That I, the undersigned Minister of the Temple Emannu-El of the City of New York, on the twenty-third day of the month Adar in the year of the world five thousand six hundred and sixty-five corresponding with the nineteenth day of March in the year eighteen hundred and ninety-five, having solemnized the marriage of

Mr. Felix M. Warburg
and
Miss Frieda F. Schiff
in accordance with the form and custom of the Jewish Religion and in conformity with the Laws of the State of New York.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto subscribed my name and affixed the seal of said Congregation.

Gustav Gottlieb
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Located on the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
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Rabbi Aaron D. Panken, Ph.D., President

On the cover:
Marriage certificate of Felix M. Warburg and Frieda F. Schiff, 19 March 1895,  
Flat file. Cabinet 5, drawer 3.  
Courtesy American Jewish Archives.

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ARTICLES

Interwoven Voices of the Religious Landscape: G.S. Ensel and Musical Populism in the Nineteenth-Century American Synagogue

Judah M. Cohen  1

The life and work of nineteenth-century liturgical musician G.S. Ensel (1827–1901) offers insight into a formative and overlooked era of Jewish musical expression. Ensel, who trained musically and religiously in Central Europe, premiered Isaac Mayer Wise’s Minhag America liturgy in Cincinnati in 1857, and subsequently worked in St. Louis; Springfield, Illinois; and Paducah, Kentucky. Emphasizing community music over high liturgical composition, Ensel produced the first major scholarly Jewish music treatise on American soil as part of a broader dialogue with local religious groups. In making Jewish musical history compatible with broad-based scholarly discussions of ancient musical origins, Ensel offered practical options for meaningful worship among a landscape of small Midwestern communities—options that remain relevant in contemporary discussions of Jewish liturgical music in small American communities.

The Lieberman Clause Revisited

Benjamin Steiner  41

The Lieberman clause, first circulated by the Conservative movement in 1954, is commonly understood as a mechanism that helped a woman obtain a Jewish divorce, and it drove a wedge between the Orthodox and Conservative movements over the legitimacy of halakhic reform. This
article qualifies both of those assessments. In fact, the principal authors of the clause sought foremost to save Jewish marriage, not to facilitate its dissolution. And it was actually debate within the Conservative movement itself—not the rancor between the movements reported in the press—that is the most important for appreciating the document’s historic significance for the Conservative movement.

Stories My Grandfather Never Told Me: The Memoirs of Moishe Chinsky (Chenchinski)
*Introduced and translated from Yiddish by Eli Lederhendler*

The memoir that is excerpted here contains a wealth of detail that is of interest to students of both East European and American Jewish history. It offers an informed layperson’s viewpoint on matters such as: the realities of Polish town life as perceived by Jews in the first two decades of the twentieth century; the complex interplay of relationships between generations, between genders, and between traditional and nontraditional families; Jews in Russian military service before and during World War I; illegal Jewish migrants in post-1918 Europe; Jewish immigration to America during the last several years prior to the institution of quota laws; and the texture of immigrant life.

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To Our Readers…

EPU (E Pluribus Unum) is an online international association that serves as a clearinghouse for students of American studies—both undergraduates and graduates. Students interested in American studies may join this website, where they have an opportunity to interact with like-minded peers in other parts of the world.¹

Recently, a student posted a blog entry on the EPU website relating to American history. The writer was enrolled in an American studies course at a university in Amsterdam, and he wrote to share his thoughts on the nature of the semester’s term projects that he and his classmates presented toward the end of the semester. The young blogger was enthralled by the many interesting subjects his fellow students had been researching. Above all, the student wrote, he was amazed by the number of students who had “stumbled upon topics that [had heretofore been] … ‘hidden’ in history.”²

The student’s observation about people and events that appear to be “hidden in history” merits closer examination. Some may jump to the conclusion that this refers to the intentional act of suppressing or hiding past events from public view. Indeed, historians have documented instances wherein facts have been deliberately falsified so as to obscure or conceal historical truth. During the Philippine-American War, for example, some American newspaper correspondents accused the U.S. government of providing them with “false statements for ‘home effect’”—that is, data that would deliberately mislead their readers.³

Yet the expression “hidden in history” does not necessarily refer to such nefarious efforts. Time and again historians and researchers have come to realize that people or events have been unintentionally overlooked—indeed, “hidden in history.” The historiographical development

¹ On EPU—American studies, see http://svepu.nl/ (accessed 15 August 2017).
of studies on African Americans, Native Americans, women, Hispanics, gays/lesbians, and many other minorities powerfully illustrates this point. In fact, it is interesting to note that a number of books dealing with these topics have actually taken the title “Hidden from History”!

Why some historical events or personalities capture the attention of historians while others remain “hidden” is a very interesting—and difficult to answer—question. Christopher Klein, a freelance writer who specializes in writing about history, has offered up eight reasons “why certain people and events are stuck in our collective memory and others are swept into the dustbin of history”:

1. **Timing**—Some happenings are overshadowed by competing contemporaneous events that dominate the news. If an event goes unnoticed by contemporaries, it is likely that it will suffer a similar historical fate.

2. **Universal appeal**—Some events speak broadly to our shared human condition and therefore possess a universal appeal. Others may appear so highly specialized that they do not engender widespread interest.

3. **Location**—Some occurrences affect the lives of many people at once. These are much more likely to be remembered than events that impact only a small number.


4. **Pop culture**—There are people and occurrences that become famous with the help of song, poetry, art, or other cultural expressions. These frequently enjoy greater historical salience than those without the benefit of “culture promotion.”

5. **Monuments and tributes**—Tangible memorials such as statues, paintings, plaques, and citations give some segments of the past an advantage over others.

6. **Painful memories**—People and events that are shameful, embarrassing, or painful tend to be overlooked or obscured by subsequent generations.

7. **Inspiring memories**—Heroes, motivational acts, and unique and remarkable achievements are more likely to be remembered than prosaic, run-of-the-mill occurrences.

8. **Dearth of documentation**—The existence of primary source material is indispensably vital to the historical enterprise. Undocumented events and personalities remain hidden in history.

   Klein’s final point, of course, reminds us of why it is important to preserve historical data. This is the American Jewish Archives’ raison d’être. We seek to collect a rich and diverse array of documentary evidence so that future scholars will continue to uncover that which has been left unnoticed.

   The historical enterprise can be compared to a vast solar system filled with previously unseen stars and planets awaiting discovery. Most historians delight in discovering aspects of the past that had been previously overlooked or disregarded. It is especially rewarding to uncover stories that have heretofore been “hidden in history.” The articles that appear in this issue of our journal illustrate this very point.

   Judah Cohen’s expansive article on Gustav S. Ensel examines the life and career of a much-overlooked figure in the history of Jewish music in the United States. Cohen’s essay reflects exhaustive, painstaking research, and it provides us with new insights about the history of Jewish liturgical music in America. In contrast to the cantors and musicians who advanced the idea of musical performance in the synagogue, Ensel took interest in synagogue music that would encourage congregational
participation. In addition, Ensel produced America’s first major scholarly treatise on the history of Jewish liturgical music, and he was arguably the first musicologist in America to publicly promote the commonalities that run through the religious music of the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This fine article pulls back the curtain on a significant personality whose important musical contributions had been largely unrecognized.

Benjamin Steiner’s essay on the “Lieberman clause” constitutes another example of history uncovered. The Lieberman clause is a codicil that has been inserted into ketubot (Jewish marriage contracts) endorsed by the Conservative Jewish movement since 1954. The clause strives to obviate the halakhic obstacles that frequently prevented women from obtaining a Jewishly legal bill of divorce. Readers will be treated to the little-known backstory as to how this well-known document came to be. Steiner’s work is filled with interesting discoveries, including the ironic fact that the distinguished Talmudic scholar, Saul Lieberman, whose name has been inextricably linked to this halakhic mechanism, was neither the originator nor the writer of this famous clause. Steiner also argues that despite the clause being widely characterized as a legal maneuver designed to facilitate and safeguard divorce, it was actually written with the purpose of preserving Jewish marriage. This fascinating reconstruction of how the codicil came into being reminds us of how we gain new perspectives on the past when we explore new historical territory.

The title of Eli Lederhendler’s documentary analysis of his grandfather’s fascinating Yiddish memoirs—“Stories My Grandfather Never Told Me”—is yet another example of how the past can be hidden for years, even from those closest to us. Those who dabble in family genealogy are familiar with this frustrating phenomenon: unexplained events and hidden chapters of family sagas suddenly and unexpectedly revealing themselves. This is precisely what happened to Eli Lederhendler, who came across his grandfather’s Yiddish memoirs only recently. Upon reading his grandfather’s document, Lederhendler concedes that he “had not heard any of these experiences as ‘stories’ while [he] was growing up … [and he] had no inkling of the wealth of personal and historical detail contained in the manuscript.” Moishe Chinsky’s (i.e., Lederhendler’s
grandfather) vivid and colorful remembrances bring the story of the Eastern European Jewish immigrant into bold relief. Generally speaking, Chinsky’s memoirs encapsulate the heritage of an entire generation of Eastern European Jewish migrants who made their way to North America during the first few decades of the twentieth century. These memoirs powerfully illustrate the daunting array of economic and emotional challenges this immigrant generation confronted. Lederhendler’s masterful introduction provides readers with a helpful contextual setting for the engaging excerpts that follow. Thanks to the efforts of his learned grandson, Chinsky’s stories, which evidently remained hidden during his lifetime, have now become an accessible chapter in the annals of the American Jewish experience.

The EPU student who expressed astonishment in discovering that his classmates had “stumbled upon topics that [had been] … ‘hidden in history’” actually learned two important lessons from his course of study in American history. First, he discovered the exhilaration that comes from the process of historical research. This is an emotion that permeates the atmosphere at the AJA, where there is always something new to discover among the millions upon millions of records in our repository. As Harry Truman famously observed, “There is nothing new in the world except the history you do not know.”

Yet there is a second, more subtle lesson that accompanies our delight in rediscovering the past. It is the realization that it is always possible to find that which has been overlooked in the annals of history. “To get a story re-remembered,” American historian Ray Raphael observed, “you need a constituency.” The rightful historical claims of African Americans, Native Americans, women, and others whom the canon has largely ignored, have motivated us to search, find, and resurrect historical episodes that have been hidden in the past.

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6 According to author William Hillman (1895–1962), the president spoke these words while being interviewed for a volume featuring his collected letters, diaries, personal papers, and photographs. See William Hillman, Mr. President: The First Publication from the Personal Diaries, Private Letters, Papers, and Revealing Interviews of Harry S. Truman, Thirty-Second President of the United States of America (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1952), 71.

7 Klein, “8 Reasons Why We Forget Some Historical Events.”
The historical need of the American Jew is our constituency. The drive to reconstruct the story of the Jewish experience in America is our institutional mission. All those who make use of the AJA’s collection may be compared to archaeologists who unearth their finds on an excavation site. The items sitting on the surface are never all that there is to find. The deeper one digs, the more one is likely to find the gems hidden among our holdings, awaiting discovery, and validating the wisdom of William Faulkner’s famous apothegm: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

GPZ
Cincinnati, Ohio

Interwoven Voices of the Religious Landscape: G.S. Ensel and Musical Populism in the Nineteenth-Century American Synagogue

Judah M. Cohen

On 16 March 1894, the small Jewish population of Paducah, Kentucky, dedicated its new synagogue building, featuring the Moorish architecture fashionable at the time. The dramatic affair reportedly involved, among other participants, “a choir consisting of twenty-four voices, selected from the best singers in the churches of our city.” Sixty-six-year-old volunteer music director Gustav S. Ensel, who enjoyed much local admiration, directed the group. A reporter writing to Cincinnati’s American Israelite highlighted Ensel’s “profound knowledge of music” and lauded his efforts to adapt “the very choicest compositions from the [Classical] masters … Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, Mendelssohn, Gounod, and other luminaries of music … to the texts of a Jewish hymnal.” Then, in perhaps an unexpected turn, the reporter

1 *All translations from German sources are the author’s.

I am grateful to Curtis Mann, manager of the Sangamon Valley Collection at the Lincoln Library in Springfield, Illinois, for locating information about Ensel in the local historical papers; to the two anonymous reviewers, who provided invaluable suggestions for improving this article; and to Dana Herman, Gary Zola, and the staff of the American Jewish Archives, who provided me access to one of the few extant copies of Ancient Liturgical Music.


Judah M. Cohen
added that Ensel “has always prided himself on the fact that he never composed a piece of music himself.” Implicitly criticizing the high cultural strivings of a “Jewish chazzan educated in the school of Sulzer, Naumb[o]urg, and other shining lights of music,” Ensel considered “Jewish” sound in a more populist frame, as “a style of music which is at once suitable to the modern tastes of our co-religionists.”3 The program of arrangements from works by Meyerbeer, Rossini, Mercadante, and Mozart, as if by illustration, appeared to gratify the assembled ecumenical crowd deeply.4

Ensel’s reported thoughts on American Jewish liturgical music provide insight into a formative era of Jewish musical expression that has received scant attention in current scholarship. What little research exists on mid-nineteenth-century American Jewish liturgical music tends toward dismissiveness or triviality: Juxtaposed against the cantorial “golden age” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the mid-nineteenth century almost disappears as a period of American inexperience involving a surfeit of non-Jewish musical leadership, a tendency toward importing popular music into the synagogue, and a disregard for “Jewish” musical tradition. Even those who have considered the era, such as John Baron and Neil Levin, largely efface perspectives like Ensel’s in favor of a trajectory of increasingly sophisticated art music composition that privileges the synagogue service over the broader community activities.5 I argue here, however, that underneath the relative scarcity of serious scholarship lies a far more interesting and rich musical topography, with Ensel’s example defying most of the stereotypes currently applied to it. Not only did Ensel have extensive musical experience,

3 Ibid. While the correspondent’s claim about Ensel’s lack of original compositions may not be completely correct (it appears Ensel wrote a few works while in Cincinnati c. 1857), it reflects a more general perception of Ensel as a musical facilitator rather than a bona fide composer.
but he also produced the first major scholarly Jewish music treatise on American soil, significantly predating—and predicting—the currently accepted historiographic timeline of Jewish music research. Moreover, Ensel rendered his ecclesiastical services in both professional and volunteer capacities, in some ways embodying an alternate ideal of American Jewish musical identity that allowed smaller, financially precarious communities to operate amid the uncertain availability of resources. In other words, rather than representing part of an illiterate and uninformed generation, Ensel’s story indicates a parallel trajectory of musical pragmatism necessary for a tiny Jewish minority to establish itself in the American church-based ecosystem, particularly in small towns. Opening dialogue with other religious music reform movements—such as the Germany-based St. Cecilia Societies and various Protestant groups who experimented with different approaches to corporate singing—Ensel promoted a musical approach compatible with broad-based scholarly discussions of ancient musical origins, while offering practical options for meaningful worship in the rapidly changing communal landscape of mid-to-late nineteenth-century Jewish life.  

From Germany

Ensel represented a generation of Central European Jews who sought to integrate their religious identities with Western culture. Born in the Bavarian town of Hechingen (Hohenzollern) Germany, on 7 April 1827, he received musical training from local masters, likely in parallel with his religious training. Once completed, he took his first Jewish leadership


7 Ensel mentioned three musical mentors in his ad as a piano teacher posted in Die Deborah in July/August 1857 (v. 2, pp. 400, 408, 416): choral director Thomas Täglichbeck.
post under Rabbi Bernhard Wechsler in the northern port city of Varel (Friesland), where from 1846 to 1855 he worked as a “teacher, cantor, and slaughterer.” As part of his responsibilities during these years, young Ensel faced the challenge of invigorating the community’s music program at a time of public discussion about music’s role in contemporary German Jewish life. Undoubtedly also aware of the trend toward new composition emerging since Salomon Sulzer’s (1804–1890) appointment to the pulpit of Vienna’s Seitenstettengasse synagogue in the late 1820s, Ensel recognized that such a complex (and expensive) path was probably unrealistic in a small community without strong musical resources. Instead, he looked to musical facilitators such as Israel Jacobson (1768–1828, of Seesen and then Berlin) and Simon Hecht (1824–1908, of Weimarschmieden and later of Evansville, Indiana), who advocated similar hymnal-based approaches, empowering their members as bearers of religious spirit through orderly communal singing.

Writing in the 18 June 1849 issue of Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums, in the wake of his recent activities to support the dedication of Varel’s new sanctuary, Ensel reflected on earlier articles by Hecht and Simon Alexander (from Strelitz) assessing the aesthetic possibilities of congregational singing. Ensel added another comparative data (1799–1867; in Hechingen from 1827–1848), a Bremen concertmaster named Schmidt, and a Hamburg pianist named Friedrich.


9 Ensel grew up at a time when Jewish songbooks and hymnals began to appear in local communities, created to promote a coherent, modern Jewish identity that bridged synagogue, school, and home. The Württemburg/Stuttgart Jewish authority (Ober-Kirchen-Behörde), close to Ensel’s hometown, produced a major revision of its hymnal in 1836 that likely influenced Ensel’s ideas. See Sefer Zemirot Yisrael. Gesang-Buch, zum Gebrauch bei dem Unterrichte in der mosaischen Religion und zur öffentlichen und häuslichen Gottesverehrung der Israeliten (Stuttgart: Hallberger, 1836).

10 Geoffrey Goldberg attempts to give these efforts at congregational singing some context, particularly entering the second half of the nineteenth century. See Goldberg, “An Overview of Congregational Song in the German Synagogue Up to the Shoah,” Journal of Synagogue Music 30, no. 1 (2005): 13–53.
point, laying out a practical philosophy of Jewish music, and criticizing attempts by cantors to “strengthen their own power” by composing complex harmonic music instead of “refurbishing and simplifying the existing chants” to champion congregants’ natural abilities. Recalling the Varel synagogue inauguration, Ensel described how he began, about three months in advance, to hold music sessions with thirty congregants two to three times a week. Rather than focusing on creating sonorous harmonies, he introduced congregational melodies through “repeated playing on the violin.” Ensel later reinforced these melodies by “providing rhythmic accompaniment on the piano” (likely indicating underlying harmonic changes) to give congregants a stronger structural context for their singing. By the July inauguration, he claimed, even those congregants who had not attended the training sessions felt comfortable singing along. People also added their own harmonies organically: Some improvised a second voice, and others added “an extremely simple but proper bass.” This account rebutted a previous letter writer’s claim that laypeople could not carry a tune, and it neutralized pressure for local music authorities to create increasingly sophisticated compositions. Ensel noted, instead: “If, in many communities, cantors have been less successful in their attempts at reform, in my opinion it is not so much because of the lack of suitable music, as it is by the incorrect use of existing music.”

Ensel concluded by outlining future steps for simplifying the liturgy in ways that could further enhance congregational participation. In particular, he advocated eliminating piyyutim (poetic/liturgical hymns) that encouraged unnecessary musical complexity, and publishing an inexpensive monthly Jewish music journal, printed in a familiar format “already used in so many choral and folksong books.” In a parting shot to musical sophisticates, moreover, he added: “And to those zealots who do not want to sacrifice their own harmonious singing, we declare with [Ludwig] Uhland: ‘Where there’s singing, settle down/Evil people have

12 Ibid., 338–339.
no songs.” The twenty-two-year-old thus articulated his support of synagogue music reform as a means of democratization, joining others who questioned the “artful” leanings of Sulzer’s followers. Even Ensel’s most controversial assertion—that the “superficial yodeling” Hecht and others sought to strip from Jewish prayer actually contained much of the melodies’ “character”—spoke to his preference for a populist folk-aesthetic over imposed (elite) artistic standards.

**Introducing Minhag America**

In mid-1857, after serving about two years as the religious leader of Bremen’s young Jewish community, Ensel brought his views to the United States. Perhaps with an eye toward Isaac Mayer Wise’s leadership, he settled in Cincinnati and advertised his availability as a piano teacher. By September the local Congregation Bene Yeshurun had hired him as “Chazan pro tem” at a prorated salary of $400 (paid $25 monthly). The date of the hire, at the congregation’s annual meeting

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13 Ibid., 340.
15 Max Markreich, *Geschichte der Juden in Bremen und Umgegend* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2003), 81; Ensel advertisement, *Die Deborah*, 2 (July–August, 1858): 400, 408, 416. Markreich describes Ensel as coming from Berne (Oldenburg), and credits him with creating the Bremen Jewish community’s official seal.
16 Minute book of Bene Yeshurun congregation, Cincinnati, meeting of 20 September 1857 and Congregational Meeting of 24 September 1857, MS-62, Box 3, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (hereafter BY Minute Book, AJA), Cincinnati, OH. It appears that Ensel’s lived near Morganfield, KY, in the early 1850s, though these early years are as yet undocumented. See “Adolph Ensel,” in Joseph Wallace, *Past and Present of the City of Springfield and Sangamon County Illinois* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke, 1904), 481–482. (Adolph, who appears to be G.S.’s brother, was listed here as a member of the Episcopal Church.)
between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, gave Ensel little time to prepare the musically intense Day of Atonement services. But it also presaged a still more significant task: introducing Wise’s hotly anticipated Minhag America liturgy, adopted by congregational vote in the same meeting. Just the previous year, Wise had characterized the hazzan as an unnecessary drain of resources on congregations thirsting for intellectual leadership, arguing: “Let the singing of the Minister be altogether abolished, all the singing and chanting ought to be done by the choir or congregation or by both jointly … and let the Minister preside over it and direct it so, that his principal part may be the expounding of the Law.” The elaborate nature of the new liturgy, however, likely proved more than Wise could handle on his own. He backtracked for the sake of practicality, recognizing that choirs and congregational singing could not easily coordinate themselves.

Ensel inherited a well-formed musical program with a recently expanded building, an ample choir loft, and an organ with a professional organist; he also took a position in the community’s school, the Talmud Yelodim Institute (TYI), which had incorporated choral singing into the curriculum. Such an arrangement accelerated ongoing discussions about the choir’s relative professionalism during services, the role of congregational singing, and the status of the service as a balance of beauty, knowledge, and ideological “progress.” After the sanctuary’s expansion and rededication ceremonies in 1855, for example, the synagogue board faced regular requests from its “volunteer” congregational choristers for payment, and had to devise public (and low-cost) ways to honor its member-singers while keeping a budget for skilled outsiders (especially a “Tenorist”). It thus fell to Ensel to effect a balance between Wise’s ideal of organic congregational musicality and the practical aesthetics required to achieve such an ideal. Wise publicly affirmed Ensel’s initial work after

18 I.M. Wise, The Israelite (12 September 1856): 76.
19 BY Minute Book, AJA. Wise’s own account of this period, which essentially focuses on the hiring of non-Jewish choristers, greatly oversimplifies the situation. Isaac M. Wise, ch. 2, The History of The K.K. Bene Yeshurun, of Cincinnati, Ohio (Cincinnati: n.p. 1892).
Yom Kippur, especially noting his “grand chorus” of the hymn “Hayom Haras Olam” (“Today is the Birthday of the World”)—which “speaks well for the musical talent of this young man, and shows his thorough knowledge of harmony.” Yet he likely knew that the new liturgy would require coordination on a different magnitude.

Wise appeared to approach Minhag America as a collaborative form that brought the congregation’s musical forces, its progressive philosophy, and the TYI into a cohesive, mutually reinforcing system that satisfied all of the community’s demographic groups. Ensel, tasked with realizing Wise’s plan, consequently had to rehearse both the largely volunteer choir and the TYI students to prepare the music-heavy premiere as an event that balanced religious and pedagogical functions. Such intricately orchestrated expectations, however, taxed Ensel to the point that Wise ultimately had to delay the liturgy’s premiere from the first day of Sukkot (Friday night, 2 October 1857) to the first Friday after Sukkot (16 October), so Ensel could prepare the choral forces more fully. The delay seemed to pay off: Wise described afterward the complex interplay of choir, TYI students, and hazzan as an interactive liturgical community, with each linguistic, artistic, or age-based cohort contributing in kind. When the hazzan and the TYI students alternated lines of the Ashrei (mainly Psalm 145, with introductory and conclusion verses from other psalms), for example—a prayer presumably taught in the school but unfamiliar to many parents—Wise described the effect as a pedagogical experience “intended for the whole congregation, who should become used to it in this way.” Ensel presented similarly coordinated works throughout the Friday night and Saturday morning services, including a number of Sulzer compositions reconfigured to Wise’s significantly altered liturgical text. Thus enacted, the weekend aimed to establish a seamless, relevant ritual that could make the Sabbath a point of convergence for all of the congregation’s needs. Music’s centrality to

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20 [Isaac M. Wise], “Cincinnati,” The Israelite (2 October 1857): 102. Wise’s comment comprises the only reference to an original composition by Ensel; the sheet music has not been found.

21 The Israelite (2 October 1857): 100; The Israelite (9 October 1857): 110.

the ritual’s success became still clearer when Ensel placed an ad in *The Israelite* the following week offering “to all congregations having introduced the MINHAG AMERICA, a complete copy of all the music, solos, choruses and recitations, as used in the Synagogue in Lodge Street.”23 This announcement, which preceded the announced sale of the *Minhag America* volume itself, remained in the paper for the next ten issues.

Ensel’s work with the congregation would be short-lived. While synagogue records show no open conflict with choir, laity, or leadership, the lofty agenda of the new liturgy and its music may have proven a less-than-perfect match with Ensel’s own ideas—exemplified by his January 1858 editorial in *Die Deborah*, where he cautioned against the trendy attractions of “Bildung” (Culture/Education) at the expense of a solid moral compass.24 In March 1858, the older and better-known Rabbi G.M. Cohen (1820–1902), who had proven his own musical and choral *bona fides* running the musical program at New York’s Temple Emanu-El from 1845–1852, indicated his availability for the Bene Yeshurun pulpit; by May, Cohen had won it in a competitive election (by a vote of fifty to twenty-eight).25 Ensel received a $50 severance payment, and remained at least a few months longer in the city as one of Wise’s recognized “professors of music” before departing westward.26

**Smaller Fields, Wider Visions**

Ensel soon arrived in St. Louis, where he established a liquor shop with his father and brothers (who had also recently emigrated). With business appearing to satisfy his financial needs, Ensel continued his musical activities on a volunteer basis with the city’s reform-minded B’nei El congregation. On 8 July 1859, Isaac Mayer Wise happily reported Ensel’s success in premiering the synagogue’s first choir with organ accompaniment; and the congregation showed its appreciation in the following months by presenting Ensel with honorary membership and an

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23 *The Israelite* (23 October 1857): 126. *The Israelite* changed its name to *The American Israelite* in 1874, thus the title discrepancy.
25 BY Minute Book, 2 May 1858, AJA.
26 Ibid., 18 June 1858, p. 396.
Ensel continued as B’nei El’s volunteer choir director through the 1860s—seeming to take permanent direction of the choir only in 1863—and received regular approbation for his work from Wise and other correspondents. His participation in the cornerstone-laying and inauguration ceremonies for St. Louis’s new Shaarei Emeth (“Gates of Truth”) synagogue, in 1867 and 1869 respectively, led to particular praise. Though Ensel, who became a naturalized citizen in June 1866, appeared quiet publication-wise during this period, his method seemed mostly consistent with his 1849 editorial: empowering members of the choir to take charge of their own synagogue music, and leading the process as an amateur with professional experience. Ensel later pointed to this time as the start of his formal study of sacred music, perhaps in part because his switch to synagogue music as an avocation allowed him to engage in other sacred music pursuits, thus whetting his intellectual appetite.

Ensel had begun to split his time between St. Louis and Springfield, Illinois as early as 1868, where he ran a liquor business with G. A. Mayer; and he appeared to take up full residence in Springfield by 1874. Newspaper records show his involvement in several musical functions there, including as organist for a Baptist wedding and a Catholic Easter...
service, and briefly as president of Springfield’s Musical Union. As in St. Louis, Ensel pushed to advance reforms, this time through the local synagogue Brith Sholem (“Covenant of Peace”)—a congregation that, noted Wise, “though small in number, is not so in means.” Banding together with the congregation’s well-off members, Ensel established a Sabbath school by 1875 and received credit for introducing the latest version of Benjamin Szold’s liberal-leaning Avodat Yisrael liturgy, recently released in a German-English edition by Philadelphia Rabbi Marcus Jastrow. The following year, when the congregation dedicated its new building, Ensel played the organ and directed an amateur choir of Jewish and non-Jewish singers. Music, regularly rendered in services alongside Ensel’s own English-language sermons, thus became a preoccupation of the community and a way for the congregation to assert its place in the changing national religious landscape. Ensel’s activity caused his stock to rise within the recently established Union of American Hebrew Congregations as well: As the congregation’s regular service leader, he received the title of “Reverend” in the Union’s 1878 meeting minutes, became a member of its national Finance Committee, and would represent his community in successive national gatherings.

Ensel’s financial security as a small business owner, moreover, gave him the time to dig deeply into the world of sacred music scholarship. Two years after the new synagogue building opened, Ensel gave a pair of lectures on religious musical traditions to general audiences: the first initially for the Springfield Literary Society and the second for the


33 [Isaac Mayer Wise], The Israelite, 16 February 1872.

34 Letter to the editor, The American Israelite, 15 September 1876.


local Scientific Academy. Drawing on the work of contemporary music scholars, Ensel used these lectures to trace an evolutionary history that paralleled similar theories about intellectual developments in human society—in this case, starting with the ancient Middle East/Orient and then tracking forward with increasing sophistication and complexity into modern Europe. In doing so, he engaged with musicologists who inevitably sought to create narratives that followed music from its beginnings into the melodic conventions of Gregorian chant and on into the broader development of Western art music. All of the major European music historians up to that time, including Giovanni Martini, Charles Burney, Johann Forkel, and François-Joseph Fétis, mentioned the ancient Hebrews as an early part of their narrative. 37 Yet as Bennett Zon notes, in a claim easily extendable from his discussion of Great Britain to the Continent, the motivations behind this kind of scholarship reflected a quietly ingrained tendency to characterize Jews as relevant to the development of Western music only as precursors to Christianity. 38 While Jewish musician/scholars such as Emmanuel Hecht, Hermann Ehrlich, Samuel Naumbourg, Arnold Marksohn, and William Wolf had begun to respond to these narratives by the time of Ensel’s lectures, their work had largely appeared in European publications intended primarily for Continental Jewish readership. 39 Ensel, aware of these and other

efforts, sought to craft a narrative that appealed to a broad American audience by recounting the history of liturgical music as a joint development of the three major Abrahamic religions. In so doing, he activated a variant of the “ethnic genres” strategy that Ann Ostendorf deems “a practical way [for nineteenth-century Americans] to consider the various and clearly identified cultural groups through exposure to what was perceived to be their music ways.”40 Ensel’s broad comparative approach thus allowed the sound of Jewish liturgical music to emerge in a more comfortable middle ground in an Occidental/Oriental continuum (with Islam, rather than Judaism, epitomizing “the East”). Released from the tense sonic East/West opposition of previous works, Ensel could take the Jewish narrative beyond the biblical period into a broader ongoing conversation with Christianity, connecting along the way with a more modern spirit of ecumenical idealism. He consequently sought “to instruct [my] hearers, by demonstrating, through argument and vocal illustrations combined, that the many analogies which exist between the liturgical music of the Synagogue, Church, and even the Mosque, point to one common origin.”41

Ensel gave his first lecture at Springfield’s Congregational Church on Wednesday night, 27 November 1878, featuring a number of poster illustrations and performing musical examples on the congregation’s organ alongside a mixed double quartet.42 Arranging his talk in a four-part chronological format, Ensel began by characterizing the Hebrews as bearers of music from the ancient period, made evident by artifacts in European museums’ instrument collections. He then turned to address Gregorian chant in the early church and followed developments through

the late Renaissance that transformed sacred music from a beautiful music of the elite—illustrated with a performance of Giovanni Palestrina’s 1561 “Improperia”—into the more democratizing Reformation that advocated group singing and brought popular tunes into religious circles. Ensel’s final section, on “modern” liturgical music styles, allowed the two soprano soloists to shine with performances of Luigi Luzzi’s 1866 “Ave Maria” (Op. 80) and Rossini’s “Inflammatus” from his 1841 *Stabat Mater*. The enthusiastic response to Ensel’s lecture led him to reprise the presentation twice over the next two months, reframed as part of a benefit to ameliorate the city’s indigent population.43 Despite his steadfastly ecumenical content, Ensel’s own Jewish identity clearly seemed to influence the lecture’s reception both locally and nationally. Coverage in *The American Israelite*, in particular, reprinted a local account of the talk under the title “Hebrew Music,” with a short editorial introduction clarifying that Ensel “feels a special attachment to Hebrew music, which, we expect he will place in a proper light before intellectual friends of music.”44

The following December, in front of Springfield’s Scientific Academy, Ensel offered a more critical assessment of biblical music by comparing it with standards of contemporary liturgical performance. Relativizing extravagant biblical accounts of music as awe-inspiring only in their own time and context, Ensel claimed that today’s congregations would find their performances inferior when considered in terms of pitch (ancient instruments had only one pitch, if any at all), notation (no notation existed in ancient times, thus necessitating shorter, memorized melodies), and talent (today’s musically-gifted performers could run circles around ancient caste-based musicians). To illustrate his larger point, Ensel humorously described how the short French folk tune “Malbrook,” played in Egypt by Napoleon’s army band in 1799, roused the locals as no other tune had done—before revealing that “further investigation developed the fact that this tune was brought 700 years before from the Orient by crusaders and troubadours, and after its migrations among European

musicians came now back to its original soil.”\footnote{This and all other references to the Scientific Academy lecture come from “The Music of the Ancients,” \textit{The American Israelite} (26 December 1879): 5. Malbrook, notably, has several variant spellings, including “Malbrouk” and “Malbrouch.”} That the tune remained a favorite in Euro-America as “We Won’t Come Home Till Morning” (and later as “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow”) offered Ensel a chance both to affirm the simplicity of ancient music, and to poke fun at the mindlessness of contemporary popular music.

Both lectures relied heavily on the precedents of Martini, Forkel, Burney, and Féti, among others.\footnote{While Ensel did not credit these works in his lectures, the numerous reported illustrations (à la Féti), the similarity of his cited examples, and his crediting of these and other histories in his 1880 published work suggest that they were consulted.} Yet by critiquing their ideas in an American setting, Ensel could open up more recent links between Judaism and the hegemonic historical trajectory of Christianity. His access to and knowledge of the leading works of music history in at least three major scholarly languages, moreover, affirmed his cosmopolitan outlook within the small but busy state capitol and railroad hub.\footnote{In 1880, Springfield had a population of approximately 20,000, making it the 100\textsuperscript{th} most populous city in the United States.} Combined with positive attention from the proponents of American Jewish Reform, who held a similar interest in integrating Judaism into American religious life through a narrative of European derivation, these lectures’ reception likely led Ensel to begin the process of formalizing his ideas on paper for a wider readership.

In the process offering glimpses of his updated synagogue-music philosophy, Ensel further burnished his authority on American Jewish music by publishing a review of Baltimore cantor/composer Alois Kaiser’s 1879 oratorio-like “Requiem for the Day of Atonement.” Writing in \textit{The American Israelite}, he called the work a “valuable addition” to the “musical literature of the synagogue” and a meaningful replacement for the Yom Kippur afternoon Yizkor/rememberance service.\footnote{Alois Kaiser, “Requiem for the Day of Atonement” (Baltimore: Alois Kaiser, 1879).} He praised Kaiser’s use of a recent integrated Szold/Jastrow text, which served to unify the liturgy, “instead of the disjointed hymns suggested by nearly all the modern
prayerbooks of the Reform Temples.” Consistent with his 1849 editorial, Ensel also gave high marks to Kaiser’s artful and organic use of the Yom Kippur Kol Nidre melody. Comparing it to the leitmotif concept in Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots* (which integrated “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”/“Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott”) and Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* (particularly the Venus grotto music and “Pilgrim’s Chorus”), he noted how “the different phrases of Kol Nidre appear as so many flowers, artistically and judiciously interwoven with the green leaves of wreath.” Kaiser’s “very successful attempt at utilizing our ancient traditional melodies into modern texts,” he wrote, not only gave the Yom Kippur liturgy a greater coherence as a whole by extending the sounds of Kol Nidre into the following day, but also presented a new model for musical emulation. “We ought to have a great many more of these old tunes, so arranged that they fit the texts of our modern prayer and hymn books.” Yet in making this call he also demonstrated a more nuanced and complex appraisal of *piyyutim*, viewing them as vessels for old melodies that might otherwise have disappeared: “If this [new approach to composition] is not done, [these tunes] will soon be lost, as our present prayer books have abolished a number of Piutim and other texts, to which these beautiful melodies were adapted many centuries ago.” Welcoming the potential of new art music compositions to the synagogue, even without direct congregational participation, Ensel steadfastly advocated approaches that valued musical organicism and historical continuity.

In the meantime, Ensel continued to work on his manuscript, which benefited from the suggestions of fellow central European émigré Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler. Kohler appeared to like the work but warned Ensel of numerous “Germanisms” in the text that might alienate American readers. Ensel consequently gave his manuscript to “an American friend”


50 Kohler emigrated from Germany in 1869, and had recently moved from Chicago’s Temple Sinai to New York’s Temple Beth-El when Ensel approached him.
for editing, later noting with satisfaction that the editor’s “scientific education enabled him fully in making the review text readable.”

51 Letter from Ensel to Edward Freiberger, 15 June 1881. At the Newberry Library, Chicago, bound in to the copy of *ALM*.

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Ensel originally planned to produce his work through a conventional lithographic (plate-based) method. The projected outlay for the copious illustrations he desired, however—which he estimated at $1,500–$1,800 (c. $35,000–$42,000 in 2017 dollars)—forced him to resort to a substantially less-costly hectograph process. This relatively recent publishing technique, requiring the author to write the original manuscript with a special ink that could transfer onto a gelatin surface, allowed for intricate images while circumventing the high cost of producing wooden or stone plates. Because the gelatin could store only a limited amount of ink, however, copy quality degraded quickly, and led to small print runs. Ensel’s (typical) case yielded about twenty usable copies, which he had professionally bound.53

**Inside Ancient Liturgical Music**

The final work—with the grandiose title *Ancient Liturgical Music: A Comparative and Historical Essay on the Origin and Development of Sacred Music from the earliest times, with illustrations of the music employed in the worship of the Synagogue, Church & Mosque* (briefly, *ALM*)—presented Ensel’s musical philosophy in its fullest form.54 He emulated the approaches of prevailing treatises from both musicologists and composer/cantors, sometimes even incorporating passages directly into his own text (usually but not always cited). Yet his result went far beyond those works, aiming to correct the “exceedingly inadequate and in many cases inaccurate” claims of the non-Jewish writers, while expanding the brief offerings of “unquestionable authorities” on Jewish music into an accessible discussion that could comfortably occupy a place in general discourse.55 To support his argument, Ensel reproduced sixty-eight images of ancient instruments and included numerous meticulously copied musical examples that illustrated a history of musical notation: from chant,
to tablature, to conventional staff notation (“modern notes”). He also made an effort to present his musical material, particularly melodies he saw as ancient, in an idiomatic manner that contemporary general audiences could understand. Drawing from previous experience, he surmised that scoring these melodies with an “imaginary and modern” harmonic accompaniment could fulfill nineteenth-century readers’ expectations, while helping to lead them through phrasings and contours they might otherwise find foreign. These elements added up to an inquisitively transgressive approach, which Ensel bemusedly described on more than one occasion as equivalent to “the boy who broke his drum in order to see what made the noise.”

Ensel began by describing music as an organic outgrowth of human intellect, an important vessel of emotion (in the style of philosopher H.R. Haweis’s popular 1871 book *Music and Morals*), and, therefore, “the most important auxiliary to the Ritual of a Church.” This premise allowed him to promote the idea of music as “neither the invention of one person, nor of one people, nor yet of one period, but the gradual development of an inherent gift which grows up, under favorable conditions, from very small beginnings, like a seed corn to a mighty and stately tree, bearing on its branches the ripening fruit.” Although the prolonged evolutionary timescale used a common strategy for tracking musical development, Ensel’s use of the phrase “under favorable conditions” opened an opportunity for Jews to enter the narrative via an alternate pathway. He set up this narrative by dutifully describing the most ancient Israelite music as an inheritance from Egyptian culture during the biblical slavery period, illustrated through a setting of “Miriam’s Song on the Red Sea.” This transitional moment, which symbolized to

56 *Letter from Ensel to Edward Freiberger, 15 June 1881. Bound in to the copy of ALM at the Newberry Library, Chicago.*


58 Ibid., 4.

59 Ibid., 9–10. Aguilar and De Sola, *Ancient Melodies* (1857), 9 (music section), no. 12, described as “the most ancient [melody] whose origin is supposed to be prior to the settlement of the Jews in Spain” (p. 12, introduction). Ensel used only the melody, which he reharmonized.
him the emergence of an autonomous Jewish culture, served to launch a millennia-long retelling of the Jewish musical story.

The first half of ALM presented a thoroughly researched summary of existing literature on the music of the ancient world, punctuated by
short sections of more original commentary intended to connect with current-day liberal Jewish practices. A long chapter on musical instruments (organology), with credited images reproduced from contemporary compendia and a significant bibliography, rehearsed the prevailing biblical taxonomy of string-based, wind-based, and percussion-based instruments before tracing their linguistic and evolutionary morphology across the ancient world (which also extended to China and “The Hindoos”). 60 One part of Ensel’s discussion followed the ancient ram’s horn as—in his view—it gradually developed into the modern brass family of instruments. Ensel’s narrative included a description of this connection in contemporary Jewish life: “in many Synagogues (Temples) of the Reformed Jewish Congregations,” he observed, “a quartet of our improved brass instruments is added to the Shofar, the effect of which is augmented by a well-trained chorus of singers, whose voices blend harmoniously with the sonorous tones of the Cornet, Trumpet and Trombone.” 61 A similar conversation about reed instruments repeated a well-circulated claim connecting the biblical magrepha and the contemporary pipe organ, with Ensel again noting “that the reformed wing of the present Synagogue—redeemed from the fetters of rabbinical medi‑ aeval observances in the Liturgy, have adopted the Organ as the musical instrument of the modern Jewish Temple, as it has been for centuries that of the Church.” 62 More than just histories, these accounts naturalized liberal Jewish musical choices as both religiously specific and deeply continuous with the larger (inherently Christian) religious soundscape.

Ensel addressed vocal practices similarly, normalizing exotic sounds by highlighting their transition into modern practice. In discussing a detail of an ancient Assyrian bas-relief in which “one of the women


61 Ibid., 30.

62 Ibid., 41. See, among many other precursors to this argument, Stössel, “Ein Orgel im alten Tempel zu Jerusalem,” Sinai 7, no. 3 (April 1862): 121–23.
holds her hand to the throat,” for example, he made a direct parallel to what “the Arab and Persian women still do, when they make those shrill sounds, peculiar to Eastern vocal music.”⁶³ That view became the

Examples

Example 3: Illustration of Assyrian bas-relief with accompanying explanation (ALM, p. 24).
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

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⁶³ Ibid., 24–25.
basis of a less-than-complimentary commentary on Eastern-European Jewish prayer leaders, with Ensel noting that “a similar custom is still prevailing among the cantors or Precentors of the Eastern and Polish synagogues.” Ensel, in presenting this material for a broad American audience, appeared mainly concerned with opening new pathways of connection between ancient and modern, as befitted a Jewish story—but he also subtly added an idiosyncratic yet persistent overlay of orientalism to the conversation, as a distinguishing quality that needed to be carefully controlled.

In his next chapter, “The Character of Ancient Music,” Ensel repeated the assertions of his second Springfield lecture—that “glowing descriptions … [of] the magnificence of the musical performances in the Temples and other public places” could not compare to music’s modern standards—by explaining that ancient performances were not driven by contemporary aesthetic values but were “mainly directed to the awakening of sacred emotions during worship,” and that they aimed “to restore a deranged mind to its normal healthy condition.” Such a position on ancient music, supported by arguments claiming the inferiority of instrument construction and the general “unnatural” nature of drawings and architecture from that time, set the stage for a discussion of the next thousand years, when harmony and notation would manifest these “sacred emotions” in ever more sophisticated and varied forms.

As with his chapter on musical instruments, Ensel’s discussions of notation largely followed the parameters of existing scholarship but shifted their focus enough to place emphasis on a Jewish story. He began by describing Greek semiography (letter-based notation) as a system whose unwieldy rationalism strangled musical spontaneity and variability, with its (alleged) 1,620 symbols “securing the immobility of every note in a scale series, thus fixing pitch.” In contrast, Ensel turned to Oriental practices of scriptural recitation, exemplified by Hebrew

64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 52, 54.
66 Ibid., 62.
cantillation. As opposed to the Greek (here read as proto-Western) system, Ensel claimed, “Oriental music is characterized by a slight melodic framework, around which profuse and extraneous ornamentations are clustering.”67 Used by “not only the Jews, but the Mahomedans, Parseis, Hindoos, and the Eastern Church,” this more flexible form facilitated emotional expression: “a sort of irregular cantillation, often combined with a lively gesticulation and movement of the whole body.”68 Citing a lecture by recently appointed Hebrew Union College Professor Rabbi Moses Mielziner, Ensel criticized what he saw as intentionally misleading attempts by non-Jewish scholars to attribute primitive harmonic and rhythmic characteristics to the Hebrew cantillation signs.69 Rather, after laying out the system symbol by symbol with accompanying Western notation, he claimed that Jewish cantillation represented a progressive musical practice with the flexibility to diversify as different religious systems developed. Thus he viewed the system’s melodic fragments as a forward-looking predecessor to Gregorian chant (and, consequently, the Western music tradition), since its “ornate phrases, called ‘melismatica’ … probably point to an early Oriental origin.”70 Ensel followed by juxtaposing transcriptions of Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim holy text chants to emphasize his alternate trajectory.71

The psalms similarly became a point of progression from Orient to Occident, but this time for new compositions that could balance Oriental melody with Occidental attempts at fixed notation. Ensel began this section with an extensive discussion of music in the Temple during the period of King David, providing references from the Talmud that retrospectively addressed the training and performance practices

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 63.
69 Ibid., 64–65. Ensel particularly singled out an example by Forkel (“Vierstimmige Harmonie, nach welcher in einigen Synagogen der deutschen Juden die hebräischen Accente gesungen warden,” Allgemeine Geschichte I, 167) as the extent to which “the misrepresentation of this branch of Hebrew music is, indeed, equal to the malignity of a Richard Wagner” (65).
70 Ibid., 71.
71 Ibid., 72–80.
of the Levite musicians and choir. He followed by highlighting both antiphonal singing and later psalm tunes as examples of the Oriental/Occidental balance, in particular a Jewish rendition of Psalm 144 that

72 Ibid., 81–89.
he dated to the Middle Ages and equated in its self-determination with the later Lutheran hymn, “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott.”73 This material allowed Ensel to make a historical pivot from Jewish chant to Christian hymn singing, through the oft-stated claim that “the first Christians … were mostly converted Jews, in whose religious assemblies Psalms and Hymns were sung.”74 They rejected Greek and Roman music as too secular; instead, citing a passage in Martini’s eighteenth-century *Storia Della Musica*, Ensel claimed that newly created Christians used the music of their birth religion to recruit other Jews.75 These melodies subsequently became the bases for innovations that transitioned from the Syriac chant of the “Eastern Church” to “Metrical Music” through the innovations of St. Ambrose and Pope Gregory VIII, Hucbald, Guido D’Arezzo, and the subsequent development of complex harmonic notation.76 In each case, Ensel implied, Oriental and Occidental influences achieved an artful equilibrium in the church through the actions of talented individuals.

Once Christianity had absorbed their liturgical musical traditions, Jews found themselves pariahs, with constant persecution devastating their public musical practices and disrupting any further innovation. Using the axiom that persecuted peoples resisted adopting their oppressors’ music, Ensel characterized the Jews as looking inward, to the synagogue, as their only place of refuge: “Henceforth, the Sanctuary became the inexhaustible fountain, from which they drew the refreshing new pure waters of spiritual culture,” Ensel claimed, in a nod to Jewish historian Leopold Zunz.77 In so doing, the Jews of various communi-

73 Ibid., 90–94. Ensel’s presentation of Psalm 144 reproduced an arrangement of a “Traditional Tune of the Ashkenas Ritual” by Samuel Naumbourg (90–91).
74 Ibid., 95.
76 Ibid., 95–130.
77 Ibid., 136. Ensel cites Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden, historisch entwickelt: Ein Beitrag zur Altertumskunde und biblischen Kritik, zur Literatur und Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1832), but does not identify specific passages aside from writing on p. 134 of *ALM* that “the author of this essay acknowledges that the greater part of this chapter, is copied from the work of Zunz.” The relevant material appears in ch. 21, p. 379ff. in the second edition of 1892; I believe that the pagination in the first edition is the same.
ties turned to *piyyutim* and liturgy as a source of creativity through the middle ages. In addition to compiling extensive bodies of text that ushered in the modern prayer book, they developed a broad range of musical materials that selectively imported the melodic and rhythmic forms around them. Cantors, in Ensel’s view, became more prominent...
during this time as both communal leaders and repositories of the new body of material.\textsuperscript{78}

The next medieval era of Jewish dispersion and discrimination, in Ensel’s view, allowed different groups to absorb the music of their respective neighbors, leading to a period of rapid and diverse musical development that he saw as the foundation for “traditional” Jewish music. East and West met through both common heritage and forced events—such as the Crusades and the sharing of folk (i.e., non-sacred) song—leading to musical developments that regularly entered into the service via settings for new hymns. This contact-centered approach to musical innovation led Ensel to build a theoretical model that viewed music as the product of cultural interaction, in direct contrast to other scholars’ claims that Jews’ musical outlook varied based on their degree of social acceptance. Ensel rebutted in particular what he (mis)interpreted as Samuel Naumbourg’s argument that Sephardic Jews’ tendencies toward major tonalities resulted from their good relationship with the Moors, while the minor tunes of Ashkenaz reflected the sorrow of German-Jewish persecution.\textsuperscript{79} Instead, Ensel saw music emerging from more complex, localized interplay among different ethnic groups, emphasizing each community’s agency in making its own musical choices. “It may be safely asserted,” he claimed, “without fear of contradiction from unbiased critics, that the minor [mode] chants of the Synagogue originated more from ethnical causes, than from sentimental motives—or, in other

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 131–139.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 163. Ensel’s claim conveniently conflates and misremembers comments on pp. 32 and 35 of Naumbourg’s introductory essay to \textit{Agudath Shirim} (Naumbourg, 1874). On p. 32, Naumbourg suggests that Sephardic cantillation is always in the minor mode (“reste toujours dans la gamme mineure”), while Ashkenazic chant alternates between minor and major (“il passe alternativement dans les tones majeurs et mineurs”). Three pages later, Naumbourg points out that the freedom Jews had under the Moors and Arabs led them to adopt aspects of the surrounding culture, including melodies, as their own. Naumbourg makes these comments in the service of a larger agenda championing the authenticity of Ashkenazic chant, which he claims conserved tradition under Christian oppression, in opposition to Sephardic chant, which was compromised in the openness of Moorish society. Ensel in contrast, sought to rebut by claiming that everyone borrowed tunes, such that no one tradition could claim to preserve ancient Jewish melodies more than another.
words, the Synagogue, like the Church, has adopted secular tunes and adapted them to its liturgical texts.” The musical conventions of the surrounding societies, he felt, held greater sway on the development of Jewish religious musical forms than previously acknowledged.

The theme of Jewish musical self-fashioning continued to develop as Ensel moved into the Reformation, the emergence of Protestantism, the reassertion of congregational choral singing, and then into the Jewish emancipation period of the nineteenth century. Recounting the career of Vienna’s Salomon Sulzer as the Jewish analog to Giovanni Palestrina (c. 1525–1594), who removed “the dross, which centuries had accumulated” on synagogue music, Ensel welcomed the reintroduction of choirs and organs into Jewish worship and celebrated Naumbourg’s rediscovery of early-seventeenth-century Jewish liturgical music composer Salomone Rossi. Placed alongside similar accounts of Palestrina and hymn singing in the Catholic and Protestant churches respectively, Ensel implied Judaism’s return to a meaningful place in Europe’s liturgical landscape in this era. He emphasized this claim in his conclusion: Rather than attributing musical ideas to one group or another, Ensel asserted that liturgical music derived from a wide spectrum of processes, based on a combination of self-determination, musical cultivation, and the specific character of each group. The source for such musical activity lay not in the hermetic space of the sanctuary alone, he argued, but in a fluid interaction with all aspects of musical life: “both the Synagogue and the Church,” Ensel stated, “have at no time been reluctant in absorbing to their liturgies the music originally composed for other purposes than sacred.” Even selections from popular culture such as opera could have a home in the modern synagogue, church, or mosque, so long as they were tastefully chosen.

80 Ibid., 164–65. Emphasis in original.
81 Ibid., 192, 196. “The fact … that these compositions should have been permitted to lie hidden for more than two centuries, until accidently [sic] extricated from the dust of a library, bears sad testimony to the neglect of Jewish sacred music, when compared with the fostering care, which the Church bestowed upon the works of Rossi’s contemporary Palestrina, among others.”
82 Ibid., 217.
His ideas thus conceived, Ensel ended his book by presenting the “Trisagion” (Kadosh/Sanctus with preceding poetic verses) in notated versions for the synagogue (in his own arrangement), the Catholic church, and the Protestant church. Noting that “[n]o other tune, perhaps, can convey the vivid and ornate style of the Orient; massive and dignified chant of Rome, and the simple musical recitation of Wittenberg, Geneva, and Westminster,” his closing example highlighted the textual parallels between the three groups, and their ability to stand together as related, and even interwoven, traditions.83

Contemporary reviews of ALM, while few, were strongly positive; reviewers commended the book’s accessibility, its copious images, and its seemingly revolutionary comparative treatment of the three major faiths. A writer for Chicago’s Daily Inter Ocean hailed the work as “one of the most complete and valuable acquisitions to musical literature that has been published for several years.”84 The short-lived Chicago journal The Musical Bulletin (1879–1883) mentioned the book in late 1881, after Ensel provided a copy to the editor.85 And a reviewer in the prominent St. Louis-based journal Kunkel’s Musical Review described the book as “remarkable in more senses than one,” and deserving “the study not only of musicians but of the intelligent clergy of all denominations.”86 The Jewish press responded similarly, though with its own slant: Chicago’s correspondent to The American Israelite called it “a book of the greatest interest to every historian, to every lover of music and of art and to every rabbi,” while affirming its place as a long-elusive “correct, reliable, and unprejudiced history of Jewish music”; the German-Jewish paper Die Zeitgeist responded similarly.87 Bloch & Company became the book’s distributor, and a copy was donated to the young Hebrew Union College; however, the extremely limited printing severely curtailed the

83 Ibid., 219.
85 Letter from Ensel to Edward Freiberger, 4 October 1881. Bound in to the copy of ALM at the Newberry Library, Chicago.
87 Eduardo, “Chicago,” The American Israelite (10 October 1881): 122. See also the review in Der Zeitgeist: Israelitisches Familienblatt 3, no. 4 (16 February 1882): 56.
book’s spread, even among its specialized readership. Mainstream music education journal *The Étude* lamented the study’s scarcity in 1885, in an article aptly titled “An Unpublished Work.”

**Jewish Music on the National Stage**

Ensel, meanwhile, continued his work with Paducah’s small congregation Bene Yeshurun and its young but well-regarded choral program. During his tenure from 1880–1886, the first years of the congregation’s membership in the UAHC, he served in both musical and clerical capacities while teaching music lessons on the side as evidenced by his occasional contributions to *The Étude*. One of these articles, likely drawn from his experience, mused about the difficulties of improving liturgical choral singing in a small-town setting:

> The few good voices which may happen to be found in the place are distributed in the various denominations. The fine soprano is an Episcopalian, and would, of course, give the benefit of her voice to her own church. The alto, being a Baptist, would not accept the invitation to sing in the Presbyterian church; and the only good tenor in town does not like church music, nor attend church. Hence, another disappointment in the music teacher’s experience in a small city.

89 “An Unpublished Work,” 230. See also a similar article in the “Musical Melange” section of the *Daily Inter Ocean* (7 November 1886): 13; despite the *Inter Ocean’s* previous mention of the book in 1881, it offered a similar interpretation based on a copy that had come into the possession of F. Ziegfeld, president of Chicago’s musical college.

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In July 1887, just after leaving the pulpit, Ensel returned to the speaking circuit, participating in an organized session titled “The True Style and Type for Congregation and Choir” at the eleventh national meeting of the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) in Indianapolis.93 Standing before 1,800 music educators, Ensel provided a Jewish voice alongside two major Christian-American musical figures with contrasting approaches to congregational singing. Episcopal minister Rev. William H. Cooke (1837–1889), of St. John’s Chapel in lower Manhattan, had founded the Church Music Association in 1874 and had served as president of the Oratorio Society of New York since 1876—both organizations aiming to elevate the aesthetics of amateur choral singing. Catholic priest Alfred Young (1831–1900) advocated tirelessly for “congregational singing” from the pews; he had edited The Catholic Hymnal in 1884 to achieve this end and wrote numerous articles supporting the practice in both Catholic and mainstream journals.94 While all three spoke on historical matters, the session emphasized pragmatic steps that music teachers could take well beyond the sanctuary, under the assumption of liturgical music’s status as a progenitor of the art music tradition.

Ensel’s message, which he had developed within an ecumenical environment, found particular depth juxtaposed with his colleagues’ presentations. All three offered idiomatic histories of music in their respective religious traditions, paying special attention to the congregation’s role in affirming an appropriate level of spirituality; and each pointedly criticized efforts to enhance the sound of worship through elite musical artistry. Young, in the style of the Saint Cecilia Society reformers, marked the Renaissance and its turn to “art for art’s sake” as the start of musical degradation in the Catholic church; Monteverdi’s popularization of the leading tone in particular, he claimed, opened an era of indulgently

complex harmony that took away from the corporate spirit of prayer.\textsuperscript{95} He advocated returning to mass chanting in the Gregorian style, which would give congregants greater claim on the service and present a more idiomatic harmonic and rhythmic connection to the text.\textsuperscript{96} Cooke, in contrast, framed the Reformation as a period of harmonic elaboration that established a healthy balance between the corporate expression of choral arrangements and the devotional music of basic chants and chorales, reflecting different levels of musical ability.\textsuperscript{97} In the United States, however, the balance tilted away from the congregation, with choirs attempting pieces that exceeded their capabilities and obscured the text. “The choir,” Cooke noted, “should never forget that in the devotional act the people have their proper place and function.”\textsuperscript{98}

Ensel’s speech, in sharp contrast, characterized Jewish chant as a creative stream that ran in counterpoint to its Christian analogs: focusing on Jews’ preservation of Oriental Egyptian/Chaldean chant, their music’s stunted existence in the era of Christian development, and its reinvigoration under the still-alive Sulzer. This history, particularly its orientalist angle, superseded the other speakers’ concerns about the balance of art music and congregational chant, since Jewish identity did not present the same tension. Although Ensel discussed Orthodox rejection of harmony and instrumentation during prayer, he framed the act as manifesting a lack of musical sophistication, producing a sound whose “sadness” could be seen as a mirror to the “spirit of the powerful [Catholic] church.” The music of this “lachrymose” worldview ended in America, however, where Jews “have no cause to lament over the victories of Vespasian, Titus and Hadrian” but rather needed to recognize

\textsuperscript{95} The leading tone, a crucial part of tonal harmony from the seventeenth century onward, refers to the tone one half-step below the fundamental note of the intended “arrival” chord (B if moving to a C-major chord, for example); contemporary listeners have been conditioned to feel the leading tone’s “natural momentum” toward musical resolution.
\textsuperscript{96} Alfred Young, “The Divine Idea of Church Song,” \textit{The Voice} 9, no. 7 (July 1887): 111–113 [Part I]; no. 8 (August 1887): 119–121 [Part II].
\textsuperscript{97} W.H. Cooke, “Church Music in the Episcopal Church.” \textit{The Voice} 9, no. 7 (July 1887): 101–103.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.

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why Jewish populations elsewhere, still under persecution, continued
the older musical ways. Ensel ended his talk by describing Kol Nidre as
a tune that bridged ancient and modern, Orthodox and “Reformed,”
Occidental and Oriental—and, remarkably, represented a case where
the music itself took precedence over the words, which were “nothing
but the merest and driest of Talmudic casuistry.”99 Ensel’s emphasis on
historical description, and his much milder series of moral prescriptions
than his colleagues, likely made sense to an audience that viewed Jewish
music as an ancient survival of uncertain significance. By inclusion in
the MTNA forum, however, his paper provided a substantive argument
for the continued inclusion of Jewish musical practices in Western musi‑
cal narratives, as seen through the lens of an active specialist.

Presented one way in a mainstream forum and published in the
MTNA’s journal The Voice, Ensel’s message shifted noticeably for a
Jewish audience. The American Israelite published the same speech in a
longer version with less invasive editing—including cues for live vocal
demonstrations by local singer Dora Messing. In this setting, lacking
the context of Cooke’s and Young’s talks, Ensel appeared to empha‑
size Jewish primacy where The Voice implied confluence—expanding
on the principle developed in ALM that sui generis musical innovation
could only happen during periods of national self-determination.100
Thus, while the ancient Hebrews included the musical style of their
Egyptian oppressors in their earliest liturgical music, only after “the
peaceful possession of the promised land … could the leaders of the
Hebrew people begin to mould whatever they had adopted from oth‑
ers, into such a type, as would become distinct from the parent stock.”
Referring to the musical liturgy developed by “Samuel, and after him
David and Solomon,” Ensel used Talmud-based references to musical
practices to assert that the musical style developed during the Second
Temple period comprised “the true type, the only true style of church
music everywhere.” While both versions of his address noted that “the

99 Ensel, “The Traditional Music of the Synagogue,” The Voice 9, no. 7 (July 1887): 107–
109.
100 Ensel, “The Traditional Music of the Synagogue,” The American Israelite (22 July 1887):
4–5; 29 July 1887: 3.
primitive church, following the advice of the apostles … intonated the Psalms in exactly the same manner,” his American Israelite article reinforced the Jewish narrative by adding: “And there is no doubt that [the Psalms] were chanted to Hebrew music.”

Similarly, Catholic oppression during the medieval period led Jews to pair folk tunes of the time with a growing body of piyyutim, leading Ensel to claim that “it is to the synagogue, and later to the Protestant church, to which the musical world owes a debt of gratitude” for this practice. Moreover, while composer/cantor Sulzer, in The Voice, amiably participated in the European church music tradition, The American Israelite’s version noted how Sulzer’s “polyphonic anthem style” drew stark contrast with Catholic and Protestant musical conventions: “in contradistinction to the Gregorian plainchant, and the Lutheran Choral, the introduction of which, having been tried, never could captivate a Jewish ear.” Somewhat genteelly blunted in The Voice, Ensel’s (perhaps original) perspective in The American Israelite represented a Judeocentric revision of liturgical music’s timeline, placing Jewish creativity at the forefront of religious musical development and citing Jews’ history of oppression as a springboard for, rather than inhibitor to, such change.

Rather more subtly, The American Israelite version of Ensel’s address adhered to the ideological underpinnings of American Jewish reformers. While the article in The Voice noted that “it is to the Israelites to whom we have to look for authentic information in regard to ancient music,” the version in The American Israelite employed the more openly ethnic term “Hebrew people” [emphasis in original], possibly reflecting the contemporary Reform Jewish nomenclature used in, for example, the recently founded Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1873) and its associated seminary, Hebrew Union College (1875). And where Ensel in The Voice described the introduction of “the organ and a choir of trained singers” into Jewish life as an innovation from “about forty years ago,” The American Israelite version added “after a lapse of nearly 2,000

101 The Israelite newspaper (called The American Israelite from 1874) likely retained its name for brand recognition, even as it represented an earlier era.
years,” fulfilling a Reform Jewish approach to theology that emphasized Jews as a biblical (rather than talmudic, or law-based) people. Ensel’s use of talmudic passages to describe ancient performance practices affirmed the Talmud’s place as a historical document in the reformers’ spiritual topography. Yet he openly criticized contemporary adherence to Talmud-based religious practice, noting specifically Orthodox Judaism’s rejection of organ and mixed choir because “the rabbins of the Talmud held that no other place in God’s wide world is fit to cultivate the old temple music but Zion.” This comment, which also affirmed Reform Judaism’s rejection of a Jewish state at the time, added a new dimension to Ensel’s concluding critique of Kol Nidre’s dry talmudic text in The Voice.

Taken as a whole, the differences between these two printed versions of the address highlighted the divergent interest that Ensel’s two key constituencies took in his work, and the lens through which each saw its relevance: adding a living Jewish voice for music educators, and championing musical reform among liberal Jews who sought to create a comfortable place for themselves in the United States. While at least one more conservative voice in the Jewish press (probably Henry S. Morais of Philadelphia’s Jewish Exponent) offered his own critique of Ensel’s ideas, that author nonetheless acknowledged that “the history of Jewish music is surely an interesting study” and affirmed Ensel’s “commendable acquaintance with that subject.”

An Effaced Legacy

For the remainder of his life, Ensel appeared to look to music education as his primary outlet, as both a peer community and a forum where he could present his research on a national level. Speaking at the 1889 MTNA meeting in Philadelphia, Ensel repeated his story about the

102 [Henry S. Morais] editorial, The Jewish Exponent (29 July 1887): 6. Morais was one of three editors of the Exponent at the time but seems the most likely author for this article because of his simultaneous editorship of The Musical and Dramatic Standard. It is not clear to which version of Ensel’s talk the editorial responded.
origins of “Malbrook” (“We Won’t Come Home ’Til Morning”), and local and national media amplified his remarks anecdotally for years afterward.  

Although he no longer served as a full-time synagogue musician—indeed, one account described him as “inclined to have no particular religious views” late in life—he remained a member of the synagogue and continued to participate in select Jewish events that called for large-scale musical leadership, acting as orchestra conductor and arranger at the March 1894 consecration of Paducah’s new sanctuary.  

Mostly, however, he continued giving private music lessons in Paducah, while continuing to contribute short pedagogical articles and epigrams to *The Étude*.  

Ensel’s efforts became increasingly overshadowed by students of Sulzer who had come to the United States starting in the mid-to-late 1860s, especially Alois Kaiser and Morris Goldstein. Cantorial voices and the concept of the cantor as professional musician began to dominate conversations about synagogue music in the United States at this time, as aspirations toward congregation-led singing and the use of pre-existing melodies faced wavering support. Ensel’s adaptation of Rossini tunes and other “traditional” melodies retained some popularity through the 1880s: his arrangements of two Portuguese/Sephardic melodies and two “traditional” holiday tunes with hymn texts by Gustav Gottheil appeared in a prominent 1887 collection prepared by New York’s Temple  

Ensel’s account of the origin of this song lingered, appearing, for instance, in S.V. Clevenger, *The Evolution of Man and His Mind* (Chicago: Evolution Publishing Company, 1903), 216.  

“New Temple Dedicated At Paducah, Ky,” *The American Israelite* (29 March 1894): 7; “A Learned Man: Prof. G.S. Ensel Dies After a Long Illness,” *The Paducah Sun* (15 November 1901): 1. Ensel appeared to suspend his membership in the local synagogue between 1886 and 1889 due to differences with the next minister, but subscribed consistently once he rejoined; see Temple Israel (Paducah, KY) minutes, 1880–1910, SC-93895, AJA.  

See, for example, Ensel, “An Old Teacher’s Opinion” (and additional poem), *The Étude* 9, no. 3 (March 1891): 53. The *Paducah, KY Directory*, 1890–1891 listed Ensel as a music teacher.
Emanu-El organist A.J. Davis. Yet American cantors’ emphasis on musical content as a basis for authenticity discouraged the use of music written by non-Jews, seeking instead an opportunity for Jewish identity to assert itself by reintroducing “traditional” melodies and elaborate new compositions. By the 1890s, cantors had formed professional organizations that aimed to enforce musical standards and argue for the legitimacy of the profession, assuming all musical responsibilities for the congregation and often eclipsing the work of nonprofessionals such as Ensel, G.M. Cohen, and Simon Hecht. To accompany a new 1892 Union Prayer Book, created to unify members of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Central Conference of American Rabbis looked to Kaiser and the Cantors Association to edit its complementary hymnal. When The Union Hymnal appeared in 1897, moreover, its stated emphasis of including original tunes by Jewish musicians and cantors largely shut Ensel out.

Aesthetic changes in the history and framing of “Jewish” music that came to emphasize modal ideas, cantillation, and oral tradition also affected the staying power of Ensel’s work, seemingly attempting radical sonic (and historical) dissociation from Christian musical forms where Ensel sought integration. Kaiser and William Sparger’s 1893 A Collection of the Principal Melodies of the Synagogue from the Earliest Times to the Present embodied the characteristic trend of mining contemporary melodies for surviving indicators of the ancient past, reversing

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106 A.J. Davis, Music to the Hymns and Anthems for Jewish Worship by G. Gottheil 1 (New York: Kakeles, 1887). Isaac Mayer Wise also noted that Ensel’s arrangement of a Rossini piece to “Lecho Adonoi” was performed at the January 1884 consecration of the new Memphis, Tennessee, synagogue.

107 Alois Kaiser et al, eds., Anthems, Hymns, and Responses for the Union Prayer Book (New York: n.p., 1894). By the time Kaiser’s anthology was published, the Central Conference of American Rabbis had recalled the 1892 Union Prayer Book and replaced it with the edition of 1894–1895.

108 Society for American Cantors, Union Hymnal (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1897).

109 See in particular Josef Singer, Die Tonarten des traditionellen Synagogalesangs: Ihr Verhältnis zu den Kirchentonarten und den Tonarten der vorchristlichen Musikperiode (Vienna: E.M. Wetzler, 1886), which became a touchstone of Jewish music modal theory.
the musicological techniques Ensel used. In 1899, British Rabbi and musicologist Francis L. Cohen described choral music as a recent Jewish phenomenon, distancing it from Christian practices, and emphasized the new trend toward monophonic chant and modal theory—a commentary that Werner’s Magazine (the successor journal to The Voice) placed in direct contrast with Ensel’s 1887 MTNA talk. By 1929, Abraham Z. Idelsohn’s foundational text Jewish Music in its Historical Development gave only a dismissive nod to Ensel’s major work as “an attempt to explain the Ancient Liturgical Music…” Despite helping to establish the field of Jewish music study, Ensel’s book largely disappeared from the scholarly landscape, its musical practices and theoretical approaches out of vogue.

Ultimately, Ensel offered another pathway for America’s Jews to place themselves in a religious-musical continuum in the second half of the nineteenth century. Rather than opting for monumentalism and new composition that emphasized a sense of Jewish uniqueness, Ensel advised Jews to use the music around them as their guide. Closer attention to music history, he claimed, revealed a much more fluid idea of musical tradition than had previously been considered—one that emphasized a sense of common origin, frequent interaction, and parallel if not always equitable development. At the same time, he made sure that Judaism (re)claimed a part in that story, standing alongside Catholicism and Protestantism (and Islam) as both progenitor and protagonist, significant for its role and influence even if limited via the comparative size of its population. Within a midwestern landscape of small congregations that needed to ration their musical resources, and working within a general era of unification and optimism that extended to progressive Jewish groups, Ensel put his intellectual work into action, prioritizing facilitation over composition, and community over uniqueness.

While the content of Ensel’s work may be forgotten, the philosophy it espoused remains relevant. Large congregations still often set the landscape of Jewish musical paradigms, publicly justifying—with the backing of cantorial schools and movement-based institutions—the expense of a cantor, the production of high-quality synagogue music, and the broader sonic values of Jewish spirituality. Yet music remains an important part of the small society as well, where cantors can be scarce and prohibitively expensive, rabbinic leadership transitory, volunteers central to day-to-day spiritual leadership, and music (perhaps) more openly connected to contemporary popular styles. In this framework, Ensel spent a lifetime bridging ideals of Jewish reform with the pedagogy of a singing community, emphasizing music’s place in a broad social discourse that filtered beyond the synagogue, shared resources with other religious groups, and engaged openly with local cultural practices and norms. In some ways, then, the erasure of Ensel’s name from the historical record of music scholarship may, intentionally or otherwise, have proven his significance: balancing the idea of musical authority with the pragmatic role of a facilitator who placed the people and their cultural context at the center of the Jewish musical narrative.

Judah M. Cohen is the Lou and Sybil Mervis Professor of Jewish Culture in the Borns Jewish Studies Program, and Associate Professor of Musicology in the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, Bloomington. A specialist in Jewish music and Jewish Caribbean history, he is completing a book on music in nineteenth century American Jewish life, while conducting research on American musical theater and a biography of singer/songwriter/liturgist Debbie Friedman.
The Lieberman Clause Revisited

Benjamin Steiner

The three principal denominations of American Judaism are often thought of as discrete units that perceive halakhah, or Jewish law, in categorically different ways. On the left, Reform rabbis champion individual choice above halakhah. On the right, Orthodox leaders claim strict allegiance to halakhah in letter and spirit. Conservative rabbis situate themselves in the middle, aiming to evolve halakhah to suit modern conditions. However, there was a time when Orthodox and Conservative Judaism were less distinguishable. As Jeffrey Gurock describes it, the division fully solidified among the laity only in the years after World War II—coinciding, as Michael Cohen writes, with a partisan turn among more newly minted Conservative rabbis.1 While unable to articulate a precise rubric for change, these rabbis adapted halakhah for themselves and their movement in response to contemporary concerns, thereby forging a distinct denominational identity. In 1948, the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly (RA) formed a Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) to hasten this objective.2

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2 Theodore Friedman, “Presidential Message: New Demands on the Rabbinate and the Laity,” Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly (hereafter PRA) (1948): 88–89. (Much of the PRA source material cited here was later reprinted in Proceedings of the Committee on Jewish...
The CJLS and its publicized liberal legal decisions provided grist for those who sought to discredit the traditionalism of Conservative rabbis, but the issue that garnered the most attention predated the work of the committee. Scholarship points to the tragedy of the agunah (literally, “anchored woman”) as a marker that helped to differentiate Orthodox and Conservative leadership as early as the 1920s.\(^3\) Simply put, Conservative rabbis were as a whole more determined than their Orthodox brethren to remedy her plight. As Jonathan D. Sarna notes in his *American Judaism*:

In many ways the long, ugly debate over how to resolve the problem of the anchored wife, which lasted long past World War II, highlighted issues that came to distinguish the Conservative strategy from its Orthodox counterpart and drew the movements farther and farther apart. Questions concerning rabbinic authority (did Orthodox sages always have the final word?), the place of the Talmud in the modern rabbinate, women's equality, and, most important, the extent to which Jewish law could be bent to meet the “progressive standards of American life” all underlay the controversy, and, increasingly, the two movements approached each of those questions differently.\(^4\)

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Response to the *agunah* question certainly furthered the process of denominational self-definition. However, overemphasis on the historic centrality of the *agunah* question to the Conservative-Orthodox divide invites a mistaken conclusion. Not every effort by Conservative rabbis to aid *agunot* is best understood as part of a trajectory toward fissure in Judaism. Public, interdenominational bickering should not occlude the *intra*denominational dynamics at play.5 The creation of the Lieberman clause illustrates this lesson, a case in which the internal politics of the Conservative movement were the more formative.

The accepted narrative about the clause, developed in writings by Orthodox and Conservative rabbis and by historians, rehashes the following points: In 1954, the rabbis of the Conservative movement published an addition to the *ketubah* (Jewish marriage contract) to help free *agunot*. The addition—dubbed the “Lieberman clause” for Saul Lieberman, the prominent Talmudist who championed it—was to be signed by the bride and groom before marriage. Should a man later refuse to give his wife a *get* (bill of divorce), the clause granted the Jewish court of the RA the authority to penalize him pursuant to the dictates of civil law. By all accounts, the response from the right was severe. Orthodox rabbis publicly condemned the document and assailed the competence of Conservative rabbis in the press.6 This standard rendering frames the Lieberman clause as a matter of Conservative reform and Orthodox critique. As Orthodox Rabbi Louis Bernstein writes, the Lieberman clause “serve[d] … the purpose of accentuating and clarifying the line of demarcation between the two groups.”7

5 This paper addresses the Conservative rabbinate and its fraught relationship with the Lieberman clause, but the response of the Orthodox rabbinate was not monolithic either. For example, see the account of Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, then vice-president of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America. Rackman, “Political Conflict and Cooperation: Political Considerations in Jewish Inter-Denominational Relations, 1955–1956,” in *Conflict and Consensus in Jewish Political Life*, ed. Stuart A. Cohen and Eliezer Don-Yehiya (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1986), 118–127, esp. 120.

6 Regina Stein provides the most comprehensive account of these developments. Stein, “Boundaries of Gender,” 322–357.

Yet it is often wise to interrogate binaries in the search for deeper meaning. This standard narrative misses the point. New archival research reveals a counterintuitive motif. It locates initial support for the Lieberman clause not with freedom for *agunot*, but rather with the broader 1950s cultural imperatives to defend the nuclear family and limit divorce—which brings us to the substance of this paper: It probes the prehistory, authorship, translation of, and Orthodox opposition to the Lieberman clause, and then points to the significance of marriage and familial cohesion to its formation. Finally, it considers the significance of a later edition of the clause, rewritten and printed by the RA in 1959.

**Before the Conservative Prenup**

The existence of *agunot* or “chained” wives reflects the unilateral nature of Jewish marriage and specifically its dissolution. According to halakhah, women cannot initiate divorce proceedings. The husband must give the *get*, and it must be of his own volition. Should he abandon his wife or disappear (often the cause of *aginut* historically), or simply refuse out of stubbornness, malice, or sheer ignorance to grant her a *get* (most common today), she remains religiously married. Should he be coerced, halakhah deems his *get* null and void. Should she obtain a civil divorce, remarry, and bear children without a *get*, Jewish law deems her an adulteress and her offspring *mamzerim* (illegitimate), to be shunned “even to the tenth generation.” Across the centuries, many rabbinic sages mustered their halakhic prowess to free individual *agunot*. However, most mid-twentieth-century Conservative rabbis wanted a more aggressive solution, although they struggled to agree among themselves on a plan.

With the advent of the CJLS, the debate burgeoned, because the committee was as diverse as the Conservative rabbinate itself. As one proponent described the arrangement, the CJLS was “to be different from all other kinds of Law Committees … representative of all shades

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8 *Aginut* is the state of being an *agunah*.
9 Louis Epstein, *Li-She’elath ha-Agunah* [Hebrew] (New York: Ginsberg Linotyping Co., 1940), 21–25.
10 Deuteronomy 23:3.
of opinion within the Rabbinical Assembly.”¹¹ Yet, such multivocality only amplified the cacophony. Interpretive pluralism bred controversy. By 1952, three proposals competed for legitimacy, each named for the rabbi who proposed it—the Louis Epstein proposal (1930), the Michael Higger proposal (1950), and the David Aronson proposal (1951)¹² (more on these below). None gained the unanimity that Conservative rabbis sought so as to sustain a united movement.¹³

A CJLS conference at the Breakers Hotel in Atlantic City in 1952 further accentuated this impasse. As the committee again plumbed the marketplace of proposals in search of a viable agunah plan, the sheer number of approaches hindered the task. Everyone had an opinion, even those absent from the conference who—sensing the importance of the gathering—conveyed their disparate positions via correspondence.¹⁴ Urgency and enthusiasm did not produce consensus. Absent a unifying set of halakhic guidelines within the CJLS, there was no general limit to the method or scope of amending the law; each proposal reflected a different approach to halakhah within the big Conservative tent.¹⁵

Amid the tumult in Atlantic City, the plan that emerged combined the approaches of Epstein, Higger, and Aronson with a new

¹¹ Proceedings of the Joint Conference of the Rabbinical Assembly and the Seminary Faculty on Law, 23–24 February 1953, Seymour Siegel Papers, MSS 61-48-7, St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York, 122 (hereafter PJCL).
¹⁵ Consider the divide between Rabbis Epstein and Aronson: Epstein, the spiritual leader of Kehillath Israel Synagogue (Brookline, MA), trained at the Slobodka Yeshiva in Europe and maintained his traditional leanings in America. He broke publicly with Orthodoxy exclusively over the question of the agunah. See Boaz Cohen and Louis Ginzberg, “Louis M. Epstein (In Memoriam) 1887–1949,” Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research 18 (1948–1949): xix–xxi. By contrast, Aronson, who ministered at Beth El Synagogue (Minneapolis), was a “trailblazer” with a broadly liberal approach to Jewish law and the project to adopt it to modernity. See Nadell, Conservative Judaism, 35–36.
proposal from Rabbi Max Arzt, vice-chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), which ordained Conservative rabbis. As Arzt advised, the RA would appoint a national *beit din* (Jewish court), charged to “use every possible means of moral suasion and social pressure to induce the husband where available to agree to the writing of a *get*.”

Where unsuccessful, the *beit din* would apply Aronson’s proposal to expand talmudic precedent to annul the marriage. Per Epstein’s plan, future couples would append a codicil to the *ketubah* to empower a woman to commission a *get*, should her husband prove unable or unwilling to give one. And a minor edit of the Aramaic *ketubah* would, à la the Higger proposal, emphasize that Jewish marriage is contracted “*al da’at beit din*” (with the mandate of the Jewish court).

This, in Higger’s understanding, would strengthen the halakhic standing of the RA *beit din*. The rabbis resolved to present the “Atlantic City” plan to the CJLS, the RA convention, and the seminary faculty, “with the view of eliciting their reactions.”

No such vote ever came to pass. Rabbi Theodore Friedman, chair of the CJLS, addressed the impasse. The problem, he argued, stemmed from the many approaches to halakhah espoused by the members of the RA. Ideological diversity within the CJLS was axiomatic. In general, Friedman himself proved willing to venture beyond the halakhah to effect change in Judaism. However, unlike other halakhic matters, here the CJLS needed consensus. As Friedman stated:

> What divides us at this point is something that cannot be argued halakhically. It really involves our philosophy of Judaism…. We were then confronted with a situation within the committee that is unprecedented. We could understandably issue a responsum on the Sabbath, which contained both a majority and minority viewpoint, but if the members

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16 Memorandum on meeting of the CJLS, 14–15 January 1952, Isaac Klein Papers, Reel 4, JTSA.
17 Minutes of the CJLS: 14–15 January 1952, Isaac Klein Papers, Reel 4, JTSA.
18 Salamon Faber, “*K’dath Bet Din shel Knesiath Horabonim*,” *PRA* (1952): 205–211.
20 In 1950, the CJLS passed *responsa* relaxing Sabbath laws, in an effort to rejuvenate Sabbath observance more generally.
of our own committee … could not in good conscience [agree] … would we not be guilty of driving a deep wedge between us … in so vital an area as marital status?21

Sabbath observance was a matter of personal conscience. By contrast, uniform marriage policy held together the Jewish collective. Any disension, Friedman insisted, would rend the threads that bound religious Jews together; Orthodox Jews would no longer marry their Conservative counterparts.

While a solution eluded the RA, the fervor of the discourse grew. The JTS faculty became concerned that, left unchecked, rogue halakhists in the RA would freely misrepresent the law. JTS Chancellor Louis Finkelstein wrote to Professor Saul Lieberman, the celebrated talmudist on the seminary faculty, to voice these concerns in March 1952. For Finkelstein and Lieberman, a solution to the agunah problem was not a pressing concern. Finkelstein, in the wake of the Holocaust, hoped to make JTS a global epicenter of Jewish scholarship, education, and life; Lieberman was preoccupied with his scholarly initiatives. However, activist RA members appeared ready to enact sweeping change that, Finkelstein believed, could endanger Jewish law, fracture Jewish life, and undermine the centrality of JTS. The time had therefore come for intervention:

This is our last chance to deal with the problem of Jewish Law effectively in this country. If we cannot find someone within our faculty group … who will make the application of Jewish law his life’s interest, nothing … will prevent incompetent people from undertaking this responsibility…. A number of us see the issue raised by the Rabbinical Assembly as secondary to other vital matters such as the future orientation of Jews in Israel and America and the building up of Torah generally. However, the rabbis who are in congregations cannot take this view and will certainly resent it….22

22 Louis Finkelstein to Saul Lieberman, 25 March 1952, General Files, R.G.1-108-6, JTSA.

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Finkelstein proposed a Joint Law Conference, at which the JTS faculty would descend from the ivory tower to coax the pulpit rabbis toward a less radical resolution. They aimed to wrest authority from the RA. In this way, Finkelstein reasoned, the integrity of halakhah would be upheld.

The steering committee coalesced in late 1952. Ten men—Jacob Agus, David Aronson, Solomon Goldfarb, Ira Eisenstein, and Theodore Friedman of the RA and Shraga Abramson, Max Arzt, Judah Goldin, Louis Finkelstein, and Saul Lieberman of the JTS faculty—called a conference for 23–24 February, with Eisenstein and Goldin acting as chairs of their respective groups.23 Invitations were sent; Goldin appraised the seminary administration:

On Monday and Tuesday, February 23 and 24, the Joint Conference on Law of the Seminary Faculty and the Rabbinical Assembly will hold its conference sessions at the Seminary. The Conference would like the use of the Synagogue room for those sessions…. There may be as many as 100–150 or even 200 people in attendance. In addition to the chairs being set-up, I imagine that the general practice is to remove the Torah scrolls from the ark.24

The physical preparations were standard, but the contents of Goldin’s memo echo the idiosyncratic nature of the gathering. First is the uncertainty regarding attendance. As the one time in history that Conservative rabbis and JTS faculty conferenced together to debate halakhic matters, suffice it to say that nobody knew how many people to expect. Second is the removal of the Torah; its physical displacement illuminates the curious absence of halakhic discussion at the conference itself. There, Conservative rabbis and seminary faculty gathered together and revisited the agunah question, but the discourse privileged hermeneutics and meta-principles over the particulars of Jewish law—less about the details and more about the sufficiency of the proposal before them, the definition of Conservative Judaism, and the locus of authority within

23 Minutes of the CJLS, 13 October 1952, Isaac Klein Papers, Reel 4, JTSA. Judah Goldin replaced initial appointee Simon Greenberg.
24 Judah Goldin to Bernard Segal, 15 January 1953, General Files, R.G.1-120-24, JTSA.
the movement. Toward the end of the conference, Lieberman presented the clause to those assembled.

**The Text and Authorship of the Clause**

Despite his indispensable support, Lieberman did not invent the “Lieberman clause” he proposed that day. As noted above, Max Arzt had first proposed a prenuptial modification to the *ketubah* in Atlantic City. The meeting minutes paraphrase Arzt’s remarks there:

> We have to become reconciled to conditions—we cannot apply sanctions, there will always be “victims of the law,” but their number should be reduced…. [We should] apply the rule of coercion in a new sense: Have [the] groom sign [a] statement submitting to RA enforcement of marriage and divorce regulations [and] use extraordinary pressure of public opinion wherever he refused to cooperate in issuing a *get.*

Arzt’s innovation reflected two considerations that later became three. First, he deemed a systemic solution to the *agunah* problem incompatible with halakhah; a plan of more limited scope would be necessary. Second, Arzt recognized the ability of moral suasion to encourage a *get* in the absence of Jewish communal autonomy. In time, Arzt also realized the capacity of Conservative rabbis to invoke the authority of secular courts to aid *agunot.*

That this became Lieberman’s eponymous clause attests less to a specific innovation and more to the significance of his endorsement. Due to his elevated stature in the Orthodox world, Lieberman’s involvement furthered the odds of success of the clause. Arzt had advanced an idea behind which Lieberman lent his influence and intellectual weight—the capacity of an arbitration agreement, backed by the moral suasion of the Conservative *beit din* and the enforcement mechanism of civil authorities—to assist the *agunah.*

This is how Alan M. Stroock, a prominent lawyer and chair of the JTS Board of Directors, understood the clause when he worded its first draft. As a prenuptial agreement signed between bride and groom, it stipulated the conditions under which the authority of the Conservative

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25 Minutes of the CJLS, 14–15 January 1952, Isaac Klein Papers, Reel 4, JTSA.
beit din could be invoked to effect the delivery of a get. Monetary damages would be the punishment for failure to respond to the summons of the beit din. Stroock wrote to Lieberman on 17 February, seven days before the joint conference, to convey his understanding in light of a prior meeting:

The proposal which we discussed was that in [the] future the ketubah should include a provision whereby the parties agree that in the event that at any time either one of them obtains a civil divorce from the other … each party to such [a] marriage would consent to the obtaining of a get at the request of the other party; and if either party refused to give his or her consent … the other party should have the right to submit the matter to the National Beth Din … for arbitration. The National Beth Din would be given power to fix and determine the amount of monetary damages to be paid by the party who refused to consent to the get, and the decision of the National Beth Din would be binding and conclusive upon both parties and would be enforceable by either party in any civil court of appropriate jurisdiction.26

The solution was unprecedented in the realm of American jurisprudence. No prenuptial document stipulating the willingness of the partners to consent to a religious divorce had ever been litigated in American courts; moreover, courts were loath to recognize any document that compromised matrimony. Lieberman and Stroock operated in uncharted territory.27

What happened between 17 and 24 February with respect to the wording of the document is crucial. When Lieberman presented the clause for the first time to those gathered at the Joint Law Conference, it read as follows:

The bride and groom desiring to live in accordance with the Jewish tradition, requiring husband and wife to give each other complete love and

26 Alan Stroock to Saul Lieberman, 17 February 1953, General Files, R.G. 1-120-24, JTSA.
devotion, and desiring also to enable each other to live in accordance with Jewish marriage law, no matter what conditions may happen, hereby agree to recognize the National Beth Din of the Rabbinical Assembly of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America as having authority to summon either party at the request of the other should occasion arise for [such] intervention, in order to enable the partner considering itself aggrieved to live up to the standards of Jewish marriage law with a clear conscience; and they authorize the Beth Din to impose such penalties as it may see fit for failure to respond to its summons or to carry out its decision.28

Lieberman, in consultation with Finkelstein and Arzt, swapped explicit rhetoric for nebulous prose. “Monetary damages” became abstract “penalties” in the new draft. And the text accentuated the propriety of marriage over and above the utility of the document to facilitate divorce.

Lieberman channeled this sentiment at the Joint Law Conference. The attempt to free agunot was not the principal consideration of the prenup; if anything, he asserted, the clause pitted the cause of agunot against other more significant factors—the integrity of Jewish marriage and the broader thrust of the Jewish tradition. For these reasons, Lieberman was reluctant to include any explicit rhetoric about divorce:

I was not guided only by the halakha. I was much more concerned with the human side of it. I learned from chazal [the ancient Jewish sages]. They didn’t want to make this thing. We have to take into consideration the psychological solemn moment [of marriage]. “In case of divorce”—you simply don’t write such a thing. It offends you. So we … [changed the] formula.29

Lieberman, Finkelstein, Arzt, and everyone assembled knew full well that an inexplicit clause would be more difficult to legally enforce. “Mr. Stroock told me that of course this is too vague,”30 remarked Lieberman.

29 Ibid., 108.
30 Ibid., 109.
Yet, amidst all the disputation at the Joint Law Conference between the faculty and the seminary graduates, nobody assailed the wording of the text.

On 19 March, JTS publicized the work and purpose of the February gathering in a press release:

The unprecedented conference was called to consider problems relating to the Jewish law of marriage and domestic relations, with a view toward determining methods of preserving the integrity of family life and of strengthening family relations in accordance with the standards of the Jewish law and tradition.31

The release made no mention of the Lieberman clause and no explicit reference to the agunah issue. Such was the mandate of the steering committee as they worked to finalize the form of the document.

At the RA convention in June, Lieberman and Finkelstein presented two versions, one that explicitly mentioned divorce and the version Lieberman presented to the Joint Law Conference.32 The RA members uniformly gravitated to the latter. Like Lieberman, they worried more about the dignity of marriage than the practical efficacy of the document. As Rabbi Jacob Agus, the steering committee member and leading Conservative voice, insisted:

I rise here to ask that … we do not include in the [clause] any detailed agreements as to the obligation undertaken by each of the parties and the penalties for failure to fulfil those obligations. Today it is contrary to the spirit in which a young couple gets married for them to even read any such detailed obligations with regard to divorce. It will be ridiculed by them and it will do us no good.33

Agus’s critique resonated with other RA rabbis.34 By all accounts, their priority was sustaining marriages. Divorce was the larger evil to be

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31 Press release, 19 March 1953, Communications Department Files, R.G.11-3-12, JTSA.
33 Ibid., 77–78.
34 See, for example, the critique of Rabbi Max Forman, in “Discussion: Ketubah,” PRA (1954): 81–82.
fought against, and Conservative rabbis lobbied the steering committee to remake the clause with that objective in mind. A proper marriage meant matrimony without qualifications.

When the Conservative leadership promulgated the printed edition of the Lieberman clause in 1954, the text accorded with the preferences of Agus. It read as follows:

And in solemn assent to their mutual responsibilities and love, the bridegroom and bride have declared: As evidence of our desire to enable each other to live in accordance with the Jewish law of marriage throughout our lifetime, we, the bride and bridegroom, attach our signatures to this *ketubah*, and hereby agree to recognize the *Beth Din* of the Rabbinical Assembly and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, or its duly appointed representatives, as having authority to counsel us in the light of Jewish tradition which requires husband and wife to give each other complete love and devotion, and to summon either party at the request of the other, in order to enable the party so requesting to live in accordance with the standards of Jewish law of marriage throughout his or her lifetime. We authorize the *Beth Din* to impose such terms of compensation as it may see fit for failure to respond to its summons or to carry out its decision.35

The printing of the clause served the ends Finkelstein intended. The CJLS formally suspended its own *agunah* activism for three years. “Competent” authorities had triumphed over those who would vitiate the halakhic tradition. However, the primary concern of the discourse about, and wording of, the clause was Jewish marriage.

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35 “*Ketubah*” (English version), *PRA* (1954): 67–68. The Aramaic translation penned by Lieberman: וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה, וְאֵילֵי אָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵחֻה וְאָבַב מִרְמִר בֶּן חַטַּנְתָּנוּ וַתְּרֵךְ.
Orthodox Opposition

Whatever the Conservative rabbis’ intentions, Orthodox rabbis assailed the document as a conduit to divorce. How could a prenuptial contract, presumably manufactured to facilitate freedom for *agunot*, possibly evidence a desire of husband and wife to remain married in “complete love and devotion”? They sought to save their own conception of the integrity of the Jewish family from Conservative clutches. The Rabbinical Council of America and the Rabbinic Alliance of America, both Orthodox organizations, authored a joint press release to decry the prenup and unite the Orthodox in opposition:

> The Orthodox Rabbinate of America calls upon the Conservative movement in the name of Jewish unity and halachic tradition to withdraw its proposal immediately…. This amended ketubah … [has] the gravest implications to the sanctity of Jewish family life and represents the most disastrous disavowal of the principles of Jewish law.36

Orthodox critics worried that the clause would produce fraudulent divorces. Women would remarry without having received a proper *get*. Illegitimate offspring would proliferate. Worse, the Conservative *beit din* might gain prominence, and the premise of Orthodoxy as the vanguard of halakhah could be compromised.

Even if the clause was itself rooted in sound halakhic reasoning—and notably, nobody condemned Lieberman himself—the Orthodox averred that it was in practice wielded by a group of rabbinic upstarts lacking the qualifications to organize a proper *beit din*. As the Israeli newspaper *Davar* quoted one Haredi critic,

> We haven’t even looked at the suggested ketubah … because those who permit the marriage of a kohen to a divorcée in contravention to Torah

36 “Statement by the Rabbinical Council of America, the Rabbinic Alliance of America, Representing the Orthodox Rabbinate of America, Concerning the Recent Action of the Conservative Movement in Altering the Traditional Jewish Marriage Contract, and in Establishing a So-Called ‘Beth Din,’” 3 December 1954, Isaac Klein Papers, Reel 8, JTSA. There were, for a time, negotiations about whether the Orthodox might make use of a modified form of the document, but they publicly scorned it. See Rackman, “Political Conflict and Cooperation”; Bernstein, *Challenge and Mission*, 67–70.
law [as many Conservative rabbis did in practice] are unqualified to innovate in halakhah.\textsuperscript{37}

The Lieberman clause became the public face of Conservative halakhic reform well outside the bounds of \textit{aginut}.

In 1959, Rabbi Norman Lamm, later president of the Orthodox Yeshiva University, critiqued the Lieberman clause along just these lines in \textit{Tradition}. He deemed it internally incongruous and misleading, ultimately a power play by the Conservative rabbinate to assert control over the halakhah. Lamm wrote:

In its approach to the … \textit{agunah}, [the clause] has nothing to do with “strengthening the Jewish home.” It is certainly not calculated to discourage what some Conservative spokesmen have unfortunately called “frivolous” divorces. On the contrary, the effect of the amendment is to put their \textit{Beth Din} in the position of forcing an unwilling spouse to consent to divorce, not preventing one.\textsuperscript{38}

For Lamm, the Lieberman clause was foremost an effort to shroud a pathway to divorce. Yet Lamm’s critique was that of an outsider looking in. As they promulgated the prenup, advocates of the clause resolved both to “preserve the integrity and advance the welfare of the Jewish family … and further the dynamic process inherent in the Jewish tradition.”\textsuperscript{39} Prior scholarship has assumed the latter motivation to the exclusion of the former; in fact, the former was primary.

\textbf{Not about the Agunah}

Overall, efforts to aid the \textit{agunah} exemplified Conservative rabbis’ affirmation of a more progressive approach to halakhah. However, most RA rabbis deemed the result, the so-called Lieberman clause, to be something quite different—a manifestation of the very fundamentalism they

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Haim Isaac, “Se’arah Saviv Ketubah Chadashah” [Hebrew] \textit{Davar} (2 December 1954): 2.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Norman Lamm, “Recent Additions to the \textit{Ketubah}: A Halakhic Critique,” \textit{Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought} 2 (Fall 1959): 98.
\item \textsuperscript{39} “Steering Committee and \textit{Beth Din} Report,” \textit{PRA} (1958): 129.
\end{itemize}

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eschewed. The *agunah* did not need an Orthodox affirmation of the status quo—she needed a Conservative resolution. The Lieberman clause, the Conservative rabbis insisted, was an Orthodox solution; its makers sought through the authority vested in the new *beit din* to move the RA to the right.⁴⁰ Philadelphia Rabbi Edward Tenenbaum encapsulated the general sentiment. Conservative rabbis, he asserted, should chart a new path.

For some time now I have had a sneaking suspicion which was confirmed today—and I certainly hope that you will not think my words harsh—and this suspicion was that the faculty of our Seminary is not a “conservative” faculty in the sense of the Conservative Movement. When I left Yeshiva [University] … to come to the Seminary, it was precisely because in all good conscience I felt that I could not live according to the laws of the [*Shulhan Arukh*]⁴¹ … I had expected, and rightly so—I don’t think it was a mistake—that Conservative Judaism is and should be different from Orthodox Judaism. Today we are told that the [*Shulhan Arukh*] is to be our guide.⁴²

Like so many Conservative rabbis, Tenenbaum attended JTS precisely to escape Orthodoxy.⁴³ Now the Lieberman clause threatened to re-anchor him to Orthodox texts and institutions of authority.

Tenenbaum also addressed the definition of Conservative Judaism. Max Arzt’s assumption that there would “always be victims of the law” was to him insufferable. Tenenbaum demanded a Judaism sufficiently malleable to reshape all manifestations of injustice in halakhah. Conservative determination and daring, he insisted, must triumph over Orthodox constraint. This, for him, was its raison d’être:

I am looking for Conservative Judaism. I am not looking for Orthodox Judaism, and the formation of this particular Joint *Beth Din* seems to me to be something that will not strengthen Conservative Judaism but will

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⁴⁰ Others have noticed the animosity many Conservative rabbis felt toward the Lieberman clause in the years after its adoption. See Nadell, *Conservative Judaism*, 13–14.
⁴¹ A systematic code of Jewish law authored by Joseph Karo (1488–1575) and adhered to strictly by the Orthodox.
⁴² *IJCL*, 137.
try to make an Orthodox Jew out of me when I am not an Orthodox Jew.… As a moral human being, I say if the halakhah does not provide for it … I want this Beth Din to create a new course of action, and until such time as that course of action is created, then we have no right to call ourselves a Conservative movement.44

Tenenbaum’s harsh tone was hardly unique at the conference. A chorus of criticism accentuated the growing ideological chasm between the JTS faculty and the students they educated. The faculty clung to traditional halakhah as the glue to unite Judaism and avoid discord. Meanwhile, JTS graduates labored toward a distinct denominational identity and leveraged halakhic reform as a bulwark against broader religious decline among their laity. The faculty deemed Conservative pulpit rabbis unqualified to render halakhic decisions, but the pulpit rabbis pushed back. As Tenenbaum continued:

[Today we are told] that the Seminary cannot give … [us] authority. The Seminary can only give [us] a nondescript degree and if [we] feel personally qualified [we] may do whatever [we] want in the field of halakhah. That to me is not Conservative Judaism. I want to be authorized to act as a rabbi in the Conservative Movement.… I give every one of my waking moments to the Torah and take it away from my family to try to build up Judaism in my community and my hands are tied because the people who are at the head of this institution are the very people who will say to me: “You must live according to … Orthodoxy and not according to the Conservative Movement.”45

For the RA rabbis, the seminary faculty did much for scholarship but little for the laity; they were academics or, as one rabbi put it, “theoreticians determining the platform of the Conservative movement”46 at a time when American Judaism needed activists on the ground.

Moreover, the Lieberman clause flew in the face of decades of prior Conservative efforts to ameliorate the agunah problem. More viable

44 PJCL, 138.
45 Ibid., 139–140.
46 Ibid., 143.
proposals had been squashed by the unsolicited intrusion of the seminary faculty. Indeed, Conservative rabbis deemed the clause regressive from the start, and the resentment only grew. Rabbi William Greenfeld, entrenched in the movement’s liberal wing,47 channeled this frustration at the 1957 RA convention:

For the first time, to my knowledge, instead of an assembly of rabbis attempting to take a case from the civil courts and bringing it within their domain, we have almost arbitrarily given up, abdicated our domain and turned it over in a sense to the judgment of the civil courts. It is something with which the majority of our men are concerned…. [Moreover,] it creates the atmosphere of having found a solution to a problem … [but] leaves outside its scope many times more problems than those that it solved.48

The Lieberman clause depended on secular authorities to solve a religious problem. Worse, it addressed only one specific type of agunah, Jewish women trapped in unwanted marriages. It contained no provisions for different types of cases of agunot, and it could not guarantee a get. An informal survey by Greenfeld suggested no more than 20 percent of RA members used it49; the clause, liberal critics insisted, could not pretend to be a panacea. If Orthodox leaders like Lamm bemoaned the clause and the national bet din as non-Orthodox, most Conservative rabbis considered them to be too Orthodox.

Those RA rabbis who accepted the Lieberman clause did so as a means toward further reform. The clause bridged the gap from the insufficient past to a better, if uncertain, future. As Rabbi Ralph Simon, who aimed to unify the movement,50 argued at the Joint Law Conference:

What has swayed my opinion, and I hope it will sway the opinions of others, is that at the very end of this conference we got the very first glimpse from a faculty member of a willingness to take one step. I don’t

47 Nadell, Conservative Judaism, 124.
49 Ibid., 178.
50 Nadell, Conservative Judaism, 241.
care how small it is, it is a step, it is movement … into a direction that might indicate where we can go. 51

Lieberman championed the clause. Recognizing movement among the faculty, the RA accepted it as an interim aid to *agunot*. This did not signify unqualified support for the clause. To the contrary, dispute about its effectiveness exposed friction within the Conservative establishment. Many rabbis were uncertain as to whether the clause could provide even a modicum of assistance to *agunot*.

At the Joint Law Conference, Finkelstein struggled to contain the resentment. Most attendees wanted nothing to do with the Lieberman clause, and they made their voices heard. So, Finkelstein resorted to a stern warning:

Let’s not resort to parliamentary tactics. Let’s not want to filibuster, and let’s not play with a very important, solemn thing. You may think it is a small matter. If you rebuff the faculty once, you will rebuff it forever…. They will go back to their work, [and] they will live extremely happily; and what will happen to those who have rebuffed them, I do not want to say. 52

Finkelstein’s strategy worked. Despite pervasive skepticism, the conference attendees forwarded the proposal to the RA for final consideration. Some feared further acrimony in the movement. Some wanted to appease Finkelstein. Some saw it as a stepping-stone to progress. Equally significant, however, was the perceived mounting irrelevance of the debate.

A Changing Landscape

Although Conservative rabbis continued to wrangle about the *agunah*, by the early 1950s very few encountered *agunah* cases, despite a lingering perception to the contrary. In the 1930s and 1940s, Conservative estimates had counted thousands. By 1952, when the Lieberman clause deliberations began, some pegged the number at closer to zero. The

51 *PJCL*, 156.
52 Ibid., 148.

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chart below highlights the gradual fading of the problem in the minds of Conservative leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Perceived Agunah Population</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Rabbi Louis Epstein</td>
<td>“Their numbers reach to the thousands.” 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Women’s League Biennial Convention Resolution</td>
<td>“[It is] an insufferable injustice upon thousands of Jewish women.” 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Rabbinical Assembly of America Statement</td>
<td>“Thousands of lives have been wrecked by [these] … types of cases.” 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Rabbi Josiah Derby</td>
<td>“I don’t think many of us are confronted with that problem too seriously. We may have a case once a year.” 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Rabbi Robert Gordis</td>
<td>“It affects thousands and thousands of cases.” 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Women’s League Biennial Convention Resolution</td>
<td>Thousands of women [are] reduced to “the status of agunah.” 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Rabbi David Aronson</td>
<td>“There is not a community that has no agunot, and the number is increasing daily.” 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Rabbi Ralph Simon</td>
<td>“Thousands of cases … now trouble us.” 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Rabbi David Aronson</td>
<td>“There are ten thousand families looking to us for the next step in their personal lives. That is a fact, too. Or am I exaggerating?” 61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1952 | Rabbi Boaz Cohen | “We … we are not presented exactly with

57 Ibid.
59 David Aronson, “*Kedat Moshe VeYisrael*,” *PRA* (1951): 120.
60 Ibid., 141.
61 *PJCL*, 63.
the situation … They all get [re]married…. They don’t exist.”62

1952  Rabbi Lawrence Charney  “The agunah … simply has disappeared.”63

1958  Rabbi Sanders Tofield  “One is inclined to ask in all seriousness, is there an agunah problem in present-day American Jewry?”64

1968  Rabbi Eli Bohnen  “There are hardly any agunot in America….. The problem of the agunah is quite different now from what it was thirty years ago.”65

When, in 1930, Louis Epstein had addressed the matter, unprecedented social upheaval—chiefly mass immigration (which often split families across oceans and facilitated abandonment) and World War I (in which thousands of Jewish soldiers went missing the world over), coupled with the eclipse of Jewish communal autonomy to punish husbands who refused to give a get—had generated an agunah crisis of proportions unfathomable in the rabbinic period. Epstein cried for a remedy to forfend still greater catastrophe:66

62 Ibid., 70.
63 Ibid., 80.
64 Sanders Tofield, “The Agunah Problem and Its Solution,” (April 1959) Isaac Klein Papers, Reel 8, JTSA. To be sure, Tofield asked this question rhetorically. He believed that the agunah crisis endured. A good number of his interlocutors felt otherwise.
The situation is much worse in America than I can depict with the etchings of a pen…. It is not possible for rabbis to win from this embarrassment, and from the obligation to handle it, because if we do not deal with the question of the agunah, we will need to deal with questions regarding the mamzerut of the children they will have.67

Epstein’s rhetoric proved prescient. Memory of the agunah crisis precipitated by World War I faded with the destruction of European Jewry in World War II, and improved methods of communication made spousal abandonment more difficult. Yet a new problem emerged from the old: mamzerim. America provided an atmosphere of unprecedented religious choice; when faced with the inability to obtain a proper get, many Jewish women turned without compunction to Reform rabbis to remarry (sometimes at the recommendation of a Conservative rabbi) or left the religious fold entirely, thereby escaping halakhic constraints.68

For many RA rabbis in the 1950s, however, this lessened the urgency of the debate; no need, they reasoned, to upend the halakhah for happily remarried women. Considering the state of the laity,69 New York Rabbi Mordecai Waxman qualified his support for the Lieberman clause at the Joint Law Conference thusly:

I am in favor of this [resolution] because it takes some action…. I am in favor of it, too, because I don’t regard it as fundamentally important. I am sure we have missed the boat on the issue, that it is no longer [an] issue in American Jewish life… The agunah problem hasn’t really troubled the bulk of Jews for the last twenty years… It isn’t significant, it isn’t important, and it doesn’t weigh on us.70

67 Epstein, Li-She’elath ha-’Agunah, 27.
68 Not every Reform rabbi endorsed the practice, but those who opposed it were in the distinct minority. See Joan S. Friedman, Guidance not Governance: Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof and Reform Responsa (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2014), 73. Indeed, a responsum by Reform Rabbi Israel Barten suggests the practice was a given. See Walter Jacob, ed., American Reform Responsa (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1983), 510–511.
69 This is not an isolated instance. Mordecai Waxman, who became a leading voice of Conservative Judaism, sought constantly to strengthen the identification of laity with the Conservative movement. See Nadell, Conservative Judaism, 251.
70 PJCL, 142.
Indeed, the Lieberman clause passed in no small part because there were so few self-identifying agunot, not because there were so many. There was little practical need to flex halakhic muscle.

**Sustaining the Jewish Family**

What, then, was its purpose? The 1950s was an era of emphasis on the nuclear family as the organizing center of religious life and vice versa. Ultimately, underlying concern for the scourge of marital dissolution tipped the balance in favor of the Lieberman clause. The clause reimagined the institution of Jewish marriage; Conservative rabbis became soldiers in the battle to prevent divorce. Consider this draft of the clause, informed by Alan Stroock's initial version. It emphasizes the steps a couple must take before legal action:

> The husband and wife look forward to living with each other in the peace, harmony, and mutual understanding required by Jewish conditions, each loving the other as himself and herself and honoring each other beyond oneself. If serious difficulties should arise between husband and wife, they will both seek the counsel of their rabbi to guide them to harmony and reconciliation, in accordance with the tradition of Judaism, before taking steps which might lead to a conviction of differences. In the event either party obtains a civil divorce from the other which is valid under the laws of the state [where the marriage occurred] … each party to the marriage consents to the preparation and delivery of the get at the request of the other party, and if [not, the denied party] … shall have the right to submit the matter to the national beit din for arbitration.71

Should a dispute ever arise between husband and wife, both parties committed broadly to seek out their rabbi (as a representative of the JTS-RA beit din) before their lawyer. To the makers of the Lieberman clause, the benefit could not be overstated. The rabbi channeled the salubrious wisdom of the Torah to save marriages, while lawyers uprooted the domestic seedbed that fostered religious life.

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RA leaders heralded the nuclear family ethic as the Jewish ideal and saw the Lieberman clause as a model of how to sustain it. Rabbi Ira Eisenstein encapsulated this sentiment at the Joint Law Conference as he emphasized the formative role of the home in ensuring religious continuity. Conservative rabbis were powerless without it. For this reason, Eisenstein deemed divorce—a symbol of the undoing of the family—the bane of Jewish life:

The many problems of marital adjustment must not lead merely to an increased divorce rate but must be met by offering the kind of guidance which will strengthen and unify the family…. We just can ill afford to have the bonds of family life weakened, for it is in the home that Jewish tradition is maintained and the basic ethical influences on the child are effected. The synagogue and the school can do little without the full cooperation of the home. It is therefore essential that we put our minds to the task of enlisting all the best talent at our command—the psychologists in social work, educators and the rabbi, the scholar, the doctor, the political leader.72

For even the left-leaning Eisenstein—who ultimately regarded the Lieberman clause as grossly insufficient, the Jewish future depended foremost on the strength of the family unit. Divorce spelled familial atrophy.73

The association of divorce with religious decline harbored broader societal significance. American Jewish families embraced religion as a tool toward social integration after World War II. In an era of burgeoning tolerance—of Will Herberg’s treatise, Protestant-Catholic-Jew74—family and religion reinforced each other and connected Jews with their largely Christian neighbors. “Jews recently arrived in gentile suburbs in the

72 Ibid., 2.
postwar years found that their neighbors went to Church and believed in God and expected Jews to do the same,” writes Arnold Eisen of the period. Which church one attended mattered less than the fact that one went. Family and religion undergirded a sense of cultural belonging and growing acceptance into the American collective.

Thus, when Rabbi William Greenfeld composed an advisory rubric with which, before the marriage ceremony, rabbis introduced couples to the Lieberman clause, he deemphasized the divorce element. Instead, like Eisenstein, Greenfeld accentuated the importance of marital harmony. He wrote:

[When] we behold symptoms of difficulties, we allow them to develop and to create inestimable harm without consultation with anyone more expert in the field of human relations. I sincerely believe that the overwhelming majority of marriages that end in divorce could be saved if vanity did not prevent an early discussion of differences with an expert in the field. This I ask of you—if difficulties arise that you cannot solve in fairly short order do not hesitate to consult with your doctor, with your rabbi, with a marriage counselor.

Should couples eschew “vanity” and, as stated in the clause, negotiate their differences before a rabbi, the institution of Jewish marriage and ultimately Jewish life might yet endure. The Lieberman clause could become a conduit for the prosperity of the Jewish family.

From the ideological right of the RA, Finkelstein voiced similar concerns in conversation about the Lieberman clause. “In order to make Jewish marriage a significant, lasting, meaningful institution,” he argued, “we must find some way to enforce the decisions of our Beth Din.” What compromised the institution of marriage? For Finkelstein, secular divorce was a blot on the social fabric; the RA could not address the agunah problem in isolation from it. As Rabbi Wolfe Kelman paraphrased Finkelstein’s sentiments elsewhere:

76 William Greenfeld, “Explanation of New Ketubah,” Isaac Klein Papers, Reel 8, JTSA.
Is it not a fact that the mores of American society have often reduced marriage laws in general to a mockery, mores which we have not resisted sufficiently? Are we to condone frequent travesties against the integrity of the family as a result of people’s readiness to perjure themselves (if necessary) in order to get a divorce, to rush to divorce at the slightest provocation, to disregard what happens to children of broken homes? … The real question is whether it is possible for Jews in America to live in accordance with Jewish law.\textsuperscript{78}

Finkelstein lamented the impact of midcentury American jurisprudence on the sanctity of the family.\textsuperscript{79} Although legal statutes in all states in the 1950s required just cause for civil divorce—predicated on the principle of “fault”—couples routinely flouted these laws and “perjured themselves” to ensure the court’s blessing to end marriage. “This dilemma played out in courtroom scenarios in which marital partners, attorneys, and judges often colluded in staging a drama,” describes one source, “‘proving’ to the law’s satisfaction that one partner had committed an offense against the marriage.”\textsuperscript{80} Finkelstein invoked the Lieberman clause as the organizing center of a Herculean effort to shelter the domestic sphere against the easy dissolution of marriage all too prevalent in the secular world.

Still, the decision to insert a prenuptial clause within the ketubah as a defense of marriage—and not chiefly as an avenue to divorce—is illogical. Were there no other means to achieve that end? Here a cross-denominational comparison is helpful: In April 1954, one month before the RA convention, the Reform Hebrew Union College Department of Human Relations sponsored a conference on the nexus between psychology and the modern rabbinate. The first presentation, by Rabbi Stanley Brav, addressed the efficacy of the “premarital interview”:

\textsuperscript{78} Minutes of the steering committee, 23–24 December 1952, David Aronson Papers, 2/4, JTSA.

\textsuperscript{79} Finkelstein knew this all too well. He had his own divorce woes that no doubt informed the urgency with which he tackled the question.

The premarital interview is a good occasion for establishing a lasting friendship between a young couple and a religious teacher who shows concern for their welfare…. No teaching situation is ever so promising, no pupils ever more receptive … if only the minister is prepared to become the counselor who enters emphatically, as well as intelligently, into meeting the needs of those who confront him.81

For Brav, the premarital interview was an opportunity to build lasting bonds. For rabbis Conservative and Reform alike, that window was especially narrow. The premarital interview would often be the only opportunity an officiating rabbi would ever have to address the couple on such intimate terms. For the first and often last time, a rabbi could expect the couple’s full attention.82

As a written affirmation of the ongoing role of the rabbi in the lives of his laity, the Lieberman clause was, primarily, an effort to expand the window of opportunity. The goal was idealistic, to be sure, but not purely academic. In 1959, JTS inaugurated a Marriage Counseling Bureau for couples in need, based on a resolution adopted at the Joint Law Conference six years prior.83 Counseling—coupled with the clause and the beat din—would further efforts by Conservative leadership to heal and elevate Jewish families. The steering committee justified the bureau in these words:

The Marriage Counselling [sic] Bureau is an outgrowth of our activity in the joint Beth Din and the ketubah which we have been using for the past number of years. Among the important results of the ketubah has been the re-establishment of the role of the rabbi as guide to a married couple in order to prevent the dissolution of a family wherever possible.84

82 See also Rebecca L. Davis, More Perfect Unions: The American Search for Marital Bliss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 163.
84 Zev Nelson to colleagues, 19 June 1959, Isaac Klein Papers, Reel 4, JTSA.
The intent of the Lieberman clause should be understood along these lines. Marriage was not a single event but a life-long process, and the rabbi now presented himself before it began as a facilitator of familial stability.

**The 1959 Version**

The dissemination of the new *ketubah* to the broader Conservative community did not end discussion about the Lieberman clause. Instead, the search began for a better formula. Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser—a rare advocate of the clause at the Joint Law Conference and a longstanding traditionalist—recalibrated the clause in consultation with seminary director and lawyer Stanley Friedman. The RA distributed the revised edition in early 1959. It stipulated:

> And both together agreed that if this marriage shall ever be dissolved under civil law, then either husband or wife may invoke the authority of the *Beth Din* of the Rabbinical Assembly and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America or its duly authorized representatives, to decide what action by either spouse is then appropriate under Jewish matrimonial law; and if either spouse shall fail to honor the demand of the other or to carry out the decision of the *Beth Din* or its representatives, then the other spouse may invoke any and all remedies available in civil law and equity to enforce compliance with the *Beth Din's* decision and this solemn obligation.

If the 1954 Lieberman clause cloaked reference to divorce in rhetoric about the sanctity of the Jewish family, Bokser’s and Friedman’s efforts reflected a newfound desire for rhetorical specificity that could withstand a challenge in secular courts and in turn assist actual *agunot*.

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85 For example, Bokser opposed the decision of the CJLS to sanction the driving to synagogue on Shabbat and rejected liturgical changes in the 1946 Conservative siddur. See Nadell, *Conservative Judaism*, 43.
Yet the revised clause reflected Bokser’s vision, not a collective endorsement. Conservative rabbis looked to more effective measures. The 1959 RA Proceedings make but passing mention of the document. And when the RA posthumously published Rabbi Isaac Klein’s widely distributed Guide to Jewish Religious Practice (1979), it included the old translation.88 The very impulse that prompted the rhetorical focus on divorce in the new translation heralded the irrelevance of the clause itself. Indeed, for most Conservative rabbis, the Lieberman clause never constituted an apt barometer of success vis-à-vis the agunah problem. Rather, across the Conservative ideological spectrum, a coalition had coalesced in 1954 about the role of the clause in strengthening the family.

In the wake of World War II, the Conservative rabbis felt the weight of Jewish survival on their shoulders. They sought to leverage halakhic reform to cultivate religious observance among the laity. “If we don’t take hold of ourselves and cross the threshold then we shall find ourselves in the midst of the kind of anarchy that no one will be able to control,”89 said Rabbi Jacob Agus, who spearheaded efforts toward halakhic change. Rabbi Ira Eisenstein agreed: “We are trying to save ourselves from this terrible plague of lawlessness.”90 By “lawlessness” and “anarchy,” Eisenstein and Agus imagined American Jewry bereft of the anchor of Jewish standards—standards that both reinforced the Jewish family and depended on its strength. As a defense of the family, the Lieberman clause was to be not a surefire defense of agunot per se, but rather a symbol of the dynamic Judaism the RA envisioned.

How, then, to frame the creation of the clause in historical perspective? The Lieberman clause was not about the changing of halakhah and inevitable Orthodox rebuttal. Indeed, its framers aimed to forestall such efforts. They produced a prenup in spite of, not in step with, prior RA efforts to reform halakhah. From the very intentional rhetoric of the Lieberman clause text to a marriage counseling service established at JTS to encourage reconciliation, the clause paid homage to the Jewish family. “[A] number of us see the [agunah] issue raised by

89 PJCL, 47.
the Rabbinical Assembly as secondary to other vital matters such as the future orientation of Jews in Israel and America and the building up of Torah generally,” wrote Finkelstein to Lieberman in 1952. Ultimately, “the building up of Torah generally” took center stage. Because for the men of the RA, proper prenups encouraged marital harmony, marital harmony ensured domestic prosperity and strong religious identity, and strong religious identity ensured rabbinic relevance and the sustained integrity of Judaism.

Benjamin Steiner is a third-year doctoral student in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies department at Brandeis University. His research interests include the history of the Conservative Movement and the evolution of the ketubah and its translation as a window into cultural change. Steiner completed his undergraduate studies at UCLA and received an MA at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Jewish Gender and Women’s Studies.
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives looks forward to hosting the 42nd Annual Southern Jewish Historical Society Conference

Cincinnati, Ohio
November 3-5, 2017
Dovid and Moishe Chinsky, ca. 1910–1911
(Courtesy of the author)
The document presented here is a translated fragment of a much longer Yiddish manuscript penned by my maternal grandfather, Moishe Chinsky (né Chenchinski), during the late 1960s, when he was in his late seventies. He titled his memoir Di geshikhte fun mayn lebn (The Story of My Life). The original was written in longhand and was subsequently typed but otherwise left unedited and unabridged, to the best of my knowledge. The original was discarded or lost at some point. The typescript remained in my mother’s possession after her father’s death, and she passed it along to me a number of years ago. The memoir covers the period from 1896 to 1926, but it remains incomplete: The typescript ends in mid-sentence, which implies that an undetermined number of pages went missing or at least that the memoir was intended to carry on into later years.

The narrative contains a wealth of detail that is of potential interest to students of both East European and American Jewish history. It touches upon a number of significant themes, some of which are more familiar than others, but in all cases it offers an informed layperson’s viewpoint rather than a “top-down” academic treatment. The topics touched upon include: the realities of Polish town life as perceived by Jews who lived there in the first two decades of the twentieth century; the complex character of Jewish modernity and the interplay of traditional and nontraditional institutions and ideas; family, generational, and gender relations; Jews in Russian military service before and during World War I; illegal Jewish migrants in post-1918 Europe; Jewish
immigration to America during the last several years prior to the institution of quota laws; the texture of immigrant life; the role that some of the immigrants played in sending monetary assistance to relatives in Eastern Europe; and Zionist politics and socialism in Eastern European Jewish society—among other topics. I will briefly summarize the gist of the narrative, while dwelling on the nature of the text itself, in terms of its composition and its individual sensibility.

Moishe (as I will call him here) lived from November 1890 until February 1981. Born in the Polish lands of what was then the western edge of the Russian Empire, he grew up mostly in the town of Jędrzejów (pronounced Yen-JAY-uv in Polish, Yendzhev in Yiddish), the hometown of his paternal grandparents. In 1920, at the age of thirty years, he immigrated to the United States, where he lived for some fifty-three years. In 1974 he immigrated to Israel together with most of the members of our immediate family. His history is that of a life lived on three continents (similar to Lee Shai Weissbach’s maternal grandfather, as recounted in the latter’s Hebrew autobiography). The memoir deals mainly with Moishe’s European experiences, together with details of his misadventures along the route he took to America. Its final pages describe his difficult initial years as a raw immigrant in New York City. The text being only a partial or unfinished account, there is no real summing up of his American experience.

The memoir reads like a conscious stock-taking by someone whose internal dialogue was heavily colored by his youth and young manhood (a not uncommon feature in autobiography and memoir literature). He

1 The Jewish population in Jędrzejów (located in the Kielce province) grew to about two thousand by the time of the Russian census of 1897. Jews were then about 45 percent of the whole population. In 1921, the Jews numbered about 4,600 and represented 40 percent of the town’s inhabitants. See https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0011_0_10035.html (accessed 28 June 2017); http://www.iajgsjewishcemeterypoland/jedrzejow.html (accessed 28 June 2017). With thanks to my friend and colleague Shaul Stampfer for his assistance.


3 Some of the classic published immigrant memoirs similarly placed as much emphasis on

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*Stories My Grandfather Never Told Me: The Memoirs of Moishe Chinsky (Chenchinski)*
regarded those periods as the formative portion of his life; indeed, those sections that deal with his life prior to emigration seem richer in detail when compared to his treatment of the years following 1920. Despite the authorial point of view, we as readers may look at the text as a whole as the product of the long-term experience of a Jewish immigrant in America, written after decades of mature reflection and filtered by later knowledge. Perhaps it was weighted toward his youth to counteract the absence of what he felt was lost or missing—that which was most in need of reconstruction. In that sense, like many other first-person narratives, the text is best read as a reflection of subjective experience, from the point of view of a man contemplating his old age.

I had not heard any of these experiences as “stories” while I was growing up. My grandfather did not discuss his memoir at family gatherings, and I was not aware of its existence until after he died. Thus, I had no inkling of the wealth of personal and historical detail contained in the manuscript. Moreover, neither I nor anyone else in the family had ever glanced more than cursorily at the 170-some-odd legal sized pages filled with single-spaced typing, the words crammed to the very edges of every page—hence, the “untold” character of the story, only a small portion of which is presented here.

From what my grandfather wrote in a private note that I later found among his papers, he seems to have regarded his memoir as a painful sort of self-therapy and a self-accounting, intended mainly for his younger siblings rather than as a legacy to be proudly handed down to the next generations. 4 It is partly for that reason that the text is occasionally oblique when it comes to spelling out the details of specific episodes, Europe, family background, childhood, and youth as they did on the account of immigration itself and the early years of adjustment in America; e.g., Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912; New York and London: Penguin Books, 1997); Charles Reznikoff, *Family Chronicle: An Odyssey from Russia to America* (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing Co., 1963, 1988).

since Moishe knew his brother and sisters would know to what or to whom he was referring.

The text was clearly reconstructed from memory rather than based on diaries or any other documentation, although a few cherished memora-bilia survive that corroborate basic parts of the story. These include photographs, postcards, and a letter or two. The narrative, though relatively long, is not long-winded or meandering. I can attest to Moishe’s mental clarity even at ninety, more than a decade after he had written the memoir; therefore, I was not surprised, upon reading the text, to find that it holds up well in terms of its composition, its attention to detail, and its seamless and articulate segues from external events to reconstructed moments of insight or introspection. In terms of the memoir’s facticity, I found several minor historical details and one or two chronological references that were slightly faulty, as was one literary paraphrase. These few instances of inaccuracy do not affect the narrative as a whole, however. On most counts, the text appears to report both personal and public events with a keenly observant eye for human frailties, and it makes every effort at achieving frankness. In the manner of many other memoirists, Moishe freely confesses to minor peccadilloes and misdemeanors as well as more serious infractions that he committed during his childhood, adolescence, and young manhood—full disclosure that, by extension, asserts a claim or guarantee of candor and truthfulness.5

In several places his comments draw upon his late-1960s historical consciousness (the results of the Holocaust, for example, are “prefigured” anachronistically in his reflections on events during World War I or in Poland in the 1920s). He displays a decidedly modern temper—even a deliberate snub to prudish modesty—when discussing themes of a sexual nature, such as those he encountered in modern, avant-garde Yiddish literature and drama, as well as in the real lives he witnessed of men in uniform, or in several instances of sexual exploitation of young female domestic servants and others in the provincial town where he grew up.

Although one is tempted to assign this modern sensibility to the tenor of secular cultural discourse in the late 1960s, certain details in the text attest to his advanced views even as a young man in Poland and Russia in his early twenties. In any event, it also reinforces his tacit claim to historical integrity and credibility.

At the end of the 1960s, when he began to set down his life story, Moishe was living in the Bronx, New York, with his second wife, Anna, in a rental apartment not far from the home of his only child, my mother (Bluma, or Blanche, as she was known in English), who was born in New York City in 1926.

Moishe was the second of eight children (seven of whom survived into adulthood). Both of Moishe’s parents as well as his one older brother had died during the decade before he began to write his life story. They had lived in the Tel Aviv area, to which they had emigrated from Poland in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Both of his younger sisters also lived in Tel Aviv, having arrived with their parents during the interwar years. Moishe’s youngest two brothers had remained in Poland along with their families and were murdered at Treblinka and Auschwitz. His other younger brother, Kalman, survived World War II in Nazi forced labor camps but lost his wife and child; then he, too, immigrated to Israel. Thus, in the late 1960s Moishe was the oldest surviving member of the family, with three younger siblings (a brother and two sisters) whom he visited in Israel and with whom he remained in close touch. He also had one younger cousin (also named Moishe) who lived with his family in Massachusetts, with whom he had made the trek to America. It is possible that my grandfather’s position as a kind of family patriarch also prompted him to leave a written account of his past.

Moishe’s grandfather had been a ritual slaughterer and a respected member of the community of Gerer (Gur) Hasidim in Jędrzejów/Yendzhev. As a young child, Moishe lived for several years in his grandfather’s home. In the memoir, he describes his paternal grandfather as a kind-hearted gentleman with a generous sympathy for people, a broadness of spirit, and a passionate interest in the politics of the day (contrasting this to his grandmother’s considerably more narrow-minded, even harsh, manner). There, at his learned and pious grandfather’s table, Moishe received the only proper course of instruction he ever had, which
took the form of predawn Talmud study sessions in the company of other bright youngsters in the community. Subsequently, he frequented the local study house (*beys medresh*/*beit ha-Midrash*—a kind of chapel with a library), again, in the company of youngsters like himself, some of whom were also involved in clandestine socialist activity. This constituted another part of his education. Moishe recalls receiving contraband leaflets and, during the revolutionary events of 1905, passing along smuggled handguns to be hidden in local woodpiles in anticipation of the hour of need. No further action involving firearms or insurrection is actually recorded in the text, and we are left to speculate that little if anything ever came of these preparations. Nonetheless, the precocious, left-leaning politics of Moishe’s youth reappeared later in his life in the form of long-lasting labor Zionist affiliations.

Thus, on the one hand, Moishe grew up in a thoroughly traditional milieu; on the other hand, he inhabited a social world threaded liberally with startlingly nontraditional notions. Two of his closest friends were obsessed, since their teenage years, with the idea of immigrating to Paris. Both eventually did so, and both subsequently re-immigrated to America. Though the attraction of the West, as symbolized by Paris, was palpable, America figured in this family narrative only peripherally. Only after much intervening narrative does Moishe bother to mention that several relatives of his father’s had immigrated there during the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, this would become of great significance in his life, and he ended up marrying the daughter of one of those transplanted relatives.

Moishe grew up in a household plagued with chronic penury. His father, Nosn (Nathan) Ber Chenchinski, was a religious traditionalist by today’s standards, but he was a modernist if not an out-and-out rebel in the context of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Poland: a Hebraist scholar and a Zionist, imbued with somewhat relaxed views on religious observance. Although Nosn Ber maintained a close, amiable relationship with his pious father, the ritual slaughterer and pillar of the Hasidic community, his departure from strictly religious standards and his free-thinking reputation were enough to preclude his participation in his father’s lucrative kosher meat trade. Instead, he eked out an inadequate living by giving private lessons in a few of the more affluent homes in
town. It was through his father’s social connections with some of the well-to-do households that Moishe eventually formed attachments in that milieu, including nearly daily attendance at young people’s informal soirées, walks together in the surrounding countryside, romantic escapades, and one great and ill-fated love story.

Nosn Ber also maintained (by fits and starts) a small newspaper agency, through which he managed an unsteady subscriber list and distributed the leading Yiddish papers and Russian and Hebrew periodicals, which arrived by train from Warsaw and Lodz (Łódź: pronounced woodge in Polish and lodzh in Yiddish). Although the nearest urban center, Kielce (pronounced KYELtse), served as a commercial hub for its own immediate area, Jędrzejów was a minor county center in its own right. The town served as a market for its surrounding countryside, which depended on local agents to cater to customers’ needs.

Moishe’s mother, Rokhl (née Weintraub), struggled to put food on the table in a musty, two-roomed accommodation—the floor and a couple of shared beds provided cramped space for sleeping; she took in laundry work and earned some extra income by sewing stockings. Fortunately for the Chenchinskis, they were constantly assisted by a younger sister of Nosn Ber’s. Moishe’s aunt enjoyed a higher living standard due to her husband’s employment as a senior manager at the local electric company. It was through this wing of the family—the Waxbaums and their transplanted American siblings and in-laws—that Moishe eventually was able to immigrate to the West.

As a teenager, Moishe left home to work in Lodz, where he was apprenticed as an office boy and then as assistant manager in a textile mill owned by a family with ties in Jędrzejów. This arrangement was set up by his parents, and thus he took his place in the family economy, as had his older brother before him, as a wage-provider, undertaking partial responsibility for his parents’ and his younger siblings’ upkeep. Moishe reflects in the memoir on how this turn of events not only prematurely thrust him into adulthood but also changed his relationship with his father, with whom he was close but, increasingly, whom he saw more as a co-partner in family affairs than as an authority figure. During his intermittent stints at home, Moishe took to managing his father’s faltering newspaper service.
In Lodz, Moishe was exposed to the ways of the big world. He describes the city as a place of trolley cars and bustling traffic, cafés and bright shop windows, alongside the grinding, humiliating poverty of the manual crafters, factory workers, and servant class. By painstaking efforts and the help of a dictionary, he picked up enough German to deal with the textile mill’s office work, since the firm’s major clients were in Germany. This linguistic skill later stood him in good stead. Apart from mastering some German, he was drawn to the local Yiddish literary and theatrical scene. He frequented theaters and became a habitué of the readers’ club at the local Jewish library, which served as a cultural hub for the younger, intellectually curious young men and women of the community.

In 1911, at age twenty-one, he was drafted into the Russian army. He served three years in an infantry regiment that was based far to the east, near Orël (pronounced aryol), a three-day journey by train into the Russian heartland. During those three years of service, which he describes in graphic detail, he spent just one, thirty-day furlough at home. The rest of the time, he kept in touch with his family by correspondence. His closest attachments in his unit, naturally enough, were formed with fellow Jewish conscripts. Their commander, who is singled out in the memoir as an unusually sympathetic fellow for a Russian officer, held liberal views on comradeship with his men and evinced a positive esteem for the Jewish soldiers. This helped only partially, however, in deflecting what was otherwise a rude exposure to the harsher (and often antisemitic) tenor of life in the ranks. Moishe was particularly upset by fellow soldiers’ reactions during the Mendel Beilis “blood libel” affair (1911–1913).

Moishe’s long-anticipated release from active duty, scheduled for the summer of 1914, was delayed due to war preparations. He went into battle with his regiment during the first week of the Great War. Captured during the initial incursion of Russian forces into Germany (known in Germany as the Battle of Tannenberg), he then spent more than four years as a POW before his return home, just before the end of World War I.  

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6 At the Battle of Tannenberg in August 1914, over thirty thousand Russian soldiers were killed and over ninety thousand captured. All told, about 2.8 million Russian soldiers were taken prisoner during World War I out of roughly 8.5 million European POWs on all sides.
His prior knowledge of German spared him some of the worst rigors of prison-camp life as it gained him a position as a prisoner-trustee, tasked with supervising the day-to-day administration of about one thousand fellow POWs (mainly Russians and Poles). The memoir is replete with the squalor of camp life; the severity of German discipline; the worsening depletion of food supplies and medicine; internecine frictions in the ranks; homosexuality as an aspect of a regendered hierarchy of the strong vis-à-vis the weak, where some men were sexual predators but also played the role of protectors of those whom they exploited; the lack of access to Red Cross packages among the Russian, Polish, and Serbian POWs (in contrast to the luckier British prisoners); and the welcome comforts of outside work-details that took the luckier POWs to civilian labor assignments in towns and farms in the German countryside. The perks of outside work included better food, unsupervised time in the evening before returning to camp, sexual favors bartered for labor or food, and the chance to observe at close range a stricken and increasingly demoralized civilian German populace that suffered privations approximating those among the POWs themselves.

There were also some nicer aspects of prison camp life, including organized musical performances and drama groups—attended not just by the POWs but also the top brass among the German officers and the local gentry. As for religious services, Protestants’ and Catholics’ needs were assiduously tended to; but the Jewish POWs were very unfavorably disposed toward the German rabbis who were initially assigned to attend the camp during holidays. Moishe describes them as mostly Reform rabbis, who evinced (as he puts it) little regard for, or interest in the welfare of, the Polish and Russian Jewish men. Mostly, the Jewish POWs simply stayed away from these services. At some point, already late in the war, some of the men decided to take matters into their own hands and provided for their own holiday prayers, in which Moishe occasionally participated.

In general, and in addition to the aspects already mentioned, the memoir includes a number of passages that deal with relations between Jews and non-Jews. These ranged from routine encounters in the marketplace (mostly amicable, if diffident) to outright violence: drunken beatings of Jews for “special occasions” and, in response, examples of violent Jewish self-defense. Senior state and military officials—Polish, Russian, German, and one Jew—are characterized as either “good to the Jews” or the reverse. If anything, Moishe registers differences among people not so much on the basis of politics, nationality, or religion, but rather on the basis of their innate qualities. Men were, in his eyes, either educated, refined and genuine gentlemen or consummate boors bordering on the downright primitive. Women, by and large, are also rated according to their moral capacities—generosity, sincerity, personal and intellectual sensibility on the one hand or promiscuity and coarseness on the other. In general, his descriptions of both non-Jews and Jews tend to hew equally to this principle—that is, moral coarseness and moral refinement are the significant underlying categories in human relations. Something of this comes across in the selected sections of the memoir reproduced here, including his report of an encounter with African Americans during a visit among relatives in Norfolk, Virginia. He seems most shocked by his brief observation of sexual morals in the African American community, but he assigns these issues to the moral failings of the social system at large; whereas his uncle’s coarseness remains inexplicable apart from sheer meanness of spirit.

In light of this inclination to see both sides of human nature (but to favor people possessing cultural and moral refinement above all else), it is pertinent that Moishe is similarly ambivalent when it comes to his hometown and Poland. He speaks of both with affection and distaste. He genuinely identifies the provincial Polish setting, with its heavily Jewish component, as “home,” whereas other places seem alien to him (such as the ethnically Russian heartland of the tsarist empire, where Jews were relatively few and far between).

7 Norfolk and African Americans also figure in Weissbach’s grandfather’s memoir.
During the final year or so in Poland, between the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1920, he found it very difficult to find his way. He was hard-pressed to find a job, he was living at home with his parents and younger siblings, and his old love affair had turned sour (his fiancée married another man, due to parental pressure). He found some temporary solace in new friendships and was particularly proud of his greatest personal achievement: He planned, directed, cast, and acted in an amateur staging of Tolstoy’s classic *Kreutzer Sonata* (in its dramatized Yiddish version, as adapted by playwright Jacob Gordin, which he had once seen professionally staged in Lodz). Characteristically, the theatrical triumph was mixed with melancholy associations: The play, after all, dealt with the frustrations and hypocrisies of sexuality, love, and infidelity. The production was also plagued by sabotage when, to the actors’ and audience’s chagrin, town authorities tried to cut off the theater’s electric power in the midst of the performance. (Volunteers from the audience improvised repairs and stood guard outside the building so that the show could go on.) The context for this interference was the upsurge of postwar Polish nationalism, which Moishe describes as having assumed a menacing, even violent, tenor amidst fomenters of anti-Jewish hatred. During those months he became an active member of the socialist-Zionist Tse’irei Tsion (Zionist Youth) Party, served as its local secretary, and reported on party affairs for the leading Warsaw Yiddish journals. But he was doubtful, if not downright disillusioned, about the efficacy of these political activities, given Polish opposition to Jewish and leftist politics and the weaknesses that he perceived in the mainstream Jewish political position. The double discomfiture—both personal and collective—led him to the decision to accept the idea of opting out, of emigrating illegally from Poland before he found himself pressed into uniform once again, this time (as two of his younger brothers who were conscripted) as a soldier of the Polish Republic.

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Moishe's immigration to America makes sense amid these circumstances, but it bears noting that it also fits into a longer pattern of family mobility. When Moishe was a small child, his father had left his wife and two children behind at his in-laws’ while he tried to make his way into the world of Hebrew and Yiddish literary life and journalism in Warsaw. He returned without having succeeded, then moved his household back to his hometown, near his own parents and relatives. Moishe’s older brother Dovid spent several years away from home, apprenticed to a pastry baker, before returning to Jędrzejów (and later migrated to Palestine). Two of Moishe’s childhood friends had immigrated, as mentioned earlier, first to Paris and then to America. He would reconnect with one of them later, when he himself reached New York. Moishe spent nearly two years in Lodz before his military conscription, his three-year term of service in Russia, and his subsequent wartime internment in Germany—thus a decade-long lapse between his former life at home and his temporary return in 1918.

In other words, the themes of leave-taking, homesickness, and much moving about repeat themselves throughout the memoir. Train journeys are described in close detail, as is the Atlantic crossing. Rather than treating his journey to America as an isolated event, Moishe seems to have related to it, in retrospect, as part of a personal trajectory studded with other, preparatory separations and displacements. In part, immigration formed part of the extended fallout of his wartime experiences, including the postwar months of emotional misery. The journey is described as an act born of desperation, mixed with an underlying determination to create an independent life for himself.

Like his earlier experiences, Moishe’s immigration to America took place in several stages, including illegal border crossings between Poland and Belgium, getting by on forged documents, being handed off from one set of human traffickers to the next, an impromptu decision to travel via Canada rather than directly to New York, and a last-minute hitch involving a troublesome (Jewish) American consular official—all with his younger cousin in tow. I have included many of the descriptions involving the overland, illegal travel procedures, which shed additional light on the question of clandestine migration in general and among
Jews in particular. Having arrived in New York and reestablished contact with one of his childhood companions, he discovers that both the veteran immigrant and the green newcomer alike possessed few skills and even fewer prospects. The impressions and sentiments that accompanied him upon his arrival in America—at once a momentous escape from all the arduous aspects of the past and a pining for his lost home and family—nearly give way before the privations and practical necessities of a working-class life. Yet, troubles both petty and serious are placed in perspective by his heartfelt celebration of fatherhood.

Although the memoir carries on a little bit longer, the birth of his

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child makes a convenient place for closure. The subsequent events and
descriptive passages elaborate further on Moishe’s domestic and work
arrangements and on his relationships with friends and family mem‑
bbers—but the thematic substance remains essentially similar to the ma‑
terial already presented.

The sections of the memoir that appear here take the story from
Moishe’s release from the POW camp at Neuhammer, Germany (today: Świętoszów, Poland) in September 1918 to New York City in July 1926.

Finally, I should say a short word about the translation. My grand‑
father wrote a richly idiomatic and sophisticated Yiddish and he aimed
for a style much like reportage, a genre at which he had tentatively tried
his hand as a soldier in Russia. In writing the memoir, he seems to have
harbored a sense of reconnection with the creative writer that had lain
dormant within him for most of his adult life. In my translation I have
tried to remain faithful to the original by rendering it into idiomatic
English. Whenever explanations are added in brackets or in footnotes,
these are all my own interpolations, as are the section titles. These have
been inserted so as to explain personal references and render the text
clearer for the English reader.
Excerpts from “The Story of My Life” by Moishe Chinsky (Chenchinski)

Liberation and Homecoming

The day of my release was an official and established fact. I had two more weeks. I had to report to the camp at Skolmierzets [Skalmierzyce], and from there I’d catch a train right into Łódź…. It pained me that I was going to have to part from friends who were staying behind, without any immediate prospect of release. Part of me felt I was committing a great sin by breaking ranks and leaving all by myself, leaving the rest of them to God’s mercy. Who knew how long they would be rotting there?

The day of my departure approached. My things were packed under watchful German eyes and then sealed in such a way that it could not be opened again until I got to my destination. The high point of all this came when the Germans came to express their heartfelt farewells to me: They were full of comradely embraces and sentiments of loss. I had, after all, lived among them all this time. Now it was all about to end…. Finally, two German soldiers escorted me and my luggage to the nearest train station. I took a window seat on the train. The engine began to smoke and move, the carriage gave a jolt, and I was seized by a terrific outpouring of tears. People around me looked at me as if I was crazy.

It was already early autumn [September 1918], and I felt the breezes coming from all the empty fields we passed. The harvest was in, the freshly cut crops were already stacked and stored away in barns. There were a few of us being released and traveling on the train, so we sat together. There were two German guards with us, and they sat in a corner, smoking pipes. They stared out the window—not at all in the normal manner of soldiers on guard duty. In fact, they were two limp reeds,1 tired and hungry-looking, and they seemed to envy us, who were going home.

When we got to Skalmierzyce, we found hundreds more like us. After signing in for the formalities, our two “shepherds” evaporated into thin air, as it were, and we all started exchanging notes and getting familiar:

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1 Tsvei alte hoshanehs: i.e., like lulav and willow leaves after having the life smacked out of them on Hoshanah Rabbah.

Introduced and Translated from Yiddish by Eli Lederhendler
“Where might the honorable Mr. Jew be from, and where might Sir Jew be headed?”

... 

The train [from Lodz] was crowded, mostly with women. They all looked hefty in their bundled clothing: It turned out that they were all smuggling items like butter, margarine, and meat, taking it from the German occupied zone [of Poland] over into the Austrian occupied areas. They stuffed their clothes and their bosoms with food items, making them appear fat when in reality they were scrawny Jewish housewives.... Somehow I managed to wedge myself between two such women on a so-called empty seat. They budged a bit, but grudgingly, to give me room, and it was quite uncomfortable sitting like that, while they alternated blessings with cuss-words, under their breath, which they aimed at the Germans and the Austrian soldiers. Naturally, all the women were chattering away in German—wouldn’t you know it—and smugly chatting about the fresh foods that they were carrying off under the very noses of the authorities, which were trying to arrange food supplies for their soldiers, to say nothing of feeding the civilian population. 

... 

Reaching Kielce, I found myself gripped by a possessive nostalgia for the entire passing landscape, all of which felt like it belonged to me. I wished I could get out and walk the rest of the way, happy to be once again on Polish soil and able to reach out and touch every tree, every branch. I wanted to walk right into my town in the middle of the night, go over to my parents’ house, and look inside to see what was going on. The notion of walking up and knocking on the window in the middle of the night and yelling, “Mama, look who’s back!” startled me. “Hey, it’s me—I’ve come back without a scratch! So wake up, what are you waiting for?! Grab me and shower me with your tears!”

When we stopped at Suchedniów, I felt something give way inside me. I was nearly home now, about to be reunited with everyone, about to reenter that poor little house I loved so well: back to a normal life, or perhaps back to that life that I had left behind in 1908, when I went to Łódź, and from which I had become estranged. What would happen to me now? I stood looking through the window at the trees passing by, turning yellow now in the early autumn. Then came the
familiar whistle from the locomotive, announcing we were approaching the raised bridge—high enough for the horses and wagons to pass along the road down below, heading west for Shtchekotchin [Szczekociny] and beyond that to Tchenstochov [Częstochowa]—as passengers bound for towns in the surrounding district prepared to get out at the station.

The train slowed to a crawl, the station bell clanged, and there I was once more in Jędrzejów, my hometown. I saw the droshky carts with their drivers, people waiting expectantly on the platform, approaching the doors of every carriage down to the end of the train. There was a scramble as passengers exited the train while drivers tried to solicit business, mostly among their old, familiar customers—though if they could collar some stranger, that was even better, since they could charge them a bit more. In all the commotion, bags were grabbed by one enterprising driver while the passenger ended up in someone else’s cart—until frantic arrangements were made to sort things out amicably. Maybe the two drivers would just split the fare between them!2 … Although it was 2:30 in the morning, the market place, where the drivers delivered their passengers, was not empty. Quite a few young people were gathered there, idlers with nothing better to do with their time, who sat around at meetings or in the library 'til late at night and didn’t feel like going to bed…. One of these was my younger brother, Avrom. As soon as he made certain that it was me, his big brother, Moishe, he ran off to pound on my older brother, Dovid’s, door—their [bakery] shop was right there on the market square—and then he ran off to rouse my parents, two streets away, whooping and shouting, “Wake up! Moishe is here!” My mother woke up with a panicked start, and she was convinced that Avrom was just playing a practical joke: She came out with a broomstick to give him a sound thrashing!

Everyone gathered at Dovid’s house, and no one got any more sleep that night. Father, Mother, my brothers and sisters—who had grown up so much since I’d last seen them—crowded around and threw themselves

2 This feuilleton-like sketch was not written on the spur of the moment. Moishe had contributed just this sort of colorful description of the horse-and-buggy drivers to the memorial volume published in Israel to commemorate the town of Jędrzejów and its people who perished in the Shoah: Shimshon Dov Yerushalmi, ed., Yendzhever yizker-bukh/Sefer hazikaron liyhudei yendzhev (Tel Aviv: Orly Press, 1965), 149–151.
at me. They felt me to make sure I was all there, gazed at me and sobbed, and would not let go of me. Father was standing there, waiting to have his turn at last, but Mother kept tight hold of me, with no intention whatsoever of ever opening her arms. Only when Father’s voice cracked in a loud sob, with the words, “Rokhele, he’s mine, too, after all, isn’t he?” did she relinquish me, and I fell into his arms. When I felt his hot tears on my face for the very first time, I nearly fainted.

My grown-up siblings gathered around—my quiet [younger] brother Kalman, standing a bit to one side, not quite knowing what to do: to cry or to hug me, man to man. I seemed to sense his awkwardness, looking at me as if I were some kind of war hero, standing tall and making allowances for those who wanted to fuss over me. He seemed flustered when I brought him close and hugged and kissed him. My two little sisters, Perl who was older and Chava, the younger; and my little brother Benyomen, child of my parents’ last youth, who was named after my [maternal] grandfather Benyomen, made as if to get close to me and yet didn’t quite know how—to cry or not to cry?—so we just hugged each other in unspeakable happiness….

At 5:00, I walked over and knocked on Grandfather’s door. He came to the door himself, Reb Alter Yechiel Yosef in person, and stood there, speechless, at a momentary loss. Then he gathered me into his arms and led me inside without a word, his hands working in the air, and then yelled out: “Soreh Rivkeh, come see who is here! Come look at Mr. General in Chief! Where have you been keeping yourself all this time?!” It took him a few moments to recover his presence of mind and achieve some capacity for normal speech, and then he asked me all sorts of things, all at once, about the war, about what he used to call “politics.” Then, as if returning to his normal sensibility, he said, “Time for a glass of hot tea and then off to the Gerer shtibl [prayer house] to pray.”

Two glasses of tea instantly appeared on the table—the same familiar-tasting tea that I could remember from those days when I would get up in the wee hours to lay a fire for the samovar. Only now it was Grandfather taking care of all that. Grandmother disappeared back to the bedroom, pulled the blankets up over her head, and was soon to be heard snoring soundly: God’s in his heaven, I’m all right, Jack, no need to get all worked up, after all!...
As night fell, I fully realized the extent of my parents’ discomfiture. There wasn’t any place for me to sleep, unless they gave up one of their own beds for me and slept on the floor, along with one of my brothers or sisters. After much consideration, it was decided that for the time being I would share with my father. That “temporary” arrangement ended up lasting quite a long time, until I left town once again to wander the earth.

What could I expect, here at home? Even among the POWs, I had had my own spot to lie down, and now? Father had his bed, Mother hers; my two sisters shared a bed in the kitchen; opposite them stood another bed for the older boys—Kalman and Avrom; while Benyomen, the youngest, slept on the floor. So what about me? And how would I spend my days? How could I earn a living? There must, surely, be a way to improve my condition. Should I return to Łódź? Where would I stay? Łódź, the Polish Manchester, the jewel in the crown, was reduced to bare subsistence—like a cemetery, with the factory smokestacks looking like grotesque guardrails erected around an immense tombstone—and silence seemed to oppress the city. Here, in my little town, all was quiet, nothing going on, the beggars were plying their trade aplenty, and the food supply was no better than I remembered as a child: a bit of bread, some hot milk or coffee, suppers consisting of a bit of cooked broth—who even dreamed of chicken or meat? Nothing had improved…. And then, I entered the scene like an uninvited guest to eat at their table. Where was the food to come from? The old newspaper trade that had flourished years ago, before I’d left town, was completely gone. Yes, there were newspapers to sell, but not enough to serve as a source of income. So my days passed in that fashion, as I slunk off every morning to sit on a rock and cogitate, not returning home ’til night fell….

Meanwhile, I discovered that Jędrzejów now had a Jewish library, located in a small building near the Kielce Road. In fact, the town also boasted a Jewish high school with a complement of worthy teachers, so that Jewish children might acquire a good education without having to go to the Polish schools. At the Jewish school there were no Christian

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3 Vi a yovon in sukke: Like a Christian popping in for a visit to a sukkah.
religious symbols on the walls, and the children were shielded from
the fear of being attacked just for being Jewish. Young people dressed
up for the holiday strolled around town, boys and girls together, with‑
out bothering to hide from their parents. This was no longer the same
provincial little place I’d remembered, going back ten years, before my
departure for Łódź.

Reyze, sister of my old friend Wolf Abramowicz, had the keys to
the library. She let me in even when the library staff was not there, to
have a look around, so I had a chance to go through the collection a
bit. There were two big cupboards loaded with volumes—literature and
poetry, books I recognized as those I had once purchased and sent from
Łódź, which gave me a fine feeling of accomplishment. Spending time
at the library was a godsend for me, for it kept me away from stalking
the lonely paths and kept me out of the cold weather. Famished for
good reading material in Yiddish after so many years, I spent long hours
just reading, which helped me to forget the troubles at home and my
uncertain future.

The Austrian military occupation of the area was all but invisible—
there was no sense, as in the German zone, of being ruled with an iron
fist. Things were as calm as could be, no orders to follow or punishments
to fear. Sometimes you saw Austrian officers—Jewish ones—taking local
girls for walks in town. Tongues wagged about such girls who allegedly
let officers take liberties with them. I couldn’t say whether there was any
truth to such gossip. There were certainly troubled homes with lots of
shouting, where it was said the parents were at their wits’ end, fed up
with their children’s brazen disobedience. The young people did as they
pleased, and to hell with the gossip-mongers.

Actually, one result of the nastiness was that some young people
grouped together and avoided associating with any girls who had flighty
reputations, preferring to spend time in the library. They came in for lec‑
tures about Polish literary giants: Juliusz Słowacki, Henryk Sienkiewicz,
Eliza Orzeszkowa, and others.\(^4\) I attached myself to that gang. Twicę a

\(^4\) Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) was a Polish Romantic poet and playwright. Eliza
Orzeszkowa (1841–1910) was a writer whose works include *Eli Makower* (1875), a novel
about the relations between Jews and the Polish nobility, and *Meir Ezofowicz* (1878),
week we had evening lectures, and in general we spent time together. It was balm for my troubled mood and for my loneliness.…

When the war was officially over, November 11, 1918, the Austrians withdrew their troops and the country was going to be turned into an independent Polish state. However, the Poles were neither prepared nor capable of governing their own country. The man to whom the Austrians left the reins of power in Jędrzejów when they pulled out was a Pole named Kruk, who declared himself the new municipal governor. This man was to play an important role in my ultimate decision to leave home in 1920—to which I will return later on.

As the Austrians withdrew, I became more immersed in Zionist affairs. We had several Zionist groups: General Zionists,5 Bnos Tzion [Daughters of Zion]6—whose members included my brother Dovid’s wife, Chanaleh—as well as a younger group called Tse’irei Tzion [Zionist Youth]…. All these activities, together with the Jewish library and the lectures on Polish literature, breathed new life and energy into my existence. The others in the group did not just see me as a passive member, but as someone who could play an active and leading role. My Yiddish, at that time, was still a bit rusty and mixed with German [after four years away], both in my speech and in writing; but I made a concerted effort to express myself in a purer Yiddish. Eventually, I succeeded in recovering the un-Germanized, pure Yiddish that I had spoken before I left for military service…. I began sending correspondence to the Yiddish press: Haynt and Moment. I also wrote for the Zionist [weekly] periodical, Dos yidishe folk [The Jewish People] and, a bit later on, for the Tse’irei Tzion organ, Bafrayung [Liberation]…. I reported on local activities and I took up the cudgels against falsified statements and harmful

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5 General Zionists were thus dubbed because they were neither socialist nor were they part of the Mizrachi religious Zionists. Chaim Weizmann was their best-known leader.
6 Bnos Tzion began as a women’s auxiliary for the Jewish National Fund; it later spread to branches throughout Poland and engaged in women’s cultural and educational work with a Zionist orientation.
policies perpetrated against Jews by the Polish government. Sometimes I got into arguments with the editors at *Dos yidishe folk* when they didn’t want to publish my reports or tried cutting them down—all because I played up the valuable work of *Tse’irei Tsion* and critiqued the ineffective, old-fashioned approach taken by the General Zionists….

Young folks in town were growing up and marriage contracts were a hot item. A proffered bride with such-and-such amount of dowry, a girl with a veritable treasure chest, though the purse strings were kept securely in Daddy’s two tight fists; coarse, ordinary Jews hoping their daughters might “marry up” into gentler society. What with my grandfather’s honored place in town and my father’s reputation as a real scholar of Hebrew and Bible, I was not an inconsiderable candidate for such things. I myself occupied a respectable position as secretary of the [Zionist] town committee and a regular contributor to newspapers. I only had to say the word and—presto—I’d be a proud little householder in my own right with a proper little wife, albeit without ever touching any of the prudent father-in-law’s finances. My straightforward answer to all of this was a firm “No.” I felt obliged to stay unattached—I had no intention of tying myself down in a town that held so few prospects for me. I needed something of substance in my life.

I would have settled for less personal freedom if it had meant a proper job. There was one possibility that seemed promising—a job in a large lumber business located in the nearby town of Chmielnik. But nothing came of it in the end. Disappointed, I threw myself even more into my Zionist and community work, while I tried to revive the old newspaper business and expand it to neighboring towns: Wodzisław, Pinczów, Busk [Busko-Zdrój], and Chmielnik. To earn something on my own would relieve my distress at living off my parents’ and my brother Kalman’s expense, and to some extent I did manage to earn a bit. By day, I busied myself with community affairs, and at night, I went to the train station to await the train from Warsaw and to carry home huge packs of newspapers and magazines. I would split them up into smaller parcels and take the local trains to distribute them among customers. I worked six nights a week and put my heart and soul into it so that I might bring in some income….
It was a time of much unrest in Jewish families, with acrimonious arguments about Jewish life and communal affairs between children and their parents—especially fathers. The wives tended to stay on the sidelines, quietly observing those arguments and listening to the raised voices, which were heard outside in the street and in the nearby houses. Children who had been raised in pious Gerer Hasidic families revolted. A movement started to replace the incumbent heads of the Jewish community board and introduce a democratically elected leadership…. We called a big meeting at the large bey medresh and issued a demand: that the incumbents expose the account books to public view, to see where the money was going…. Things did not descend into fistfights—the way things usually went among the Hasidim, when they got into violent encounters over who received honors during the prayers on Simchas Töyreh [Simchat Torah]. Still, voices were raised, and people standing around outside or across the street could hear everything that was said. Finally it was decided to forcibly remove the account books from Seltzer, the treasurer and de facto leader of the established community board. He had tears in his eyes as he literally begged not to have to part with the community records, but to no avail. The books were impounded and handed over to a committee, freshly appointed from among the victorious younger generation.…

The local government was no different from the antisemitic regime that was in power in Poland at the time. During the day, life was fairly normal, but at night there was fear. People used to keep their lights off and cover their windows with blankets, hiding inside because people threw rocks into Jewish homes. Sometimes people were hit in the head and seriously injured in this way. Anti-Jewish excesses took place on trains, too, where Jews had their beards cut off or were even thrown off moving trains. Shopkeepers began to suffer losses of income, since it was too dangerous to travel to Warsaw or Łódź to buy merchandise. The Poles instituted boycotts against Jewish shops, brazenly posting their pickets outside Jewish businesses with signs that said: “Buy [only] from your own kind!”

In Jędrzejów, the chief agitator among the Poles was the owner of a bookshop, a man by the name of Janowski. He was the ringleader of the so-called “intelligentsia,” including the senior Christian cleric
in town, Dr. Przypkowski. I have some doubt, however, whether the priest was actively involved in initiating these things, because later on, during the Nazi occupation, Przypkowski hid Jews in caves outside town and kept them alive with food and medicine. I have this on good authority, as it has been attested to by witnesses who are alive today in Israel, such as [here he mentions several individuals]. A distant relative of mine told me himself how he was hidden in the quarry of an old brick-factory. Except for one man who died and was buried there, the other seven in the group, including one woman, survived. So, I am willing to concede that Przypkowski might not have been to blame—unless, of course, he was conscience-stricken and decided to turn a new leaf [when he helped Jews in the 1940s]. I couldn’t say for sure, since I was no longer there.

I had other troubles on my mind. The Polish government started drafting soldiers for the army. See, they had the gall to attack Jews, but they also wanted to draft Jews of military age for the army! It tortured me when my two brothers, Kalman and Avrom, were drafted in 1919 and had the dubious honor of wearing Polish uniforms, with the Polish eagle on their caps. The Polish military was known for its antisemitism and hardly bothered to hide it. Kalman was the first to be taken, and along with him went the income that he had generated for the eight-member household.

Once again, I faced the question of how Father and Mother would manage. I considered leaving quietly some night, just so as not to have to see the anguish they went through in their inescapable predicament, with no help in sight. But what would people think of me? What would my parents say about such a coward, who would abandon them, defenseless on the battlefield? I got no relief or rest at all, with all this going through my head. My sole escape was to redouble my efforts in community work, party work, and the newspaper business. I can say that this helped me.

Kalman, who was a qualified printer, was fortunately assigned by the army to a military printing plant in Kielce, and he came home on weekends. That was truly a salvation for my mother. At least he would not
be posted to the front, to fight the Russians. But something else would happen as a result of his being in Kielce, something that turned his good fortune into misfortune. Luckily, he was saved in the end through the efforts of a prominent Jewish attorney, a member of the Jewish caucus (Koło) in the Polish National Sejm [parliament], Apolinary Hartglas. Hartglas, a Zionist, was a defender of Jewish rights and Jewish honor, and he stood up against attempts to frame Jewish soldiers for supposed treason, espionage, and so forth—an antisemitic libel that Hartglas exposed, so that he [Kalman] was spared. By the time all that happened, however, I was already in America.

In our own circles at home, we organized protest demonstrations. I myself wrote reports for the Jewish press, for which I was called in on several occasions to be questioned at the municipal government building. They accused me of slandering the state and the police, and threatened to carry the matter further if I persisted. That didn’t stop me from publishing the truth—facts to substantiate what I had been writing.

The anti-Jewish excesses hardly made a dent in the Zionist activities, which we pursued as intensively as ever before. It kept me very busy, all that work for the party organization. Our finances were precarious, so we started spinning ideas on how to raise funds to support our work. A small group of us in Tse’irei Tsion hit upon the idea to stage a theatrical event to raise funds. It would serve two purposes, since we wanted to engage in cultural work as well as make some money for our cause. The others agreed to my proposal that we stage a production of Jacob Gordin’s “Kreutzer Sonata.”

I undertook the director’s job myself, as I had seen the play performed at Zandberg’s Theater in Łódź, with celebrated actors like Julius

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7 The Russo-Polish war, 1919–1920, was fought between the Russian Bolshevik government and the Polish Republic over territorial issues.
8 The memoir does not spell out what Kalman was accused of, since the incident was well known to his siblings and needed no explanation. But the passage indicates that a false accusation implying at least insubordination or disloyalty if not worse was laid against him and this required a strong legal defense.
9 Jacob Gordin (1853–1909) emigrated from Russia to America and almost single-handedly modernized the New York Yiddish stage with powerful melodramas based on current social reality.
and Amelia Adler, the comic actor, Bulman, and others. I would be in charge of the day-by-day work on the play. It was not so easy, though, since all the young folks wanted the best roles for themselves. Every single one of them believed that he or she was cut out for stardom. We often faced setbacks, as we discovered after several auditions that some people did not perform as expected. They were required to really immerse themselves in the play, which concerned a great tragedy in a wealthy Jewish household—but most of them just wanted to get up on stage and act. I kept having to switch characters around.

The main tragic role, playing the character of Etenyu [Ettie], was assigned to my good friend, Chaya. Because her father was a dayan, we withheld her name from the publicity until the opening night, for fear he would find out about it. As for myself, I took the role of Etenyu’s old nanny, Natasha. Natasha was not just a nanny to Etenyu, she was more like a mother who watched over her.

We put on the play in a big room at the town fire department. The place was packed to the rafters and there was a shortage of tickets. Somehow, the antisemites tried to interfere with us again: The lights went out suddenly in the midst of the performance and it took a while to restore them. Even though our young people were all dying to watch the show, we found enough volunteers who were willing to stand guard over the electricity connections outside the building, so the show could go on.

It was a wonderful performance, and the next day, everyone in town raved about it. The rabbi, who knew all about it by then, just held his peace. He said not a word to his daughter, Chaya, who was the apple of his eye. The proceeds from the play were ample, and we split them up among the various sponsoring organizations, to pay for our various activities.

10 Julius Adler and his wife Henrietta were celebrated Yiddish actors in New York. “Amelia” Adler is probably Sara Adler (who once played a character called Amalia. She was the third wife of another Yiddish stage genius, Jacob P. Adler. It was Sara Adler who played a character in “The Kreutzer Sonata.”


12 Judge: a senior rabbinical functionary, authorized to pronounce judgment on legal matters in Jewish religious law.
Leaving Home

In the center of town, right on the market square, there lived a family named Dudkiewicz. They had one married son, two younger boys who were members of Hashomer Hatzair [the Young Guardsman], and two daughters. The two girls had their own place to live. The name of the older one was Masha. They used to call her “Masha with the stooped shoulders,” because she walked around with her head to one side. She hosted a lot of the town’s younger crowd at her home, acting as a kind of surrogate mother. She held a nonstop open house for anyone who wanted to sit and talk, work through personal problems, make decisions about their lives, and so on. I was a frequent caller there, as was my friend Chaya, the dayan’s daughter. That house provided the backdrop for many a budding romance, and more than a few of these led to marriages. Everyone beat a path to Masha’s door in good times and in bad, knowing that they would find a willing ear and a possible solution to their problems. Sometimes it worked out, sometimes not. …

Another person in that set was still a teenager, a tall, slender sixteen-year-old girl named Chantshe [Hannah]. She was very bright, but as naïve as a ten-year-old about some things. She demanded to know everything, including matters of the heart, and everything had to be spelled out for her in words she could understand. Try explaining to her, for example, why a kiss between a girl and a fellow was nothing but a natural urge, not anything to be ashamed of. She became our mascot, and even had we wanted to tell her to leave us grown-ups alone, using her tender years as the pretext, it would have been impossible to do so. At any rate, that girl grew up to be one of the sharpest young women in town, a devoted political activist who was cut out for a leading role

13 Hashomer Hatzair was (and still is today) a Zionist youth movement, which became affiliated in time with the radical left wing of socialist Zionism in Palestine – which became the (now defunct) Mapam Party. Shmuel Dudai (Dudkiewicz) and his brother Hillel left Jędrzejów along with a group of 102 young Zionists, both men and women. Shmuel Dudai was at Tel-Hai during the famous battle in March 1920 and was wounded alongside Joseph Trumpeldor. He later worked at the Tnuva dairy plant in Jerusalem. He was a district leader for the Haganah in northern Jerusalem in 1947. See Yerushalmi, ed., Yendzhever yizker-bukh/ Sefer ha-zikaron li-yehudei yendzhev, 296.
amongst the younger generation. But she, along with all the other regulars at Masha’s place, was mercilessly murdered by Hitler’s mob, damn them!14

Producing the play had kept me busy over many weeks and allowed me to forget my own personal concerns; but once the performance was over, I faced the question of the future once more. What ought I to do? Should I link my future with Chaya’s, get married and stay in our little town for good, even though I had no prospects to speak of? Or should I seek my fortune elsewhere, in the hopes of a brighter future? I felt something of my old wanderlust set in and wondered what would become of me. At that time [after the war], visitors began to arrive from abroad, mainly from America. They came to see their parents and their families. My uncle Henekh’s brother from America also came, with the intention of taking his mother back with him. That planted the germ of a notion that perhaps I ought to go, too.

My younger brother Avrom was doing his military service around Pshemishl [Przemyśl] and Lemberg.15 Rumors started going around that they would also call up veterans of the Russian and Austrian armies who were now living under Polish jurisdiction. The thought that I might not be able to avoid this [fate] preyed upon me: that I might once again have to bear arms; once again have to give up any sort of human normalcy; and once again be made into a cipher amongst a mass of cannon fodder. My freedom was destined to come to an end, because I was a former soldier and a fine marksman to boot. My alternatives were to stay and be drafted or run off like a thief in the night, but the decision had to be made.

I sought Aunt Brokhe’s [Henekh’s wife’s] advice, and we formulated a plan for me to leave and take her oldest son, Moishe, with me. We would be taking a big risk, placing ourselves in God’s hands; but Henekh’s brother promised he would help us get to America if we could get hold of [Polish] passports and smuggle ourselves across the border into Germany. If that could be arranged, then the two Moishes would make it to America together….

14 Yemakh shemam: literally, “may their name be blotted out.”
15 Lemberg was the city’s name under the pre-1919 Austrian regime. In Russian and Yiddish it is called Lvov; Polish: Lwów; today it is L’viv, Ukraine.
The passports were the first hurdle, and here is where Kalman’s connections became crucial. As I’ve mentioned before, he worked at a print shop…. The owner, however, relied on his employees to do all the work, and that meant Kalman. Since this was the only printing press in town, it handled all the printing jobs required by the local government administration. Kalman, therefore, had easy access to the offices there, and he became responsible for our paperwork: printing our passports and acquiring a copy of the municipal governor, Kruk’s, signature. I took it upon myself to learn to forge that signature perfectly. I worked at it day and night, writing out his name repeatedly until I could produce a very good facsimile that would not arouse suspicions.

No one at home or among our close friends knew that the passports were ready and that it was just a matter of choosing how and when to make our move. Getting across the Polish-German frontier was not the easiest thing in the world. The Polish military authorities had secret agents who were thick around those parts, on the lookout for Jewish boys, many of whom were doing what we were about to do. The secret police had their paid informants. There were people who knew they could extort protection money from parents with draft-age boys looking for ways to escape. Smugglers set up a thriving business, charging fees to spirit people across the border.

On the very last day that I was ever to see my town, I dashed over to Masha’s house where the whole younger crowd was gathered. We embraced and kissed one another frantically, laughing and crying all at once. It pained me to have to leave again. I was especially upset over leaving Chaya, who had formed such a strong attachment to me. She had had some expectation that we two “rejects” might end up being more than just friends. She burst into uncontrollable tears, threw herself down on a couch, sobbing and gasping out, “Moishe, why? We need each other so much! Why is fate set against us?!”

In the middle of the night, I went with my cousin and his American uncle to the train station. We stayed apart from one another, on different parts of the platform, so as not to draw unwanted attention. Our American held our passports for us until we reached the little town of Sosnovtse [Sosnowiec], across from Katowitz [Katowice], which lay [at the time] on the German side of the border. Smugglers stood by, waiting
for us. The money we were to pay them was being held for safe-keeping in trustworthy hands, awaiting a signed note from us to confirm that we were safely across the frontier.

We waited two whole days in Sosnowiec. Then, when it was pitch-black out, the smugglers came to guide us across the border. We went through small footpaths and across fields, where we had enough cover from the growing crops. We came to a stream, went into the water up to our necks, and forded the stream to the opposite bank. When we heard a few gunshots, we knew that was our signal that we were out of danger.

The town on the German side [Katowitz] was officially under French military jurisdiction—the French army was in charge of security and there was a civil administration. The place was crawling with Polish agents, however, who sometimes collared fleeing youngsters and dragged them back to Polish soil. We took our Polish passports and registered with the authorities to get travel permits, which we hoped would protect us from any further interference. We got visas for the area: in the French zone, we had full liberty of movement. Getting to Berlin, however, would require another smuggling arrangement. We had neither luggage nor any money. Later on, smugglers brought us some money, sent by Aunt Brokhe and Uncle Henekh. We worked out how we might save as much as we could until we were deep inside Germany, at least, or possibly crossing into Belgium.

We set out from Katowitz, headed for the neighboring town of Gleiwitz [Gliwice]. There, we booked into dowdy lodgings at a dingy guest house, slept all night, and went out in the morning. We returned very late, hoping to evade having to pay the landlord. During the time we spent there, we generally avoided the beer halls. But once, while we were walking around, we did go inside one place and there I spied a

16 The Treaty of Versailles (1919) redrew the map of East-Central and Southern Europe more or less to accommodate the major national groups, but many areas remained ethnically and linguistically mixed. Upper Silesia was such a place, with Germans and Poles as well as Jews. It was held and policed by the Allied Powers until a referendum that was held in 1921, when the area was split more or less in half between the two countries. See Paul Robert Magocsi, Historical Atlas of Central Europe, vol. 1 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 125–127.
very tall, very thin German in civilian clothing. It was none other than [ex-German Army] Sergeant Janow from [the German administration at the POW camp at] Neuhammer! Our strange reunion is hard to convey. He hugged and kissed me, and was genuinely glad to see me. He introduced me to the people he was sitting with, telling them all about me, that I spoke fluent German, and so on. He not only treated us to beer, but to a meal, too, and he was tremendously helpful to us, seeing the predicament we were in….

Gleiwitz was thick with smugglers, who thrived on the wave of new “opportunities.” They took up all the best lodgings in town. Amongst themselves, the smugglers were avaricious competitors. They offered package deals to “clients” looking for direct transportation from Gleiwitz to Berlin, via express trains. They worked out a system of putting Polish fugitives into first-class compartments and locking the doors—and the German train conductors profited handsomely from being paid to look the other way. This became a daily routine. The smugglers made contact with the fugitives’ relatives in Poland, and that was how they could secure payment for services rendered, once their “clients” were safely delivered to their destination.

There were two smuggling rings in Gleiwitz, each with its chosen representative and its standard fees. One of these men was from Łódź, dressed to the nines and too clever by half, by the name of Reis. The other was named Shargel, and he was completely the opposite from Reis in terms of his general appearance. Reis’s business flourished on the strength of the successful front he presented, while Shargel picked up the crumbs. One got the impression that Reis was too smooth a talker; that he was playing fast and loose with the way he represented his feats and accomplishments; that he was too much the fortune hunter. But you can’t argue with success, and we followed the majority and struck a bargain with Reis. The bargaining began in Gleiwitz and ended up with Uncle Henekh in Jędrzejów, who deposited a sum of money, guaranteeing our passage through to Berlin. Upon receiving our written confirmation (that we had arrived safely), the smugglers would receive their due reward.

On a Shabbos afternoon, Reis informed us that at 11:00 that night, he would conduct us to the train station and get us on board the train to Berlin. We were to sit in separate first-class compartments, locked in.
We traveled all night, but were unable to get any sleep. The tension, the nervous anxiety we went through, the anticipation of arriving in Berlin without untoward interruptions—it was too much to expect that we might also catch some shuteye. At 7:00 in the morning, we got into Berlin and the door to the compartment was opened. Reis was there to meet us. I should point out that, even here in Berlin, inquisitive officials started asking to see our papers; but the smugglers charged so much money that they had enough to hand out, down to the last policeman. It was truly an enormous operation....

By the time we reached Berlin, the American uncle, along with his mother and his sister, had already reached Antwerp, the main Belgian port from which ships departed daily for America and Canada. We set out from Berlin and reached Köln the following day. We went to the address we had been given, and there we stayed in a locked room for four days. The landlord left food for us. Then, we got a letter from Antwerp, instructing us to proceed to Aachen, where we were to try sneaking across into Belgium under the cover of darkness.... After a few unsuccessful sorties, we got in touch with the American uncle in Antwerp and made it clear that we would have to enter Belgium legally. We had our Polish passports, but we had no American visas. This was not a severe problem, however. Our passports were stapled together like booklets, and all we needed to do to remove some pages was to unclasp the staples. Nothing could be simpler. We sent the extracted pages to the uncle, who sent them back stamped with American visas. We then reattached the pages into our passports, and with no one the wiser, we boarded the train to Antwerp on the strength of our American visas. That’s how we got there, no questions asked!

Antwerp was full of waiting emigrants, and we were now free to come and go as we pleased. We had left Poland and its antisemites far behind us. There were a lot of young fellows like us, awaiting news and arrangements for booking passage to Canada and America. All sorts of refugees from Poland—some who had made it legally, and others illegally—used to converge on a certain guest house that had a restaurant. It was owned by an old-timer by the name of Skladowski, who had established himself there. Skladowski’s place served as an information bureau. You could go over there every day to check on how to make
travel plans, to see who was leaving, and so forth. It was the kind of place where you could get a good meal, and sometimes passengers waiting for their ships would offer the needy some leftovers, or a glass of tea, or a bowl of noodle soup.

We were at something of a loss, without funds or a place to stay. The rabbi in Antwerp at the time was Rabbi [Yehuda Leib] Kowalski, formerly of Włocławek in Poland, and an active member of the Mizrachi Zionists. Because of my Zionist connections from Poland, I felt I could go see him and request a bit of help, while we waited to leave for Canada. He told us to come to the synagogue on Friday, where people would willingly invite us to eat with them for Shabbos.

We hit upon the idea of traveling via Canada, so as to avoid any suspicion that our passports were in any way out of order. Canada didn’t require visas; it was enough to bring $25 with you. Meanwhile, we lived on the bit of help from Rabbi Kowalski and a bit of money that came to us in the mail, posted to us at Skladowski’s restaurant….

When we went to buy our ship’s passage, we discovered that although the Canadians did not require immigration visas, the Polish government demanded the right to be represented on the docks, where they could inspect Polish passports held by departing passengers. Anyone without proper visas from the Polish and American consulates would be prevented from boarding ship. We went over to the HIAS office to seek their advice. Was there a way to get on board the ship without going through the Polish passport inspection? It seemed that we had no choice but to go to the Polish consulate. This was a tricky business, since the consulate was legally Polish soil. There was always the danger that they would seize us for desertion from military conscription or for carrying forged documents. A HIAS representative accompanied us there. His name was Dovid Lehrer. He assured us that, should the Poles confiscate our papers, HIAS would see to our release and prevent our being deported back to Poland.

With heavy hearts, we entered the consulate, where we explained that we hadn’t had enough time to travel to Warsaw to apply for visas. We stood there, trembling before the consul, while he inspected our passports and the French visas that we were given in Katowicz. He finally agreed to give us visas, in exchange for a fee that we could pay in U.S.
dollars (the only currency that we had on us). We walked out of there in such a state that we literally fell into Dovid Lehrer’s arms when we saw him waiting for us outside. He had saved us from disaster. Years later, I met him in America and reminded him of how he helped us.

After that, we went over to the American consulate, where everything went smoothly. 17 Now we were really ready to exit Belgium and leave Europe. We sat down and wrote letters to our families: farewell to our homes, to our town, to Europe.…

Arriving at the port, we encountered hordes of fellow passengers and also many familiar faces from the Antwerp crowd, who came just to give us a send-off. ... The ship sounded a final whistle and cast off. All of us on board shouted and sang, waving goodbye to those on shore. The older passengers soon went inside to find their berths, but all the young folk stayed outside, heads held high in the wind.

Finally, when the waves began to buffet the ship and the deck became thoroughly soaked, we went inside, only to discover the soreness of our plight. The ship was hardly fit any more for passenger service. It would be hard to imagine even livestock being transported in it. It was pressed back into service because of the tremendous demand for Atlantic shipping in those days. As the boat heaved from side to side, the people heaved the last drops of green bile from their innards. Who could think of eating? Who had any appetite? Wives who were traveling to join their husbands cursed their menfolk, the shipping company, and anyone else who had brought them to such dire straits. We tossed around on our straw mattresses while the crew-members poked fun at us. They were happy not to have to cook, and they looked forward to arriving in Quebec with lots of food supplies, which they would no doubt sell for a pretty penny.

17 Although they now had bona fide U.S. visas, they still carried out the plan of traveling via Canada. This was probably because they had already booked passage to Quebec, though it is possible that they thought it prudent in any case.
Among all those miserable people, only a few of the younger passengers managed to hang on and stay strong. Among these were my cousin Moishe and myself. We ate roasted potatoes and salted herring and went on deck to breathe the clean ocean air—trying not to look at the waves below. We had a powerful thirst from eating so much herring and we were dying for a drink. They only had bottles of some queer soda drink that smelled like cinnamon. We had precisely the sum of money that we needed to present to the authorities in Quebec, and none to spare. As the oldest, it fell to me to break a dollar and buy a couple of bottles. We would later reap the consequences of this decision, upon our arrival in port.

It took over two weeks to make the crossing. We ate badly and slept even worse. The straw pallets gave off an awful, dusty odor that made our lives miserable. It was better to stay out on deck. We would go down and beg for food in the kitchen. The crew laughed at us, gobbling their own meals with hunks of meat but sparing us only potatoes and herring. We passed by icebergs and prayed we’d make it safely through. Once the icebergs were behind us, we began wondering if our old floating tub had taken a wrong turn somewhere and we were lost at sea. Then we began to see flocks of sea birds swooping around us and diving into the water. People said that was a sign that we were approaching land. ’Til we got there, though, it seemed like that day would never come. Had it not been for the seagulls, we would have carried on fearing that we were lost.

All the tension and worrying kept me focused on the here and now. I hardly spared a thought for the folks back home, my family and friends, my town. I had only one thing on my mind: Would we come through those swelling, churning waves? Would we live to set our feet down on shore again and be rid of the awful mattresses, the anxiety, and the drunken crewmembers with their jeers, cackling over the moans of the seasick passengers?

Those final days were the worst: we were all drained, slaphappy and apathetic. Three days went by like that, and then we began to see small black spots on the horizon. There were two schools of thought: some said these were signs of land, while others, who seemed to have given up hope, said these were a dark omen, probably storm clouds approaching our ship, with even worse in store for us than what we had before.
But when morning came, we saw that we were quite close to shore. We slowed down and stopped heaving about so violently. The smokestack, which had stood silent until then, went into action and sent out loud blasts, announcing “We are here.” We could see lots of other vessels in the middle distance—big boats and smaller ones, even open-topped fishing boats that came alongside.

The slow sailing in calm waters brought many of the passengers up on deck. They looked like living skeletons, some of them. They had sallow complexions and they poured out the last of their accumulated bile while they gulped in some fresh air. The stronger ones pulled the weaker ones along, hauling and pushing them out on deck. The younger people crowded the railings and started singing God’s praises, chanting: “I believe in perfect faith....” There was singing and dancing, as if the Messiah had really come at last: no more pogroms, no more wars, and no more ocean left to cross in this leaky tub. We were getting closer to the moment when we would stand on firm ground in a free country, where we could sing Hallelujah and bless the Lord for bringing us safely through a dangerous time. We were ready to be led like a humble herd of sheep into wide-open meadows; to be welcomed with open arms and be told we were now free men in a new country, free to walk around without papers, visas, and all such distressing visitations.... On shore, we could see hundreds of people waiting with outstretched arms, no doubt to welcome their relatives or friends. The creaking vessel let out one final blast on its horn and then we anchored to the dock. Gangplanks were put in place and everyone crowded to disembark, the sooner the better. Twenty days had been more than enough.

From Montreal to New York

The boisterous disembarkation proceeded, and then it calmed down as we all gathered in a large hangar for inspection of our papers. Everyone also had to show the $25 they were supposed to have. My cousin and

18 Ani ma’amin be’emunah shleymah.
19 Bentshn goyml.
I held each other by the hand so as not to lose one another. When our turn came, I was $1 short because of the drinks that I had bought when we were perishing from thirst. They let my cousin go through, while a few others and I were held back in a side room. A terrible fear gripped me. Here I was, literally a step away from freedom, but once again standing behind windows with iron bars. I broke out in tears, as did a few of the others who were detained.

After a bit, government inspectors arrived, accompanied by a Jewish committee with papers that guaranteed they would take responsibility for us. Each one of us went through another inspection to see why we had been detained. I spoke up in a quavering voice, explaining my lack of a single dollar, and why. Then we were released into the custody of the committee and we made a dash for the train to take us to Montreal. Luckily, they held the train ’til all the passengers had disembarked from the ship. Breathlessly, I ran from one train car to another, shouting at the top of my lungs, “Moishe, where are you?” Finally, we met amid a shower of tears. We looked like two little kids.

The commotion in the train was like a town fair back home. The committee members gave instructions to the immigrants all up and down the train: how to buy food and drink during the journey. The wonderful people [from the committee] were not just shepherding us on a train ride; they were guiding us to a new way of life, a new culture. They were like family to us—strangers after all—and we were like their little children, whose needs and welfare had to be assured. The train whistle sounded and got us all excited, the sound of it echoing as we raced forward, on to the new country.

The young crowd felt at ease in the spacious train cars. There was singing, dancing, and great enthusiasm. It was a wonder, really, that we could muster so much happy excitement so quickly and instantly thrust behind us everything that we had gone through over the previous months. All our fears were tossed out the windows of that train as it sped along the rails: the fear of being caught at the border; of being sent back to Polish overlords, Polish antisemites and Polish prisons; and fear of conscription to the Polish army with its ingrained Jew-hatred, which reckoned us as second-class citizens even though we wore the same uniform and bore the same arms. Gone was the fear of violence,
of rocks coming through our windows at night: no more blankets hung up behind the curtains, no more darkened rooms to avoid having a bullet aimed at us.…

All of these thoughts brought back my concerns for home and a yearning for my parents, my family and friends. I was so far away now from Polish fields and forests. When would I ever see them again, if at all? When would I go berry picking or mushroom picking? When would I look over my hometown on its market Thursdays? That was when peasant men and women would arrive to pay their tabs at the local shops and market stalls, while drunks loitered around the [state-owned] liquor concession or lay about near the pig market, sleeping it off under the wheels of their wagons. Jędrzejów seemed so dear now, with all its intimacy, all its poverty, the homes with the thatched roofs—how I missed it now. I would have liked to see my home again, to look in our window and see what Mother was up to. Had she shed her tears ’til there weren’t any left? Or was she staring into space with her face still wet with grief, thinking of her son who was wandering the face of the earth and whom she might never lay eyes on again? And father—driven aimlessly from the house to the market and back again, at a loss: Not only was his son gone, but he also had lost a companion with whom to share things, with whom to consult or commiserate, share glad tidings and bad news, discuss politics. And what was happening at Aunt Brokhe’s? They had parted from their eldest son. I, too, had been like another son in that family. Brokhe and I had grown up together at Grandfather’s house. How were they all faring now? And what was going on among the Tse’irei Tsion? Would they carry on without me? And where was my dear [ex-fiancée] Rosa? And what of Chaya? They had both languished for me—if only I could have divided my body and soul in two!

When we arrived at the big terminal in Montreal, we saw a large crowd waiting to receive us. Only a few were there to greet their own friends and relatives, however. Those passengers were busy hugging and kissing, and then they picked up their modest baggage and left. The rest of the crowd was there because of the Jewish committee’s organizing efforts. We were lined up, we gave our names, and then we were paired up with host families. Then the committee took us all to a spacious, well-appointed Jewish restaurant, all decked out with white tablecloths,
glassware, silverware—a veritable banquet. At each table, there were a few members of the Montreal Jewish community. We were stunned that this had all been organized for our benefit. Had we landed on some other planet, perhaps? Why had these people gone to such trouble to make us feel welcome, and with such sincere good will?

The dinner lasted about two hours. Between courses, there were speeches in a beautiful, juicy Yiddish, and every speaker made the point that they wanted us to feel at home in Canada, so that we might make our way without too many problems and settle in as good citizens. At the end of the dinner, we left two by two, together with our host families. My cousin and I went with a family called Aronson. They were clothing manufacturers and they treated us as if we were their own flesh and blood. We came to a large hotel where we were installed, two to a room, and were asked not to leave until someone came for us.

Wearied from the journey and the tension, but full of good food, we fell sound asleep. My dreams were disturbed, though, wracked by all the fears and troubles that we had gone through over recent weeks and even years. I dreamt I was on the front in Germany, doing sentry duty at night, that I had fallen asleep and had awakened screaming, “Help! Shma yisroel!” as a German bayonetted me and blood was streaming out of my body. I was struggling with the German but couldn’t beat him. In the dream, I seemed to relive my four years in the prison camp…; sneaking across the border; the ship and its miseries…; my detention at the harbor in Quebec. My cousin woke me up and I was covered with sweat, yelling, “Help! Save me!” I finally regained my composure, let go of my nightmares, and fell asleep again. When I woke up at last, it was 4:00 in the afternoon. Outside, there were cars waiting to take us to our host families.

The Aronsons were originally from Lithuania, near Kovno [today Kaunas], and they had the typical local idiosyncrasy of not pronouncing “sh” properly.20 They understood us quite well, but I can’t say that I fully understood them. There were the two parents, plus their two boys and two girls, who were in high schools and came home only on weekends.

20 In the Yiddish dialect of that part of Lithuania, an “s” was substituted for a “sh.”
They were fine, intelligent, and warm-hearted people who showed us every hospitality. They were also very open and above-board with us, making it clear that they hoped we might stick around, marry their daughters, and become part of the family. They knew we were hoping to carry on to America, but they offered us jobs at their factory. That way, we’d be earning a living right away and could give up our plans; we could become Canadian citizens, instead. Life in the United States was not as calm and easygoing as in Canada, they explained. In Montreal, in particular, we would find a thriving Jewish community with schools and a worthy cultural life. In America, in contrast, people lived more detached lives, separated from each other—even from their own relatives, whom they saw only once in a blue moon.

Although we enjoyed their company and were grateful for their open-hearted welcome, we decided to push on, nevertheless, and continue our journey to New York. We took leave of that wonderful family as if they were kith and kin—tears were shed, we promised to keep in touch, and they promised us a warm welcome and an open door, should we ever decide to return to Montreal.

It was only an eight-hour trip from Montreal to New York, but getting into America didn’t go without a hitch. We had to go through the local American consulate. The consul himself was a Jew named Klein, a canny, round-bellied man. He tried to create all sorts of obstacles to prevent us from entering the United States. He wanted to know why—if we had American visas—had we not sailed directly from Antwerp to New York? And if we were headed for New York, why had we loitered in Canada for ten days? The route we took, via Canada, aroused his suspicion and we were required to give a full explanation. Other questions meant to trip us up were: To which faction of the Bolshevik party did we belong? Why were we so keen to leave our homeland, Poland?

He examined our passports up and down, left and right, and in the end, he delayed giving us his decision for forty-eight hours. That would give him time to consult with the American consul in Antwerp, to make sure our travel visas were genuine. So, we returned to the consulate two days later. Again the same story: If we had proper American visas, whom had we visited in Montreal? Where did we stay? We were not cowed by
his manner or his official position, but answered him that we were with the Aronson family, who were our relatives, fine upstanding citizens with their own clothing factory, who had no connection at all with left-wing parties, were synagogue members and educated people.

Finally, he gave us a permit to enter the United States, as long as we obtained a health certificate from the American doctor, right there in the consulate. There were no problems with the medical exam—the doctor just asked what illnesses we had had since childhood, and that was that. In the meantime, Moishe’s American uncle arrived—my uncle Henekh’s brother, who had been with us that difficult night when we left Jędrzejów, and who had helped us on our way over to Belgium.

Seated on the train at the Montreal station, it was hard to believe it was finally happening. ’Til we began to roll, it hardly seemed real that a whole new chapter in our lives was about to begin. It was only when we picked up speed and the excitement of the moment had passed that I began having second thoughts. Why were we going? Where would I go when we got there? How would I make a living? Neither of us had any real job training, and certainly no professional qualifications. My cousin Moishe had not even set foot outside our little town, had never lived in a big city; whereas I, at least, had seen a bit of the world—Russia, Germany, Poland—and had lived through a lot during the war. I was entrusted with responsibility for him. His parents were counting on me, which made my position doubly difficult.

My thoughts were interrupted when an American inspector came along to look at our papers. He had an easy job with us, since we had no baggage for him to inspect. We had only what we were wearing. There were no questions this time. The train’s whistle announced we were crossing into American territory. So here we were at last, free as birds. Had I wanted to, I could have torn up my papers right then and there, as if there had never been a Moishe Chenchinski.

Thoughts and speculations, however, could not satisfy an empty stomach. With the help of the American [uncle], we found our way to the dining car, where tables were set with white tablecloths and silverware. We made ourselves comfortable at one of those little tables for four. At each setting, there was a printed menu. The two of us, “green” immigrants that we were, had as much notion of what was written
there as chickens might understand a human being. So, we nodded at whatever the American decided to have—we might as well, what other choice did we have? We enjoyed a good meal, not bothering to wonder if the food was kosher at all. The cup of coffee they served was especially good, hot and aromatic. It was nothing like the “coffee” that my mother used to make, which was just hot water and a pinch of chicory. And they served us a plate of pastries, too—pick out whatever you liked, or gobble up everything! That was the first time in my life that I ate in a traveling restaurant—it was a splendid novelty that I had never seen anywhere before.

The train stopped in New York at 125th Street [East Harlem in Upper Manhattan] and everyone scrambled out. After the jostling and the mad rush, we got out, down to the street, and we saw at a glance how different things looked compared to the peaceful streets of Montreal. There, people walked along, but here they ran, everyone trying to overtake whoever was in their way. Everything was a huge commotion, with automobiles honking their horns so loudly you needed to cover your ears. The buildings were like tall tombstones standing there. They looked like they could use a good cleaning: They were covered in years of accumulated grime. There were cafés with little colored lights, inviting passersby to come inside for a coffee and a freshly baked roll or other delicacies. Everyone was hurrying along, trying not to be late for work, to get down to the subway.

The whole scene, the noise, the voices of the people—the impression I had was that it would take me years to get used to it and be able to speak a few words. I saw dingy signs, lit up with little light bulbs, with words that seemed to point where to go: “Downtown … Uptown.” I needed constant instruction from our companion. When the subway train arrived at the station, droves of people tried to jam their way through the door, while others were pushing to get out. We managed to get inside, but there was nowhere to move, let alone sit down. No one explained why all the rush: Was this the last train that would come along today?…

We arrived at a house, surrounded with trees, which had two entrances. One was in front, facing the street, and the other in the back. The back door was for food deliveries, and the front door was for receiving guests. Since we were guests, we were conducted through the
front door. I saw people who, with one exception, were strangers to me. The missus looked familiar, however. I remembered her from home, years ago, when she had come looking for her brother [Henekh], and we had both just been kids. Now, here she was with her own home and four school-age children of her own: three boys and a girl. Later on, we met the rest of the family. I had no close ties to these people, but I was a relative after all: my uncle [by marriage], Henekh, was this woman’s brother, which counted for something.

In the evening, neighbors came by to have a look at the two “green” arrivals—who knew what strange sort of creatures we might be? They may have been a bit disappointed when it turned out we were perfectly ordinary, just two fellows sitting and exchanging news and conversation, relating the events of our passage over from Poland. Some of them needed to hear what we were saying translated into English, as they didn’t quite understand. They seemed astonished that two ordinary young men could have done what we did. Where had we gotten the courage and summoned the endurance to go thousands of miles without extra clothes, without money, often without enough food to eat?…

[The next morning] I slipped out of the house and walked to the streetcar nearby, which took me to the subway. There, in the city, everything was running at a frantic pace. I found my way over to 116th Street, the place where my old friend [Chaim] was supposed to have had his little “gold mine”—a store—and lo and behold, there he was! We were both stunned to see each other in the flesh. We laughed, fell into each other’s arms, and had ourselves a good cry. Then, I met my friend’s wife. She had on a big white apron, wore glasses, and stood behind a counter to deal with the customers. Some wanted to buy a newspaper, another wanted a cigar, and one person came in to borrow a few cents for the subway.

Imagine my shock when I passed through the shop into the apartment behind it, where they lived, so to speak. It was divided into small alcoves—they called them rooms—and there was a bedroom with no windows. A sour, yeasty smell pervaded the place. The shabbiness of the furnishings and of the beds was apparent. That was my rude introduction to the “golden land,” where you were supposed to pick dollars off the pavement and stuff them into your rucksack. We spent the day
together. I wondered: Was this really the young fellow I remembered from our days at the beys medresh?! Back then, he had never done a stitch of work in his life. Here in the “golden land” he was working himself to the bone, both he and his wife, who had borne him two children, and were living in a place with no windows, not a drop of fresh air. Gevalt! How did people live this way, in such cramped quarters?

My friend’s wife hailed from Warsaw and was my friend’s cousin. She was a trooper, a good soul, too, and she shared whatever she had, even in their poor circumstances. She was often busy with the customers while my friend and I caught up on our lives—and then we switched. Our conversations were frequently interrupted because of customers who came in all at once and needed to be served right away. I kept wondering whether my friend’s business, so-called, provided enough for him to send money home to his parents.

It was midnight. The two little children were fast asleep, and we were beginning to run out of material for conversation, even though we had so many years to catch up on—from 1911 to 1920. But the two of them were exhausted and it showed in their faces, so we turned in, shut off the electricity, and tried to sleep. The sour odor from the neighboring bakery was very strong and kept me awake.

Then noises started, like crawling things. I couldn’t stand the thought of what might be crawling around in the dark, while my friends snored. I felt like something was on my blanket, so I coughed out loud to chase away whatever it was. I was worried it might be rats and I covered myself up over my head. I just wanted to sleep a bit, if only to be rid of my fears. I’d had enough nightmares before. It was good when I poked my head out from under the covers and saw a crack of daylight. I just wanted my friend to wake up, too, and the day to begin. When he did get up and I told him about the noises in the night, he confirmed that they were, indeed, rats, which came in from the bakery next door. But he claimed they were harmless, and anyway they had gotten used to those sounds—they might almost think something was amiss if the sounds disappeared. There was no need to be alarmed. But I was nauseated by the very thought of rats creeping up on me, trying to lick my salty skin, while I was supposed to give them a gracious welcome. After the torment of insects and such that I had lived through during the war, I
was in no mind to go through such things again. I also worried about the two little children in the house…. I shuddered to think of what this meant. Would I fall into the same state as he? Was this what lay in store for me in this new country—to live in filth and suffering? Was it, then, any better than living in Jędrzejów?…

All this made me think: What was I to do? At thirty years of age, what life could I expect to build? I needed to make a thorough change: to let go of my previous life, my youth, my loves, the grooves that had shaped my soul. There was no turning back anymore. I needed to rebuild my life completely, make a home, start a family of my own, and raise a new generation. I wanted this so badly—my own home, a peaceful life, and to earn a living at last, so I could eat from the fruit of my own labor. Ever since leaving Łódź, I had lived on what others had given me, at others’ expense. I wanted to be able to forget all the troubles and sufferings, the wanderings and disappointments, of a whole decade of my life, and to come into my own. I wished for the day that my dream would come true, that I would return home from work and hear a little voice saying, “Tateh” [Papa]. How happy I would be if such a miracle could occur.

My thoughts turned to my parents and how they were managing. And what of my brothers, still in uniform in Poland, which was involved in a contest with the Russian Bolsheviks? What was my brother Dovid up to? How I wished I could have him there alongside me, if only there were a way to bring him. And what was I to do about my cousin, who was entrusted to my care? These thoughts and worries kept haunting me and they made me all the more determined to get myself going once and for all. I needed to get married, I needed to find an occupation, and I needed a place to live.

I found a place to rent from a widow, bought a few furnishings from her—a bed, an iron stove, a table and a couple of chairs, a cupboard for hanging up some clothes: finally, a place of my own. I also found myself ever more strongly embedded in the Waxbaum family, beyond my kinship with Aunt Brokhe and [through her, with] Uncle Henekh on my father’s side. I became their brother-in-law—which meant I was now their family in a double sense, and thus doubly responsible for my cousin, who had traipsed along with me all those months…. My burden of obligation was all the heavier for that.
So, I was all set, with a woman to marry [Sarah-Rivka, Henekh’s younger sister] and a job as a wall-painter. I scraped walls and floors, brushed on paint as smooth as could be, to make houses look bright and new. The job paid $20 a week. That amount, in Polish money, sounded like an extraordinary treasure. I was already thinking how I might save some of it to send to my parents. They needed to know that their son, all the way over in the “golden land,” had not forgotten them and would go on caring for their welfare, as he had before.

What was it like, earning my bit of wages, bringing them home on Fridays? I felt that my life was definitely altered. But I felt apathetic—depressed, low, whatever you want to call it. I tried focusing on reading the Yiddish press. In those days we had the following daily newspapers: Der Tog, Forverts, Morgen-Zhurnal, Tageblat, as well as Di Tsayt. I pounced upon them as a famished person devours food, but I soon settled upon three papers to read regularly: Forverts, Der Tog, and Di Tsayt. The latter was published for the [labor Zionist] Po’alei Tsion movement, and its editor was the famous writer, Dovid Pinski.

I tried sending him a few sample news reports and commentary, but that’s where it ended, since I got no reply. My commentaries were never printed and evidently were thrown in the wastebasket, without even a word to me. I decided that the Yiddish press in America was not like in Poland, when it came to allowing amateur writers a chance to express themselves or to comment on current events. I remained a devoted reader of Der Tog and on weekends I read Di Tsayt.…. My life was not easy. I was anxious about my parents, I was not very happy with my work, and influenza was spreading all around. I had an old

21 Their ketubah (Jewish wedding certificate) is dated the 12th of Heshvan 5681 (October 1920).
22 Forverts (Forward) was the democratic-socialist paper, with a non-Zionist orientation; Der Tog (Day) and the Morgen-Zhurnal (Morning Journal) were liberal papers and later merged, supporting a Zionist orientation. Tageblat (Daily Press) was a more conservative, pro-Republican paper. Di Tsayt (The Times) was a labor Zionist organ.
23 Dovid Pinski (1872–1959), author and playwright, born in Mogilev, Belarus. After studying at the university in Berlin, he immigrated to America in 1899, where he remained active in the Jewish press and cultural life in New York, until he re-immigrated to Israel.
friend from home, Yoisef Maierov, who had been in America quite a long time and had become a doctor. He lived just two blocks away from me. Where would I turn in time of illness if not to him, practically a kinsman, who had once sat and studied with my grandfather, may he rest in peace?…

But now, he revealed his true colors. He was callous and downright cruel in his behavior. When I lay sick with flu and a high fever and sent to fetch him, what was his first question to me? “Have you got any money? If not, go to the hospital and don’t summon a doctor for a house call.”… Then I let him have a piece of my mind: “You might be a famous physician,” I said to him, “but when it comes to human decency, you haven’t got the least qualifications! To be a doctor you have to have some compassion and the first thing to ask a patient is, ‘What is ailing you?’”

He heard what I said and held his tongue. Either his tragic youth drove him to be bitterly disposed to other people—be they friend or foe—or else he became a money-worshipper, for whom nothing counted but accumulating wealth. He came to a bitter end. He never married. He lived in rooms tucked away behind his medical practice. Rumor had it that he lived with a non-Jewish nurse who bore him a child. He died of cancer and everything he owned went to those two people. I happened to run into him one summer, just before he died. He looked all shriveled up, nothing left but skin and bones…. He was different by then and tried to express some genuine feeling, asking after this one and that one [whom he used to know]. He paid some attention to me and seemed contrite after all those years. But none of us was informed when he died, and to this day we don’t know where he lies buried. I think it was a tragic end to a tragic life, the life of someone who was taught by misfortune to be hard-hearted.

I divided up my wages so that each week a certain sum was deposited in a bank to be sent to my parents. This did not diminish the idyllic life I enjoyed with my wife. Quite the contrary, knowing that we were together in this effort, contributing to helping my family overseas, brought us closer together. In Poland, my father received dollars, which for them was of great value. At last they had enough to eat…. I wanted so much to have my family join me, and the best idea I could come up with was that my brother Dovid should come over first, since he was a good candidate for admission and would be able to get settled here
quickly. Then, working together, we could earn enough to bring the others over, too. My friend Chaim-Yeshaya took an interest in this plan, too, and he and I approached the landslayt [hometown association members] to give us a loan. We had friends from the landsmanshaft [association] spread out all over the New York area, in Brooklyn, in Paterson, New Jersey… [but very few of them were willing to part with any money].

Between a few of these fine people, I was able to put enough together to buy a ticket and get papers filed in order to bring Dovid over. I wrote home with my plan and it was all agreed. I had an immigration affidavit signed by my friend Chaim-Yeshaya. It took weeks, however, for me to receive confirmation from home that the papers had arrived and that Dovid had received an invitation to the American consulate in Warsaw to get a visa. But then my whole plan went up in smoke. Chanaleh, my sister-in-law, had become very religious and she refused point-blank to let her husband go off to America, where all the Jews turned into goyim, she said. If Dovid was determined to go, she was prepared to divorce him and remain in Poland. A few weeks later, I got the boat ticket back in the mail. I lost some of the money and had to return the loans I had received. And that was how the whole plan came to naught—all because in America, so it seemed, there weren’t any pious Jews!

It is now too late in the day to start speculating … what might have happened had the plan been successful. It might have saved my two brothers [Avrom and Benyomen] from Hitler’s destruction and maybe some other parts of the family [such as my brother Kalman] would have come over, without having to live through the Nazi period….

I decided to have done with house painting and transfer to a new trade: women’s handbags. This transformation came about by accident…. It was a Friday, as I recall. I was holding onto the ladder with one hand and with the other I was doing the shingles, brushing them as I went from the top down. All the while, I kept shifting the ladder around. Every time I did that, I felt my head spin, and I feared that any moment the rope would give way—and that would be the end of me. I envisioned myself lying spread-eagled, down on the ground, covered with paint mixed with blood. Those thoughts kept going round in my head, and when I’d finished half the roof, I got down and decided there and then: If I lived through this day and finished the roof, I would give
up the painting trade for good. When evening came and I got down, I announced my decision to the head of our crew: My painting days were over, and he should not expect me on Monday. I hurried home to tell the wife. She agreed with me completely. But right away we faced the question: Where to get the money for our weekly transfer to my parents in Poland? We decided we'd keep up the practice as before, even if it meant borrowing temporarily until I obtained new employment.

My brother-in-law, who was also a house-painter, had an in-law on his wife’s side who worked in quilting [linings] for women’s handbags. He put me in touch with his employers—two brothers—and I started learning how to sew handbags. I carried on in that trade ’til 1950, when I gave it up and took a trip to Israel….

Along with everything else that I had on my mind—my parents, my sisters and brothers, my own life that needed sorting out—I was also constantly worrying about my cousin Moishe. His parents were counting on me, ever since we left home together…. But no matter how much I tried to find him steady employment, it never seemed to work out. So I decided to put the matter before his rich uncle, the one in Norfolk, and let him understand that he would be doing a great mitzvah [in this sense, a good deed] if he could take his brother’s son, his nephew Moishe, down to Virginia and find him something to do….

After Moishe had been down in Norfolk for a year, I heard from Mendl, the rich uncle, and directly from my cousin, that he was now living on his own and working for someone else. This concerned me and I wanted to go see him, to find out the reason for these drastic changes. I chose a time when work was slack and traveled down to Norfolk for a week. But circumstances were such that we never got much chance to be alone with one another. By day, he was in the store where he worked, selling tobacco products, sweets, and the like. His half-hour lunch break was not enough time to have a real heart-to-heart talk about everything. In the evening there was also a lack of opportunity, since there were five people there (including my in-laws and their child, a boy), sitting at Mendl’s house. So I could not get to the bottom of why Moishe was driven to leave his uncle’s home to live on his own and at his own expense….
The store was located in a black ghetto. That was when I first encountered the dire circumstances of the lives those people led. I met a family of seven, for instance: two parents and five children, the eldest being a girl of sixteen. The girl always accompanied her parents when they came to the store, and she had a baby with her. The father of the child was the girl’s own father. He even boasted of being the father of his own daughter’s baby, at the ripe old age of fifty-seven! He was proud that he “still got it”; and his wife, the mother of the sixteen-year-old, was indifferent and nonchalant about it all, quite the reverse of what you might imagine. There was no anger, shame, or resentment in her expression. It was a shocking introduction to family relations of a different kind. It was by no means an isolated example, for as I spent more and more years in the “land of opportunity,” I learned that not all was goodness and light; even in a big city like New York there were plenty of such sick, disturbing household arrangements. It made you understand that here in America, with all its wealth, people could still grow inured to awful social conditions, which bred such abominations.

Black people worked in the coal mines, to earn a so-called living. The women did housework in white homes. Sometimes the men stayed at home, just for spite, or went on drinking sprees and smoked filthy cigars—the smoke alone could kill someone. At home, half-drunk men climbed into bed with their wives and daughters. Police would be called out when there were domestic fights, but often the police just did nothing. This was the sort of environment where my in-laws lived and had their store. This was where he was raising his son, and where he thought he could “make a man” of my cousin.

Moishe stayed in Norfolk for a couple of years, where he sought out the company of new friends. One of these was a fellow named Balisok, who came from the Boston area. Later on, Moishe’s life would become intertwined with that of this friend, when Moishe became his brother-in-law: The two of them married two sisters from Boston and settled down there.

24 The use of “ghetto” with reference to segregated black neighborhoods in America was not perhaps quite so common prior to World War II, but Moishe wrote this in the 1960s, when it was the common term.
Our life [Sarah’s and mine] as a young couple was very pleasant. We met often with our friend, Chaim-Yeshaya [and his wife Ida], and through them we made new friends. We decided that every Sunday—this was before anyone dreamed of a five-day work week—we would get together at someone else’s home, starting on Saturday evening and stay over until Sunday afternoon—eat together, swap stories about the old country, poke fun at the “golden land,” and so on. We became more like brothers and sisters to each other and those bonds lasted many, many years, until Chaim-Yeshaya gave up the ghost decades later in Miami, Florida, where his second wife had dragged him against his will.

The progress I was making in my new trade was satisfactory. I had left my first place of employment where I did my early apprenticeship, and I was now working for my third employer. Not only was I earning more, but they even told me I had a gift for this work. I was already a member in the handbag workers’ craft union and I held a responsible position. I was aiming to become the head cutter in that place, which employed 150 people on an almost-year-round basis.

Seasonal employment was the bane of the work force in those days. People who worked seasonally could expect to have work for twelve weeks at a stretch, then would have to wait for the next season. A typical worker might have a job for twenty-five weeks a year. People had to borrow to make up the shortfall in their income; then they would start paying back the loans when their wages began again, and so on, round and round. But there were always some jobs where one could expect year-round employment, and those were the lucky people. I was one of the lucky ones, so I didn’t have the burden of worrying about debts.

We lived quietly and modestly, the two of us. I was terribly eager to have a little one running around the house, but I tried not to bring up such a sensitive, perhaps painful, subject with my wife, and she did likewise. We just went on hoping that our desire for a child would be fulfilled. One Saturday, the incredibly wonderful news arrived. Just as I was entering the house, my wife grabbed me in a hug and, with a happy smile, she kissed me. “What’s going on?” I asked. “I’m finally pregnant,” she said. We had ourselves a little celebration that evening.

I was beside myself. I hardly knew what I was doing. If I caused my wife to make any superfluous or unnecessary step, it seemed like a
crime I was inflicting on her. I worried that the least strain might have unforeseen consequences on the tiny life that she was carrying inside her. We entered a period of taking every precaution, of being especially caring and gentle. We waited with great anticipation to feel the baby move a bit inside the womb. I felt very much a part of what was going on: I had a part to play in what we were creating, in the happiness that would come to us, and in the pride that we would feel, as our lives were bound to become sweeter and so much more interesting.

The rest of the family did not show quite as much enthusiasm or excitement over the news as we did. For them, pregnancy was a humdrum business, an everyday affair. With me, it felt like my whole life was at stake. This was it for me: My life and my future depended on it. As I had always been a worrier by nature, fearing the worst of what the morrow might bring, I became nervous and uneasy. Troubled dreams disturbed my nights. I bounced between bright visions of walking down the street and smiling to the new little one in the carriage and receiving smiles in return—and dark visions of unfortunate, frightening results…. I recall that final night when I took my wife to the hospital, which was just two blocks from where we lived. I paced around the house, prayed, and went crazy with worry. I ran frantically up and down the hospital steps to try and peer through the window.…

Finally, I saw the dawn begin to break. It had been a hot night [in early July] and the stifling air, combined with all my worrying, had left me in a sweat. I ran over to the hospital, a two-story building, its windows obscured by long curtains. People started coming out of their homes, running to the subway to rush to work or going into the food market to get a container of milk and a roll or the like. I paced and paced, thinking: My life rests in the balance behind that blank wall. Anything can happen in the next hours. I felt completely insignificant—just some individual who was trivial at that moment, whose fate was no one’s concern. I wished I had my mother there with me, who might have comforted me and filled me with hope, rather than fear. But Mother was miles and miles away, a world away, sleeping on her hard pallet and not even aware of what I was going through.

The hospital was supposed to open its doors to visitors starting at 10:00, but I could bear it no longer. At 8:00 I knocked at the door and
asked to see the doctor. Soon enough, the doctor appeared in his white coat, looking sleepy. Smiling, he asked me to come inside, shook me by the hand and congratulated me as a new father. He said that the baby was born at 2:00 in the morning, a healthy little girl, and that mother and baby were both fine. “You can see the mother,” he told me, “just for a few minutes. Then you should go home, calm down, go about your daily business, and come back around 6 this evening.”

Those few minutes that I spent in the ward with the brand-new mother infused me with new life. She was beaming with happiness, a bit pale and tired-looking, lying there on the immaculate bed linen; and with just a few words said to me: “The doctor is a guardian angel.” He had relieved her pain and stayed by her side during the birth. And, she added, as far as our daughter goes, she was the most beautiful creature in the world, none could compare to her. Even though I knew very well that every mother would say that about her own child, I willingly accepted her judgment as being perfectly true. Those precious few minutes were full of loving words, kisses, and blessings not just for us, but for everyone who would be part of our sheer joy.

Eli Lederhendler is the Stephen S. Wise Professor of American Jewish History and Institutions at the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. His latest book is American Jewry: A New History. He writes mainly on subjects related to the East European Jewish immigration to America, transnational history, and Jewish culture.

In recent years, Detroit has attracted research and studies by historians, sociologists, and journalists, who describe and explain the city’s former glory, precipitous decline, demographic shift from a white city to a black city, and the current efforts to stimulate a renaissance. This deeply researched and vividly written book by Lila Corwin Berman is part of this trend; it concentrates on Detroit’s Jewish community in post–World War II, from the 1950s through the 1960s. Berman chose to examine Detroit Jewry, she says, because of the outsized roles Detroit Jews have played on the Jewish national stage and because Detroit Jewry’s experience can shed light on the postwar Jewish experience throughout the United States. Additionally, aside from local histories of its Jewish population, “historians of Jewish urban politics and culture have almost entirely neglected Detroit” (15).

With Detroit as her laboratory, Berman asserts that:

Jews who migrated away from American cities and to suburbs in the postwar years understood their movement through an urban framework because they felt connected to the idea of the city as a space of orientation in American Jewish life. Jews believed in cities and persisted in reinventing their relationship to cities because they thought that there was no better place to be a Jew than in the city or in a region defined by proximity to the city (9).

Her book examines how and why Jews reinvented their urbanism over time and the ways in which the city remained a central element of Jewish identity, even as most of them left the city space. Jews did so by creating a new kind of urbanism, a metropolitan urbanism. They became “metropolitan Jews.”
The book represents an interesting, and very convincing, argument of historical change over time. Berman persuasively demonstrates how Detroit Jews’ engagement with the city began with a neighborhood-based urbanism, then changed into a city-wide urbanism, and eventually became a metropolitan urbanism. To do this, she structures her narrative chronologically in seven chapters, each of which carefully examines an element of Detroit Jewry’s experience that illustrates and supports her thesis. The first chapter offers readers a historical and geographical orientation to Detroit and the city’s Jewish neighborhoods. Following chapters discuss Jewish decisions about where to live in the postwar period through the early 1970s, especially after the devastating 1967 riot; how Jewish political activism and identity changed over time in Detroit; and the ways in which Jewish spiritual and cultural transformations occurred. In addition, she examines the sacred places Jews built as they moved their families, communities, and congregations away from the city. In constructing her narrative, Berman focuses on community leaders, religious and secular institutions, and political and cultural movements in the city. She also spent a great deal of time with Jews who grew up in Detroit, who provided her with insights on how place and power worked in the city. In an epilogue, she describes the new Jewish urbanism that has developed in Detroit in the twenty-first century.

One interesting aspect the book offers is a different perspective of Detroit Jews’ ongoing urban liberalism and commitment to the Democratic Party despite their increasing economic and political success and integration into American life.

In writing her book, Berman examined material in Jewish institutional and national archives, read the correspondence of communal leaders, perused the local Jewish and general press, made use of communal surveys, and consulted a wide range of historical and sociological works. Her thoroughgoing research contributes to our understanding of the relationship and contribution of individual Jews and Jewish communal institutions to the city of Detroit over the past fifty years. This study will likely influence the way scholars perceive American Jewry and American urban history for some time to come.

On a personal note, I grew up in Detroit and personally experienced many of the trends and movements that Lila Corwin Berman describes
and analyzes so ably. Consequently, I had to check impulses to interject my own views of the events. What I can say is that reading the book brought back my own memories of Detroit, the neighborhood I lived in, my family, and the dear friends of my youth. I also learned a great deal that I did not know about the city and its Jewish community. I have lived away from Detroit for more than fifty years. Nonetheless, I still return to the city at least twice a year and continue to feel emotionally connected to it. Many years ago, a reviewer of my book on early Detroit Jewry wrote, “It appears that you can take Rockaway out of Detroit, but you can’t take Detroit out of Rockaway.” That still remains true.

Robert Rockaway is professor emeritus at Tel Aviv University. He authored The Jews of Detroit: From the Beginning, 1762–1914; Words of the Uprooted: Jewish Immigrants in Early 20th Century America; and But He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters.


Last December, my daughter’s fifth-grade teacher invited students to bring family holiday decorations to display in their public school classroom. My daughter happily hung a homemade Hanukkah banner near her seat, prompting a classmate to ask, “Are you … Hanukkan?” While “Hanukkan” quickly became our new favorite word and this anecdote part of our family lore, the Hanukkan experience also demonstrated a couple of important points about the power of material culture and the potential of American public space: (1) Art and objects can act as powerful conversation starters about identity; and (2) American institutions can offer space for much-needed, meaningful exploration of American Jewish life. Avi Y. Decter’s book, Interpreting American Jewish History at Museums and Historic Sites, argues these points and, in the process, provides a useful guide for exploring American Jewish life in American cultural spaces.
Decter’s book is designed for secular American institutions; this is not a guide for interpreting material culture at Jewish museums and historical societies. Rather, this book argues for the inclusion of American Jewish stories in the larger cultural conversation. Dector decries the lack of Jewish history in American institutions: “Despite their presence in communities both large and small across the continent, especially in the most recent 150 years, Jews and their histories are frequently unknown or misunderstood, even in their own locales” (3). He names the factors that have contributed to the absence of American Jewish history from American cultural institutions: American Jewish history is complicated—it’s diverse and dispersed. Public history professionals are not familiar with the American Jewish experience. The majority of objects and images that might help to illuminate American Jewish life fall under the auspices of Jewish institutions and private collections. Finally, mainstream institutions, Decter argues, are afraid of “getting it wrong”—of offending or misrepresenting a minority community.

Decter’s book aims to help American museums and historic sites get it right. He, along with contributing authors Zev Eleff and Grace Cohen Grossman, offers primer and practicum via five thematic chapters and twenty case studies meant to educate the reader about American Jewish history and elucidate the varied methods of delivering that history. The thematic chapters—“Migration and Mobility,” “Domestic Life,” “Communal Life,” “Commerce and Culture,” and “Discrimination and Tolerance”—provide accessible, detailed history of the topics, while the case studies present examples of how the themes have been explored in venues as varied as a historical society in Chicago, a prison in Pennsylvania, a museum in Los Angeles, and a historic home in Alabama.

The result is a useful toolbox for museums and historic sites interested in building the American Jewish experience into their galleries and tours. This tool kit contains crucial background information (history) and practical application of that history (case studies), but it is missing a component necessary for interpreting American Jewish history at museums and historic sites: discussion of design.

Public historians would benefit from a clearer illustration of the cognitive map that moves interpretation from idea to design. What are the
central themes or questions of each exhibit? How does design help to engage those themes? Can you convey a sense of Jewishness in design? What are the challenges in writing text for Jewish content? How do you create Jewish content that is appealing and accessible to non-Jewish audiences? There are illustrations of objects in the text, but the book lacks a visual guide to the case studies. Adding images of the exhibits, tours, and videos would allow an appreciation for and analysis of design. Inclusion of both curator and visitor interactions with the material would further illuminate the successes and challenges of interpreting American Jewish history.

The closing chapter of the book, “Toward Next Practice,” is an acknowledgement of future work to be done. Decker, Eleff, and Grossman provide a solid, important foundation for museums and historic sites interested in interpreting American Jewish life. Going forward, scholars and practitioners can build on this foundation by adding discussion of design and consideration of curatorial and visitor experience.

Joellyn Wallen Zollman, PhD, is the curator of “Celebrate San Diego: The History and Heritage of San Diego’s Jewish Community” at the San Diego History Center.


Though I have been asked to review these works as a two-volume set, Ellen Eisenberg’s recent studies of the Oregon Jewish experience (from 1849–1950 and from 1950–2010) actually function as two distinct volumes. The first, *Embracing a Western Identity: Jewish Oregonians, 1849–1950*, takes the form of a standard historiographical monograph. Covering a century of history, Eisenberg explores Jewish migration to Oregon, the development of Jewish institutions and neighborhoods, and the influence of Oregon’s Jews in business, politics, civic engagement,
and social activism; and she connects that history to recent trends in American Jewish historiography. The second book, *The Jewish Oregon Story, 1950–2010*, reads more like a collection of essays, each arguing a discrete point about a particular facet of the Jewish Oregon experience in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. The collected chapters (essays) that make up the book address topics such as the dispersion of Portland’s Jews from the city center to the suburbs, the ways in which that city center was remembered and memorialized, the increasing presence and influence of women in Jewish organizations, and other topics of significance to Jewish Oregonians since the end of World War II.

In her first book, *Embracing a Western Identity*, Eisenberg explains that Oregon’s earliest Jewish immigrants were part of the pioneer generation that came to the region in the 1840s and 1850s, prior to statehood. Like other, non-Jewish, Oregonians, this generation would see their identity as bound up in the pioneer experience, of being part of the generation that took the risks and built the social and business infrastructure that would serve future Oregonians. Like other Jews who came to the American West in the mid-nineteenth century, historians typically connect Oregon’s pioneer Jews to the immigration of German peddlers who, in the American interior and in the Far West, would often become traders or dry-goods merchants, and Eisenberg continues to characterize them in that way. Employing a fairly typical narrative of American Jewish migration, the author notes the subsequent arrival of Eastern European Jews to the region and the communal divides created by religious and social differences between the two migrant groups. Here, though, Eisenberg employs Hasia Diner’s important scholarship on the inaccuracy of this supposed German/Eastern European divide to complicate the narrative, noting that many of the so-called Eastern European Jews who arrived in Oregon were Poseners, “Polish Jews [who lived] under Prussian rule,” (61) who, at least in Oregon, would serve “as a bridge” between German Jews and Jews of Eastern European descent. Throughout the book the author observes the ways in which class and ethnic divisions between pioneer Jews (as well as their descendants) and more recent arrivals would manifest themselves in religious practice, politics, and attitudes toward Zionism.
In her third chapter, Eisenberg studies the history of Neighborhood House, a Jewish settlement house in South Portland whose programming proved so central to that neighborhood that Eisenberg has called it “The Heart of the Community.” And the volume concludes by exploring the fluidity and tenuous nature of Jewish racial identity and the ways in which that identity would direct or restrict Jewish Oregonians’ actions on behalf of racial and ethnic minorities in the state. She notes that, in the nineteenth century, societal acceptance of Jews and their roles as merchants and traders resulted in Portland’s Jews advocating against anti-Chinese violence. As anti-Jewish sentiment grew in the twentieth century, however, Jewish Oregonians’ familiarity with prejudice “heightened their sensitivity to the plight of more disadvantaged groups … [but it also] made them reluctant to speak out in ways that drew attention to their community” (230).

In her second book, *The Jewish Oregon Story*, Eisenberg explores a series of topics of regional and national concern. As noted above, I believe that the book’s constituent chapters do not collectively form an overarching narrative, and that the book functions best if one thinks about it as a collection of essays. When thought of in this way, though, it is quite useful and to my mind breaks more new ground than her first book. One of the more notable chapters documents the ways in which women’s engagement and leadership in the Jewish community evolved in the second half of the twentieth century. Calling on a remarkable collection of oral histories, Eisenberg traces the way that the changing role of women in postwar society altered their participation in Jewish organizations, first becoming “professional volunteers”—a term that Eisenberg defines as women “who made a virtual career out of volunteering” (85)—and then, in the 1970s and beyond, building on their volunteer experience and education to became paid staff, institutional leaders, and major donors. Eisenberg notes that while Jewish women appreciated and embraced the professional opportunities made possible by changing attitudes and a more equitable society, some lamented the ways in which new professional opportunities for women limited their free time and “led to a curtailment of women’s organizational work” (104).

Eisenberg’s work (in both books) is at its best when she explores the insights, attitudes, and contributions of women. In *Embracing a
Western Identity, for example, she explains that most historians who study the clash between German and Eastern European Jews focus on “difference[s] over liturgy” and have, perforce, focused on men “who, unlike women, had an official role as members and officers of synagogues and burial societies” (53–54). Her study, by contrast, focuses greater attention on Jewish women’s identities, and in so doing she provides important insight into the social implications of such ethnic divisions. Eisenberg’s use of women’s oral histories provides important information in other chapters, as well, including her study of Neighborhood House, her chapter on the memorialization of Old South Portland, and, of course, the chapter about the postwar evolution of women’s engagement in the Jewish community (cited above).

Both studies should prove welcome additions to the bookshelves of scholars and others interested in western Jewish history, the history of American Jewish women, and, of course, the history of the Jews of Oregon. They both function as solid reference works and can serve as foundational texts in university classrooms, continuing education programs, and other venues where Jews and others study the American Jewish experience. This reviewer is particularly taken with the second volume for the diversity of its topics and the ease with which each chapter can serve as its own discrete article. Nevertheless, both books make an important contribution to our understanding of the Jewish experience in Oregon, the Far West, and in some ways, the United States.

Erik Greenberg is the director of Education and Visitor Engagement at the Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles. He is adjunct faculty in the history department of California State University, Los Angeles.


At the core of this collection of documents Zev Eleff has assembled is the question of who and what constitutes “Modern Orthodox Judaism.” Is it made up of all Jews who continue to identify themselves as Orthodox
and live in the modern world? Or is it those Jews who, while Orthodox in their behavior and outlook, also embrace the ethos of modernity and see value in its plural culture, ideas, and practices? If it is the former, then it will include the increasingly fundamentalist, haredi, and stubbornly insular Orthodox. But if it is the latter, it will be far more open, tolerant, and inclusive. One might suggest that the best way to answer that question is by looking at its documentary history—that is the way Eleff has decided to go. However, as any good editor knows, the documents one selects as significant and illustrative determine the answer.

Eleff gives a hint of his answer in his preface, when he identifies former Jewish Center Rabbi Norman Lamm—his teacher and, for many years, president of Yeshiva University (YU)—as its “leading spokesman.” This is the same Norman Lamm under whose leadership this flagship Orthodox institution—once criticized by those on the right as not being a real yeshiva and those on the left as not being a true university—moved steadily toward the haredi right in its rabbinic faculty and the atmosphere in its beit ha-Midrash, which often diverged from the values and outlook of its university side. Nevertheless, as a product of YU, Eleff is clearly committed to seeing it as the embodiment of Modern Orthodoxy.

Eleff warns readers that the Modern Orthodox community is “far from coherent,” because it includes both those who identify as “liberal” and those who are “stringent.” In other words, for Eleff, Modern Orthodoxy is not an ethos but rather all those who call themselves Orthodox. To that, he adds, it is “indigenous to North America.” This last point—undoubtedly a reflection of his training by American-oriented historians such as Jeffrey Gurock and Jonathan D. Sarna, whose influence looms large in this volume—will come as a surprise to many. Indeed, there must be countless Jews who are part of modern culture and consider themselves loyal to halakhah (Jewish law) and Jewish practice yet find themselves living in Israel, Europe, Australia, or South Africa—to mention but a few places where arguably “Modern Orthodox” communities are found. To this reviewer, the impact of Israeli Orthodoxy on North American Orthodox Jews seems impossible to deny.

Given this bias, Eleff’s collection is helpful albeit flawed by his selection criteria. The whole of Part One, predating the real influx of the
Orthodox to America during and after the Holocaust, is effectively a documentary record of a proto-Orthodoxy, filled with materials reflecting the difficulties that traditional Jews had with American Jewry and its lack of adherence to Jewish practice. Readers familiar with Orthodoxy today will perhaps be interested to discover, for example, that bans on using a Reform prayer book, such as an 1855 letter from Rabbi Bernard Illowy or an 1865 suggestion that these books be burned, reflect a pattern of contempt toward Reform Jewry and its products that still can be found in many precincts of Orthodoxy today.

The real heart of the documentary substance, however, begins with Part Two, where we discover the emerging impressions of America as a place hostile to Orthodoxy. Here are the documents that the rabbis and leaders of Orthodoxy used to persuade European Jewry that America was a land where Jewish observance and all that Orthodoxy valued could never survive. This of course, as we now know, was wrong. With the large influx of Orthodox refugees and survivors after the Holocaust, we have discovered that America is on the contrary a place where Orthodoxy has flourished as never before. Had more Orthodox Jews been encouraged to emigrate from Europe earlier, lives would have been saved. As it was, the rabbis (quite a few of whom managed to save themselves) discouraged their followers from leaving when it was still possible. This resistance to the “Treifene Medine,” as the Orthodox called America, was not to be gainsaid, as these documents make clear.

Finally, what I have called the “slide to the right” is documented in these pages, a process by which an ideologically open Modern Orthodoxy has been attacked and often vilified. Eleff offers documents that show this. Perhaps none is more telling than a famous exchange that took place in 1966 in the pages of the YU student newspaper between two representatives of the Modern Orthodox world: Rabbis Yitz Greenberg and Aharon Lichtenstein. The subject was “making Orthodoxy relevant in America.” Greenberg argued that Orthodoxy was refusing to abandon its “East European ghetto psychology” and was living “in its own world,” having “lost all connection with modern life.” He commended other movements for having taken “the risk and dealt seriously with Judaism’s relevancy to modern life,” even if they had come up with what he thought were “wrong answers.” His was the
paradigmatic expression of an ideologically open and engaged Modern Orthodoxy, in which withdrawal from mainstream culture or insularity—which haredi Orthodoxy champions—was “cowardice.” Greenberg argued that the Torah provided “enough vitality to live in any situation” and that Orthodox Jews should integrate American values and culture to “illuminate and deepen our traditional Jewish framework.”

Responding several months later, Lichtenstein, also on the YU faculty and son-in-law of esteemed Orthodox Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, attacked his colleague Greenberg in the pages of the same newspaper, arguing that to call upon students to meet those challenges of integration and take those risks of engagement with mainstream culture was not “in the best interest of Halachic Judaism.” Instead, he advocated a “retreat” into a “traditional bastion in order to avoid confronting the contemporary world altogether,” a strategy Lichtenstein asserted was “a genuine path to avodat hashem [service to God],” which he admitted he prized “most highly.” He accused Greenberg, whom he addressed somewhat patronizingly as “Dear Yitzchak,” of a “strident tone” and called upon him to be “more careful and more responsible” in future public discussions. In a nutshell, the Greenberg/Lichtenstein exchange captures the ongoing problem of Orthodoxy. In the years that have followed, this divide has only grown deeper.

Eleff’s collection is rich in documents from all the important voices of Orthodoxy—from Soloveitchik to Shlomo Riskin, Herman Wouk to Marvin Fox, Eliezer Berkovits to Haskel Lookstein, Moshe Tendler to Avi Weiss and Asher Lopatin. Women are represented here as well—Rivka Haut, Esther Krauss, Blu Greenberg, and Tova Hartman—although they are too few in number and particularly missing the new generation of Orthodox feminists. Also missing are many of the academics who have written about Orthodoxy—although to be fair, the latter have their own books and articles in print. In assembling this collection, Eleff has provided a useful compendium for those interested in American Orthodoxy.

Samuel Heilman holds the Harold Proshansky Chair in Jewish studies at the Graduate Center and is Distinguished Professor of Sociology at Queens College of the City University of New York. He is the author of numerous articles and reviews as well as eleven books, including Sliding to the


“I believe in America.” So begins perhaps the greatest film trilogy of the twentieth century, Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather*. Yet the story of the Corleone family is compelling not only because the characters are simultaneously sympathetic and heinous, noble and deeply flawed, but also because the story is the story of America’s coming of age in the twentieth century, a tale that extends back into the Old World but really begins with Ellis Island and wends its way to the Upper West Side of Manhattan, with an interlude in Nevada along the way.

Likewise, Aaron Hughes’s most recent book, *Jacob Neusner: An American Jewish Iconoclast*, is compelling not only because Hughes’s biography of the most published individual in human history is also a story that reaches beyond the vicissitudes of a particular scholar who grew up in West Hartford, Connecticut, and made his way across the academic landscape: from Harvard, Oxford, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Columbia, on to the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, Brandeis, Dartmouth, Brown, the University of South Florida, and Bard College. Rather, as Hughes says, “Neusner’s story is the story of what happened as Jews migrated to the suburbs, creating new lives for themselves as they successfully integrated into American society” (6).

Hughes begins with Neusner’s early days in the interwar period in central Connecticut, far from the centers of Jewish learning in central Europe and its luminaries who would make their way to the New World in the wake of Nazi devastation. Growing up in the home of a journalist in the Jewish press and himself reviewing books from an early age, Neusner developed and would never lose a fine-tuned skill for turning out words quickly and for striving to reach a broad audience. Finding
his way into the newly-emerging scholarly study of Jewish texts almost by accident, Neusner brought a uniquely “American” approach that allowed the study of Judaism to take its place in the pantheon of religious studies in the American academic scene. More to the point, one of the central strands that Hughes weaves recounts Neusner’s place in the broader movement of the field of Jewish studies from “ghettoized” roots which were the province of rabbis or at times rabbi-scholars to a place as one of the constellation of religions that would be studied in religious studies departments in North America and Europe, subjecting Jewish “data” to a rigorous methodological examination and demonstrating the importance of Judaism to the comparative exercise.

Hughes draws the trajectory of Neusner’s prolific career, with both professional and intellectual volte-face in spades, as a scholar of rabbinic Judaism shifting over time from the study of the Talmud to the study of religion and eventually even to constructive theology itself. Yet Neusner’s daunting and inexhaustible literary production, writes Hughes, may be the scholar’s Achilles’ heel, keeping Neusner from receiving his due. At the same time, Neusner’s prickly personality may have sent the man into self-imposed isolation, writing books with titles such as Are the Talmuds Interchangeable? Christine Hayes’s Blunder. Relying on archival materials as well as personal interviews with Neusner, his wife Suzanne, and others, Hughes gives us a window into the man behind the legend.

Hughes himself has already written no less than seven books over the last decade both theorizing and historicizing the fields of Jewish studies and Islamic studies, so his latest contribution should be read in light of his commitment to shining a light on one of the thorniest problems plaguing these two fields—what Hughes describes in this book as “identity politics” and what one might otherwise glibly describe as the distinction between the ichthyologist and the fish. In his other work, Hughes has, of course, shown the field of Jewish studies to suffer from the undue influence of foundations and corporations whose interests lie beyond the academy and whose willingness to fund projects that advance those interests has shaped the direction and even the conclusions that researchers in the field have drawn. Yet in this book about Jewish studies, Hughes actually hews closer to his critique of Islamic studies, in which he argues that the field has reactively overcorrected in response to
the challenges posed by Edward Said’s 1978 book *Orientalism* by lion-izing research and teaching from the perspective of the “fish.” By focusing on Neusner’s concern (one might even say obsession) with bringing Jewish studies out of the yeshiva and into the pantheon of disciplines that might be studied in the university, Hughes reminds us that Jewish studies, too, had to deal with—and, perhaps, still has to deal with—the problem of confessionalism creeping into scholarship.

By expressing this concern in the form of a *bildungsroman*, Hughes allows us to see his protagonist’s own awareness of the problems inherent in a naïve approach to rabbinic sources unfold over time. For example, Neusner writes his doctoral dissertation on Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and yet subsequently declares his very own work “gullible, conventional, and unoriginal” (62). In dialogue with scholars who worked on religions other than Judaism while he was at Columbia (as doctoral student and as a Kent Fellow at the National Council in Religion in Higher Education) and particularly at Dartmouth (1964–1968), where he exchanged ideas with Hans Penner (a student of Mircea Eliade) and Jonathan Z. Smith *inter alia*, Neusner came to see “the difference between religious studies scholarship and that which passed for scholarship in the quasi-seminary model of Jewish studies” (112). Leaving Dartmouth for personal reasons, seeking a position where his children could receive a Jewish education, Neusner brought this keen sensibility to Brown, where his prickly personality seems to have been his own worst enemy but where he also seems to have had great latitude to “train a generation of young scholars using his newly developed methods” (132). Clashes at Brown would drive Neusner first from its religious studies program into a separate Jewish studies program (clearly a challenge for someone who wanted to see Jewish studies integrated into religious studies) and eventually from Brown itself to the University of South Florida.

Amid these developments, Hughes identifies another strand of Neusner’s persona, that of the public intellectual we might call “Rabbi Jacob Neusner.” His strand was distinct from, yet interwoven with, the Neusner who lived in the rarified world of scholarship. A journalist from his youth, Neusner came to take on the role of cultural critic when tapped for the National Council for the Humanities (1978–1984) and the National Endowment for the Arts (1984–1990). In this role,
Neusner shifted from the soft left-wing politics of his youth to support the right wing as a compatriot of William F. Buckley, Lynne Cheney, and William Bennett. Hughes explains that “Neusner, like Bennett and Cheney, had no qualms articulating what constituted ‘good’ humanities and how it differed from ‘bad’ humanities” (209). Neusner also came to scorn affirmative action in the university, seeing it as leading inexorably to the further marginalization of the very minorities it was designed to help. We might see this as parallel with Neusner’s scholarly critique of Jewish studies as an area of study independent of religious studies; here, too, Neusner “was critical of African American students who would simply gravitate to courses on African American studies taught from insider perspectives as opposed to being more fully integrated with the humanities curriculum” (208).

Hughes presents us with a compelling and sympathetic portrait of a man fighting to bring Jewish studies out of the ghetto. He seems very deferential of his subject. Never having interacted with Neusner personally, nor having received one of the myriad “drop dead” letters he is known to have sent, I am incapable of judging the accuracy of this portrait. There are signs throughout the book that Neusner may have been his own worst enemy, both in terms of his professional life and his scholarship. Jewish studies need not take the route into religious studies Neusner encouraged—Jewish studies has also demonstrated its place in Near Eastern studies, classics, history, literature, and so forth—but this book is important and should be read by Jewish studies scholars and students alike for its attention to the tension between confessionalism and scholarship. At the same time, undoubtedly due in large part to Neusner’s own influence, the problem of so-called identity politics has subtly shifted over the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first—as Hughes is well aware. Neusner had great faith that the university was the vehicle for Jewish humanities to take its place among the canon of the West, yet this materialized at the very moment when the canon itself seems to have disintegrated. While the university may have provided American Jews a means to cultivate their cultural prominence through the support and expansion of Jewish studies programs and endowed chairs, the scholars who now teach in those programs and populate those chairs do not, by and large, use their perch as a soapbox...
for Jewish confessionalism. Yet the concern that identity politics (or, indeed, politics itself) might crowd out scholarship is very much alive, even if the nature of identity politics has shifted over the course of recent decades. The Godfather is dead—long live the Godfather!

**Phillip I. Ackerman-Lieberman** is associate professor of Jewish studies and law, associate professor of religious studies, and affiliated associate professor of Islamic studies and history at Vanderbilt University. His book *The Business of Identity: Jews, Muslims, and Economic Life in Medieval Egypt* was a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award in the category of Sephardi culture. He is a social, economic, and legal historian of Jewish life in the medieval Islamic world currently revisiting Jewish urbanization under early Islamic dynasties.

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Naomi Prawer Kadar, formerly the national director of the Workmen’s Circle schools, passed away in 2010, only three years after completing her doctorate in Yiddish literature at Columbia. Subsequently, her family, assisted by a team of advisors and academics, shepherded her dissertation to publication. *Raising Secular Jews* is both a testament to Kadar’s work in the realm of Yiddish education and a useful volume for scholars of children’s literature, Yiddish culture, and secular Jewish identity.

Kadar’s book is a study of the children’s periodicals produced for American children by the four secular Yiddish school movements: the labor Zionist Farband schools, the largely apolitical Sholem Aleichem Folk schools, the socialist Workmen’s Circle schools, and the Communist-leaning Ordn schools of the International Workers Order. Throughout her work, Kadar meticulously documents both the ideological differences between these movements, as well as each organization’s evolving relationship to politics and Jewish tradition over time. The second chapter of the book offers a comparative analysis of the philosophical and pedagogical goals of each group, as expressed through the cover art
printed on their respective magazines. Her careful study of the diversity within the world of secular Yiddish education, particularly the attention she gives to the publications of the unabashedly pro-Soviet Ordn schools, is one of the book’s core strengths.

Each educational movement receives its own chapter in the middle of the book, in which Kadar reviews the history of its publications, recounts the biographies and ideological orientations of its editors and key contributors, and engages in thorough literary analysis of selected stories and features. One of the interesting insights to emerge from this comparison, although the reader is left to do much of the work in stitching it together, is the disposition of each group toward America and American culture. As Kadar writes, “The struggle of the Jews’ complex relationship with America—on one hand, a provider of opportunities, and on the other hand, a usurper of the souls of Jewish youth—is a source of constant tension for the immigrant educators” (70). In the Farband schools’ *Di yidishe kindervelt (The Jewish Children’s World)*, for example, America is both celebrated as a land that has welcomed Jewish immigrants and enabled them to prosper, and “portrayed as a place of cruelty” and “moral emptiness” by the pen of the well-known Yiddish writer Joseph Opatoshu (73). While the publications of the Sholem Aleichem schools celebrate multiculturalism and the harmonious compatibility of Jewish and American ideals, the 1937 premiere issue of the Ordn schools’ *Yungvarg (Young Stuff)* features a fictional character who lives in the United States but longs to be in the Soviet Union, where freedom and prosperity are within reach for all. In the early pages of *Yungvarg*, it is neither New York nor Jerusalem but rather Birobidzhan that captures the imagination and affection of the writers.

The most important chapter in Kadar’s book deals with the subject of how Yiddish children’s periodicals introduced young readers to the Holocaust as the genocide unfolded. Yankev Pat and other Yiddish writers seeking to convey to children the enormity of the Nazi devastation “believed that the events of the catastrophe had to be conveyed to the younger generation in all their stark brutality and without euphemisms” (161). Accordingly, readers were not spared gruesome details about what transpired in the ghettos and concentration camps of Nazi-occupied Europe. Children figured prominently in these stories, both when they miraculously avoided death and when they did not.
Kadar argues that Yiddish writers in America, though physically removed from the horrors of the Holocaust, felt a deeper emotional bond to their brothers and sisters in Eastern Europe than their contemporaries who did not write in Yiddish. Therefore, she suggests, and for the same reasons, just as the American Yiddish press was ahead of English-language publications in terms of reporting Nazi atrocities to adult readers, Yiddish children’s magazines grappled with the destruction of European Jewry much earlier and much more intensely than the English-language publications for Jewish children did.

Her claim that Anglo-American Jewish schools avoided discussion of the Holocaust until the 1960s is difficult to sustain in light of Rona Sheramy’s work on early Holocaust education, which Kadar seems not to be familiar with, and Hasia Diner’s groundbreaking book about the Holocaust in postwar American Jewish culture, which Kadar sadly may not have had the opportunity to read. Here and elsewhere, the book would have been enriched by thematic comparisons between the magazines that Kadar studied and those that Jewish children in English-language Hebrew schools read, such as World Over and Young Judaean. Kadar’s insight that Yiddish writers focused on conveying examples of physical and spiritual resistance so as to provide American Jewish children with hope and pride, for example, calls to mind Sheramy’s analysis of the parallel literature written in English for American Jewish children immediately after the war.

Raising Secular Jews ends with a chapter on how these periodicals faced challenges and ultimately folded in response to acculturation, suburbanization, and the decimation of the Eastern European Jewish community. “Walking the tightrope of becoming integrated into American society while maintaining a close connection to the Jewish roots and linguistic heritage of the immigrant generation ultimately proved to be an impossible task” for secular Yiddish school movements in the United States, Kadar concludes. “But unlike footprints in the sand, the legacy remains” (235). So too, Naomi Prawer Kadar has left behind a remarkable legacy as an educator and scholar. May her memory be a blessing.

Joshua Furman is the Joan and Stanford Alexander Postdoctoral Fellow in Jewish Studies at Rice University.

*To Stand Aside or Stand Alone: Southern Reform Rabbis and the Civil Rights Movement* collects thirteen oral-history interviews that P. Allen Krause conducted at a Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) convention in Toronto in June 1966 for his Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) rabbinic thesis. Three years later he summarized his findings in an article in *American Jewish Archives*. His scholarship was pioneering then, and any subsequent study of the Jewish role in the Civil Rights movement has had to consider it. Retired after forty years as a pulpit rabbi, with the wisdom of experience, Krause has presented us with a more complete accounting by publishing edited transcripts of the interviews. To establish context, he introduces each interview with a community history and a rabbinic biography.

Sadly, it was not given to Krause to complete the task of publishing this book, but neither did he desist from it. At his retirement, Krause was diagnosed with cancer, and he succumbed in 2012. This volume thus has added resonance as a memorial. Standing neither aside nor alone, Krause entrusted its editorial completion to Mark K. Bauman, the estimable authority on Southern Jewry, who worked with Stephen Krause, the rabbi’s son and a lawyer. The volume begins with moving and well-deserved tributes from Bauman, Stephen Krause, and Sherri Hofmann Krause, the rabbi’s widow. The American Jewish Archives, which houses Krause’s tapes and papers, provided support. (As one rabbi advised Krause, to learn more, go “ask Professor Jake Marcus.”)

More than an editor, Bauman has been the book’s impresario. His editing of the interviews retains the freshness and immediacy of the oral history, noting deletions with ellipses. He inserts citations and contributes to the scholarly apparatus. He adds an explanatory introduction to Krause’s foreword, providing a historical overview, and ends with a bibliographical essay that not only contextualizes the book’s place in the literature but reads as a self-referential book review.

As Bauman notes, Krause’s research inspired a revisionist history that
overthrew the common narrative of a Southern Jewry, still cowed by Leo Frank, which had remained silent and compliant during the Civil Rights era. As acculturated Southerners acquiescing to Southern racial codes, according to the narrative, Dixie Jews were a people caught in the middle, few and vulnerable, fearful of an economic or even violent backlash if they were to express their repressed racial sympathies. What Krause showed was that nearly all Southern Reform rabbis sermonized in support of integration, and, unlike Protestant ministers, rarely felt their tenures threatened. They mostly shunned the spotlight, and even those publicly silent often worked behind the scenes to prepare for, if not effect, an incremental desegregation. Krause added names to the list of those who acted at personal risk—with their congregation’s tacit, if not open, consent. Virtually all rabbis took pride in their “freedom of the pulpit.” Building on Krause, Berkley Kalin and Mark Bauman in the anthology *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights* and Clive Webb in *Fight against Fear: Southern Jews and Civil Rights* updated the revisionist evidence, arguing that a sizeable Jewish minority did much even if others could have done more.

Working from a standard protocol, Krause queried the rabbis on contentious issues focusing on Southern and Jewish exceptionalism. Behind Krause’s first question, on the boundaries of the South, lies the now-commonplace recognition that there are indeed many “Souths.” Each rabbi regards his city as somehow different. The situation of Rabbi Jacob Rothschild in cosmopolitan Atlanta with thousands of Jews, including civic and business leaders, was not that of Rabbi Charles Mantinband in provincial Hattiesburg, Mississippi, with its small, isolated mercantile Jewish community. A rabbi in Atlanta or Nashville found allies in progressive civic, religious, and political leaders, while the Birmingham rabbi contended with violently recalcitrant Sheriff “Bull” Connor. The presence of a military base, a black or white college, or a liberal or reactionary press influenced community racial dynamics. For Rabbis Rothschild or Malcolm Stern, in Norfolk, a merchants’ association more concerned with economic development than with massive resistance created yet another kind of Southern reality. Interestingly, in the mostly Protestant South, places with large Catholic constituencies, such as Mobile and New Orleans, tended to be more hospitable, and progressive
rabbis spoke of finding allies among priests who had institutional sup-
port and did not serve at their congregation’s mercy. At a contentious
temple board meeting, Rabbi Mantinband of Hattiesburg was rescued
when a Catholic priest showed up—uninvited—to speak in his defense.

Krause was well aware that the thirteen rabbis interviewed were but
a selection. He focused on states in the Deep South with large African
American populations. Half of all Southern rabbis were Reform, and he
notes other activist rabbis whom he did not interview. He concedes that
more research is needed on Conservative and Orthodox rabbis. The rabbis
interviewed, with exception, describe colleagues from other movements as
insular, mostly uninvolved, more concerned with pastoral duties.

As Southerners, rabbis share a sense of social order as well as a com-
mitment to social justice. For Jews the Holocaust was a living memory,
and bombed temples and beaten Jews certainly lay behind the fears of
rabbis, who, if not European born, were a generation or two removed.
Expressing a typical Southern racial paternalism, several rabbis com-
plain of “lawless” Negro demonstrators. One notably quiet rabbi, dis-
paraged by his colleagues, claims that he would cooperate with African
Americans if only he could find an intelligent one. Although several
rabbis hold warm, intimate social relations with local black Civil Rights
leaders—including Medgar Evers and Martin Luther King Jr.—recognition
of black agency came slowly. Activist Rabbi Alfred Goodman in
Columbus, Georgia, notes that the city’s school integration was negoti-
ated by white civic and school leaders without black participation.

In his 1969 AJA article, Krause distinguished among societies that
were “closed,” “less closed,” and “open” or “safe” for Civil Rights activ-
ism. In this current work he makes a bipartite distinction between nine
rabbis “in the land of the almost possible” and four “in the land of
the almost impossible.” The rabbis almost all sought Protestant cover
through an interfaith or ministerial council, several serving as its presi-
dent. Often they expressed disappointment with the Christian clergy’s
lack of commitment, especially among the dominant Baptist. Virtually
all rabbis serve on a local or state biracial human relations organization,
and many join the progressive Southern Regional Council.

Rabbinic responses to the integration crisis range from a quiet token-
ism to a confrontational activism, challenging stereotypes of a fearful
Southern Jewry wanting only to fit in. Some rabbis have become praised as famous men for their heroism. Threatening letters and phone calls came to their homes, and looking out their windows they could see Klansmen stalking them. After the 1958 Atlanta Temple bombing, Rothschild rallied the community, converting this antisemitic act into a turning point in the city’s racial history. Many speak admiringly of Mississippi Rabbis Mantinband of Hattiesburg and Perry Nussbaum of Jackson, who remain bravely defiant though confronted with murders and bombs. In 1966 Rabbi James Wax could not have known that his efforts to make Memphis a model of peaceful integration would not survive King’s assassination two years later. For his outspokenness, Rabbi William Silverman of Nashville—a.k.a. the “Pistol Packin’ Rabbi”—endured dead rats thrown on his lawn and was once bloodily assaulted in a Methodist church; when white extremists targeted his family, he let it be known that he carried iron when driving his son to school. At their retirements, rabbis were feted by Jew and gentile alike as paragons of social justice. Once-vilified rabbis often retired from their communities holding keys to the city.

The rabbis cited the prophetic ethics of Reform Judaism as the foundation of their activism. That civil rights presented a clear choice between good and evil does not mitigate that many rabbis were confronted with choices that lay in what Primo Levi called—in the context of the Holocaust—the “grey zone,” a place where moral action is fraught with ambiguity. As Birmingham Rabbi Milton Graffman put it, choices were “no-win.” Graffman, infamous for being among the clergymen cited in Dr. King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” has been disdained for his gradualism, but he had a long history of tirelessly advocating integration. Is the gradualist strategy a reprehensible cowardice, or is King’s civil disobedience—integration here and now—the only morally defensible position? Can quiet diplomacy succeed when public action will provoke violence? Does one take a moral stand in support of African Americans if the consequences compromise the safety or livelihood of others, one’s family or congregants? No Southern rabbi appeared to have taken to the streets to march or demonstrate. Prior to the interview, the once-uncompromising Rabbi Mantinband handed Krause a statement acknowledging “multiple approaches to this struggle, and all serve a
purpose.” If the rabbis tended to begin as gradualists, wanting to change hearts and minds, such, too was the first position of prominent Southern liberals such as Lillian Smith and Frank Porter Graham. Although we may seek in this book confirmation of our own Jewish values—and assess these rabbis in that light—much here suggests the wisdom of withholding judgment. Several cite the rabbinic admonition to stand in another’s place.

With rare exceptions the rabbis express reservations about the public stands of national Jewish defense organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the CCAR, and the American Jewish Congress, which made grand public gestures and filed friends of court desegregation briefs but ignored the sentiments and situation of Southern Jews. Many rabbis resented Northern rabbis coming South and regarded their marching and demonstrating as grandstanding to promote their rabbinic careers while their Southern brethren labored in the hinterlands. They similarly dismissed Freedom Riders, disproportionately Jewish, for their “hit-and-run” tactics even as they might arrange housing for them locally. Not knowing nor understanding the South, these interlopers left a mess for the local rabbi to clean up. Rabbi Wax describes Freedom Riders who arrived in Memphis not knowing that the bus station had long ago integrated.

The rabbis insist that racism is a national problem, noting that Northern Jews who condescend to their Southern brethren themselves lived in segregated societies. The rabbis typically say that they have few if any segregationists among their congregants. Southern Jewish communities typically include a small core of multigenerational natives, but often Northern newcomers, drawn by postwar industrialization, outnumber them. The rabbis do not find a predictable North-South Jewish divide in racial attitudes among their members, noting that the acculturated Southerner will acknowledge that segregation is morally untenable. Most Jews concede the immorality of segregation but simply did not want to become involved. Yet, at moments of crisis, temple boards almost invariably supported their activist rabbis, and, relative to Protestant clergy, few lost their pulpit or had it imperiled. After the Nashville JCC was bombed and the temple threatened, Rabbi Silverman was heartened to find his next service so packed that he thought it was Rosh Hashanah.
What brings to life *To Stand Aside or Stand Alone* is its human dimension, catching the rabbis in the fullness of their beings. They repeatedly note that civil rights was only one dimension of their rabbinate, and their pastoral virtues seemed to trump whatever discomfort their civil rights advocacy caused. Principled rabbis could also be personally abrasive and uncompromising. Their Zionism or traditionalism also shaped community relations. Those of us not in the clergy might be surprised by their willingness to engage in rabbinic sniping, unmindful of *lashon hora* (gossip). They name colleagues they regard as bigoted or cowardly. What is one to make of Rabbi Mantinband’s characterization of his “good friend” Rabbi Nussbaum of Jackson as a civil rights “Johnny-come-lately?” Why carp about Nussbaum who spoke early and often to his congregation on integration, sat black friends at his dinner table, suffered a house bombing, and conducted integrated services for Freedom Riders at the notorious Parchman prison? Reading the interviews in total, one becomes more aware of the limitations of taking oral histories at face value as self-representations without corroboration.

With notable exceptions the rabbis do not claim that their role changed the course of civil rights history, a judgment that accords generally with the views of Webb and Bauman. Yet the rabbinic role was not insignificant. The interviews open a window into the times, and Krause and Bauman provide the frame through which to view them. These voices speak with the freshness of experience, and the commentary adds reflection. *To Stand Aside or Stand Alone* holds value as both a reference book and a work of literature. As a scholarly resource, it belongs on the shelf of anyone studying community history, black-Jewish relations, or the South generally. As a good read, it fits on the night table of anyone seeking an absorbing story of courage and all-too-human fallibility.

*Leonard Rogoff, historian for the Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina, has written extensively on Southern Jewry. His last book is Gertrude Weil: Jewish Progressive in the New South.*

*Hideous Characters and Beautiful Pagans* analyzes how representations of Jews on the early national and antebellum American stage mirrored the treatment of actual Jews offstage. Nathans argues that antisemitic and philo-Semitic representations of Jews paralleled early American Jews’ struggle to become part of the new nation. *Hideous Characters and Beautiful Pagans* is the first book-length exploration of Jews and American theater prior to the Civil War. It is also a masterpiece of scholarship. Beautifully written, well structured, and exquisitely researched, Nathans's book deepens our understanding of this tumultuous, but often under-studied, era. Her attention both to theories of the theater and masculinity should make her volume compelling and useful to scholars working in later eras.

*Hideous Characters and Beautiful Pagans* moves chronologically and thematically through the history of Jews in early American theater. The introduction lays the groundwork for Nathans's main argument. While previous scholars have suggested that “Jews were inevitably depicted as venal villains on pre-Civil War American stages” or were described in reviews as “hideous characters” or “beautiful pagans,” Nathans discovered subtle distinctions even in the “most egregious images” (1). Nathans is as much concerned with *why* stereotypes were useful at specific moments as with *how* specific characters challenged expectations (1). Although Jews represented only a small proportion of the new nation’s population, they were particularly conspicuous in early theater. Drawing on the work of theater scholars Marvin Carlson and Henry Bial, Nathans pays particular attention to the way that certain characters were “double coded” (that is, spoke to at least two audiences) and how they were haunted by the ghosts or shades of “well-known figures from theatre, literature, and poetry” (5–7). Jewish dramatic characters, in turn, she argues, “ghosted” other early American Jews, as they performed their own identities off stage.

Nathans’s book follows this argument through six chapters that move from the Revolution to the brink of the Civil War. In the first chapter, Nathans examines how the theater served as a mirror for “Jewish men’s
participation in the American polity” from the Revolution to the Jew Bill of 1826 (19). Here she focuses primarily on the legal means Jews used to claim their place in the nation. In contrast, the second chapter turns to extra-legal strategies and examines the revival of classical republicanism in theater productions between 1826 and 1861. Throughout the second chapter, Nathans places theatrical characters alongside contemporary displays of violence—particularly duels, native American removals, and the Damascus affair (51). In the third chapter, Nathans turns her attention to theatrical representations of the wandering Jew and cosmopolitan citizen. As in the previous chapters, Nathans relies on theater theory to expand the notion of performance.

In the fourth chapter, Nathans shifts her gaze to how American Jewish actors and audiences forged communities on and off the stage. This chapter includes both Jewish and Jewish-descended performers and in doing so questions how perceptions of Jewishness and the actors’ own Jewish identities shaped their reception. Nathans’s fifth chapter centers on female Jewish actors and how they forged a middle ground between Orientalized stereotypes and claims to republican motherhood. Nathans argues Jewish female actors faced a “crisis of visibility.” The final chapter, “If I Forget Thee,” considers representation of biblical history and Jewish rituals on the antebellum American stage. Nathans contextualizes these staged productions with “rituals of tolerance” that politicians used to showcase the young nation’s commitment to religious freedom (175).

*Hideous Characters and Beautiful Pagans* is a remarkable work of scholarship from a senior scholar with deep knowledge of both theater history and early America. Nathans balances performances of Jewishness on and off stage, and in doing so, provides a unique window into everyday early American life. One of the more compelling aspects of Nathans’s work is her approach to what we cannot know: She repeatedly calls attention to the limits of the archive without losing sight of her larger argument. Although her work benefits from gender and theater theory, her prose remains lucid and engaging. Each chapter is filled with both insightful analysis and important revelations from the archives. This is a work that should appeal to literary scholars and historians alike.

The weaknesses in Nathans’s work are minor and primarily have to do with her discussion of race. Nathans cites Sander Gilman’s
often-repeated claim that “the association of the Jews with Blackness is as old as Christian traditions” (27), but her analysis would benefit from more investigation of how the perception of Jews and race changed during the era she discusses. Surely “blackness” meant something different in medieval European Christian theology than in the antebellum United States? Likewise, while I loved Nathans’s inclusion of runaway advertisements for Jewish servants from 1752–1776, I found myself skeptical of her claims for what they meant about Jewish stereotypes (85). Although the examples she cites emphasize the skin color (“dark complexion,” “yellow complexion”) and height of the runaways (5’5”, 5’4”, 5’3”), these attributes are part of the stock language of runaway ads. Even runaways from Northern Europe often are described as having dark skin, presumably because as laborers they worked outdoors. The reduced height of Jewish servants may reflect that they were foreign born rather than stereotypes about Jewish shortness: As historian John Komlos notes, American men tended to be taller than their English counterparts, and American-born apprentices “dwarfed” their counterparts in London.¹

These quibbles aside, this is a phenomenal book that is both smart and a pleasure to read. Nathans provides a new standard for integrating literary and historical approaches. As Josh Lambert notes, some of most interesting recent works of literary criticism pay attention to the materiality of Jewish American literature “by analyzing its production and consumption in fine detail.”² Nathans follows this trend, but brings to the conversation an eye for how theater performances mattered to everyday life and Jewish history.

Notes


Laura Arnold Leibman is a professor of English and humanities at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. She is the author of Indian Converts and numerous
academic articles. She served as the academic director of the award-winning, multimedia public television series American Passages: A Literary Survey. Her book, Messianism, Secrecy and Mysticism: A New Interpretation of Early American Jewish Life, won a Jordan Schnitzer Book Award and a National Jewish Book Award, and was a Choice Outstanding Academic Title.


The detailed relationship between Abraham Lincoln and the Jews is explained in this valuable study coauthored by historian Jonathan D. Sarna and collector Benjamin Shapell. Using the rare manuscripts and images from the Shapell Lincoln Collection, as well as archival materials from other major institutions, the authors portray the large number of Jews Lincoln befriended in his fifty-six years.

This beautifully illustrated volume is not only a credit to the authors but to the vast legacy of Jewish history. Included are many examples of the relationship between Lincoln and Jews. There are real treasures displayed here, including autographed documents in Lincoln’s hand and photographs of Lincoln and his Jewish contemporaries. This finely crafted book not only satisfies a collector’s yearning but further enlightens us about the middle period of American history.

Lincoln did not know Jews in his youth, and in his million-word-utterance record he only mentions Jews a few times. Yet those times were meaningful. He described Abraham Jonas as “one of my most valued friends. And when he appointed a well-known Jew, Moise Levy, as assistant quartermaster, he defended the choice by saying, “I believe we have not yet appointed a Hebrew”—although he had, in fact, appointed others. In an antisemitic world where hatred of Jews was nearly universal, America’s greatest president was free from this ancient prejudice; he proclaimed their legitimacy with genuine admiration.

Most know Lincoln was quick to countermand General Ulysses S. Grant’s General Order #11, which banished Jews “as a class” from Grant’s Department—i.e., the Mississippi River to the Tennessee River.
and from Northern Mississippi to Cairo, Illinois. Before Grant’s order could be carried out, a delegation of Jews went to the Executive Mansion. The authors described the exchange between the delegation and Lincoln. It demonstrates his knowledge of the Bible, his bonhomie, and, more important, his empathy for the Jewish community:

“And so the children of Israel were driven from the happy land of Canaan?” Spokesperson Cesar Kaskel responded, “Yes, and that is why we have come unto Father Abraham’s bosom, seeking protection,” with Lincoln immediately responding, “And this protection they shall have at once.” The order was revoked (116, 118).

Grant spent the rest of his life trying to make up for his mistake, and Jews during the Civil War and during his presidency were quick to forgive him. Other generals, however, such as Benjamin Butler and George B. McClellan, expressed antisemitic sentiments openly.

Jews emerged on the national scene during Lincoln’s lifetime. With a scant 3,000 Jews living in the United States in 1809—the year Lincoln was born—there were more than 150,000 at the time of Lincoln’s assassination in 1865. Alarmed by a growth in the Jewish population, many Americans, cabinet members, and generals treated Jews as outsiders. As he did with all immigrant groups, Abraham Lincoln took the opposite tack, expressing a deep knowledge of the Old Testament and employing its language and concepts in his most important writings, especially his second inaugural address. Having befriended Jews from early adulthood, he promoted equality, appointed numerous Jews to public office, and, beginning in the 1850s, had Jewish advisors and supporters. He replaced “Christian nations” with “This nation under God” as part of his Gettysburg declaration.

Lincoln was assassinated on Good Friday, 14 April 1865, and died at 7:22 a.m. on Holy Saturday, 15 April. This was during Passover, so Jews actually heard the news in synagogue. The New York Times reported that Temple Emanu-El in the city responded with all the congregants spontaneously rising to recite kaddish, the Jewish prayer of mourning. The country not only lost its president, but the Jewish people knew, as this volume demonstrates, that they had lost a great friend.

This book gives Lincoln’s presidency an expanded dimension. Even while orchestrating a civil war, Lincoln also had to navigate his way
through the middle of a troubled time in American Jewish history. This book shows that he did so with great skill and empathy and, in the process, it brings an expanded dimension to his presidency.

Frank J. Williams is the chair of the Lincoln Forum and author of Lincoln as Hero.


As the field of American Jewish history follows the transnational turn in the humanities, more and more studies theorize and show how the Jewish experience in the United States has been entangled with other Jewries, in more ways than by immigration and in reciprocal, multidirectional relationships. Europe has always figured prominently in the many complicated ways that American Jewry has developed and seen itself: as a source of immigration; as a dark foil for the shiny “New World,” or a role model of (East) European authentic Jewishness; as the source of sophisticated culture, or the locus of the murder of six million Jews. With the exception of Israel, no other place, real or imagined, may have served to define American Jewry as much as Europe. But has American Jewry been so different and self-sufficient as to “transcend” the European experience in Jewish history? And if so, what does that mean?

This is the question at the heart of a volume edited by two German scholars of the modern Jewish experience: Christian Wiese, professor of Jewish thought and philosophy in Frankfurt, and Cornelia Wilhelm, professor of modern history in Munich. They assembled an impressive group of American Jewish history scholars to endeavor to understand “in which regard and for which reasons American Jews did, indeed, deviate from the patterns of their European past, which aspects of the ‘Old World’ they retained and continued to cherish, and what facilitated the unmistakable re-invention of Jewish identity in America over the last centuries” (8). The length of the sentence in Wiese’s introduction
matches the breadth of the scope and the ambition of the volume. It consists of twenty-one articles, all but a few original, which roughly follow a chronological order from colonial times to the present. In Wiese’s words, the volume does not claim to cover all perspectives that its transnational approach could open on American Jewish history, but it still aims “to explore the gradual emergence of the leading role American Jews have played and continue to play with regard to religious trends, secular Jewish culture, and Jewish politics” (9).

It is notoriously difficult to do justice to edited volumes and their constituent parts in a review, even if the questions they address are more limited and the topical and disciplinary diversity less rich than in the present case. If there is a cumulative response to the questions that emerge from the heterogeneous mix of articles, it may raise the counter question: What does “transcending” mean? How did American Jews relate to Europe at various stages of their history? The title phrase was a smart choice, as it leaves room for a wide spectrum of interpretations, reflected in the contributions. A few examples may suffice. Wilhelm’s analysis of the B’nai B’rith organizations in nineteenth-century Germany and the United States points to a German Reform heritage that could unfold its potential under the more favorable conditions of cultural pluralism in America, whereas exclusionary German nationalism denied legitimacy to such ethnic forms of Jewish distinctiveness. Karla Goldman’s article on the changing role of women in nineteenth-century American and German Judaism, and Wiese’s chapter on American rabbis’ perspectives on their liberal German counterparts, show how Reform Judaism in the United States went beyond—i.e. transcended—the limited changes that were made on the other side of the Atlantic. These and other contributions are at least as comparative as transnational, if the latter is understood as addressing interrelations and mutual influences rather than unidirectional ones. Other chapters, such as Tony Michels’s study of the “export” of New York Yiddish socialism to Russia, add dimensions of reciprocity and entanglement to the categories of influence and comparison.

Yet other chapters are set so firmly within the American Jewish context as to make the relation to the European experience implicit. Jeffrey Gurock revisits his seminal 1983 article “Resisters and Accommodators” to nuance the categories of Orthodox rabbis in their attitude to
(American) modernity. The East European background of some “resist‑ers” aside, this is an American story. Similarly, Michael Staub’s analysis of the early 2000s, “American Jews and the Middle East Crisis,” is a story in which Europe has no role. It can be read as an illustration of the overarching trajectory that propelled American Jewry to a dominant po‑sition in world Jewry, engaged on many levels with Israel but no longer with Europe. This is a striking reversal of earlier constellations, analyzed by Susannah Heschel in her well‑known essay, “The Myth of Europe in America’s Judaism,” which opens the volume. Whereas Europe was the central point of reference for American Judaism at least from the early nineteenth century, today it is the American Jewish community that serves as a model of a flourishing modern Judaism (41). Jonathan D. Sarna takes the story one step further. After analyzing how American Jewry moved from the periphery to the center after 1945, not least due to the influx of European‑born Jews, he points to later developments that put Israel at the center, challenging American Jewry’s central role. In this “two‑center model,” Europe has become peripheral, if it figures at all.

Taken together, the articles remind us of the diverse ways in which the American Jewish experience has been related to the European one and transcended it in many and complex ways, according to the various understandings of the term. The authors demonstrate this complexity by the variety of their topics. Many of the articles will engage readers interested in their respective specialized topics. The volume’s broader questions will speak not least to European scholars, who are less familiar than American ones with these specialized questions and the topic of American Jewry.

Weaving the centrifugal strands together in his introductory con‑sideration of the larger topics, Wiese also addresses a crucial aspect of the notion of America’s “transcending” Europe: the oft‑discussed issue of American and American Jewish exceptionalism. To the extent that “America is different” for the Jews has become a central tenet of an American Jewish civil religion, exceptionalism has even acquired a veneer of yet another form of transcendence, echoing in the invocation of the “new promised land.” Most contributions to the volume address the American Jewish experience as favored by a constellation of factors
that made for a more felicitous environment than in most of European Jewish history. Hasia Diner is most explicit in her reservations against the self-congratulatory and overly celebratory rhetoric of the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in North America in 2004/2005 (355). She calls for a critical perspective on the insight that America has been different for the Jews, based less on exceptional characteristics essential to Jews and more on a set of external factors, which made for “an environment which synergistically worked well for them” (364).

The contributions do not gloss over the less opportune aspects, such as the existence of antisemitism, albeit in a different and less fatal degree from Europe. Steven Whitfield explicitly challenges the exceptionalist notion of congenial American and Jewish values by arguing that the optimism ingrained in American national culture runs counter to fundamental tenets and insights that Judaism gained in the ancient and the Old World: “an unambivalent accommodation to the entitlement to seek happiness would snap the lines of continuity with Judaic tradition, without offering the prospect of enriching the national culture either” (350). It is an argument that adds yet another aspect to the million-dollar question of the relationship, real or ideal, of Judaism to modernity. The volume by Wiese and Wilhelm takes on this question by looking at the relationship of American Jewry to the European Jewish experience and offers a spectrum of valuable insights.

Notes


Markus Krah is a lecturer in Jewish religious and intellectual history at University of Potsdam, Germany. He received his doctorate in modern Jewish studies from the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York. His book *American Jewry and the Re-Invention of the East European Jewish Past* is scheduled to be published by de Gruyter in the fall of 2017. He is currently working on a study of how the transnational history of Schocken Books informed the publishing house’s program for post-1945 American Jewish readers.
Select Acquisitions 2016

Aaron, Marcus Lester
Correspondence between Marcus Lester Aaron, Rabbi George Zepin, and Rabbi Louis Egelson concerning the establishment of a Jewish congregation at Harvard University, 1919–1923.

Received from Elinor G.A. Langer, Santa Barbara, CA

Association for Jewish Studies
Records of the Association for Jewish Studies, including correspondence, newsletters, journals, and other publications, plus audio recordings of conference events, 1969–2006.

Received from Rona Sheramy, New York, NY

Bennett, Allen
Correspondence and other personal papers of Rabbi Bennett, 1982–1991.

Received from Allen Bennett, San Francisco, CA

Berman, Howard A.
Order of service for an interfaith service titled “A Service of National Healing, Reconciliation and Hope,” 9 November 2016; together with three sermons by Rabbi Berman, delivered at Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York, 2016.

Received from Howard A. Berman, Boston, MA

Berry, Theodore M.
Letters of Theodore M. Berry, former mayor of Cincinnati, Ohio, pertaining to Berry’s receipt of the “Good Neighbor” award in 1962 and his participation in the dedication ceremony for the Rabbi Samuel Wohl Chapel of the Isaac M. Wise Center, 1976.

Received from Thomas F. Glassman, Cincinnati, OH

Beth Isaac Synagogue (Trenton, MI)
Board minutes, bulletins, correspondence, and records of synagogue activities, 1948–2015.

Received from Barbara Barnosky, Trenton, MI
B’nai B’rith Independence Lodge No. 1776 (Washington, DC)
Brochures, clippings, correspondence, newsletters, and membership material, including papers of lodge President Bertram R. Abramson, 1947–1969.
  Received from Edward Abramson, Washington, DC

Bob, Steven M.
Rabbinic student coursework; sermons and other writings; correspondence; and workbooks for the Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute’s Chalutzim Hebrew immersion program, 1973–2014.
  Received from Steven M. Bob, Lombard, IL

Bureau of Jewish Education (San Francisco, CA)
  Received from David Engel, Penn Valley, PA

Chajes, Julius
Papers of composer Julius Chajes, including orchestral and vocal compositions, together with awards, notes, correspondence, news clippings, concert programs, and recordings, 1941–1985.
  Received from Yossi Chajes, Haifa, Israel

Citrus Valley Jewish Center (West Covina, CA)
  Received from Marilyn Lubarsky, West Covina, CA

Cohen, Philip and Helene
Family papers consisting of photographs, correspondence, genealogies, prayer books, and hymnals, 1852–2005.
  Received from Philip T. Cohen, Cincinnati, OH

Cohon, Samuel S.
Unpublished manuscripts of Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon, along with correspondence of A. Irma Cohon about the arrangement and publication of Rabbi Cohon’s writings, 1910–1983.
  Received from Baruch Cohon, Los Angeles, CA
**Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York (New York, NY)**


*Received from Joanne E. Sobel and Warren Klein, New York, NY*

**Contra Costa Jewish Community Center (Walnut Creek, CA)**


*Received from Judith E. Endelman, Ann Arbor, MI*

**Cook, Michael J.**

Video recording of “Making a Crossroad in History: Marc H. Tanenbaum and Vatican II,” presentation by Dr. Cook at the dedication program for the Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Digital Collection at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, 11 October 2015.

*Received from Michael Cook, Cincinnati, OH*

**Cooper, Bettie Minette Switzer**

Personal and family papers including correspondence, diplomas, and a marriage certificate, 1912–1957.

*Received from Minette Cooper, Norfolk, VA*

**Davids, Stanley M.**

Note by Rabbi Davids to his grandchildren about the election of Donald Trump, 11 November 2016.

*Received from Stanley Davids, Atlanta, GA*

**Davis, Maurice**


*Received from Susan Kulick, Cincinnati, OH*
Diamant, Anita

Papers of author Anita Diamant, including correspondence, notes and drafts for books, and miscellaneous documents, 1977–2009.

Received from Anita Diamant, Newtonville, MA

Drake, James A.


Received from James A. Drake, Merritt Island, FL

Ezring, Sheldon


Received from Sheldon Ezring, Syracuse, NY

Fabrangen Havurah (Washington, DC)

Correspondence, newsletters, publicity, and budgets. Also includes some material pertaining to the National Havurah Committee, 1980–2002.

Received from Michele Alperin, Princeton, NJ

Friedman, Debbie

Papers of Debbie Friedman, including master recordings of her music, 1970–2010.

Received from Freda and Cheryl Friedman, Laguna Woods, CA

Friedman, Herbert A.

Phonograph recording of a United Jewish Appeal campaign speech by Rabbi Friedman, 23 April 1958.

Received from Jay Moses, Columbus, OH

Friedman, James

Article by Friedman titled “All Men are Created Equal,” 2016.

Received from James Friedman, Cincinnati, OH

Glickman, Brenner


Received from Brenner Glickman, Sarasota, FL
Goldberg, Joshua
Writings and student papers of Rabbi Goldberg, together with news articles, tributes, and memorials concerning his service in the U.S. Navy chaplaincy, 1980–1994.

Received from Natasha Tall, Ithaca, NY

Goldman, Beryl L.

Received from Edward Goldman, Cincinnati, OH

Goldstein, Robert
Papers of Rabbi Goldstein concerning his work as a Zionist, 1907–1976.

Received from Ronnie Ross, Mt. Kisco, NY

Gottschalk, Alfred

Received from Marc Gottschalk, Laguna Beach, CA

Greenstein, Micah
News articles about Rabbi Greenstein’s being named “Memphian of the year” in 2013. Also includes HUC-JIR Founder’s Day address given by Greenstein on 30 March 2016, and correspondence between Greenstein and Jacob Rader Marcus, 1990–1995.

Received from Micah Greenstein, Memphis, TN

Haberman, Joshua O.
Correspondence regarding Rabbi Haberman’s efforts to help immigration applicants, 1946–1948.

Received from Har Sinai Temple, Pennington, NJ
Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Rhea Hirsch School of Education

Records of the school, including correspondence and other records about a meeting titled “Consultation on Reconceptualizing Congregation Education,” May 1993; and concerning a grant proposal prepared for the Mandel Foundation, 1997.

Received from Michael Zeldin, Los Angeles, CA

Hirsch, Richard G.

Papers of Rabbi Hirsch, including a citation, in Hebrew, from Maram, the Israel Rabbinic Association, with Rabbi Hirsch’s response, May 2016.

Received from Richard G. Hirsch, Jerusalem, Israel

Hirschhorn Family


Received from Joseph Hirschhorn, Cincinnati, OH

Hirsh, Norman D.

Sermons, interviews, and other papers concerning the life and career of Rabbi Hirsh, 1964–2013.

Received from Norman and Margaret Hirsh, Seattle, WA

Ingber, Abie

Files pertaining to his teaching and guidance activities at the University of Cincinnati and Xavier University, including material about the exhibit “A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People.” Also includes recordings of various television broadcasts, lectures, public dialogues, and other interfaith and educational events, 1980–2016.

Received from Abie Ingber, Cincinnati, OH

Jaye, Harold S.


Received from Harold S. Jaye, Ocala, FL
Jung, Leo
Correspondence with various persons; a student notebook labeled “Freshman’s Course”; and a scrapbook kept by Rabbi Jung, 1910–1928.  
Received from Marc Lee Raphael, Williamsburg, VA

Kaplan, Larry
Ordination certificate for Rabbi Kaplan, 28 May 1965.  
Received from Seth Kaplan, Richmond, VA

Kaufman, Jan Caryl
Speeches, correspondence, academic writing, and materials pertaining to Rabbi Kaufman’s rabbinic training and career, 1971–2009.  
Received from Jan Caryl Kaufman, New York, NY

Kerber, Justin
Sermon by Rabbi Kerber titled “Uncovering and Covering,” 26 September 2013.  
Received from Justin Kerber, St. Louis, MO

Knobel, Peter
Received from Peter Knobel, Evanston, IL

Kreshtool, Constance
Received from Constance Kreshtool, Wilmington, DE

Lazarus, Bruce I. and Philip D. Weintraub
Materials on the first gay marriage performed at Plum Street Temple, Cincinnati, OH, 2015.  
Received from Bruce I. Lazarus, Cincinnati, OH
Levy, Eugene H.
Received from Rabbi Eugene H. Levy, Little Rock, AR

Lorge, Ernst
Received from Michael Lorge, Chicago, IL

Los Angeles Jewish Feminist Center (Los Angeles, CA)
Records including steering committee meeting minutes and budget documents, 1991–2011.
Received from Yaffa Weisman, Los Angeles, CA

Lucas, Judy
Papers of Cincinnati Jewish organizations, including the Bureau of Jewish Education, the American Jewish Congress, the Jewish Community Relations Committee, together with miscellaneous and personal items of Judy Lucas, 1938–1953.
Received from Judy Lucas, Cincinnati, OH

Mack, William J.
Correspondence with General George S. Patton regarding the death of Mack’s son, Leon, in Belgium during World War II, February and March 1945.
Received from Millard Mack, Cincinnati, OH

Maller, Allen S.
Published articles by Rabbi Maller concerning Jewish relations with Muslims and Hindus, 1982–2015.
Received from Allen S. Maller, Encino, CA

McCoy, Lowell
Received from Lowell McCoy, Cincinnati, OH
Meir Chayim Temple (McGhee, AR)

Constitution and bylaws, board minutes, correspondence, bulletins, building plans, fundraising and building fund records, scrapbooks, photos, and legal documents pertaining to the temple's 2016 closure, 1973–2015.

Received from Rose Ann and Don Noran, Little Rock, AR

Meyer, David J.

Erev Rosh Hashanah sermon by Rabbi Meyer titled “And From All Dishonor We Will Keep Her Free,” 2016.

Received from David J. Meyer, Marblehead, MA

Meyer, Michael A.

Files on several Union for Reform Judaism summer camps, compiled by Dr. Meyer, 1956–1964; and correspondence with Jacob Neusner, 1965–1979.

Received from Michael A. Meyer, Cincinnati, OH

National Havurah Committee

Records pertaining to the administration and programs of the National Havurah Committee, including fund raising, board meetings, summer institute programs, regional retreats, correspondence, publications, and strategic planning, 1984–2005.

Received from the National Havurah Committee, Philadelphia, PA

Panetta, Santina Semadar

Digital portfolio of the artist’s works, 2016.

Received from Santina Semadar Panetta, Laval, Quebec, Canada

Paper, Herbert H.


Received from James Paper, New York, NY

Pearce, Stephen S.

Photograph of Rabbi Pearce with Shimon Peres, undated.

Received from Stephen S. Pearce, San Francisco, CA
Pelli, Moshe

Material related to Professor Pelli’s writings; together with notes, correspondence, interviews, and research materials, 1961–1999.

Received from Moshe Pelli, Orlando, FL

RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network


Received from RAVSAK, New York, NY

Reform Judaism Magazine


Received from the Union for Reform Judaism, New York, NY

Riverdale Temple (Bronx, NY)

Executive board minutes (1958–1998), bylaws, commemorative and anniversary books, records pertaining to the temple Sisterhood, Men’s Club, temple bulletins, photographs, and scrapbooks.

Received from Helen Krim, Bronx, NY

Rosenau, William

Papers and family correspondence, plus tribute books and bound volume of letters received for Rosenau’s twenty-fifth anniversary at Congregation Oheb Shalom (Baltimore, MD), 1917–1948.

Received from Sally Fox Korkin, Cincinnati, OH

Sarna, Jonathan D.

Address, “Princeton University – 100 Years of Jewish Community,” 2016.

Received from Jonathan D. Sarna, Waltham, MA

Schulman, Zell


Received from Zell Schulman, Cincinnati, OH

Acquisitions
**Schwartzman, Allan H.**

Correspondence and personal papers concerning his retirement, 1989.

*Received from Allan H. Schwartzman, Sarasota, FL*

**Schwartzman, Sylvan D.**

Essay titled “Highlights of the Jewish Experience: A Numismatic View,” discussing Jewish experience and history as seen through coins and medals, including ancient and modern examples, 1979.

*Received from Daniel Randolph, Cincinnati, OH*

**Serotta, Dorothy**

Papers of Dorothy Levin Serotta and her family, including correspondence, writings, sermons and clippings, 1940–2008.

*Received from Isaac Serotta, Highland Park, IL, and Gerald Serotta, Chevy Chase, MD*

**Shapiro, Mark Dov**

Personal papers, including early drafts and critiques of *Gates of Shabbat*; material on interfaith activities; files from Shapiro’s tenure as chair of the CCAR Conversion Committee; files of the Young Congregants program of Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, ON, Canada; and files of the Jewish Information Class of the Toronto Reform community, 1977–1998.

*Received from Mark Dov Shapiro, Springfield, MA*

**The Shlenker School (Houston, TX)**

Records of the Shlenker School, a Reform Jewish day school. Includes commemorative and promotional material; student handbooks and prayer books; strategic planning events; and general literature, 1985–2016.

*Received from the Shlenker School, Houston, TX*

**Silver, Daniel Jeremy**

Sermons and writings, scrapbooks, and photographs, 1955–1996. Also includes scans of photographs and clippings pertaining to Abba Hillel Silver and family, 1929–2003.

*Received from Adele Silver, Washington, DC*
Snyder, Richard

Program of service installing Richard Snyder as president of Isaac M. Wise Temple (Cincinnati, OH); together with draft of his president’s address, delivered 14 June 1985.

Received from Richard Snyder, Cincinnati, OH

Spiro, Saul S.

Correspondence and papers on Jewish education, 1933–1980.

Received from Rena Ziegler, Bellingham, WA

Steinbach, A. Alan

Personal notes with Marilyn and Edgar Blumberg; plus published works and news clippings, 1939–1978.

Received from Andrew Blumberg, Croton on Hudson, NY

Stiffman, Jeffrey B.

Sermon before the National Association of Retired Reform Rabbis, 2 January 2015.

Received from Jeffrey B. Stiffman, St. Louis, MO

Stone, Alan


Received from Marilyn Stone, Edison, NJ

Temple Beth-El (Jefferson City, MO)

Congregational annual meeting minutes, 1986–2015; Board of Trustees minutes, 2010–2016; Sisterhood minutes, 1939–1986; and minutes of the B’nai B’rith Women’s Auxiliary (Spinoza Auxiliary No. 155), 1935–1939.

Received from Temple Beth El, Jefferson City, MO

Temple Beth Tikvah (Regina, Saskatchewan)

Minute books, constitution, and legal records; photographs; and material pertaining to weekly services and special events, 1987–2012.

Received from Sharon Eisbrenner, Regina, Saskatchewan
Acquisitions

**Temple B’nai Abraham (Livingston, NJ)**

Records of Temple B’nai Abraham, including sermons of Rabbi Barry Friedman and correspondence of Rabbi Clifford Kulwin, 1968–2015.

*Received from Clifford M. Kulwin, Livingston, NJ*

**Temple Concord (Binghamton, NY)**


*Received from Barbara Thomas, Binghamton, NY*

**Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom (Montreal, Quebec)**

Video history of Temple Emanuel-El-Beth Sholom, 2016.

*Received from Rabbi Leigh Lerner, Montreal, Quebec*

**Union for Reform Judaism**

Files of the URJ Department of Synagogue Management, including notes from visits to congregations throughout North America, including board trainings, staff seminars, and congregational planning sessions; and material from URJ Biennials, Scheidt Seminars for Congregational Presidents and Presidents-Elect, and Joint Commission on Synagogue Management meetings, 1980–2015.

*Received from Dale Glasser, New York, NY*

**Union for Reform Judaism, Southwest Council**


*Received from Brian Zimmerman, Ft. Worth, TX*

**United Order of True Sisters (Brooklyn, NY)**


*Received from Enid Miller and Sue Brody, Brooklyn, NY*

**Warshal, Bruce S.**


*Received from Bruce S. Warshal, Hillsboro Beach, FL*
**Weinberg, Werner**

Personal papers of Professor Weinberg, including correspondence, notes, and writing, 1983–1996.

*Received from Monika Preuss, Heidelberg, Germany*

**Weston, Alice F.**


*Received from Alice F. Weston, Cincinnati, OH*

**Zelizer, Gerald L.**


*Received from Gerald L. Zelizer, Metuchen, NJ*

**Zoberman, Israel**


*Received from Israel Zoberman, Virginia Beach, VA*

**Zola, Gary P.**

D’var Torah by Rabbi Gary P. Zola given at Temple Sholom (Cincinnati, OH) for Yom Kippur 5773 (26 September 2012); together with “Eulogistic Remarks” delivered at memorial service for Edward Meyer Ackerman, 5 October 2016.

*Received from Gary P. Zola, Cincinnati, OH*
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives welcomes the following seventeen scholars as 2017–2018 Fellows to the Barrows-Loebelson Family Reading Room located on the historic Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion.

Jonathan D. Awtrey
Louisiana State University
The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Fellowship
Jews and the Unfolding of Religious Freedom in Early Pennsylvania

Joseph Block
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
The Marguerite R. Jacobs Memorial Fellowship
The Intellectual Origins of African American-Jewish Relations, 1827–1925

Jamie Downing, PhD
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Fellowship
Fear and Self-Loathing in the Catskills: Jewish Humor and Carnivalesque

Nicole Freeman
Ohio State University
The Marguerite R. Jacobs Memorial Fellowship
Rehabilitation, Care, and Education of Jewish Children in Post-WWII Germany and Poland

Alan Levenson, PhD
University of Oklahoma
The Starkoff Fellowship
The Last Belletrist: Maurice Samuel, 1895–1972
Einat Libel-Hass, PhD
Ashkelon College
The American Council for Judaism Fellowship
The Roots of the Israeli Reform Movement

Claire Maligot
École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris
The Rabbi Ferdinand Isserman Memorial Fellowship
An American Jewish History of Interfaith Relations at the Time of Vatican II

W. Raymond Palmer
Independent Scholar
The Loewenstein-Wiener Fellowship
The World Jewish Congress-London and the Holocaust, 1936–1948

Sarah Patterson
Florida State University
The Rabbi Harold D. Hahn Memorial Fellowship
The Few, the Proud: Gender and the Marine Corps Body

Immanuel Clemens Schmidt
Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig University
The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Fellowship
Protestant Canon and Jewish Experience: Political Philosophy of Religion and Literary Thought in Horace Kallen’s Conception of Cultural Pluralism

Haim Sperber, PhD
Western Galilee College
The Loewenstein-Wiener Fellowship
Agunot in America, 1857–1914

Robert Tabak, PhD
Independent Scholar
The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Fellowship
American Jewish Student Experience in Israel, 1967–1973: A First Person Encounter
David Tal, PhD
University of Sussex
The American Council for Judaism Fellowship
The Making of the US-Israel Special Relationship

Nina Valbousquet, PhD
New York University
The Herbert R. Bloch Jr. Memorial Fellowship
American Jews and Catholic Antisemitism: A Transatlantic Perspective, 1914–1950s

Dimitrios Varvaritis, PhD
Wiener Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, Vienna
The Loewenstein-Wiener Fellowship
Antisemitism, Greek Jewry, and the World Jewish Congress, 1944–1949

Kerstin von der Krone, PhD
German Historical Institute, Washington, DC
The Joseph and Eva R. Dave Fellowship
Educating the ‘Modern’ Jew and the ‘Loyal’ Citizen: Redefining Jewish Religious Education in the Nineteenth Century

Aaron Welt
New York University
The Loewenstein-Wiener Fellowship
The Shtarkers of Progressive-Era New York
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Temple Shalom, Louisville, KY
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Bet Shalom Congregation, Minnetonka, MN
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Temple Jeremiah, Northfield, IL
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Temple Sholom, Chicago, IL
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Temple Israel, Boston, MA
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Congregation of Temple Sinai, South Burlington, VT
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Temple Bet Yam, St. Augustine, FL  
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Congregation Sukkat Shalom, Wilmette, IL  
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Temple Chai, Long Grove, IL  
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Temple Israel, West Lafayette, IN  
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Temple Beth Torah, Ventura, CA  
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Xavier University, Cincinnati, OH  
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Warren, NJ  
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Rabbi Daniel Levin  
Temple Beth El, Boca Raton, FL  
Rabbi John Linder  
Temple Solel, Paradise Valley, AZ  
Rabbi David Locketz  
Bet Shalom Congregation, Minnetonka, MN  
Rabbi Ari Lorge  
Central Synagogue, New York, NY  
Rabbi Steven Lowenstein  
Am Sholom, Glencoe, IL  
Rabbi Bruce Lustig  
Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, DC  
Rabbi Devorah Marcus  
Temple Emanu-El, San Diego, CA  
Rabbi Steven S. Mason  
North Shore Congregation Israel, Glencoe, IL  
Rabbi Bernard H. Mehlman  
Temple Israel, Senior Scholar, Boston, MA  
Rabbi David J. Meyer  
Temple Emanu-El, Marblehead, MA  
Rabbi Stanley R. Miles  
Temple Shalom, Louisville, KY  
Rabbi Evan Moffic  
Congregation Solel, Highland Park, IL  
Rabbi Jay H. Moses  
Director, Wexner Heritage Program, Columbus, OH  
Rabbi Michael L. Moskowitz  
Temple Shir Shalom, West Bloomfield, MI  
Rabbi Randi Musnitsky  
Temple Har Shalom, Warren, NJ  
Rabbi Howard Needleman  
Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El, Plantation, FL  
Rabbi Geri Newburge  
Temple Beth Elohim, Wynnewood, PA  
Rabbi Jordan Ottenstein  
Congregation Dor Tamid, Johns Creek, GA  
Rabbi Stephen S. Pearce  
Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco, CA  
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Southside, AL  
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Temple Shir Shalom, West Bloomfield, MI
Rabbi Joshua L. Segal
Bennington, NH
Rabbi Jeffrey M. Segall
Rockville, MD
Rabbi Isaac D. Serotta
Lakeside Congregation for Reformed Judaism,
Highland Park, IL
Rabbi Mark S. Shapiro
Congregation B’nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim,
Deerfield, IL
Rabbi Benjamin A. Sharff
The Reform Temple of Rockland,
Upper Nyack, NY
Rabbi Scott L. Shpeen
Congregation Beth Emeth, Albany, NY
Cantor Wayne S. Siet
Temple Shaari Emeth Manalapan, NJ
Rabbi James L. Simon
Temple Israel, Tulsa, OK
Rabbi Jonathan L. Singer
Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco, CA
Rabbi Jeffrey J. Sirkman
Larchmont Temple, Larchmont, NY
Rabbi Rievan W. Slavkin
Dix Hills, NY
Rabbi Donald M. Splansky
Framingham, MA
Cantor Howard M. Stahl
Temple B’nai Jeshurun, Short Hills, NJ
Rabbi Jonathan A. Stein
San Diego, CA
Rabbi Richard M. Steinberg
Congregation Shir Ha-Ma’alot, Irvine, CA
Rabbi Andrea C. Steinberger
UW-Madison Hillel, Madison, WI
Rabbi David E. Straus
Main Line Reform Temple, Wynnewood, PA
Rabbi Lance J. Sussman
Reform Congregation Kneseth Israel,
Elkins Park, PA
Rabbi Susan A. Talve
Central Reform Congregation, St. Louis, MO
Rabbi Miriam P. Terlinchamp
Temple Sholom, Cincinnati, OH
Rabbi Karen Thomashow
Isaac M. Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH
Rabbi Gerry H. Walter
Blue Ash, OH
Rabbi Michael A. Weinberg
Temple Beth Israel, Skokie, IL
Rabbi Max W. Weiss
Oak Park Temple, Oak Park, IL
Rabbi Jeffrey S. Wildstein
Temple Beth David, Westwood, MA
Rabbi Hanna G. Yerushalmi
Arnold, MD
Rabbi Benjamin J. Zeidman
Temple Mount Sinai, El Paso, TX
Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel
Temple Micah, Washington, DC
Rabbi Irwin A. Zeplowitz
The Community Synagogue,
Port Washington, NY
Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman
Plano, TX
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