian Jews in the Age of Rupture, 1890–1923

Michael Rom
Yale University
The Loewenstein-Wiener Fellowship
Constructing Jewish Brazil

Nancy Sinkoff, Ph.D.
Rutgers University
The Loewenstein-Wiener Fellowship
Lucy S. Dawidowicz and the Construction of Postwar Jewish Liberalism, 1948–1967

Wendy Soltz
Ohio State University
The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Fellowship
Fighting Allies, Frightened Friends or Foes?: Untangling the Jewish Involvement in Desegregated Higher Education in the South, 1910–1965

Randi Storch, Ph.D.
SUNY Cortland
The Joseph and Eva R. Dave Fellowship
Rabbi Stephen S. Wise and America’s Promise

Britt Tevis
University of Wisconsin
The Loewenstein-Wiener Fellowship
May it Displease the Court: Jewish Lawyers and the Democratization of American Law
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