

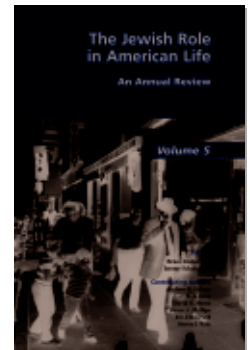


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An Annual Review

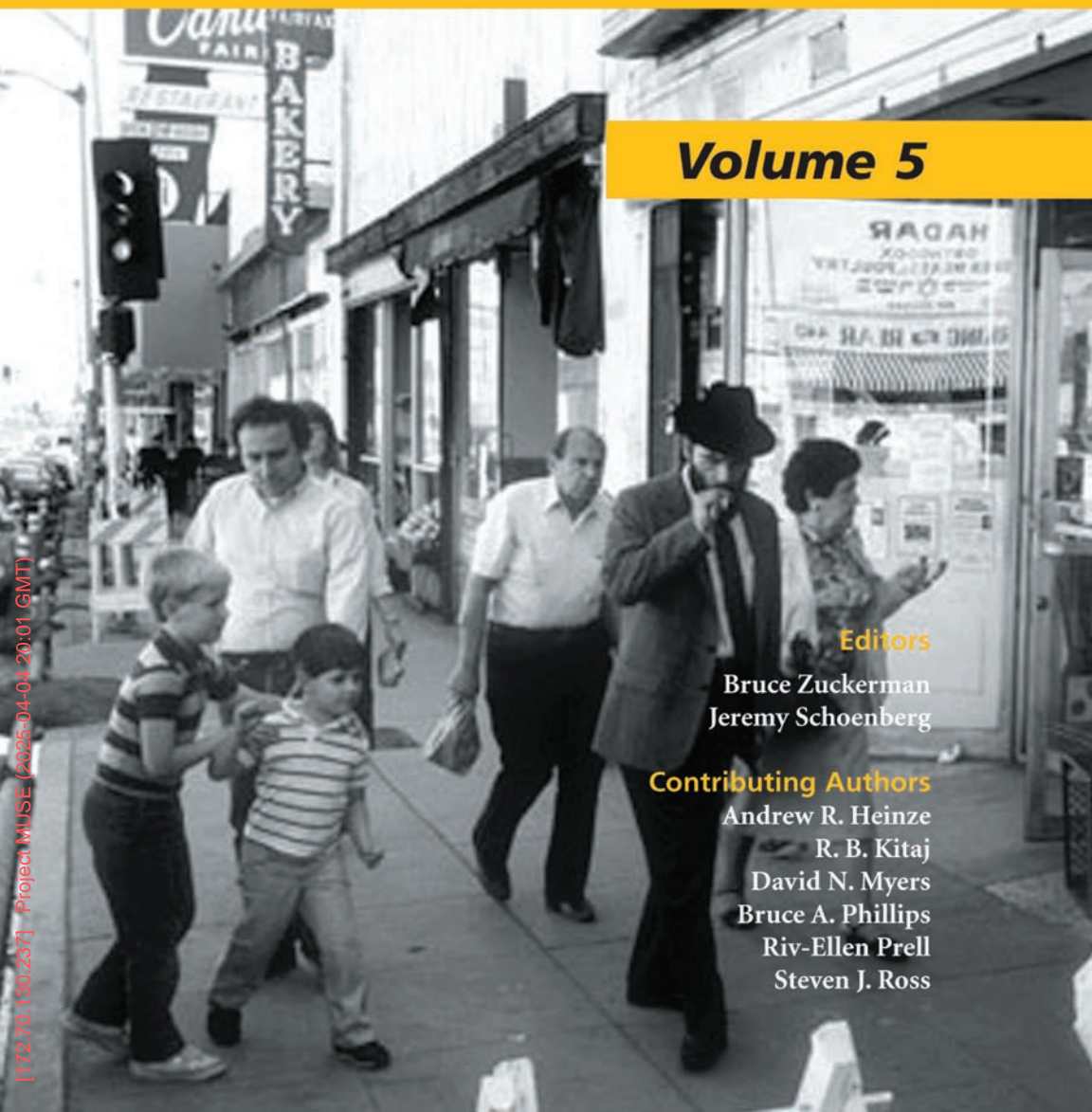
Volume 5

Editors

Bruce Zuckerman
Jeremy Schoenberg

Contributing Authors

Andrew R. Heinze
R. B. Kitaj
David N. Myers
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Jewish Role in American Life

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Finally, we must thank Barry Glassner, who just stepped down in 2005 as the Myron and Marian Casden Director of the Casden Institute in order to become Executive Vice Provost of USC. We wish to acknowledge the excellent leadership he has given the Casden Institute since its inception. Professor Glassner was instrumental in bringing together the essays that form Volume 5 of our annual review. To a great extent this volume reflects his academic judgment and vision, as have the four previous installments. We, who have the challenge of continuing to build the Casden Institute, therefore wish to dedicate this volume to him.

Bruce Zuckerman, *Myron and Marian Casden Director*

Jeremy Schoenberg, *Assistant Director*

Introduction

By Bruce Zuckerman and Jeremy Schoenberg

The recent retirement of Sally J. Priesand, the first ordained woman rabbi in the United States, serves as a reminder of the number of remarkable accomplishments that have occurred in American Judaism during the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. The relationship between Jews and the U.S.A. is necessarily complex: Jews have been instrumental in shaping American culture and, of course, Jewish culture and religion have likewise been profoundly recast in the United States, especially in the period following World War II. A major focus of the Casden Institute—as its full name explicitly emphasizes—is to consider the Jewish role in American life. Naturally, the “flip-side” of this concern must also be considered: the American role in shaping Jewish life.

This fifth volume of the Casden Institute’s annual review continues our investigation of how Jewish culture helped shape modern America and vice versa. Organized along five broad themes—politics, values, image, education and culture—the 2006 edition of the *Jewish Role in American Life* spotlights what we believe to be a rich sampling of thought-provoking and under-examined issues.

Going right to the heart of Los Angeles, the volume begins with a look at the city’s most iconic industry—Hollywood—and how some of its most prominent stars and producers, many of them Jewish, struggled against government, colleagues and public opinion to alert the nation to the dangers of Hitler and Nazi Germany. USC historian Steven J. Ross, an expert on Hollywood’s emergence as a major player in American politics, digs underneath the industry’s “Golden Age” to shed light on a time when box-office profits often outweighed principles, and when moral indignation was met with isolationism and anti-Semitism. But despite hate mail and government investigations, stars such as Edward G. Robinson and Melvyn Douglas put values ahead of popularity in their efforts to counter fascist propaganda at home and abroad. In the face of industry sensors and Nazi threats, Harry and Jack Warner put a spotlight on their anti-Nazi message with the film *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*. Hollywood ultimately played an important role in shaping public opinion about fascism as well as Jews, but circumstances also linked anti-fascism with Communism, which ultimately led to the destruction of many Hollywood careers after the war.

In the next essay, historian and Jewish Studies scholar Andrew R. Heinze carries forward the theme of Jews bringing about change in American thought, but instead of popular culture, he examines academic culture, specifically the Humanities as studied, taught and presented in American colleges and universities. He begins by asking whether the disproportionate number of Jews teaching in the Humanities since WWII have brought a particularly Jewish perspective to the critical analysis of literature,

philosophy and culture. He then proceeds to make the case that indeed they have. Though the Humanities milieu—especially before the Second World War—was traditionally Protestant and often inclined toward being anti-Semitic, America’s essentially egalitarian nature allowed Jews to participate in opening up literary and cultural interpretation to a broad variety of approaches. In offering an overview of the esoteric field of postwar literary criticism and highlighting the work of three particularly prominent Jewish figures—Erich Auerbach, Harold Bloom and Leo Strauss—Heinze explains how Jewish thinkers have helped to “de-Christianize the public square” and infuse the Humanities with an appreciation of the importance of Jewish and Hebraic texts alongside the more traditional Christian canon.

We then turn from the world of intellectuals to one intellectual in particular, R. B. Kitaj, one of the world’s most well-known living easel painters, as we delve beneath the surface of his paintings to catch a glimpse of his life as a Jewish artist, the Jewish writers and thinkers who have influenced him, and his own fascination with the Jewish people. The first part of this chapter, in fact, is Kitaj’s prepared lecture—unedited—that he delivered in a rare talk for the Casden Institute’s Jerome Nemer Lecture Series in 2004. Kitaj was born in Ohio and eventually settled in London, where he became a leading figure among the artists known as “The School of London.” But after the sudden death of his second wife, artist Sandra Fisher (pictured at the beginning of the chapter), as well as being “attacked” by critics upon a major retrospective of his work at the Tate Gallery, he relocated to Los Angeles in 1997. In this sometimes blunt and sometimes nuanced and poetic essay, Kitaj describes how the “Jewish Question” is central to his life and art, a fact which alienates him from much of the art world; and he further laments the lack of great Jewish painters in history, as opposed to many more important Jewish intellectuals. But he also muses, “Violent opposition tells me I might be doing something right in art.”

Just as was the case for the 2004 Nemer Lecture, R. B. Kitaj’s self-exploration is complemented here by some context and further analysis from his good friend David N. Myers, Professor of History and Director of the UCLA Center for Jewish Studies. In his response to Kitaj’s essay, Myers delves further into Kitaj, the Jewish intellectual, and the “Jewishness” of Kitaj’s “textualism,” referring not only to the texts and ideas that shape his art, but also to Kitaj’s practice of putting those ideas front and center with his own commentaries appearing next to his paintings, something that further alienates him from some of the art world. He explains that Kitaj’s Jewish art is not concerned with people-hood but rather alienation—that of a Jew in a non-Jewish world and an artist with “Jew-on-the-brain.”

The next chapter, in contrast, concerns itself precisely with people-hood. Anthropologist Riv-Ellen Prell shares her research on how Jewish leaders and educators in the mid twentieth century went about shaping a new generation of Jews by sending them to that quintessential rite of passage for American youth: the summer camp. From the ordination of women to the creation of Jewish Studies as an academic disci-

pline, Prell brings to light the profound effect that Jewish summer camping has had on American Judaism in the latter half of the twentieth century. Fearing that suburbanization would equal complete assimilation and that the parents of Baby Boomers were ill equipped to give their children a proper Jewish education, denominations and communal organizations founded numerous summer camps to create a “redeemer generation”; and while each camp reflected the particular values of its founders, they all “took as their mission to make Judaism, Jewish life and/or Zionism a ‘normal’ and integrated part of American life for children.” By emphasizing personal experience and incorporating Jewish learning and observance (or Zionism) into sports, crafts, art, music, drama, social activities, and daily life in general, summer camping has transformed American Jewish culture in ways that are still unfolding today. Prell thus reveals to us a Jewish story with a distinct American accent.

Returning to the Casden Institute’s particular focus on the West, the last chapter features the work of sociologist Bruce A. Phillips, a leading expert on American Jewish demography. In this look at his innovative research on Los Angeles, he challenges old assumptions and offers new insight into how to demarcate the area’s various Jewish communities, how they differ from one another, and how they are evolving. He explains that traditional urban models simply do not apply. Dividing Los Angeles into seven “socio-ecologies”—areas of residence defined by both geography and social distinctions—and using data from a variety of population surveys, Phillips demonstrates that conventional wisdom about Jewish population growth does not always hold. For example, even though LA’s West Valley is considered the “new Jewish hot-spot” and Jewish institutions in that area are rising quickly, it has not seen significantly more Jewish population growth than the region as a whole, while other less obviously Jewish areas have shown upsurges in Jewish population. In fact, Santa Clarita is surpassing the West Valley in the percentage of Jewish households with young children. From age and affluence to synagogue membership, Phillips analyzes a number of factors that not only point to the emerging Jewish areas to watch, but also make abundantly clear that, at least in Los Angeles, suburbanization does not easily equate with assimilation.

In many ways, these five essays tie into the Casden Institute’s activities over the last couple of years. For example, in 2004 the Institute awarded Steven Ross its annual USC faculty research grant for the work he discusses in this volume and which will be part of his forthcoming book, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics*. Past recipients include art historian John Bowlt and legal scholar Nomi Stolzenberg, whose work on émigré Russian artists and custodial issues for interfaith divorces, respectively, appeared in previous volumes. More recently, the Institute supported a project by film-scoring professor David Spear, who guided his graduate students in the creation of a new and wonderful score for the restored Yiddish American silent film *Hungry Hearts*, which will be screened at USC in Fall 2006. The current grant recipient is religion scholar Donald Miller, Director of the USC Center for Religion and

Civic Culture, who is studying the American Jewish community's phenomenal activism regarding the genocide in Darfur. The Institute has also supported the research of graduate and postdoctoral fellows, including sociologist Tobin Belzer, whose article on Jewish "GenXers" with Jewish jobs appeared in last year's publication.

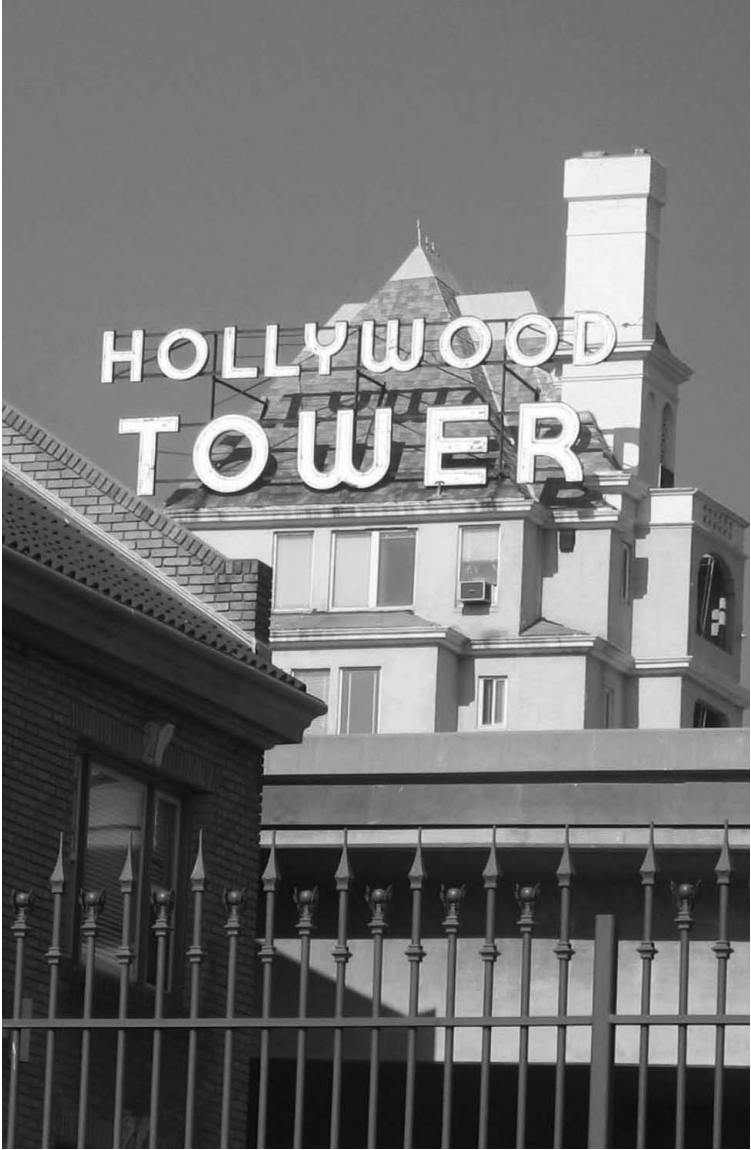
These chapters converge with the Casden Institute's public events, as well. In addition to R. B. Kitaj's rare appearance at USC in 2004, Andrew Heinze is preparing to come to USC for the 2006 Jerome Nemer Lecture, in which he will discuss Jews and the age of psychology. Steven Ross' interest in Jews and politics fits with the theme of another institute event, the Carmen and Louis Warschaw Distinguished Lecture Series, which invites prominent Jewish politicians—including Henry Waxman, Barbara Boxer, Norm Coleman, Howard Berman, Barney Frank, Joseph Lieberman and Dianne Feinstein—to consider how their religious and cultural backgrounds affect their political lives.

In celebration of USC's 125th anniversary, the Casden Institute hosted a program in September 2005 exploring the beginnings of Los Angeles' Jewish community, which has of course grown into the diverse and complex population described in this volume by Bruce Phillips. Isaias W. Hellman, a Jew who was one of three men to donate that land for the founding of USC, came to Southern California in 1859, saw the region's potential, and rose to become one of the Pacific Coast's leading financiers. Hellman's great-great-granddaughter, Frances Dinkelspiel, spoke to a sold-out audience about her research into Hellman's life and the early history of Jews in Los Angeles to a standing-room-only crowd. We plan to make the Jewish role in California—with special emphasis on Southern California—a particular scholarly project of the Casden Institute in the coming academic year and further expect to share the results of this project in future pages of this annual review.

One aspect of the Casden Institute's mission is to link the academy with the community by working with a number of outside organizations, and this past year saw one of our strongest partnerships to date. The Institute joined forces with the National Foundation for Jewish Culture to host three film screenings (we are in Los Angeles, after all) and corresponding lectures as part of the NFJC's American Jewish Icons national lecture series. Exploring Los Angeles' historically Jewish Fairfax area, which Bruce Phillips discusses in his essay, the first event brought Faye Ginsburg from New York University to "unpack" *In Her Own Time*, the award-winning documentary about the final field work of late USC anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff. A few months later, USC documentary scholar Michael Renov dissected the "Jewishness" in Alan Berliner's *Nobody's Business*, in which Berliner persistently nudges his father to open up about his life and family. Finally, American University's Pamela Nadell showed us how the Barbara Streisand film *Yentl* resonated with a generation of American Jews struggling over the right of women to become clergy and lay leaders, a generation and a struggle surely shaped by the camping experiences described by Riv-Ellen Prell. It was indeed a year of film for the Casden Institute, as we again co-sponsored the annual International Jewish Student Film Festival at USC, about to go into its seventh year.

The Jewish relationship to American life is of course far too expansive for this volume to address as a whole. What we show here instead are some of the more interesting and intriguing parts of the complex puzzle that defines the role of Jews in America. It is perhaps enough that each piece in itself is fascinating and gives the reader a new insight into American Jews, but as one reads the following essays, it is particularly striking how each chapter, seemingly so unique, informs and reflects the others. One might not imagine that a Jewish artist has faced the same intellectual obstacles as Jewish scholars in the Humanities, or that fears about suburbanization and assimilation discussed in a paper on summer camping are addressed in a paper about demography, or that the interdisciplinary field of Jewish Studies can be traced not only to Jewish scholars who helped open up academic discourse, but also to Jewish summer camps that inspired a whole new generation of scholars and religious leaders.

While this annual review could hardly attempt to provide any grand answers or visions nor can it address every important question, it invites the reader to sample the rich and varied dimensions of “Jewishness” and Jewish involvement in the U.S. and to consider relationships and intersections that might not otherwise be so obvious. Jews and America have a reciprocal relationship, as this volume of our annual review well documents. The reflections and refractions to be seen in the offerings of Volume 5 well exemplify the kaleidoscope of Jewish life in its multifaceted role in American culture.



CHAPTER ONE

Politics

The Politicization of Hollywood
before World War II:
Anti-Fascism, Anti-Communism,
and Anti-Semitism

By Steven J. Ross

Hitler. There is no need for a first name or a further point of reference. The name has become synonymous with evil. But that was not always the case. Americans today like to talk nostalgically about World War II as the “Good War,” a war where the forces of “good” and “evil” were easy to identify. Self-affirming films such as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and *The Thin Red Line* (1998) remind audiences of the horrors of that war, but, as they watch these images of the past flash across the silver screen, today’s moviegoers never question the wisdom of American involvement in WWII. In the mid 1930s, however, the real horror for politically engaged citizens was how few people wanted to hear about the lurking dangers of Nazism. Whatever we might wish to think today, during the 1930s the vast majority of Americans preferred to turn a blind eye to evil outside their borders; indeed, ninety-five percent of those polled in November, 1936, opposed U.S. participation in any European conflict (Gallup and Robinson 388).

There was one place, however, where Hitler and his allies were met with marked resistance: Hollywood. On December 9, 1938, two months after European leaders signed the infamous Munich Pact, allowing Hitler to annex part of Czechoslovakia,

fifty-six Hollywood stars, directors, writers and studio heads—including James Cagney, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Melvyn Douglas, and Jack and Harry Warner—met at Edward G. Robinson's home and signed a "Declaration of Democratic Independence" that called upon Congress to boycott all German products until Adolf Hitler agreed to stop persecuting Jews and other minorities. Four months later, on April 9, 1939, Harry and Jack Warner premiered *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, the first American film to dramatize the Nazi threat to America.

It would be heartening to think that Americans were awakened by the daring pronouncements of their favorite stars. But that was not the case. While some applauded these actions, others accused anti-fascist movie figures of being ungrateful Jews and godless Communists. Several days after signing the "Declaration of Democratic Independence," Edward G. Robinson was flooded with vitriolic letters reproaching him for joining "with the international Jewish faction to aid the Communists in destroying democracy and setting up a Soviet in the United States" (Stauder). The Warner brothers received equally vicious responses to the opening of their film. J. P. Thompson of St. Louis denounced *Confessions* as "gross Jewish propaganda" and told the brothers their movie "will have more people hating the Jew because a Jew produced it to show his hatred" (Thompson). Some people did more than just complain. Nazi sympathizers in Milwaukee burned down the local Warner Brothers' theater shortly after the movie opened, while angry crowds in other cities picketed movie houses, slashed seats, and threatened exhibitors (Birdwell 76–77).

Film scholars often refer to the 1930s as the "Golden Age of Hollywood," a time when films were at their lavish best. But the 1930s were also the Golden Age of Hollywood *politics*, the decade when movies and movie stars emerged as a major force in the nation's political life. Movie stars used their celebrity to bring attention to the dangers posed by fascists abroad and by the Nazi sympathizers known as Brown Shirts and Silver Shirts at home. Likewise, a handful of politically engaged producers sought to reach millions of people by making anti-fascist films such as *Blockade* (1938), the aforementioned *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), *The Great Dictator* (1940), and *Underground* (1941). Both groups quickly discovered that anti-fascist activities elicited anti-Semitic and anti-Communist reactions from fans, censors, and government officials. In the pre-World War II period, not everyone thought Hitler was such a bad guy. As late as January, 1939, the Production Code Administration (PCA), the movie industry's self-censorship board, attempted to halt production of *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, explaining that to "represent Hitler only as a screaming madman and a bloodthirsty persecutor, and nothing else, is manifestly unfair, considering his phenomenal public career, his unchallenged political and social achievements, and his position as head of the most important continental European power" (Lischka).

This article examines the politicization of Hollywood during the 1930s and the ways in which stars and producers fought fascism on and off the screen. It was during this era that the myth of "liberal" Hollywood was born—a myth, as we will see, that was

partially true and partially false. What stands today as a seeming example of democratic courage against Nazism and fascism was then seen by many government leaders as actions so dangerous that they prompted the Senate to launch an investigation of “Propaganda in the Motion Pictures” in September, 1941. And these “un-American activities” and activists did not go away in the post-War period. The repeated association of anti-fascist activities with Communism by anti-Communist and anti-Semitic politicians and citizens continued well after the war and would dampen liberal and radical Hollywood activism for decades to come.

THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF HOLLYWOOD

From the opening of the first nickelodeon in 1905, motion pictures did more than simply entertain audiences. Political and civic leaders understood that movies were a new medium of political communication that bypassed traditional authorities and spoke directly to millions of Americans. Local elites realized that audiences were also voters, and they feared that movies might sway the minds of millions of citizens in ways they did not approve.

In the years before the coming of sound, it was the medium, not its stars, that had the greatest political impact on American life. Silent filmmakers addressed the most contentious political issues of the day—class conflict, child labor, women’s rights, birth control, rampant poverty, judicial corruption—and offered viewers solutions to social, political and economic ills. The inexpensive cost of making these early one or two-reel films allowed groups on the left, center, and right of the political spectrum—the American Federation of Labor, the Russell Sage Foundation, the National Association of Manufacturers, for example—to join more commercially oriented companies in producing films aimed at influencing mass opinion.¹

Although organizations and individual filmmakers used movies to promote their ideological agendas, movie stars maintained a low political profile during these early years, in part because they were more focused on their careers than on their political commitments. Of course, there were some exceptions. A handful of actors, such as Viola Barry and Francis X. Conlan, openly proclaimed their socialist loyalties. Comedienne Mabel Norman did more than just talk. In the spring of 1913, she visited scores of nickelodeons in Los Angeles, campaigning for the Socialist ticket and speaking out on behalf of woman’s suffrage (*Los Angeles Citizen*, April 18, 1913; Normand 102).² These exceptions aside, few actors said much about the specific political issues of the day.

The first systematic efforts to enlist stars for explicitly political purposes were made by the federal government during World War I. Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo understood the power movie stars held over the public imagination and reasoned that, if star power could be used to sell movie tickets, it could also be used to sell war bonds. Convinced that movie stars would “attract large audiences and arouse a great amount of enthusiasm and patriotism,” McAdoo called on the nation’s preeminent screen idols—Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and William S.

Hart—to tour the nation hawking war bonds to movie-mad citizens (*New York Exhibitors Herald*, March 16, 1918). Prior to the war, explained Harry Crocker, Chaplin's one-time assistant, "Hollywood stars had maintained a strict silence on the subject of religion, politics or civic subjects." The stars feared "that if an actor took sides in any matter, he was bound to alienate a portion of his public. And that was bad, as [theater magnate] Sid Grauman would have said, 'for the old box officeroo.'" But selling Liberty Bonds, they decided, was an exception, "and that task they accomplished with gusto" (Crocker 15; ch. 14). Indeed, McAdoo's expectations proved correct. The four screen idols were repeatedly mobbed by throngs of upwards of 100,000 movie-crazed people and sold as much as \$1 million in war bonds in a single day.³ Such pronounced success would, ironically, heighten government fears in subsequent decades: if stars could sell Treasury bonds with such effectiveness, why not political ideas or causes?

During the 1920s, movie stars—especially those with theatrical ties—began to involve themselves in presidential campaigns. Al Jolson organized Broadway stars to work on behalf of Republican candidates Warren Harding in 1920 and Calvin Coolidge in 1924. In 1928, Claudette Colbert, Walter Huston, Frank Morgan, and a number of other stars, directors, and producers joined the Hoover-Curtis Theatrical League and campaigned for the Republican hopefuls. That same year, New York stage and screen stars Fanny Brice, Eddie Cantor, Helen Hayes, George Jessel, and Ed Wynn promoted the Democratic cause by organizing "Stars for [Al] Smith" (Cantor; Slayton). Yet, while celebrities happily endorsed their favorite candidates, few spoke out on controversial issues or involved themselves in political life in any substantial way. Most stars, observed screenwriter Anita Loos, were too busy trying to get their careers launched to pay much attention to politics. "It was every man for himself in those days, too" (Loos 36).

The increased participation of stars in political campaigns, however tangential, elicited worried reactions from conservatives who feared the potential uses of the new medium and its icons on behalf of left-wing causes. In 1922, three years after the Third International (a worldwide body of Communists) declared world revolution as its goal, R. M. Whitney, director of the conservative American Defense Society, reported that the "Communist party of America was quick to see the excellence of the stage and the screen as mediums through which Communist propaganda could be fed to the public without contravention of the laws." Given access to FBI files of suspected Communist sympathizers such as Charlie Chaplin, Will Rogers, and Norma Talmadge, Whitney warned that many "prominent 'movie favorites,' men and women, as well as stars of the legitimate stage are involved, knowingly or unknowingly, in this plan to sow the seed of Communism through entertainment for the public" (Whitney 141).

Celebrity attitudes toward politics changed in the 1930s as the devastating effects of the Great Depression, the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the rapid spread of fascism in Europe politicized millions of Americans and generated an unprecedented era of Hollywood activism. Los Angeles was not always a bastion of liberalism—certainly not in the years before FDR. As California's one-time Attorney General Robert W.

Kenny remarked, “For all practical purposes, in the year 1930 there was no Democratic Party in California.” In 1931, there were four Democrats and thirty-six Republicans in the state Senate, and three Democrats and seventy-seven Republicans in the Assembly (Kenney 82). The appearance of a charismatic new President, who brought a dramatic flair to politics, proved especially important in inspiring previously complacent movie industry personnel. Roosevelt, explained Edward G. Robinson, made politics “no longer merely a politician’s ‘job’—he made it the concern of every human being . . . and in doing so he left the artist with no excuse to remain aloof from it” (Robinson).

As conditions at home and abroad worsened, movie stars began to question their responsibility as citizens to stand up for ideas they believed in and against forces they felt threatened democracy at home and abroad. And few issues raised as much concern as events in Nazi Germany and fascist Spain. Given the large numbers of Jewish movie industry personnel, European émigrés, liberals, and radicals that populated Hollywood in the 1930s, it is not surprising that anti-fascism emerged as the focal point of political action. Of the 1,500 film professionals who fled Germany after 1933 and Austria after 1938, over one half settled in Hollywood—and told their stories of Hitler’s horrors to anyone who would listen. They reminded their industry colleagues of how the Nazi regime restricted the rights of Jews in 1933, barring them from employment, ownership of businesses, and enrollment in universities; how the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 officially classified Jews as an inferior race; and how the climate of hatred climaxed in 1938 with Kristallnacht—when Jewish businesses and synagogues were looted, vandalized and burned down by German mobs. Fears of anti-Semitic persecution were further compounded by the spread of fascism in Mussolini’s Italy and the outbreak of civil war in Franco’s Spain in 1936.⁴

The intersection of so many pressing issues, observed Leo Rosten, who spent nearly four years conducting a sociological study of the inner workings of Hollywood (1937–1940), soon led many stars to abandon the idea perpetuated by “managers, press agents and producers, that the actor or actress must remain a kind of a romantic, glamour idol or symbol, who never gets into the kinds of things which would lose him or her the esteem of the fans” or “alienate the Democrats or the Republicans” who went to the movies (Rosten, *Oral History* 46, 47). Movie stars who had previously shied away from the political spotlight—Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, Gene Kelley, Katharine Hepburn—now entered the political arena.

Actor Melvyn Douglas, a Jew, recounted the process of politicization that he and his wife, actress and future Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas, underwent during a European visit in 1936:

I had come back from Europe in 1936, and had become very much aware of and concerned about what seemed to me to be the encroaching sympathy for the whole Hitler movement that I encountered in France and other places. On the boat on the way home, I sat at the Captain’s table and heard middlewestern business-

men talking about this very efficient guy that was running things in Germany, and how it was too damn bad that we didn't have somebody like that in this country rather than that cripple in the White House, etc. etc. I was so shocked and so concerned by the whole experience—as was Mrs. Douglas when she came back later on from a singing trip in Europe—that we began to feel it was necessary for anyone who thought he sensed what was happening in Europe to talk about it, to do something about it if possible. (Douglas 24–25)

Not everyone in the world's movie capital was frightened by the growing power of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco. "There were people in Hollywood who supported their views," explained Eddie Robinson. "Oh, the thoughts went, 'Hitler will forget the anti-Semitism; it's only a passing phase. And he will stop the spread of Communism'" (Robinson with Spiegelgass 162–63). A deeply concerned Paulette Goddard, Charlie Chaplin's co-star in *Modern Times*, told one reporter in October, 1936, that many Hollywood figures were "falling easy victims to fascism" which was "fast outdistancing Communism in the film colony" (*New York Times*, Oct. 18, 1936). Indeed, one of the most outspoken conservative stars was "America's Sweetheart," Mary Pickford. A long-time admirer of *Il Duce*, Pickford cheerily noted in March 1934, "Italy has always produced great men and when she needed one most Mussolini was there. Viva Fascismo! Viva Il Duce!" Three years later, after touring Europe, she lavished equal praise on Adolf Hitler, remarking to one reporter that he "seems to be a very great fellow, too, for the German people. Things look much better over there" (*New York Times*, March 24, 1934; *New York World Telegram*, May 3, 1937).⁵

In addition to combating nationwide isolationist sentiments, Hollywood activists found themselves battling fascists in their own backyard. Pro-Nazi groups such as the German-American Bund and the American Nationalist Party (ANP) joined with other local fascist organizations in stirring up anti-Semitic hatred and accusing Hollywood activists of being Communists. Calling on loyal "Christian Vigilantes" to boycott movie industry filth, one ANP poster proclaimed, "Hollywood is the Sodom and Gomorrha [sic] where International Jewry controls Vice-Dope-Gambling—where young Gentile girls are raped by Jewish producers, directors, casting directors who go unpunished."⁶ Anti-Semitic religious leaders, such as the fiery fundamentalist preacher Dr. Gerald B. Winrod, known as "the Kansas Hitler," were invited by popular local figures like Aimee Semple McPherson to deliver sermons to local congregants (*Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 17, 1938).

While a few stars praised the leadership of Hitler and Mussolini, fears of fascism and Nazism led a far greater number of Hollywood liberals, Communists, and some conservative Republicans to fight on two fronts: some battled fascism off the screen, while others preferred to wage their battles directly on the screen. Those pursuing the former course organized a wide range of progressive Popular Front groups—among them, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, the Motion Picture Artists Committee to Aid

Republican Spain, and the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee—dedicated to fighting fascism abroad and at home. “No other cause so gripped Hollywood during the 1930s,” observed one newspaper reporter (Brownstein 60).⁷

Angelinos were exposed to anti-Nazi activities as early as February, 1934, when Samuel Untermyer, head of the New York-based Anti-Nazi League, came to speak about the dangers of Nazi Germany; a Los Angeles-based Anti-Nazi League was operating in the city by August, 1935 (*Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 21, 1934; Aug. 29, 1935). However, it was not until movie stars got involved in April 1936 (the same time that civil war was breaking out in Spain) that the organization, soon renamed the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League (HANL), began attracting mass attention. Far from being a dilettante celebrity group, the HANL marked the beginning of a new kind of issue-oriented politics that used the power of movie stars to raise public awareness about the dangers posed by Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco. Led by actors and actresses such as Melvyn Douglas, Frederick March, Paul Muni, Sylvia Sidney, Eddie Cantor, and Gloria Stuart, the anti-fascist organization mounted frequent demonstrations and rallies, held talks on topics such as “Hitlerism in America,” sponsored two weekly radio shows that publicized fascist activities at home and abroad, published its own biweekly newspaper, called for boycotts of German and Japanese products, and blockaded meetings of the Los Angeles German-American Bund. Bolstered by its celebrity presence, HANL membership soon swelled to over 4,000 (*Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 7, 1937).⁸

In addition to appealing to the general public, the HANL policed its own. When Vittorio Mussolini, Benito’s son, came to Hollywood to see his new business partner, producer Hal Roach, in September, 1937, HANL spokesman Donald Ogden Stewart denounced the visit on behalf of all “artists and writers” declaring that “Fascism means the suppression of all freedom of expression” (*Los Angeles Examiner*, Oct. 9, 1937; also see *New York Times*, Sept. 26, 1937). A similar protest was mounted a year later when Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler’s favorite filmmaker, came to tour the city’s studios. Taking out full page ads in trade publications, HANL activists declared, “There is no room in Hollywood for Leni Riefenstahl. In this moment when hundreds of thousands of our brethren await certain death, close your doors to all Nazi agents” (*New York Times*, Nov. 30, 1938). Indignant at such a hostile reception, both fascist figures cut their visits short.

It is important to underscore the emergence of politics as an important part of entertainment and social life in Hollywood—especially after the coming of sound prompted the influx of more intellectually and politically oriented Broadway actors and writers. Before Roosevelt’s election, explained director Elliot Nugent, Hollywood “wasn’t so political.” Dinner parties were filled with “artistic conversations” about “the difference between stage and screen” and discussions about “how much you missed New York” (Nugent 53).⁹ The anti-fascist campaigns of the mid-1930s politicized social life. The frequent meetings, dinner parties filled with debates over foreign policy, and anti-fascist marches before star-struck audiences provided actors and actresses with both a sense of purpose and social activity.

By January, 1938, Hollywood was thoroughly politicized. "There is hardly a tea party today," Ella Winter wrote in the *New Republic*, "or a cocktail gathering, a studio lunch table or dinner even at a producer's house at which you do not hear agitated discussion, talk of 'freedom' and 'suppression,' talk of tyranny and the Constitution, of war, of world economy and political theory" (Winter 276).¹⁰ Studio moguls grew so worried about the increased activism of their stars that they were considering inaugurating "a squelch campaign against anything savoring of political activities, even incorporating a clause in contracts covering this, like the famous morals clause" (*Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 24, 1937).

The fact that Hollywood's actors, writers, directors, and producers were at the forefront of internationalist politics at a time when most Americans were still isolationists is hardly surprising given the city's sizeable émigré community and that profitable foreign sales had long drawn industry-wide attention to events abroad. According to Leo Rosten, approximately twenty-nine percent of the industry's directors, twenty-five percent of its actors, fourteen percent of its producers, and fourteen percent of its writers worked in Europe before coming to Hollywood (Rosten, *Hollywood* 57). By the end of 1936, they and most Americans knew that fascist forces in Europe were on the move; Germany was reoccupying the Rhineland, Italy annexing Ethiopia, Spanish fascists fighting Republican forces, and Hitler and Mussolini formalizing their Axis alliance. Nevertheless, a poll that November reported ninety-five percent of Americans were opposed to United States participation in any potential war. Three years later, a Gallup poll found that forty-two percent of the public thought it more important to investigate American war propaganda than to investigate the spread of Nazism, fascism, or Communism in America (Gallup and Robinson, "Surveys, 1935–1938" 388; "Surveys, 1938–1939" 595).

Concern with international issues soon came to haunt Hollywood activists as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began its pattern of portraying anti-fascists as the allies of Communists bent on destroying America. Ironically, the initial impetus behind HUAC came from Representative Samuel Dickstein's fear of Nazism, not Communism. In 1934, the Jewish Congressman from New York's Lower East Side called for a House investigation of pro-Nazi propaganda and subversion in the United States. His insistence that the government "watch every subversive group in this country," was endorsed by Texas Congressman Martin Dies, who wanted the committee to focus on the Red menace. When Congress approved the plan in 1938, they made Dies the chair and completely excluded the Jewish politician from HUAC. The Texan immediately launched an investigation of Hollywood, which he called a "hotbed of Communism," but paid little attention to the Silver Shirts, German-American Bunds, or other fascists groups that many considered subversive.¹¹

In August 1938, HUAC investigator Edward Sullivan turned the nation's attention to the movie capital, when he accused the HANL of being a Communist front and its members of being the knowing or unknowing dupes of Red organizers in America.

Characterizing the accusations as a blatant effort to smear the organization, HANL chairman Donald Ogden Stewart argued that the committee should focus on the more immediate threat to democracy: fascism. HUAC investigators, he pointed out, had discovered “that the National Guard is being penetrated by the Nazi Bund and that there is an effective German spy ring operating in this country” (*Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 16, 1938). While the HANL certainly *did* have Communist members, such as director Herbert Biberman and writer Lester Cole, most of the group shared Edward G. Robinson’s attitude that he would join with anyone, “Stalinists, Quakers, Holy Rollers, D.A.R.’s, anarchists, or Republicans” willing “to fight against the black horror that was beginning to sweep Europe” (Robinson, *All My Yesterdays* 13, 146).

Not everyone shared Robinson’s Popular Front attitude. Those who feared the power of celebrity-politics continued to link anti-fascism with Communism, often in ways that carried strong anti-Semitic undertones. Hermann Schwinn, western director of the German-American Bund, was quick to defend Sullivan’s charges. Raising a cry that would be echoed years later by Joe McCarthy, Schwinn claimed to have in his possession “documentary evidence to substantiate charges . . . that the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League is co-cooperating closely with known Communists” (*Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 21, 1938). The HANL also came under attack from the anti-Communist Patriotic Sons of America who, at their annual convention in August, 1938, denounced all actors who lent their name to the anti-fascist cause (*Los Angeles Examiner*, Aug. 25, 1938).

Undaunted by efforts to intimidate them, fifty-six of Hollywood’s most prominent stars, directors, writers and studio heads gathered at HANL activist Eddie Robinson’s Beverly Hills home on December 9, 1938, to discuss the worsening situation in Germany and western Europe. Agreeing that something must be done, the Hollywood elite signed a petition, the “Declaration of Democratic Independence,” which they sent to the president and Congress, calling for a boycott of all German products until Hitler stopped persecuting Jews and other minorities.

Unfortunately for HANL activists, their efforts to persuade fellow citizens that anti-Nazism was distinct from Communism suffered a fatal blow when Hitler and Stalin signed their infamous non-aggression treaty on August 24, 1939. Liberals had been willing to unite with Communists so long as they stood in opposition to Hitler. But the day after the pact was signed, the HANL office was flooded with phone calls and telegrams from disillusioned members announcing their withdrawal from the organization—which quickly changed its name to the Hollywood League for Democratic Action (Friedrich 24, 47). The pact also succeeded in encouraging a new round of anti-Communist investigations of Hollywood. During a Grand Jury investigation in August, 1940, John Leech, a former Los Angeles County organizer for the Communist Party (CP), insisted that the HANL was conceived and organized by the CP for the purpose of playing upon the fears of Hollywood Jews and their sympathizers. We were “making suckers out of ninety-five percent of those who joined the organization” Leech boasted. These charges sparked yet another round of hearings by Dies’

HUAC later that month, and again a year later by California's own un-American Activities committee headed by Jack Tenney (*Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 7, 1940).¹²

Underlying these accusations was the familiar anti-Semitic charge: Jews could not be good Americans because their loyalties lay with their religion rather than their nation.

THE AUDIENCE RESPONDS

Government officials were deeply concerned about the power of movies and movie stars to sway public opinion. What stars said, explained Leo Rosten, was "reported to the world in greater detail than any other single group in the world, with the possible exception of Washingtonists. . . . People would know Clark Gable or Greta Garbo in parts of the world where they didn't know the name of their own prime minister or the mayor of their own little town" (Rosten, *Oral History* 1–2). But did Americans notice or care about the political opinions of their matinee idols? Did they have any impact on contemporary political thought? Apparently they did.

This new era of outspoken political involvement earned movie stars the admiration and the wrath of concerned Americans. In the weeks following the release of the December, 1938 call to boycott German goods, the signatories were barraged with scores of letters from fans who praised or disparaged their actions. Walter Loebel, a Roanoke, Virginia, attorney applauded their "stand regarding Nazi Germany," and suggested that if "more popular, definitely non-Jewish, motion picture stars would speak from the screen to the audience, the audiences would be glad to sign the document as drawn up at your meeting" (Loebel).

The call to boycott Germany, however, prompted an even greater number of anti-Semitic letters denouncing the signatories and warning of future retributions. "News reports state that you have organized a crew of Jews to try to force the American Government to break diplomatic relations with Germany," Chicago resident T. Conden wrote Robinson in December 1938. "Once it becomes apparent that you are attempting to supplant your role of stage villain and mendicant with an off-stage role of pseudo-statesman—every Christian in the country will recognize you for what you really are. A cheap, big-mouthed ignorant Jew lacking in a sense of public decency and decorum." I. E. Schoening, a self-proclaimed "Bible Christian," chastised Robinson for "entering upon a new field of endeavor—that of advising the President and Congress. What arrogance!" Apparently not knowing Robinson was Jewish, she added that the call for a boycott "was born in the minds of the men who own the movie industry—a group of clever atheistic Jews. They sit in the background and do the bossing while you godless gentiles do the fronting for them. . . . You set up a howl at what Hitler is doing, but now you are planning to starve innocent Germans. Pray tell me in what way you are better than he?" (Conden; Schoening).

Although many of these letters were written by people who wanted to vent their anger at the "Jew-dominated" industry, other correspondents—some anti-Semitic,

some not—were concerned that the group's denunciation of Germany did not include a denunciation of the Soviet Union, which they believed posed an even greater threat to the United States. "You and your bunch are making it your business to boycott Germany," J. O'Connor wrote from Cleveland. "But! Nary a word or statement against Russia and its persecution of Christians—oh, me!" Harwood Motley, an avid fan of Robinson's radio show, *Big Town*, asked the performer if he condemned all the "Godless 'isms' of Europe" and pleaded with him to use his show to attack Communism as well as Nazism. Motley also included an article from a religious periodical, *Our Sunday Visitor*, that threatened "a boycott of the pictures" made by politically offensive stars (O'Connor; Motley).

Motley's letter raised the worst fears of movie studio executives: that political activism by stars—especially Jewish stars—would alienate audiences and adversely affect box office receipts. Industry leaders had good reason to be concerned. Outraged by the stars' call for a boycott of Germany, D. Shea, founder of the National Gentile League, announced that his organization, which he claimed represented over twelve million "True Blue Americans," was declaring "a Nonattendance strike against yourself and others who take the same attitude against Gentiles as you do." Likewise, the National Association of Southerners warned Robinson in December 1938 that his outspoken political activity was "far a field from your profession and can only cause your popularity to wane with millions of Americans who are unsympathetic to Jewish activities" (Shea; National Association of Southerners).

A number of studios quickly responded to the political actions of their stars. Anti-Nazi League leader Melvyn Douglas recounted how MGM executives, after receiving scores of similar letters, summoned him to their offices and "read me the riot act" and "politely asked me to desist from these activities." Douglas refused to back down and suggested that the studio "tear up my contract" if they "felt that my activity was in any way harming their product." The studio did not tear up his contract, but they did notify him that the German government refused to allow two of his Metro pictures to be shown "because of things that you have said about Hitler and the German regime" (Douglas 27, 28).

THE CINEMATIC WAR AGAINST FASCISM

The activities of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League reached thousands if not tens of thousands of citizens. But committed anti-fascists knew they had to reach millions if they were to politicize Americans and alter isolationist foreign policy. To that end, producers such as William Wanger and Harry and Jack Warner supplemented off-screen political activities with on screen activism. No studio, no moguls were more devotedly anti-fascist and willing to put their money on the line than the Warner brothers. As Jack told a reporter in August 1936, studios "should strive for pictures that provide something more than a mere idle hour or two of entertainment" (*New York American*, August 11, 1936).

For the Warners, fighting fascism and anti-Semitism was a deeply personal com-

mitment. Harry and Jack, whose father fled deadly pogroms in Poland and immigrated to Baltimore in 1883, were determined to help European Jews who were being persecuted by Hitler and his Nazi thugs. Having spent a great deal of time in Europe setting up distribution networks, Harry was a far more astute judge of changing conditions in Germany than most studio heads. When Hitler declared an official boycott of Jewish business in April, 1933, and then demanded that Hollywood studios fire all German Jews, the Warners responded by closing their German offices in July, 1934, and refusing to conduct any business with the Nazi regime (Paramount, Fox, and MGM continued operating there until 1939). The brothers also announced plans to begin producing anti-Nazi films. As conditions in Germany continued to worsen, the Warners asked President Roosevelt to pressure European nations into keeping Palestine open for Jewish émigrés (H. Warner, Telegram).¹³

The Warners and other producers wishing to make anti-fascist films found themselves constrained by two factors: the considerable financial risks entailed by offending Hitler and the severe limitations imposed by the Production Code Administration. Not all studio heads, not even Jewish ones like Louis B. Mayer and Adolph Zukor, were as worried about Nazism as the Warners. The Jews may have created *An Empire of Their Own*, as Neal Gabler argues, but the author overestimates the moguls' commitment to Judaism. When business interests clashed with Jewish interests, many studio heads—most notably Louis B. Mayer—favored the former. Upon returning from Germany in 1934, MGM executive Irving Thalberg told Mayer that “a lot of Jews will lose their lives” but that “Hitler and Hitlerism will pass; the Jews will still be there.” As late as August, 1939, just one month prior to the Nazi invasion of Poland, Paramount chief Adolph Zukor told a reporter: “I don’t think that Hollywood should deal with anything but entertainment. The newsreels take care of current events. To make films of political significance is a mistake. When they go to a theater they want to forget. If it’s entertainment, it’s all right—but not propaganda.”¹⁴

Cooperation with Germany and Italy, or at least turning a blind eye to their policies, proved highly profitable. Throughout the 1930s, studios were heavily dependent on foreign markets for profits; some forty to fifty percent of industry revenues were generated from overseas distribution and exhibition. Hitler and Mussolini were highly conscious of the ways in which Hollywood was portraying their regimes and promised to retaliate against any studio that offended them. This threatened studios with a double loss: the loss of revenues from any anti-fascist film that was banned throughout the growing fascist empire, and even greater losses if all films produced by the offending studios were banned. There was even a third loss to consider: losing the pure profits that could be made by re-releasing old films on the European market.¹⁵

Jewish studio heads like William Fox and Louis B. Mayer felt it simply did not make sense to take such risks. As late as December, 1938, Fox was doing over 1.5 million marks worth of business with Germany, and MGM had hired Leni Riefenstahl’s good friend Ernest Jaeger to serve as their talent scout in Berlin (*New York Times*, Dec.

11, 1938). Columbia studio head Harry Cohn, a Jew, went a step further by making a documentary, *Mussolini Speaks* (1933), that hailed the achievements of its subject. *Il Duce* loved it so much that he invited Cohn to Rome to receive a medal. When the flattered mogul returned, he rebuilt his office to copy Mussolini's and put a picture of the fascist dictator on his wall (Friedrich 47). On September 11, 1937, Hal Roach, not a Jew, and Vittorio Mussolini joined together to form Ram Productions. Denying any fascist leanings, Roach defended himself by saying, "I simply entered into a business deal," and insisted that in no place other than Hollywood "was there criticism" of the deal (*Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 24, 1937).

Producers willing to risk financial losses in Europe in order to alert the nation to the dangers of fascism were nevertheless constrained from doing so by the Production Code Administration (PCA) and its anti-Semitic head, former journalist and Catholic layman Joseph I. Breen. A self-policing body organized by industry leaders in 1934 as a way to forestall federal censorship of motion pictures, the PCA regulated the content and subject matter of American film until its abolition in 1968. Under the leadership of Breen, the PCA set out to restore morality in Hollywood by controlling what audiences could and could not see on the screen. Eschewing the use of the screen for political purposes, the Code declared, "Theatrical motion pictures . . . are primarily to be regarded as *Entertainment*." The Code also stipulated that the "history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly."¹⁶

Chances for making anti-fascist films were further blunted by Breen's own prejudices. Brought to Hollywood by Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America head Will Hays, Breen did little to hide his antipathy for Jews. All that was wrong with Hollywood he blamed on the "lousy Jews" and insisted that "95 percent . . . are Eastern Jews, the scum of the earth." The studio heads, he wrote in 1932, were "simply a rotten bunch of vile people with no respect for anything beyond the making of money" (quoted in Carr 131). Worse yet, Breen accused Hollywood activists of trying "to capture the screen of the United States for Communistic propaganda purposes" and suggesting that "most of the agitators are Jews" (Breen to Robert Lord, Dec. 5, 1937, quoted in Vaughn 44).

Breen did all he could to prevent the making of any film with openly sympathetic references to Jews. Although independent producers turned out two low-budget anti-Nazi films before PCA regulations took hold, *Are We Civilized* (1934) and *Hitler's Reign of Terror* (1934), Hays and Breen succeeded in halting subsequent studio efforts to produce *The Mad Dog of Europe*, a stark denunciation of Hitler's regime. In a 1936 memo to RKO producer Sol Lesser, Breen insisted that Jews "as a class, are behind an anti-Hitler picture and using the entertainment screen for their own personal propaganda purposes." He warned Lesser that there was "strong pro-German and anti-Semitic feeling in this country" and that the inflammatory film "might result in a boomerang." The movie was not made. Breen also managed to kill MGM's efforts to bring Sinclair Lewis' stark anti-fascist novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, to the screen (Breen

to Sol Lesser, Nov. 25, 1936, quoted in Doherty 102).¹⁷

Initially thwarted by Breen and Hays, politically driven producers circumvented Code restrictions by making three different types of films: obliquely anti-fascist movies based on real events, movies that exposed audiences to the historical contributions made by Jews, and movies that highlighted past incidents of injustice against Jews. In the first instance, Warners' 1937 production *Black Legion* told the true story of a domestic fascist organization that wrought murder and terror throughout the Midwest during the early 1930s. Likewise, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) was a lightly veiled anti-fascist film that celebrated Robin Hood's resistance to the authoritarian rule of King John. Biographical productions that heralded the varied contributions Jews had made to western civilization included films such as *The House of Rothschild* (1934), *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), a re-released version of *Disraeli* (1929), and *Dr. Erlich's Magic Bullet* (1940). Finally, films such as *They Won't Forget* (1937), told how prejudice led a Southern mob to hang Jewish factory owner Leo Frank for a murder he did not commit.¹⁸

Anti-fascist producers proved less successful in dramatizing the Spanish Civil War. Paramount's *Last Train From Madrid* (1937) focused on the drama of the war without any reference to its political struggles. A year later, independent producer William Wanger tried to make an explicitly pro-Loyalist film about the starving residents of a Spanish small town who were surrounded by Franco's troops and whose only hope of survival depended on the arrival of a Russian supply ship. The PCA approved the film only after forcing Wanger to eliminate most of its politics. The version of *Blockade* that opened in April, 1938, was turned into a love/adventure story with only the slightest hint of a pro-Loyalist message. Even so, *Blockade* was condemned and picketed by Catholic groups around the nation—actions which led to its cancellation in several states. The film's hostile reception sent a clear warning to bottom-line-conscious studio executives.¹⁹

After several years of trying to get around censors, the Warner brothers finally found an opportunity to make an explicitly anti-Nazi film. On February 26, 1938, FBI head J. Edgar Hoover announced that his agents had uncovered a Nazi spy ring operating in the United States. Unfortunately, the publicity-seeking Hoover's remarks came before all the spies had been arrested, thus allowing several to escape back to Germany. In October, 1938, eighteen individuals charged with violating U.S. espionage laws were put on trial in New York; a month later, the jury found them guilty.

Seizing on this golden opportunity, Harry and Jack bought the rights to the story from Leon G. Turrou, the "G-man" who broke the case, and brought him to Los Angeles to work as a technical consultant. Turrou, who had little respect for Hollywood prior to his visit, was impressed by the film community's political awareness. The stars and executives he met "seemed infinitely more cognizant than anybody in the East of the intentions of all 'isms', Bunds, and so-called 'America for Americans' societies. They really know and appreciate the problems that this country faces in this subversive activity,

which is more than I can say for many other responsible citizens throughout the country." Most importantly, he added, "I found Hollywood more than ready to do something about it" (Turrou 6).²⁰

Although based on a true story, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* encountered heated opposition from people who tried to stop the film from being made. Dr. George Gyssling, German Consul General in Los Angeles, quickly called on PCA head Joseph Breen and demanded that production be halted. Gyssling threatened that the Reich would ban all subsequent productions that featured any actors who appeared in *Confessions* (Gyssling to Breen, Nov. 23, Dec. 6, 1939; *Los Angeles Examiner*, June 6, 1939). Rival studio leaders also voiced their displeasure, fearing that the Warners' anti-fascist campaign would lead the German government to retaliate by banning all American films—thereby costing them millions in revenue. "So far as we are concerned," Paramount Pictures executive Luigi Luraschi wrote Breen in December 1938, "our policy at the moment is that we will not attempt to make any picture that will be obviously uncomplimentary to any nation abroad." Downplaying Paramount's economic motives, Luraschi warned that if Warners made the film, they "will have on their hands the blood of a great many Jews in Germany" (Luraschi to Breen, December 10, 1938).

PCA censors were equally opposed to the film and repeatedly warned that *Confessions* would cost the studio money and do irreparable harm to the film industry. As one PCA official wrote in January, 1939, "Are we ready to depart from the pleasant and profitable course of entertainment, to engage in propaganda, to produce screen portrayals arousing controversy, conflict, racial, religious and nationalistic antagonism, and outright, horrible human hatred?" Although the Nazi spies had recently been convicted, the PCA nevertheless concluded that the "inference that the German government is directly sponsoring agitation in the United States, with the intent of seizing control of the country, constitutes an extremely grave accusation, which lacks proof as far as public information goes" (Lischka).

The Warner brothers discovered that there were many others who did not want to see Hitler and Nazism portrayed in a negative light. The studio received so many threatening letters after announcing production plans that they hired special policemen to keep visitors off the set throughout the filming and released almost no publicity. Even the names of the cast members and crew were kept secret for a long time. A number of actors refused parts in the film fearing reprisals by the Nazis against relatives in Germany.²¹

The Warners refused to give in to outside pressure. "We produced the 'Nazi Spy' picture because we believed first that it would supply dramatic entertainment," Jack explained, "and second, because we felt it exposed conditions concerning which every American and every free man everywhere should be informed" (J. Warner, Correspondence). When told by one studio owner that making anti-Nazi movies might hurt business, Jack exclaimed, "The Silver Shirts and the Bundists and all the rest of these hoods are marching in Los Angeles right now. There are high school kids with swastikas on their sleeves a few crummy blocks from our studio. Is that what you want

in exchange from some crummy film royalties out of Germany?" (Warner quoted in Friedrich 50). The goal of films like *Confessions*, Harry chimed in, was to "drive out the Bunds, the leagues, the Black Legions, Silver Shirts, Black Shirts, Dirty Shirts" (*Jewish Telegraphic Agency Features*, Dec. 23, 1938).

After finally receiving approval from a reluctant Breen, the Warners premiered the controversial film in Beverly Hills on April 27, 1939. The film generated so much concern within industry business circles that numerous studios "secretly warned their big stars that it might not be good policy to be photographed at the preview or reported among the audience" (*Film Weekly*, May 27, 1939). Fearing German box-office retribution against any of his stars seen at the premier, Louis B. Mayer threw a "surprise" birthday party for Lionel Barrymore on opening night and ordered all MGMs luminaries to appear at the gala (*Film Weekly*, May 27, 1939). Despite the hesitancy of studio heads, the opening night audience "broke into frequent expressions of its emotions, and at the close applauded with unusual and sustained enthusiasm" (*Hollywood Reporter*, April 28, 1939). The film's anti-fascist politics were widely praised by film critics. "The evening of April 27, 1939," declared film critic Welford Beaton, "will go down in screen history as a memorable one. It marked the first time in the annals of screen entertainment that a picture ever really said something definite about current events, really took sides and argued for the side with which it sympathized" (*Hollywood Spectator*, May 13, 1939).

The Warners succeeded in reaching beyond the physical confines of Hollywood and bringing their anti-fascist message to people throughout the nation and the world. An editorial in the Indiana newspaper, the *South Bend Tribune*, suggested that "every person who claims to be a true American and a loyal citizen ought to see it at least once. . . . This picture is needed to awaken these wishy-washy Americans to the fact that their national sentiments need rejuvenation" (*South Bend Tribune*, May 14, 1939). Critics in London, Toronto, Jerusalem, and Durban were equally enthusiastic. England's *Film Weekly* hailed *Confessions* as "Hollywood's first frankly propaganda film" and noted that it was playing to packed houses in London at every performance ([England] *Film Weekly*, June 24, 1939). The studio was also flooded with impassioned letters from viewers, over 550 according to Harry Warner. Sylvia Wilcox Razey, Executive Secretary of the Descendants of the American Revolution, praised the brothers' "courage in producing such a picture in the face of Nazi pressure and intimidation" and hoped that it would "arouse public opinion against Nazi agents and their followers in this country . . . who are, undoubtedly, the foremost menace to our liberties and democratic institutions" (Razey).²²

The brothers' anti-fascist efforts also elicited vituperative reactions from moviegoers who blasted the film and its producers for pursuing narrow Jewish interests that endangered national security. As one Riverside, California resident wrote Jack Warner, "Most motion picture executives have favored only the 'reds,' is it because most of them are Jewish and they hate Hitler or are they in favor of atheism? . . . America's

place is at home. We have enough to do to put our own house in order and stay out of other people's troubles and their countries." A Somerville, Massachusetts viewer wanted to know when the brothers were going to "put out a picture showing the horrifying menace of a Communist regime that slaughters millions and millions of souls (Please don't say Communism doesn't do that!). We have seen 'Confessions of a Nazi Spy'. Let us now see 'Confessions of a Communist Spy' or the 'Red Menace Exposed', or 'Red Moscow and Satanic Utopia'" (Haesle; De Angelis).

Audience response may have been mixed, but the reaction of industry watchdogs was not. Fearing the disastrous financial impact anti-fascist films might have on the European market, following the outbreak of war on September 1, 1939, movie industry czar Will Hays forbade American studios that wished to receive a PCA seal from developing any films with an obvious anti-Nazi bias—a ban that remained in effect from September 15, 1939, to January 1940.²³ The PCA edict slowed down but did not halt the most determined producers. Warner Brothers quickly turned out a slew of anti-fascist films—many of which were developed before Hays' prohibition. On September 23, 1939, they premiered *Espionage Agent*, a film whose production was completed in August. The movie told the story of a Nazi spy ring (this one fictional) that planned to destroy American industrial plants, munitions factories, railroads, shipping facilities, stockyards and water supplies. Although the plot was foiled, the film emphasized the need for American preparedness against potential attacks by Germany.²⁴

Once the PCA ban was lifted in January, 1940, several other studios produced films critical of Nazi Germany and American isolationism. Fox studios released *Four Sons* (1940) and *I Married a Nazi* (1940), while Charlie Chaplin premiered *The Great Dictator* (1940). Louis B. Mayer continued to play both sides of the political fence. "M-G-M kept on releasing films in Nazi Germany until Hitler finally threw them out," remarked a disgusted Joseph Mankiewicz, himself an MGM producer. "Warner Brothers had guts. They hated the Nazis more than they cared for German grosses" (Mankiewicz quoted in Friedrich 49). As late as June, 1939, Mayer was still trying to curry favor (and business) with the German government by hosting a group of ten Nazi newspaper editors on the MGM lot, including Carl Cranz, editor of Hitler's *Völkischer Beobachter* (*People's Observer*)—which initiated the anti-Semitic attacks on Hollywood. "I couldn't believe it," Harry Warner wrote to MGM executive Sam Katz. Harry refused to contact Louis directly because he considered it "a waste of time" (H. Warner to Katz, June 27, 1939). Once war actually broke out, Mayer tried to mollify his critics by producing three anti-fascist films in 1940, *The Mortal Storm*, *Flight Command*, and *Escape*.

Even after the outbreak of war in Europe, anti-fascist filmmakers continued to encounter opposition from fans and industry officials alike. As Nazi troops marched across Europe, Charlie Chaplin, the world's most famous comedian, decided to break his silence, literally and figuratively, by working on a film that mocked Hitler and Mussolini, a film in which he planned to add a speaking conclusion. "I'm no Communist," Chaplin

told his assistant Harry Crocker, “just a human being who wants to see in this country a real democracy, and to see freedom from this internal regimentation which is crawling over the rest of the world” (Crocker 18; ch. 15). Chaplin began shooting *The Great Dictator* in September, 1939, and premiered it in October, 1940.

Like other Hollywood activists, Chaplin quickly learned what happened when stars spoke out on controversial political issues. Just the rumor of an explicitly anti-Nazi film generated calls for punishment from disgruntled moviegoers. In February, 1939, Walter W. McKenna of Ventnor City, N.J., wrote to influential Foreign Relations Committee member Senator Robert R. Reynolds, demanding that “official cognizance should be taken of the motives of one, Charles Chaplin, an alien resident of the State of California” who now intended to produce a film “designed to ridicule and antagonize certain totalitarian governments of Europe” (McKenna). Other disgruntled fans accused Chaplin of being a Communist because he attacked Hitler and Mussolini but not Stalin. Chaplin also antagonized Hollywood’s anti-Semitic critics when he told a Seattle Jewish Transcript reporter, “I did this picture for the Jews of the world. I did it because I want to see a return of decency and kindness and humanity” ([Seattle] *Jewish Transcript*, December 20, 1940).

THE PRICE OF ACTIVISM

As one looks back on the heated controversies of the late 1930s and early 1940s, it would be comforting to think that by 1941 the vast bulk of Americans understood the dangers that fascism posed to democracy and the important role that movie-activists played in drawing the nation’s attention to such threats. “It will be to Hollywood’s credit,” Leo Rosten predicted in August, 1941, “that its anti-Fascist activities predated the swing in American public opinion and diplomacy. It will be to Hollywood’s credit that it fought the Silver Shirts, the German-American Bund, and the revived Ku Klux Klan at a time when few citizens realized their ultimate menace” (Rosten, *Hollywood* 154). He was wrong! Americans did not applaud Hollywood or immediately rise up to proclaim the need to protect world-wide democracy. Isolationism, not interventionism, was the dominant mood of the times; what happened in Europe was none of our business. As late as July, 1941, a Gallup poll reported seventy-nine percent of the respondents opposed the U.S. entering war against Germany and Italy (Snow 69).

By downplaying the threat of fascism and emphasizing “Jewish” Hollywood’s reluctance to attack Communism, anti-Communist and often anti-Semitic politicians and movie fans of the prewar era helped lay the ideological groundwork for the postwar Red Scare and HUAC investigation of Hollywood. What the Warners and activist producers viewed as actions in defense of our country, others saw as part of a media conspiracy, led by Jews, aimed at forcing America into war. An opinion poll commissioned by the American Jewish Committee in April, 1940, found that a plurality of Americans believed that Jews held too much power and influence in the United States (Carr 238).

In September, 1941, isolationist Senators Gerald Nye of North Dakota and

Bennett Clark of Missouri, citing the recent spate of Hollywood films that they insisted were vicious un-American propaganda intended to sway public opinion toward American intervention, succeeded in launching a formal Senate “Investigation on Propaganda in Motion Pictures.” In a radio address given at a pro-isolationist “America First” rally on the eve of the hearings, Senator Nye accused Hollywood of producing films “designed to rouse us to a state of war hysteria.” Reading aloud the names of studio heads—Cohen, Mayer, Zukor, Schenck, Warner—while the audience reportedly chanted “the Jews,” Nye denounced Hollywood as a “mighty engine of [pro-war] propaganda” whose power lay “in the hands of men who are naturally susceptible” to “national and racial emotions.” He accused the moguls of exerting undo influence on President Roosevelt and pressuring him to make foreign policy decisions that were not in the nation’s best interests (Nye quoted in Carr 241, 243).

Senator Clark opened the hearings on September 9 by accusing the motion picture industry of glorifying “England’s imperialism” and creating “hatred of the people of Germany.” Sounding a now familiar refrain, he asked, “Does anyone see a pictorial representation of life in Russia under ‘Bloody Joe’ Stalin? They do not” (U.S. Congress 71). Nye joined in the vilification campaign by calling Hollywood the “most potent and dangerous Fifth Column in our country” and identified twenty-five American films that he considered pro-war propaganda (Nye quoted in Birdwell 155). During the course of the hearings, Nye admitted that he had seen only two of the films he identified as propaganda. This was two more than Clark, who admitted he had seen only one film in the past six years. Insisting that he and the committee were driven by patriotism and not prejudice, Nye proclaimed, “If anti-Semitism exists in America, the Jews have themselves to blame” (*Variety*, Sept. 10, 1941).

The Senate hearings quickly came under widespread attack from the press and national leaders, who accused Nye of fostering religious hatred. Former Republican presidential candidate Wendell Wilkie, hired by the moguls to represent them at the hearings, blasted Nye for dividing the “American people in discordant racial and religious groups in order to disunite them over foreign policy” (*Motion Picture Herald*, Sept. 13, 1941).²⁵ He defended Jewish concerns with Nazism as American concerns with national security and democracy. Hollywood personnel were acting in the service of the nation—helping FDR, amusing citizens, and promoting patriotism. Studio executives joined Wilkie in insisting that the American people, not the Senate, should decide what constituted propaganda. The Senate committee responded to these multiple attacks by abruptly recessing their hearings at the end of September, postponing them indefinitely in mid-October, and canceling them in December after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

But the damage had been done. The hearings had succeeded in once again conflating Hollywood and anti-fascism with Communism, internationalism, and Jewish interests. America’s entry into World War II and the movie industry’s enthusiastic participation in the war effort led many fans and politicians to suspend their suspicions of Hollywood’s “true” loyalties. However, soon after the war’s end, a rabidly anti-

Communist Congress quickly forgot Hollywood's vital contribution to the "Good War" and launched another round of HUAC hearings that linked prewar anti-fascist activities with Jewish self-interest and Communist efforts to undermine American democracy. The men who led the Red Scare conveniently forgot that pre-war anti-fascists had allied with Communists because the latter were the most vocal and well organized opponents of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco. Although producers and stars defended their anti-Nazi stance as consistent with the best principles of American democracy, Hollywood's political activists were forced to retreat. Jack Warner, who testified as a "friendly" witness, denounced any Red presence in Hollywood and fired *Confessions* co-writer John Wexley for his alleged Communist activities. Anti-Nazi League members like Edward G. Robinson, who defended their earlier actions as fully consistent with democracy and the Bill of Rights, wound up blacklisted.²⁶

The politicization of Hollywood during the 1930s set precedents and provided lessons that have lasted into the next century. The first, and perhaps most important, was the emergence of "liberal" Hollywood. Like any myth, the "myth of liberal Hollywood" contained elements of truth. *Individual actors*, writers, directors, and producers *were* in the vanguard of liberal and radical activities in the 1930s and early 1940s. However, the *studios* that constituted the core of the movie industry (with the exception of Warner Brothers) and determined what movies the public would or would not see had repeatedly proven themselves political conservatives who were unwilling to risk profits to promote liberal causes. Nevertheless, it was the stars' politics, not that of their employers, that made "Hollywood" synonymous with the "liberal media"—an association that was fixed in the popular imagination by years of highly publicized anti-Communist investigations undertaken by various Congressional and state committees. Activists who attacked Hitler without simultaneously attacking Stalin were vilified by conservative critics as Communists, Communist dupes, or, at best, naïve liberal dupes. By the early 1950s, "liberal Hollywood" was seen by many citizens as a danger to American security—a sin many liberals paid for by being blacklisted.

The persecution of Hollywood activists after the war provided an important warning: Americans did not want their fantasies punctured by screen idols who took controversial political stands. As the often prescient Leo Rosten observed in 1941, "It is not surprising that when Hollywood became articulate about war, unions, Fascism, boycotts, or the New Deal, a murmur of anguish rose in the land. . . . When a Joan Crawford denounced the invasion of Ethiopia, when a Frederic March pleaded for ambulances for Spain, it was like harsh voices destroying a cherished dream" (Rosten, *Hollywood* 134). Star activism proved especially problematic for actors or actresses who took stands on controversial foreign issues that were well in advance of public opinion and government policy. Charlie Chaplin found his career effectively ended after making what his enemies judged as pro-Communist remarks in 1942.²⁷ Over the next several decades, liberal and left-leaning stars who spoke out on foreign affairs—from nuclear disarmament in the 1950s to the Viet Nam war in the 1960s to the most recent

Iraq war in 2003—opened themselves up to Red baiting and faced a public wrath that was not leveled at stars who took conservative stands in line with official government policy. When actor and longtime activist David Clennon went on Sean Hannity’s radio talk show in February, 2003 and likened the current “moral climate” of American foreign policy to Nazi Germany under Hitler, the VOTE.com website set up a poll asking whether Clennon should be fired from his job on CBS’s *The Agency*.²⁸

The successful efforts of right-wing proponents before and after World War II to link Hollywood activism with Communism sent a signal to subsequent generations of movie stars: going public with even modest liberal politics was likely to endanger if not ruin a career. During the 1950s, Hollywood conservatives such as George Murphy and Ronald Reagan grew increasingly outspoken in denouncing what they repeatedly referred to as the Communist menace. At the same time, as blacklisting ended the careers of scores of actors, directors, and producers who had been politically active before the war, many if not most of Hollywood’s liberals and leftists, fearing for their own careers, chose to retreat from the political arena and remain quiet. The Hollywood left would not reemerge until the 1960s, when opposition to racial discrimination—a domestic issue that could not easily be Red-baited—prompted a new era in the politicization of Hollywood.²⁹

Notes

- ¹ The early uses of film for political ends are discussed in Sloan; Brownlow; Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*; and Shull.
- ² I am grateful to Rob King for bringing this material to my attention.
- ³ For descriptions of the uses of celebrities during World War I, see Mary Pickford Scrapbooks (vols. 30–31); Maland; and Campbell. The best overview of the evolving relationship between movie stars and politics is unquestionably Brownstein.
- ⁴ For portraits of the émigré community in Hollywood, see Taylor; and Giovacchini.
- ⁵ For further information on Pickford’s politics in the 1920s and 1930s, see Pickford Scrapbook, vol. X; and Whitfield.
- ⁶ See photo of flyer in Carr 112. For pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic efforts in Los Angeles and throughout the nation, see Whitfield; Gabler; Brinkley; and Carr.
- ⁷ Anti-Nazi League members included conservatives such as Rupert Hughes and Morrie Ryskind. The Popular Front was a common term used in the 1930s to describe the broad coalition of left and liberal groups—often led by members of the Communist party—who joined together to oppose fascism abroad and to promote a progressive political agenda at home.
- ⁸ League activities were regularly reported in the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times*. The best overviews of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League can be found in Cogley 35–40; Giovacchini 72–107; Birdwell; Carr; and Brownstein.

- ⁹ For a first-hand description of Broadway activism see Maltz.
- ¹⁰ The activities of these and other Popular Front organizations are discussed in Ceplair and Englund; Denning; Rosten, *Hollywood*; and Brownstein.
- ¹¹ Dickstein and Dies are quoted, respectively, in Friedrich 52n, 52.
- ¹² For subsequent hearings in Washington and California, see Ceplair and Englund.
- ¹³ Hitler's prohibitions against Jews in the German film industry—and American reactions—are discussed in Doherty 93–102. The best overviews of Warner Brothers involvement in fighting fascism are Kaplan and Blakley; Roddick; Warner with Jennings; Birdwell; and Gabler.
- ¹⁴ Thalberg and Zukor quoted in Gabler 338, 340.
- ¹⁵ The importance of foreign revenues is discussed in Koppes and Black; Rosten, *Hollywood* 160–61.
- ¹⁶ The Code guidelines are quoted in Doherty 347, 364. An industry wide Production Code was first adopted on March 31, 1930, but largely ignored until July 1, 1934, when an expanded Code was rigorously enforced by the newly created Production Code Administration. A complete version of the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 and the 1934 Addenda can be found in *ibid.*, 347–67.
- ¹⁷ For a discussion of the three aforementioned anti-Nazi films, see Doherty 98–102; *New York Times*, April 22, 30, May 1, Dec. 30, 1934; *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1934.
- ¹⁸ Leo Braudy has referred to these as “‘displaced’ political films, guised in a mixture of fiction and history, anchored in a particular time and place but speaking to the present” (Braudy 30).
- ¹⁹ For a discussion of *Blockade* and its reception, see Bernstein; Booker, 65–66; Koppes and Black, 24, 25.
- ²⁰ For an analysis of the making of and reactions to the resulting film, see Ross, “*Confessions*,” 48–59.
- ²¹ One especially frightening letter sent to Jack Warner's wife Ann, just prior to opening night, contained a detailed floor plan of their Beverly Hills home (Shindler 209).
- ²² For foreign reaction to the film, see Ross, “*Confessions*” 55–57.
- ²³ As Joseph Breen predicted, *Confessions* was banned everywhere the Nazis could exert pressure. The PCA ban on anti-Nazi films is discussed in Birdwell 78.
- ²⁴ The film was granted official PCA approval on August 30, 1939. It was banned in Norway, Sweden, Dutch East Indies, Egypt, and Shanghai (PCA Files, *Espionage Agent*).
- ²⁵ For a fuller discussion of the Senate investigation, see Moser 731–51; Carr 238–77; and Birdwell 154–71.
- ²⁶ For Jack Warner's testimony, see Birdwell 174–75; for Robinson's fall from grace, see Robinson and Spiegelgass.
- ²⁷ For a discussion of Chaplin's politics and decline, see Maland.
- ²⁸ On February 7, 2003, 14,471 respondents (63%) had voted Yes to firing Clennon and 8,658 (37%) voted No. When the poll closed on March 6, 2003, the final totals had changed: 27,723 votes Yes (48%) and 29,623 (52%) voted No. See www.vote.com/vote/60025734/index.phtml?cat=4075633.

²⁹ For an overview of Hollywood politics from the 1930 to the 1960 see Ceplair and Englund. The activities of movie stars on the left and right are the subject of my current project, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics*.

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Values

“Farther Away from New York”: Jews in the Humanities after World War II

By Andrew R. Heinze

In the half-century following World War II, Jews played a large, even pivotal, role in the Humanities, one that was far out of proportion to their numbers in the American population. This is well known. What may be less clear is the extent to which these scholars brought anything identifiably Jewish with them into the academic arena. It is one thing to acknowledge that Thomas Kuhn is Jewish, but can we really say that his trend-setting book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* owes anything to that fact? Even as self-conscious a Jew as Sigmund Freud has left generations of scholars wondering, arguing, and even baffled about whether his being Jewish had any effect on his ideas about the human condition.

In this essay, I want to make a very tentative start—at best a preface—toward a better understanding of this question. The hypothesis I want to explore is that Jewish scholars did battle against two trends in the Humanities that were inherently dismissive of the Jewish heritage. Those trends were: 1) an overly agrarian, overly Christian perspective on American history and culture; and 2) a perceived, long-standing bias against Hebraic sources, which were often deemed obsolete or provincial. In this admittedly sketchy overview, I want to highlight several texts as examples of some of the ways in which Jewish perspectives figured into the post-World War II humani-

ties: Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, Harold Bloom's *Book of J*, and Leo Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.

Though I will not focus on the institutional dimensions of Jewish participation in the Humanities, I want to make a few brief comments about that subject. The most obvious institutional difference Jews have made in American academic life would probably be, first, the creation of Jewish Studies as a distinct field and, second, the creation of Brandeis University as a top-tier research university. There is also another, more vaguely institutional impact of Jewish scholars: the relative increase in scholarly works on Jewish topics. A database search of doctoral dissertations in the Humanities whose titles include the keywords "Jews" or "Jewish" suggests that after the mid-1960s, there was a definite increase both in the rate of production of such studies and in the academic stature of the institutions from which they issued. Most of those dissertations were in History, and Jews wrote many—though far from all—of them. By the 1980s and 1990s, histories of American Jewry outpaced those of every other minority except African Americans; and, unlike African American history, in which white scholars produced many of the field's path-breaking works, Jews themselves produced the bulk of research in American Jewish history.¹

When we turn from the institutional to the subjective dimensions of Jews in the Humanities, we encounter, first of all, the issue of Jewish self-consciousness. Because most of the Jewish scholars in America who attained distinction in the decades after World War II were born between 1900 and 1940, it would be strange if they had lacked an awareness of themselves as Jews. This is obvious in the case of Europeans forced by Nazism to leave their homelands, but even for the American-born we can safely say that, until the 1960s, Jews and Christians generally lived in different though strongly overlapping worlds. Well-known prejudices against Jews in academia and especially in the Humanities, which were considered the scholarly territory of old-stock Americans, gave Jewish scholars plenty of reasons *not* to highlight their origins, *not* to display those "typical" Jewish "traits" described in professorial correspondence about hiring, and *to* prove their credibility as competent, and not identifiably Jewish, interpreters of the Western tradition. Beneath that sense of difference, whether it led individuals to mask their Jewish background or not, lay a powerful Jewish conception of America as a promised land, the first society in the history of Christian civilization that had not targeted Jews as essential nemeses (for that honor, there were Africans) and that offered a religion-blind (if not color-blind) ideal of democracy. Belief in America as a potentially cosmopolitan democracy in a world of provincial societies supported the energies of Jewish scholars and, as historian David Hollinger has observed, sometimes inspired their intellectual programs.

Hollinger ("Jewish Intellectuals"; "The 'Tough-Minded' Justice Holmes") established the fact that liberal Jewish intellectuals did not simply assimilate into a larger academic universe but also collaborated with liberals of Protestant background in an effort to de-Christianize the public square and thus create a truly pluralist America. Their aim

was to replace “the old Protestant cultural hegemony” with an elite of intellectuals from various faiths (or from none at all).²

Working toward the de-Christianization of academia was not the same as making it more Jewish. And yet, Jews could hardly forget their background when faced with overt assertions about the fundamentally Christian quality of Western culture. The most famous and germane of those assertions came from T. S. Eliot, perhaps the single most influential expositor of American humanism at mid-century.

Eliot made his claim in 1933, when he delivered the Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia. These were published as *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy*. A Christian apology about the nature and destiny of American culture, *After Strange Gods* was, among other things, an effort to define culture by defining the kind of tradition from which culture would grow and flourish. Eliot claimed that a viable culture depended on a “homogenous” population (“where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate”). Even more important than social homogeneity, he insisted, was “unity of religious background.” Therefore, he deduced, “reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable” (18, 20).³

We can hardly avoid recognizing the gratuitous nature of that remark, which must be taken seriously precisely because Eliot was a writer whose extraordinary command of language made it a safe bet that his words were not only deliberate but rich in oblique meaning. Eliot could simply have described what he believed to be the religious core of a tradition, warned about the presence of “free thinkers” in general, and left it at that. But rather than speculate about what he meant by this infamous statement, we can glance at the immediate context Eliot himself provided. The poet opened his Page-Barbour Lecture with praise for *I’ll Take My Stand*, the 1930 manifesto of those writers and thinkers known as the Southern Agrarians. Noting that his visit to Charlottesville was his first to the South, and reflecting on the senescence of New England, he interpreted *I’ll Take My Stand* as a sign of the redemptive possibilities the South might hold for the nation.

I think that the chances for the re-establishment of a native culture are perhaps better here than in New England. You are farther away from New York; you have been less industrialized and less invaded by foreign races; and you have a more opulent soil. (Eliot 16–17)

I’ll Take My Stand defined “genuine humanism” as something “rooted in the agrarian life of the older South and of other parts of the country that shared in such a tradition.” Disenchanted with the “abstract” quality of cosmopolitan humanism, the Southern Agrarians believed in “the concrete” reality of locale and custom. In 1930, of course, those concrete forms of Southern life drew breath from a racial caste system that, as native son Wilbur Cash showed so brilliantly in *The Mind of the South* (1941), implicated the entire region in a corrupt code of silence. Robert Penn Warren, one of the most eminent of the Southern Agrarians, contributed to the manifesto a brief for

racial segregation and an endorsement of the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, which notably denied the value of higher education for Southern blacks. (Warren subsequently disavowed that position.) He drew a telling comparison between the “educated Negro” and “the immigrant labor leader or organizer,” both of whom displayed “a tendency toward the doctrinaire.” Accepting a dichotomy in which the rooted, authentic, simple knowledge of the South opposed the ephemeral, abstract, mechanistic knowledge of the North, Warren believed that the educated black man would inevitably go north where, like his immigrant counterpart, he will have “left the life he understood and come to this country whose life he did not wholly understand” (Rubin and Rock xvii, xxvii, 251–52).

In the critic Lionel Trilling we can locate a specifically Jewish reaction to Eliot’s challenge. His response took the form of an unexpected essay, “Wordsworth and the Rabbis.” In praising Wordsworth (author of “A Jewish Family in a Small Valley Opposite St. Goar, upon the Rhine” and of that memorable evocation of “the savage thoughts that roll/In the dark mansions of the bigot’s soul”) Trilling cleverly challenged Eliot’s entire conception of the spiritual life. Likening the “non militancy” of the Talmudic rabbis to that of Wordsworth, Trilling dismissed the mentality in philosophy and literature that insisted on violent extremes as the proper representation of the human condition and overlooked the dynamism of ordinary life. Eliot had depicted two virtuous paths of life—the heroism of the saint and “the common routine”—but, as Trilling quickly pointed out, Eliot actually saw no spiritual quality in the latter.

There is no reference to the principles, the ethical discipline, by which the ordinary life is governed . . . no reference to the possibility of either joy or glory. . . . Mr. Eliot’s representation of the two ‘ways’ exemplifies how we are drawn to the violence of extremity. We imagine, with nothing in between, the dull not-being of life, the intense not-being of death; but we do not imagine being—we do not imagine that it can be a joy. We are in love, at least in our literature, with the fantasy of Death.

In contrast to that sensibility, Trilling praised the “normal mysticism” that he saw as characteristic of rabbinic Judaism. The rabbis’ belief in the potential richness of mundane life, though less dramatic than the path of Eliot’s saint, was, he argued, superior to it (Rubin and Rock 146).⁴

Jewish wrestling with Eliot, of course, hinged heavily on those events that followed in the wake of 1933 (when Hitler came to power), a year in which the Page-Barbour lectures figure as a mere footnote to the ominous. George Steiner, that versatile critic-in-exile who taught for a while in the U.S., spoke candidly about the “Eliot problem” of the Jews. Reflecting on Eliot’s *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1949), Steiner called “acutely disturbing” Eliot’s failure to address the “phenomenology of mass murder as it took place in Europe.” Without doing so, he argued, it was impossible to produce an “analysis of the idea and ideal of culture”:

How, only three years after the event, after the publication to the world of facts and pictures that have, surely, altered our sense of the limits of human behavior, was it possible to write a book on culture and say nothing? How was it possible to detail and plead for a Christian order when the holocaust had put in question the very nature of Christianity and of its role in European history? Longstanding ambiguities on the theme of the Jew in Eliot's poetry and thought provide an explanation. But one is not left the less uncomfortable. (33–34)

The length of Eliot's shadow over the Jewish literary imagination (if it is possible to speak of such a thing) may be gauged by its appearance at the late date of 1994 in Harold Bloom's grand survey, *The Western Canon*. There, Bloom saw fit to meditate upon Eliot's peculiar description of Montaigne:

Montaigne, Eliot assures us, was "a fog, a gas, a fluid, insidious element," which must surely be the oddest description of Montaigne ever attempted. The intention of Eliot's invidious metaphor is revealed when the author of *Murder in the Cathedral* insists that Montaigne "succeeded in giving expression to the skepticism of every human being."

Mindful that Eliot's characterization of the Jewish-descended Montaigne resembled that of the insidious Jew in Eliot's poem "Gerontion," Bloom exalts Montaigne: "Not a fog, a gas, or a fluid, Montaigne is complete, natural man, and as such an offense to desperate implorers for grace like Pascal and T. S. Eliot" (141).

The extensive (perhaps too extensive?) list of Yiddish and Hebrew books in Bloom's canon of twentieth-century literature might be read as a final reply to Eliot, whom we cannot really imagine esteeming I. L. Peretz's "Oyb Eikh Nisht Hekher" ("If Not Higher") or Sholom Aleichem's "Iber a Hitl" ("Over a Little Hat") as much more than an unpleasant variety of folk art. (The same might be said of Bloom's decision to include Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*, a book of greater historical than literary value.) (Bloom 527–28, 532)

Although we will no longer dwell on T. S. Eliot and the aesthetic revolt that, in the U.S., centered on the Southern Agrarians, its significance for understanding the perspective of certain Jewish scholars in the Humanities might also be extended into the domain of historical studies. Ultimately, our concern here is with the introduction of explicitly Jewish viewpoints into the Humanities, and for that we will soon turn to several books by Jews about the art of reading and writing. But the case of historians in the postwar decades compels us to investigate at least briefly an additional question: if we encounter a preponderance of Jewish scholars in a certain thematic field of interest, does that mean that we have come upon an "ethnic" perspective within the larger field of inquiry? The outstanding case of this would be the predominance of Jewish scholars in the "consensus history" that emerged in the 1950s. The distinguishing char-

acteristic of those scholars known as consensus historians was an emphasis on the broadly unifying elements of American society, the shared customs and beliefs that overrode the social, ethnic, regional, religious, and, at times, even racial differences of Americans. Among the different ways we might come to better understand that scholarly enterprise, one is in light of the Agrarian critique and Eliot's Anglican (or High Anglo-American) critique of American culture.

Without its Jewish progenitors, the trend we know as consensus history might not have existed, for its cardinal texts were Richard Hofstadter's *The American Political Tradition*, Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America*, and Daniel Boorstin's *The Genius of American Politics* and *The Americans*. We can also include Oscar Handlin's 1951 classic *The Uprooted* among the key works of consensus history because it made the bold claim that the immigrant experience of "uprootedness" was the essential American experience, one that transcended the particular ethnic differences that separated immigrants from each other and from the native-born. To account for the striking overrepresentation of Jewish voices in consensus history, we might suggest that a sense of awe about American *difference* gripped some Jewish scholars to such an extent that they felt an overwhelming desire to interpret it. Whether they viewed the consensus-producing features of American life in fairly positive terms, as Daniel Boorstin did, or in the more critical vein of Hofstadter and Handlin, they were aware of the contrast between the racially exclusive ideology that brought ruin to European Jewry and the culture of practical cooperation that allowed American Jews to assimilate into the social order. When Louis Hartz approvingly likened the U.S. Supreme Court to "nine Talmudic judges examining a single text," he expressed a sentiment that resembled that behind Trilling's "Wordsworth and the Rabbis." Much as Trilling preferred the rabbinic embrace of daily routine to the flamboyance of the saintly path, Hartz favored the judicial moderation of Talmudism and liberalism over the flamboyance of emotion-driven political alternatives (Hartz 10).

A cosmopolitan ideal, one that developed among the New York intellectuals associated with the journal *Partisan Review* in the 1930s, underlay the Jewish consensus historians. It was no coincidence that, in the 1950s, as Terry Cooney has observed, "academics with strong connections to the New York intellectual community" had developed a distinctive scholarly critique in which "populism, ruralism, anti-intellectualism, reaction, and anti-Semitism" all combined, as they had in the *Partisan Review*, as the key elements of a fascist social psychology. (And during the interwar decades Jewish psychological authorities had perfected a moralistic critique in which the psychopathic personality was virtually synonymous with the backwoods fundamentalist, the racist, and the anti-Semite.) The consensus historians framed a powerful new conception of American society in which those who had once been outsiders became insiders of a vast middle-class citizenry. The outsiders in this scheme were the paranoid or antisocial malcontents who clustered around such demagogues as Joseph McCarthy (Cooney 598; Diggins 24–28, 200–204; Moore 393–94; on the Jewish psychological critique, see Heinze 157–64).

Hofstadter (who was Jewish on his father's side and identified himself as a secular Jew) and Handlin (the son of immigrant Jews) lent a distinctly urban style to the postwar study of history. Compared to the older generation of historians for whom rural America was the fountainhead of indigenous values, these two highly influential scholars put a whole new set of issues on the map. Together, they opened up the hot topic of Populist antisemitism, and, in doing so, disrupted the agrarian romanticism that was in the air after the 1930s. Historian Thomas Bender has written of Hofstadter that he helped shift "the American sense of the past" toward an appreciation of "cities, their people, and their modern, secular, and cosmopolitan values" (Bender 4; vol. 11). And Oscar Handlin, as the principal founder of immigration history, produced a school of younger historians who wrote the first rigorous histories of various immigrant groups, most of them with a strong urban emphasis. His own *Boston's Immigrants* (1941) was a model for an inspiring new approach to the study of American immigrants, and one of his students, Moses Rischin, produced *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870–1914* (1962), which remains one of the most sophisticated urban histories of a Jewish population on either side of the Atlantic in the period after 1800.

While some European-born theorists—Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm—worried that the seeds of fascism would sprout in the soil of American mass culture, Daniel Boorstin, an Oklahoma Jew, spoke for and to a majority who believed, to the contrary, that an endemic force inoculated America against the virus of ideology. Boorstin rewrote the Puritans in a way that would explain how an allegedly dogmatic and bigoted group of founders actually paved the way to their own extinction by creating an undogmatic, practical, and cooperative culture. By an ingenious interpretive sleight of hand, he made the deep theological commitments of the nation's intellectual ancestors disappear, and uncovered in their stead a knack for adapting to the New World environment, which demanded compromise, negotiation, and motion, the skill of "becoming" something new and burying all fixed identities. A people like that could not fail to produce, eventually, an open society. Just as Hartz saw a likeness between Supreme Court justices and Talmudic scholars, Boorstin compared, in a 1949 essay, the historical consciousness of Jews and Americans and argued that a synthesis of the two would magnificently enhance the national destiny (Boorstin 311–16; Diggins; Kusmer).⁵

Did consensus history reflect a Jewish vision of the kind of America that would permit a minority, such as the Jews, to thrive? It would seem so. That America was one in which immigrants were normal and essential; urban cosmopolitanism represented the best of what the country had to offer; and the rural masses were identified as a bastion not of democracy but of bigotry. Was this vision of America shared by urban liberals who were not Jewish? Of course. But no other ethnic group embraced it as unequivocally as did the Jews.

Ultimately, though, it was Literature, more than History, that provided a venue for Jewish concerns—in particular, the concern about Hebraic and Jewish texts being

properly respected within the Western canon.

By the 1960s a new generation of American literary critics had emerged, one that contained a disproportion of Jewish scholars far beyond that found in other fields of the Humanities. We can get a quick idea of this intellectual trend by comparing two reference volumes: “Modern American Critics, 1920–1955” and “Modern American Critics Since 1955” in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. In the earlier period, one-twelfth of the listed critics were Jews; in the latter, that proportion skyrocketed to one-half.⁶

There is no Least Common Denominator among contemporary American Jewish literary critics, but I think it bears mentioning that they include, in Harold Bloom, E. D. Hirsch, and Robert Alter, some of the most public opponents of “deconstruction” and other interpretive strategies that reduce the importance of the author and challenge the conventional integrity of books. Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy*, Alter’s *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age*, and Bloom’s *The Western Canon* stand squarely against the most powerful academic tide of the past generation. These authors form a distinct camp in the aesthetic wars of our time not only by being opponents of deconstruction, but by being non-Marxist opponents. Marxists worry that the deconstructionist assault on meaning subverts politics, but Bloom, Hirsch, and Alter worry that it subverts culture. For them, the Western literary tradition must remain in place. It is within that tradition that a new appreciation of Jewish texts, from the Hebrew Scriptures to modern Hebrew literature, must take place.⁷

That appreciation should be viewed against the backdrop of a long-running Christian-Jewish polemic that shaped discussions of Jewish texts for a generation after World War II. A vivid example of interfaith tension can be found in the career of philosopher Walter Kaufmann. A refugee from Germany who, during his career as an academic philosopher at Princeton, became an important editor, translator, and commentator on existentialism (and creator of an excellent textbook, *Philosophic Classics*), Kaufmann may be as well remembered today for his semi-autobiographical *The Faith of a Heretic* (1961) as for anything else he wrote. Having converted from Protestantism to Judaism in 1933 at age twelve (shortly after Hitler’s accession) only to learn afterward that all of his grandparents were Jewish, Kaufmann subsequently rejected orthodoxy but “wrote so much on religion and defended Judaism against Christian theology with such fervor and vehemence,” recalled journalist and critic Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, “that it seemed to me that Professor Kaufmann ‘doth protest’ too much” (Weiss-Rosmarin 120; Kaufmann 15–27, 219–60).

Bothered by Christian appropriations of Martin Buber, Kaufmann produced a new translation of *I and Thou* (1970) that made the Jewishness of Buber’s philosophy a polemical issue. “The book is steeped in Judaism,” declared Kaufmann in his prologue—“This is often overlooked and perhaps as often denied explicitly.” Remarking upon the failure of the original translator of *I and Thou* to render correctly the German *Umkehr* (“turning back”), which became, in the 1937 edition, “reversal” and in the revised 1958 edition “turning,” Kaufmann explicated the original Hebrew term to

which Buber referred, *teshuvah* (“return” as in “spiritual return” or “repentance”), and compared the Jewish to the Christian concept of salvation. “Paul’s elaborate argument concerning the impossibility of salvation under the Torah (“the Law”) and for the necessity of Christ’s redemptive death presuppose [sic] that God cannot simply forgive anyone who returns”; but for the Jew, Kaufmann urged, “man stands in a direct relationship to God and requires no mediator.” In *I And Thou* Buber “deals with such immediate relationships, and in this as well as in his central emphasis on return he speaks out of the Jewish tradition” (Buber, ed. Kaufmann 36–37).⁸

One of the most important contributions of Jewish Studies as an academic field has been to put the nails in the coffin of anti-rabbinic readings of the Hebrew Scriptures. In the early years of the century, the great British Unitarian scholar R. Travers Herford tried to restore the dignity of rabbinic thought to mainstream theology, largely through *The Pharisees* (1924), but Herford’s task remained unfulfilled until the rise of Jewish Studies in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Up through the 1970s, there were very few Jewish Bible scholars outside of seminaries working in American universities, and a large gap separated Jewish studies from biblical studies (that gap harked back to the Higher Criticism of the nineteenth century, an academic approach which devalued the spiritual significance of the Torah). After the 1970s, the rapid expansion of Jewish Studies and the incorporation of greater numbers of both Jews and women into biblical studies radically altered the field and created new kinds of cross-fertilization between Christian and Jewish scholars. Symbolic of the new academic environment was the commentary on Leviticus that Jacob Milgrom published in the 1990s as part of the Anchor Bible. Leviticus had long been considered an almost superfluous, spiritually anachronistic text, one that the Higher Criticism claimed to be a late addition from a decadent priestly era of post-exilic history. Milgrom’s Leviticus, though not the first scholarly work to revise that older view, was emblematic of a new appreciation of Torah within a Jewish context. In that framework, Leviticus turned out to be a coherent, sophisticated, theologically pregnant book (Cooper 20–23).

The closing of the gap between Jewish and biblical studies may be thought of as a *recovery*, as well as a revising, of both texts and commentaries. That process spilled over into literary studies, as illustrated by the recovery of early rabbinic commentary on the Bible commonly known as *midrash*. In his preface to the 1986 anthology *Midrash and Literature*, Geoffrey Hartman observed of midrashic literature that, for many years, “the authorized interpreters—in church and university . . . remained oblivious to its influence, ignoring midrash as a subject and misconceiving or misappropriating the Hebraic elements in our culture.”

Little by little, however, institutional resistance to the implications of midrash has worn away. For some time now, it has been understood that many profoundly ingrained habits of western reading . . . are historical derivatives of midrash—sometimes by way of

emulation, sometimes as aggressive inversions.⁹ (Hartman and Budick x)

It is within this context—the rejuvenation of Jewish approaches to key texts of the Western tradition—that I want to examine three influential scholars: Erich Auerbach, Harold Bloom, and Leo Strauss. Through such works as *Mimesis*, *The Book of J*, and *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, these three found novel ways of projecting Jewish scripture and exegesis into humanistic discourse.

Erich Auerbach demands our attention here not so much for the vast impact of his masterpiece *Mimesis* but for its overt, though at times cryptic, Jewish valences. More definitively than anyone before him, Auerbach compelled scholars to look at the Hebrew Scriptures with fresh eyes. He rooted his dazzling interpretation of Western literature in a juxtaposition of the Torah and Homer and argued that the laconic and fragmentary quality of the Hebrew scripture (long a target for supercilious aesthetic criticism) actually generated a psychological depth and a suspenseful uncertainty about its very human characters that were intrinsically lacking in Homer. With the fully “foregrounded” Greek characters, what you saw was what there was—there was no biographical uncertainty about them and all of their exploits were clearly delineated. The Hebrew characters, however, begged for commentary and explication, and that feature of the biblical text provided the basis for the *figural* orientation of Western literature, beginning with the need of Christian writers to interpret Hebrew characters and scenarios typologically, as figures of future characters and events in the unfolding of Christian history. Unlike allegory, which would reduce Abraham, for example, to a symbol for something else, *figura* is a literary device that preserves Abraham’s integrity as a character even as Abraham takes on additional meanings. The *figura* exists, as Auerbach put it, “without prejudice to the power of [the] concrete reality” of the original (in this case, the figures of the Old Testament). *Mimesis* returned the Torah to a foundational position in Western literature, which lined up with conventional Jewish understandings of it as a deeply significant book full of its own mystery and worthy of internal readings.¹⁰

Auerbach also added an important self-referential aspect to *Mimesis*. “It is the personal, the self-reflective, in Auerbach,” writes scholar Seth Lerer, “that late-twentieth-century readers treasure” (222–23). Not only on the verso of the cover page, where Auerbach (now famously) tells his readers that the book was written in exile in Turkey between 1942 and 1945, but at various points within the text he momentarily departs from his history and refers to the events that led to his expulsion from his position as professor and his exodus from Germany. In one of the more memorable conclusions of any book of its time, Auerbach discloses:

With this I have said all that I thought the reader would wish me to explain. Nothing now remains but to find him—to find the reader, that is. I hope that my study will reach its readers—both my friends of former years, if they are still alive, as well as all the

others for whom it was intended. And may it contribute to bringing together again those whose love for our western history has serenely persevered. (Auerbach 557)

A number of scholars have speculated that Auerbach found a precious refuge in his conception of *figura*, which became for him a means of insisting on the Judeo-Christian foundation of Western civilization at a time when Hitler aimed to excise its Jewish component. Auerbach had a deeply personal interest “in the persistence of Hebrew influence against forces that would compromise or occlude it from Western representations of reality” (Gellrich 111; Uhlig 43).¹¹

We can see in the work of Harold Bloom a similar desire to redirect our attention toward the Hebraic legacy in Western literature. Bloom commands our attention because of both his extraordinary prominence among American literary scholars and his significance as a humanist with concerns that are clearly Jewish.

Those concerns appear in the distinctive theory of literary influence he developed and in the way he, like Auerbach, reinstated the Hebrew scriptures at the heart of modern literary aesthetics. Bloom’s distinctive theory of poetic influence holds that modern writers labor, anxiously, in the shadow of overarching predecessors, of whom Shakespeare and Dante are the principals in the Western tradition. Until 1990 Bloom was content to leave Shakespeare and Dante in charge of the “anxiety of influence,” but then he added a very old predecessor named “J,” a woman whom Bloom took to be the author of the core section of the Torah. Bloom recognized that J, though not necessarily a woman, was the redactor whom biblical critics beginning in the nineteenth century had dubbed “the Yahwist” (the Hebrew “Y” becomes the English “J”), referring to the oldest version of the biblical narrative. Bloom’s *The Book of J* was a joint project of translation and commentary, in which, building on the critical insights of biblical scholars, the J-text is excavated from the whole to stand alone in fresh translation from the Hebrew, accompanied only by Bloom’s interpretation.¹²

In one respect *The Book of J* may be seen as Bloom’s effort to get a piece of the biggest game in town, the re-reading of the foundational text on which the moral apparatus of Western civilization stands. The 1990s were remarkable for the production of innovative translations of the Torah, most notably Everett Fox’s American extenuation of the 1920s Buber-Rosenzweig project of restoring the orality of the Hebrew, and Robert Alter’s similarly inspired translation of the Five Books of Moses, begun in the 1990s and completed in 2004.¹³

Bloom’s re-reading of the Hebrew Bible is characteristically irreverent but certainly a Jewish reading, by an interpreter who described himself as a “Jewish Gnostic.” He offered this self-definition in his 1982 lecture, “The Breaking of the Vessels,” which referred to a Kabbalistic theory of creation. In that lecture, subsequently published as a book, Bloom also made a point to favor the Hebrew over the Greek word for “word,” preferring the Hebrew *davar* to the Greek *logos* because it fused the concepts of “act” and “word” and expressed more of what he saw in the art of poetry (Bloom, *The Breaking of the Vessels* 3–4).

The *Breaking of the Vessels* prefigured *The Book of J*, as it was prefigured by Bloom's 1975 *Kabbalah and Criticism*, the first effort by a major American critic to introduce a Jewish concept as an aesthetic model. "Kabbalah," he argued, "seems to me unique among religious systems of interpretation in that it is, simply, already poetry, scarcely needing translation into the realm of the aesthetic." For Bloom, the Kabbalistic thought that emerged after the Jewish exile from Spain embodied an essentially poetic striving "to be different, to be elsewhere," which was also the desire "for an end to Exile."

But this emphasis on *interpretation* is finally what distinguishes Kabbalah from nearly every other variety of mysticism or theosophy, East or West. The Kabbalists of medieval Spain, and their Palestinian successors after the expulsion from Spain, confronted a peculiar psychological problem, one that demanded a revisionist solution. . . . The Kabbalists were in no position to formulate or even re-formulate much of anything in their religion. . . . Their stance in relation to all this tradition became, I think, the classic paradigm upon which Western revisionism in all areas was to model itself ever since, usually in rather indirect emulation. For the Kabbalists developed implicitly a *psychology of belatedness*, and with it an explicit, rhetorical series of techniques for opening Scripture and even received commentary to their own historical sufferings, and to their own, new theosophical insights. (Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* 34–35, 52)¹⁴

In short, Bloom found Kabbalah to be an exemplary literary act because of the sophistication and boldness with which it confronted its precursor tradition. It embodied the poetic enterprise at its most sublime, by daring to present an answer to the problem of evil in a world governed by a God both good and all-powerful, and to the problem of exile as a basic condition of human existence.

Bloom's argument found a vague parallel in the thought of philosopher Robert Nozick, which is interesting to note in passing. In *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations*, Nozick offered several (characteristically) provocative observations about theology. In a discussion of "The Ideal and the Actual," he explained that various systems of organization, such as communism and capitalism, had essentially undermined the ideals on which they were based, and Christianity served him equally to illustrate the point. Christian ideals of brotherly love and compassion for the downtrodden were "coupled with inquisitions to root out those whose faith deviates or to impose the faith on those who do not choose it, averting the gaze from (when not blessing) the monstrous crimes of those in power." As for the most monstrous crime, the Holocaust, Nozick believed that it "constitutes some kind of rift in the universe" and accordingly demands a theology that shows a commensurate trauma or upsetting in the divine entity itself. The task of contemporary theology, Nozick argued, was "to dare to speculate, as the Kabbalists did before, about a divine being's internal existence. A daring

theory is needed to drive issues about evil deep within the divine realm or nature in some way, leaving it deeply affected yet not itself evil" (Nozick 232, 235, 280–81).

Bloom's *Book of J* is a daring theory of literary creation at the dawn of time, so to speak. It operates on the premise that the author of the J narrative of the Bible was a poet from a literate, urban culture, probably one that flourished during the time of King Solomon, in which imaginative Hebrew narratives already existed. Bloom responds without embarrassment to conventional claims about the nature of a religious text, saying, "It is considerably more anachronistic to regard J as a historian or a theologian than as a prose poet" (Bloom, *Book of J*, 318).

By creating a bold comparison between J and Shakespeare, Bloom, like Auerbach, throws the entire Western literary tradition into a new perspective. In contrast to Northrop Frye, whose Christian readings of Shakespeare he has debated, Bloom sees the English poet as a humanist and notes the real paucity of conventional Christian imagery in his work. So, when he then takes up the ancient writer who well merits comparison with Shakespeare, he leaves us with two founders of the Western literary heritage, neither of whom is Christian in any essential way. J and Shakespeare, Bloom contends, established the pattern of human self-understanding in the West. "Our ways of representing ourselves to others," he writes, "are founded upon J's and Shakespeare's way of representing character and personality." As for the Greeks, they don't appear in Bloom's picture, because J's characterizations can be compared *only* to Shakespeare. Like Auerbach in *Mimesis*, Bloom observes, "J's Yahweh and her theomorphic [having the form of a god] men and women are far closer to Shakespearean characters than are the gods and humans of Homer. We listen to J relating the long agon of Jacob, from the womb until burial, and we come to know Jacob as I do not think we can come to know even Odysseus." In one respect, Bloom found J not merely equal but superior to Shakespeare: "We see Shakespeare's most favored figures, whether tragic or comic, at their apogee, but not advancing toward more life in a time without boundaries" (Bloom, *Book of J* 316, 319, 322).

Leo Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952) stands along with Bloom's *Kabbalah and Criticism* as a bold effort to inject a religiously derived Jewish perspective into the Humanities. What is remarkable is how slow we have been to recognize this point. The book by Strauss that has elicited the most attention and debate is the 1953 *Natural Right and History*; by comparison, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* has been neglected by scholars outside of Jewish Studies.¹⁵

A central concern of Strauss was the problematic relationship between philosophy and religion. He rejected the claim that science had successfully debunked the "extreme possibility" of revelation and miracle, yet he insisted on the stern duties of philosophic rationalism. In one sense, if only one, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* is a successor to William James' classic, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, by virtue of both Strauss's intellect and the nature of the problem he set out for himself. Both James and Strauss took the academically defiant position of allowing for the possibility of the

Divine. To resolve the conflict between science and faith, James turned to psychology and explored the experience of revelation; Strauss turned to the rabbinic tradition and explored the experience of reading.

Persecution and the Art of Writing is remarkable in that it manages to be both a study in political philosophy and a theory of reading and writing—“reading between the lines”—that is worthy of being called strong literary criticism (with its critical model deriving from medieval Jewish texts). Written, as were his previous books, with underlying reference to the degeneration that took place under the Nazi regime, this collection of essays explores the nuances of “a peculiar technique of writing . . . in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines.”

That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only. It has all the advantages of private communication without having its greatest disadvantage—that it reaches only the author’s acquaintances. It has all the advantages of public communication without having its greatest disadvantage—capital punishment for the author. (Strauss 25)

This wry passage, ostensibly focusing on literature written under the fear of a despotic regime, hints at a general theory of writing and reading. For what becomes clear as one reads Strauss is that he understands the fundamental impulse of a strong *creative* writer (i.e., the poet and novelist) to write on at least two levels at once, always cognizant that there are at least two kinds of readers, the inquisitive and the hasty. To the average reader looking for various forms of inspiration, the text says one thing, while to the keen, close reader it says something else above and beyond the most apparent meaning, which it may compromise or even contradict.

Harking back to the example of Socrates, Strauss was equally concerned about two kinds of catastrophe facing the skilled writer of philosophy: the force of a censorious regime and the potential of uprooting the faith of the average person. Moses Maimonides provides the perfect example, not for being a Jew writing under a gentile power, but for being a rabbinic scholar who needed to talk about the rationalist ideal but needed also to protect the Jewish community from the religiously destructive potential of unbounded rational inquiry. In the keystone essay of the volume, “The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed*,” Strauss suggests through minute textual analysis that Maimonides designed his *Guide* for the philosophical reader (“the small number of people who are able to understand by themselves”) and his code of law, the *Mishneh Torah*, for the average Jew who does not understand philosophy. Maimonides’ supreme act of intellectual equivalence was paradigmatic for the ethically responsible philosopher—he (or she) pursues the difficult questions about truth but, not elevating that pursuit into a narcissistic ideal, puts himself at the service of the community, interpreting the Law by which he and they are equally bound in a universe that stands on a divine revelation beyond the reach of philosophy. Because Strauss was adept in his readings of both Jewish and general philosophic texts, he sensed in

Maimonides the tension he himself experienced. As one of his students characterized Strauss, “The powerful counterclaims of a revelation calling for obedience and a reason demanding satisfaction retained their primeval urgency for him.”¹⁶

But Strauss did not invest himself in orthodoxy; rather he maintained and perhaps implicitly suggested as a model for formerly orthodox Jewish thinkers like himself a state of almost exquisite tension between Law and Reason, making sure not to allow for the catastrophic deterioration of religious morality at the hand of skeptical philosophy. The second textual analysis in *Persecution* centers on another medieval classic, the *Kuzari* of the poet Judah Halevy, which stages a debate between religion, especially Judaism, and philosophy. “The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*” takes up the question of the difference between natural laws and rational laws. Natural laws operate even among “a gang of robbers” (probably an ironic allusion to Voltaire’s *Philosophy of History*, where the Jews of antiquity are so described) and evolve to establish that “minimum of morality required for the bare existence of any society.” Rational laws, however, derive from the Divine and have as their goal the “perfection of man as man.” The complexity of the *Kuzari* essay defies a proper summary here, but Strauss warns that the philosopher is liable to fall into an “enormously dangerous” trap by insisting there is nothing beyond natural law—“only revelation can transform natural man into ‘the guardian of his city’, or, to use the language of the Bible, the guardian of the brother” (Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* 132). That being said, though, Strauss does not force the philosopher into orthodoxy, but rather into a state of longing and anticipation.

One has not to be naturally pious, he has merely to have a passionate interest in genuine morality in order to long with all his heart for revelation: moral man as such is the potential believer.

Strauss concluded his reflections on Halevy with the thought that, “in defending Judaism, which, according to him, is the only true revealed religion, against the philosophers, he was conscious of defending morality itself and therewith the cause, not only of Judaism, but of mankind at large” (Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* 140–41).

Rarely had Jewish tradition been distilled in such a philosophically relevant way as a post-Enlightenment option—the option being not conversion to Judaism but rather an approach to balancing Reason and Revelation at a time when philosophy said precious little about religion. Strauss’s reading of Maimonides highlighted the need for a high-level rational engagement that is *grounded* in a larger framework of communal morality. With his appreciation—some would say a contemptuous appreciation—of the necessity of religious belief for the majority of people across the ages, Strauss understood, perhaps more than many professional philosophers, that the layperson could not cope with a relativistic universe. Contrapuntal to American pragmatism, which accepted the relativity of truth and envisioned a specialized scientific community of truth-determiners, Strauss spoke out of a Jewish tradition that locked the sage

into the community of regular believers, whom the sage loved in the spirit of *Klal Yisrael* (the whole of Israel) even as he knew that he could discourse with only a select few of them.

Persecution and the Art of Writing affected the humanities in several ways: by filtering a Maimonidean and rabbinic perspective into the mix of contemporary literary methodologies; by stimulating a range of scholars to think about the Maimonidean “reading between the lines” dynamic behind certain texts; and by presenting a Maimonidean philosophical alternative to the dominant mode of American philosophy—pragmatism—which held truth to be relative and progressive and rejected the traditional religious idea that truth was found in a religious revelation from the past.¹⁷

The Auerbachian impulse, the Bloomian impulse, the Straussian impulse—which have been cited here only as evocative focal points, not as determinants of a spectrum of Jewish sensibilities—all centered on the Western literary tradition while bearing definite but different relations to Judaism and traditional Jewish ways of reading texts. It is their clear relation to things Jewish, as well as their importance in academic discourse, that forces our consideration.

To the extent that we can speak of tendencies among the most influential, self-consciously Jewish scholars in the humanities after World War II, we seem to be locating a “canonistic cosmopolitanism.” Like T. S. Eliot, such scholars as Auerbach, Bloom, and Strauss venerated tradition, but not tradition as an exclusively Christian phenomenon; they placed a premium on the canonical West, certainly including the venerable Christian texts, but adding a new appreciation for Jewish sources and constituents of the canon. Such an appreciation would probably not have developed without Jewish scholars.

Without question, Jews were strong allies of those liberal Protestant and post-Protestant progressives who made academia a more religiously and ethnically inclusive arena than it had been before the 1940s. And without question, the vast majority of Jewish scholars spoke as scholars, not as Jews. But within the confines of academic discourse, we can, I think, identify Jews reacting *as Jews* against attempts to harmonize humanism with Christianity. Occasionally those attempts took surprisingly overt form—T. S. Eliot defining Jews, or certain Jews, as *out of culture*—but more often they involved assumptions about the irrelevance of Jewish texts and viewpoints.

In one sense, as Jews moved across the land into the nation’s far-flung faculties after 1945, they fulfilled Eliot’s prediction that a humanist culture would flourish “farther away from New York.” But when they moved they did not leave behind the memory of their grandfathers (if we may adapt a famous phrase from the American Jewish philosopher Horace Kallen, whose 1915 essay, “Democracy *Versus* the Melting-Pot” originated the concept of cultural pluralism when it suggested that Jews would not simply melt away into America¹⁸). By bringing a *Mimesis*, a *Book of J*, a *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, a “Wordsworth and the Rabbis” into academic conversation about the nature of reading and writing, especially reading and writing as performed in the West, Jews were bringing something Jewish along with them.

Notes

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- ¹ Two conspicuous exceptions to the general rule of Jewish authorship of leading works in American Jewish history are John Higham, and David A. Hollinger.
- ² In terms of empirical value, Hollinger's work is a decided improvement over the brilliantly creative but highly speculative arguments of sociologist John Murray Cuddihy, who explored the possibility of an "intraethnic war" that was "encoded in various ways in the literary and ideological product of the Jewish social critics of the Diaspora" (225).
In the field of European Jewish history there is the useful notion of a German Jewish "subculture" that we should, however, avoid in American history. That idea centers on the propensity of nineteenth-century Germanic Jewry to coalesce intellectually around certain Enlightenment ideals of rationality that rapidly became outmoded with the powerful emergence of romanticism and volkish nationalism. Compared to continental Europe, though, where modernization was grudging and fitful, America—and its Jews—modernized early, rapidly, and quite completely. Indeed, to the degree that the integration of Jews into Christian society serves as a gauge of modernity, America was modern in a way Germany never managed. Without a doubt, there are certain dynamics of assimilation and anxiety that link the histories of German and American Jewry, but I think it would be a mistake to overstate them. That exaggeration would lead to a false idea of American Jews existing in a more internally cogent social and cultural world than was possible for most people of European descent in the U.S. See Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg, and David Sorkin. My assertion about Jews and other white ethnics contradicts the claims that Whiteness Studies has made about Jews, Irish and other European immigrants. For a definitive critique of the "whiteness" approach, see Eric Arnesen.
- ³ For the continuing interest in this subject, see "Eliot and Anti-Semitism: The Ongoing Debate." For a detailed rereading that questions the assumption of anti-semitism in regard to Eliot's most infamous Jewish references, see Patricia Sloane.
- ⁴ The essay "Wordsworth and the Rabbis" appears on 118–50; for Trilling's engagement with Eliot, see especially 132–33, 145–48. On Trilling and the middle class ideal, see Mark Krupnick (104–05); and Thomas Bender.
- ⁵ Some of the "darker" mass culture theorists mentioned in passing in this paragraph formed a foundation for another "Jewish locus of concern" in cultural history, one that historians have not yet identified as having any particular ethnic coloration—the shift from a putative "culture of character" to a "culture of personality" in the early twentieth century. That influential paradigm was rooted in the sociological ideas of Philip Rieff, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, and David Riesman and passed into historiography through Warren Susman. Though not focusing on the Jewish background of the progenitors of this model, I discuss it in "Schizophrenia Americana."
- ⁶ For good vignettes of a dozen Jewish professors of literary criticism and American Studies in the postwar era—Lionel Trilling, Harry Levin, M. H. Abrams, Leo Marx, Daniel Aaron, Allen Guttman, Jules Chametzky, Steven Marcus, Robert Alter, Sacvan Bercovitch, Ruth Wisse, and Carolyn Heilbrun—see Susanne Klingenstein, *Enlarging*

America: The Cultural Work of Jewish Literary Scholars, 1930–1990. Given the subtitle, it is a puzzle as to why some of the most influential Jewish literary scholars (especially those such as Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman, who have explicitly taken up Jewish themes in a way Leo Marx and Sacvan Bercovitch, for example, have not), do not appear in the book.

- ⁷ Hirsch; Bloom 22–23, 57, 71. See the measured critique in the introduction of Alter. Alter accepts as a tonic some of the critical energies imported into a “stodgy” Anglo-American tradition but laments the degree to which the study of avant-garde criticism has displaced the study of literature itself. “I strongly suspect that many young people now earning undergraduate degrees in English or French at our most prestigious institutions have read two or three pages of Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, and Kristeva for every page of George Eliot or Stendhal” (11). There is a colorful short sketch of the interchanges between Bloom and other members of the “Yale School” of criticism about deconstruction in David Lehman (145–50). Alter provided advance praise for Lehman’s critical account of deconstruction. For a good overview of academic literary criticism, one that defends deconstruction against Alter while praising Bloom, see Evan Carton and Gerald Graff.
- ⁸ Recently, the Jewish affiliations of two prominent academic philosophers, Hilary Putnam and Martha Nussbaum, entered into a subtle Christian-Jewish tension embedded in the debate over Aristotle’s relevance to contemporary interpretations of the mind-body problem. In the early 1990s, Putnam, who identifies himself as a “practicing Jew,” and Nussbaum, who defines herself as “an Enlightenment Jew,” collaborated on a polemical reply to Myles Burnyeat. In contesting Burnyeat’s self-described “Christian view” of the mind-body problem, Putnam and Nussbaum identified their own perspective as Jewish. See Nussbaum and Putnam 51–52. For Nussbaum’s account of her conversion to Judaism and intellectual embrace of the classical Reform tradition, see her “Judaism and the Love of Reason.” See also Martin Kavka. Putnam intimates some of his Jewish predilections in the introduction he wrote to an updated edition of Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of World, Man, and God* (1–20).
- ⁹ Hartman sees the submergence of the author in midrash as especially pertinent to contemporary criticism: “In midrash we have tradition and the talent of individual interpreters, but without ‘the individual talent’; without, that is, myths of private genius. How this absorption of self into text is accomplished while a startling human coloration is still preserved; how a language of universal intimacy . . . is constructed—these are among the most important questions midrash raises” (xii). See also Susan A. Handelman.
- ¹⁰ The quote from Auerbach comes from *Mimesis* 555. On Auerbach’s making a figura of Christian figuration, see Hayden White 128–29. The continuing vitality of *Mimesis* registers in the flurry of academic commentaries of the past few years. In one essay in a special Auerbach issue of *Poetics Today*, Egbert Bakker offers an important assessment of Auerbach’s reading of Homer, vindicating the essence of that reading while introducing several clarifications based on the fact that Auerbach did not know to interpret Homer as an oral phenomenon. Because of the performative demands of the

Homeric tale, it had to foreground in the way Auerbach described and could not attain the psychological depth perception of the Bible stories.

- ¹¹ For a peculiar example of an attempt to reread Auerbach against himself as a Jew, see Edward Said's introduction to a recent edition of *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Said, a Palestinian Christian, misreads and misquotes (!) Auerbach, claiming that Auerbach assigns the notion of incarnation to Abraham and thinks that only figural interpretation can recover the hidden aspects of Abraham (xx). Auerbach, of course, makes no such statements—see 15–16, where Auerbach notes that “doctrine and promise” are “incarnate” not in Abraham but in the stories, the narrative style, of the Old Testament. Auerbach considers Christian figural interpretation the most striking way of reinterpreting the Biblical claim to be universal history, but *not* the only or the necessary means of explicating the hidden psychological elements of biblical characters. Said writes, “Auerbach, I believe, is bringing us back to what is an essentially Christian doctrine for believers but also a crucial element of *human* intellectual power and will” (xxii).
- ¹² See Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; 1997), which includes a prologue in which Bloom reflects, a quarter-century later, on his theory and its reception; and Bloom and Rosenberg, *The Book of J*.
- ¹³ Parts of Fox's translation appeared in the 1980s. See his introduction for an explanation of his effort in relation to the Buber-Rosenzweig translation (ix–xxvi). See also Alter, *Genesis* and *The Five Books of Moses*.
- ¹⁴ Bloom has referred to Gershom Scholem as “my great mentor.” See the feature on Bloom, “Ranting Against Cant.”
- ¹⁵ We need not concern ourselves here with the nearly hysterical debate occasioned either by “the Straussians” or by Strauss's eccentric interpretation of Plato. That uproar has prompted one distinguished Plato scholar, G. R. F. Ferrari, to ask, “What is it about Leo Strauss that provokes sensible people to childish outbursts?” In 1985 Myles Burnyeat published a withering critique of Strauss as a reader of Plato in the *New York Review of Books*, but more recently Ferrari, who was one of Burnyeat's students, has challenged those who dismiss Strauss prejudicially and reopened Strauss's unorthodox argument about Plato as a “politic” writer.
- ¹⁶ The quotation is from Ralph Lerner, author of the foreword to Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law* (x). This is the first English translation of *Philosophie und Gesetz* (1935).
- ¹⁷ For a fairly recent study that finds inspiration in Strauss's theory of exoteric/esoteric writing, see Paul J. Bagley 236, 240. Bagley notes that “Strauss's unconventional readings . . . has [sic] incited unreasonably partisan reactions from both his detractors and his putative disciples” (240).

For an application of the Straussian idea of writing to William of Auvergne, see Alan E. Bernstein. Using Strauss's reinterpretation of Maimonides as a jumping off point, Kenneth Stein suggests that a rabbinic, and in this case Maimonidean, approach to reading would enable literary criticism to avoid the problems that come with the tendency toward single, overriding, often anagogical approaches. Using Northrop Frye as a model of that sort of monism which subordinates all other ways of reading to the mythological, he juxtaposes Maimonides reading of Job to Frye's. The result of that

comparison is to underscore the deficiencies of what might be called Frye's anti-rabbinic way of reading, which is to say, his failure to attend to a range of literal and figurative meanings, and to allow for the possibility that different kinds of passages might inherently call for a literal, a rational, *or* a symbolic reading, or some combination thereof, rather than automatically imposing "a purely anagogical perspective" that ends up distorting the text. Maimonides method, Stein urges, offers a richer, more variegated way of reading texts in which "all the categories of interpretation remain available." Rather than submerge literature in allegory, rabbinic methods of reading operate "on the principle of discreteness which allows for varying approaches to the text"—they offer a model of *discontinuous* interpretation that is truer to the discontinuous semiotics of any text. See Kenneth Stein (1151 for the quotes). Following Stein, see Handelman 102–03.

For an introduction to Strauss, see Thomas L. Pangle 659–61. See also Kenneth L. Deutsch and John A. Murley, and on Strauss as a Jewish philosopher, see Kenneth Hart Green.

¹⁸ An annotated, abridged version of Kallen's essay appears in Heinze, "The Critical Period" 497–503.

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CHAPTER THREE

Image

How to Reach 71 in Jewish Art

By R. B. Kitaj

EDITORS' NOTE: The following lecture was given by R. B. Kitaj at USC's twenty-fourth annual Jerome Nemer Lecture on October 20, 2004. This is not a transcript of the event but rather Kitaj's own prepared remarks—unedited. The photograph that precedes this chapter is that of Kitaj's late wife, artist Sandra Fisher, whose image is included in all of his publications. We are pleased to be able to include some wonderful samples of Kitaj's art, as well. The subsequent essay in this chapter is by David N. Myers, who was a respondent for Kitaj's lecture. Please see the introduction to this volume for more information.



Kitaj, *Freud Paints Me Twice*, 2004, oil on canvas

As you've guessed, I am a painter. I'm told I'm the first painter to do this lecture, so I feel honored. I am not a scholar, but I come from the People of the Book, lots of books really, and the Burning Books. Since I was a very young painter, books and book-learning have been for me what trees and woods are for a landscape painter.

I also have "Jew-on-the-brain" more than any other crazy painter alive, I dare say. This passion of mine gets me into a lot of trouble in what is called the art world, which is half Jewish but doesn't talk about it. I am the most controversial living easel-painter; that is to say that the world's museums, Glittering Prizes and an amazing Hatred—even a low-octane Jew-hate—come my way.

What Dr. Goebbels called "Jewish Intellectualism" is also taboo in today's kitsch driven art world. But, as everyone in this room knows, the Jews have been in trouble since the Expulsion from Eden. A French Catholic Judeophile named Charles Péguy called us "five thousand years of neurasthenia." In the immortal words of Sam Goldwyn, we've passed a lot of water since then. After the worst thing that ever happened to us, we found a billion new enemies, in the Muslim world, we never had before. I fear it will never end.

That trouble we are always in was one of the things that fascinated me about the Jews and drew me to them forty years ago, when I was a young painter, and I'm still fascinated and obsessed by the Jews today at age seventy-one, which makes my strange passion quite heretical in our Art Scheme, which, like my grandmother, likes to pull the shades down so the neighbors don't hear. I had no Jewish education. My mother was an atheist 'til the day she died, but my life has been quite a Romance in which the Jews and the Jewish Question have been my Tahiti (think Gauguin), my Provence (think Cézanne, my favorite painter), my Lost Horizon. I swore to become myself—the new Jewish painter of a Diasporist art who cleaves to my own version of perplexed Jewish life and thought.

My old pal, David Hockney, and I arrived at the Royal College of Art in London on the same day in 1959, almost forty-five years ago. I had just finished at Oxford on the GI Bill, brimming over with the teaching of the German-Jewish refugee art professors from the circle of the great art historian Aby Warburg. Soon, I began to read Hannah Arendt's regular dispatches from the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem, appearing in the *New Yorker*, which were later published in her very controversial book. I determined to educate myself about these strange people of mine who were always in such



Kitaj, *Servant of Abraham*, 2004, oil on canvas

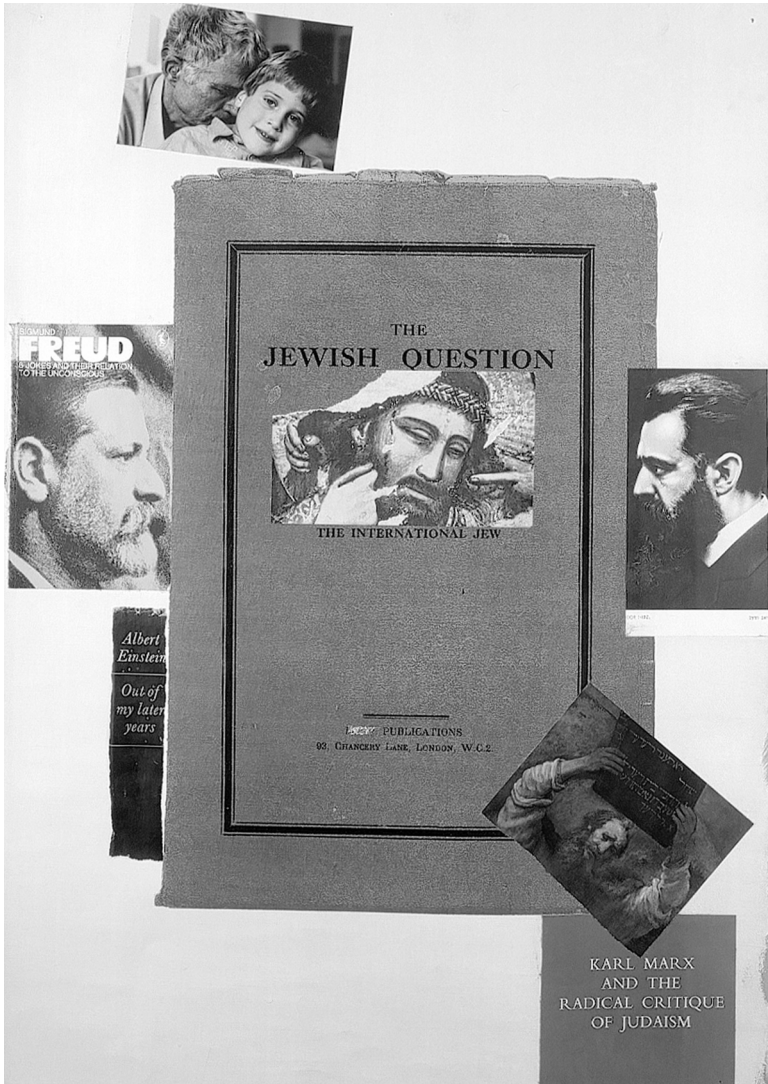
deep trouble. I was a book-nut anyway, so I began to study my Jews. Like many Jews, I went through a morbid period (which never really ends) studying the Shoah. And, I read all of Kafka. Like everyone, I had read the two and a half novels and some of the stories long before, but now I read Kafka the Jew—the fiction, the parables, the vast letters, and those incredible Jewish-inflected *Diaries* as well as a lot of the huge Kafka literature. I never got over him. To this day, Kafka is my greatest Jewish artist—far more of a Master for me than any Jewish painter. Kafka is my Chief Rebbe, my Besht, my Zaddik, and his creature, K, in *The Castle*, is my favorite Jew. Don't ask me why. That would take another lecture. W. H. Auden (a Gentile) said that Kafka was to our age what Dante and Goethe were to theirs. I'm painting a few Kafka pictures just now in my studio. I feel guilty not being there today. But a Jew, Clement Greenberg—an unlikely source—said it best for me. Clem, the paramount art critic of his era, wrote:

Kafka wins through to an intuition of the Jewish condition in the Diaspora so vivid as to convert the expression of itself into an integral part of itself; so complete, that is, that the intuition becomes Jewish in style as well as in sense . . . the only example I know of an integrally Jewish literary art that is fully at home in a modern Gentile language.

Well, I wanted to do that in a Jewish art of painting, and I still do! K never gets into the Castle in Kafka's book, so, right now, I'm painting *K Enters The Castle At Last*. It's fun. It's heretical. It's Jewish, and I wonder if any other writer or painter these eighty years got K into The Castle? The book is unfinished anyway and so is my painting. Kafka's *Diaries* always lie by my bedside. They're part of my Jewish Canon.

One heavyweight led me to another. Kafka to Benjamin to Scholem to Buber to the Hasidic Masters and Rosenzweig . . . some of them a hard read, even impenetrable, but I love them anyway and I pay them a lot of attention, so I read all about them—a very clear writer, Gershom Scholem, particularly has come to influence my painting again and again. Most experts agree that he was the greatest Jewish scholar of the 20th Century. He was awesome. Another path led me from the great Ahad Ha-Am to Pinsker to Herzl and the Zionists to the present tragic *tsouris* which I fear will never end, as I just said. At one time or another I read the Zionist essays of Einstein and the proto-Zionist Lazare and the brilliant and often boring and anti-Zionist Frankfurt School. My art also awoke to the wonderful Meyer Schapiro and my great living mentor Isaiah Berlin, and a lot of Freud and Benjamin and countless books about Modernist Jewish forebears.

All the years, don't forget, I was just as crazy about Modernist art and artists, every day, my Host Art in the Diaspora. Closer study of Torah was on hold for later! I seem to represent a new Jewish voice unseen before, or may I say unheard in the art of painting—recently a critic compared me to Bellow—well then, out on my own in a post-Roth/Bellow painting art. Then there were always Heine and Proust and Celan and above all Kafka. Thousands of books and picture books excite my art and live with me in my Jewish Library room where I study and browse each day; listen to some of the



Kitaj, *Study for the Second Diasporist Manifesto*, 1970-1996, collage

Jewish precursors I have schlepped to my painting experiments—they couple wondrously with my Gentile art masters, from Masaccio to Matisse; listen to these unlost souls who appear in my art imagination, some more, some less, some read long ago, some always on call. Here are a few of them: Panofsky, Karl Kraus, Berenson, Maimonides and his Mizvot, Adorno, Isaac Babel, Svevo, Dubnow, Canetti, Primo Levi, Shestov, Tristan Tzara, Ziga Vertov, Eisenstein, Levi-Strauss, The Hollywood Jews, Heschel (on the Prophets), Steinsalz (my favorite magic Rabbi!), Bruno Schulz, Aby Warburg and his amazing circle, Jabés, Bialik, Yerushalmi and many less-known gems like Carl Einstein, Jiri Langer, Jean Améry, the Partisan Review group of New York Jews, Abram Room, Edward Dahlberg and many more. I've read very little Marx and the Jewish Marxists except Benjamin. *I now try to read a Torah portion every day* and look forward to Robert Alter's new English Version. My Steinsalz *Talmud* defeats me—I am too old! And it's too much genius, even for me. Anyway, I'm anxious to study some Rashi to see why his *Commentaries* are so revered, and more Psalms before I die.

Some of my Jews were religious. *Very many more were not*, and never appeared in shul. Some, as you all know, had and still have no interest in being Jewish at all. They can mesmerize me—guys like the genius Wittgenstein and the loony Otto Weininger. Some—especially the philosophers—are quite difficult for me—and I'm not alone! Spinoza, Husserl, Herman Cohen, Bergson, Leo Strauss, Wittgenstein, Derrida, and so I like to read about them the way one reads commentaries on Scripture. My philosophy reading has been wildly idiosyncratic. But one of them, Emmanuel Levinas, has broken through to my life-in-art this last year or two, and I've made a few pictures inspired by him and his beautiful Jewish essays on the human face of the other.

Freud, his Jewish Science and his almost totally Jewish circle of Psychoanalysts has absorbed me recently—Freud the conflicted Jew. I've just painted three pictures of those three famous Jews, ID, EGO and SUPEREGO. A friend said that I must have the only library in the world where Marcel Proust stands next to Rabbi Soleveitchik. Each one of the guys on my long list just given, plus many others, crash my studio with beloved Gentile precursors already there, like Giotto, Manet, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Degas, Matisse (my big six!) in the tricky business of making pictures.

Some dear friends have been living inspiration in my life, above all, Philip Roth, Isaiah Berlin, Aharon Appelfeld, Leon Wieseltier and David Myers who is my Los Angeles Rebbe. What is unusual about this litany—even strange—is that I am a painter, a shmearer of colors. My Bet-Midrash is the Studio where I paint pictures each day. My books feed the pictures I make in a perpetual dialectic which excites me.

The Jewish Question is the central drama of my life and I guess that no radical painter has put the Jewish Question so openly to the art of painting since very early Vitebsk Chagall one hundred years ago. My Russian grandparents were contemporaries of Chagall and the largest exhibition of Jewish Art ever held was called Chagall to Kitaj, about fifteen years ago in London. The term “Jewish Art” is interesting and very elusive. Some art people, including many Jews, loathe the term and shun it, for many reasons.



Kitaj, *The Jew Etc. Etc.*, 1989-2004, oil on canvas

Good art should be universal, they say. And I guess they are right, except that I don't think there is any "should" in good art, and I feel in my old bones that what is most particular about a person, what most excites him/her, what is most daring may be what is most compellingly universal because it is, well, most human. Another reason Jewish Art is not well liked is that the term is associated with the endless liturgical chatchkes one finds in Jewish Museums. Then there is the Shleper Art often advanced as Jewish Art; Flying Cows, Dancing Hasids, Lachrymose Rabbis and the like have not led to great expectations, especially in the last century of daring Modernism, new forms and total Evil. I leave it to the Rabbis to argue the 2nd Commandment.

Something strange occurred to me—that no Jewish painter had ever risen to greatness. (Don't worry—I never will either!). Jews and women were only allowed into art academies when they were freed up, sort of, by the Enlightenment. Thus, the first Jewish and women painters of any consequence arose only in the late nineteenth century in France—Pissarro, Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt—very good, but minor masters. There is no Jewish Manet or Cézanne or Degas or Monet or Van Gogh or Matisse or Picasso. Don't argue with me—let's just agree for now! It drove me crazy that so many forefathers of Modernism were Jews—Marx, Freud, Einstein, Schönberg, Proust, Kafka, Eisenstein, Wittgenstein, and dozens more—but not in painting! There are ten or twenty very fine Jewish painters in the hundred years between Pissarro and Lucian Freud, depending on your taste and list, but no great masters to my way of thinking. Soutine and Balthus are my favorite Jewish painters. Balthus denied being a Jew and both lie with a cross over their graves. My own life-in-art has been largely determined by something called Modernism, by which I mean the daring intelligence which began to—I think the modern term is *transgress*—disrupt, violate and what is called *advance*, ossified Western traditions. The paramount catalyst painters in this Modernism were not Jews. That fascinated me because Jews were founding fathers in every other path, as I said. Jewish Modernism became my grand obsession and Jews in Trouble on my dark side. The Jewish Question and "Jewish Intellectualism" would define and endanger My Brilliant Career. You've got to be a daring soul to stand by me. Amazingly, some do!

Some Jews recoil at the very notion of Jewish Art. Some Jews recoil at the notion of Zionism, or of a Jewish Question at all. Some Jews recoil at the notion of God. Some Jews say He was out to lunch when we most needed Him! Jews love to argue. They argue in the Yeshiva—I believe it's called *pilpul*, and they argue in the Knesset, in their own besieged country, about Who is A Jew and other mysteries, and they argue in uncivil warfare in the world of art. Jewish Art can't be a precise term. It will never satisfy anyone. It is merely a code-term for what I might call an interesting and avant-garde predicament in art—that is, a predicament which interests me. In my experience, Jewish Art is TABOO in the Art Scheme! It is, well, too transgressive, too avant-garde for the art crowd. It's much more shocking than photos of advanced SEX or giant puppy dogs, or sink drains in art! Jewish Art is a cultural state of mind one inhabits or

not for reasons of one's own. There is no simple definition except to say that a Jewish Art exists in the sense that I will it to exist because the quest gives me a lot of heartfelt intellectual pleasure—in my studio, in my imagination, in my sense of art history and, I hope, in my pictures. Please don't ask me what Jewish Art looks like because there is no clear style, not yet anyway, like we know at once the look of Japanese Art or Egyptian Art, or Classic or Archaic Greek Sculpture—all, I might add, of circumscribed periods and less than obvious relations between style, of depiction, for instance, and the wider culture in which it appears. Who knows, someday a young Hebrew-speaking painter of genius, an Israeli Giotto may come out of the Negev and personify a newer Jewish Art than my own flawed Diasporism.

In the end, a Jewish Art exists, like so many passionate imponderables, because I say it exists in me and my pictures and in spite of the next guy who says "no, it doesn't." At the very least, *Jewish Art is a temptation to exist*. In art history, this reasoning has a very modern, 20th century pedigree. As some of you may know, a great deal of what is called Modern Art, and especially today, is art because the artist and his protagonists say it is, in the stolid face of naysayers. It was a strange, brilliant, artist-guru named Marcel Duchamp (not Jewish) who challenged what he called Retinal Art eighty-five years ago. Today he's the glitzy flavor of the young century for a million artists.

Violent opposition tells me that I may be doing something right in art! Jewish artists I know want their work to be universal. *So do I*—it is a noble goal. But for me, the universal, if such a wide thing exists, may best be approached, even led, by the particular, by what one is, if one can know oneself. That is what I meant earlier by a predicament in art which interests me. When I. B. Singer got his Nobel Prize, he gave his reply, his Nobel lecture, in Yiddish, and when people asked why he replied in a largely dead language, he said that his work could only be universal because of what *he* was. What one is! What we are! How can one not be changed forever by the Jewish Passion of sixty years ago? I, for one, was changed forever by the slow recognition many years ago of a Jewish Question. In scholarly terms, I am only an amateur of the Jewish Question. If the Jews are always in trouble, my pictures are troubled, and God knows, my art and I get into a lot of *tsouris*. To fellow painters I say: Paint the opposite of anti-Semitism—by treasuring the Jews! Because they are Holy Fools! Even Hitler outwitted them!

What I have called Diasporism in my *FIRST*, and now my *SECOND DIASPORIST MANIFESTO* (out soon), is a subtext for my Jewish Art because I don't live in the besieged Jewish State; like Herzl I have no Hebrew or religious background and I am a flawed but thrilled auto-didact in Jewish studies. I hope and believe that my strange Jewishness rehearses its essence in my pictures, but I'm very anxious about the rehearsal.

Clement Greenberg wrote: "I believe that a quality of Jewishness is present in every word I write, as it is in almost every word of every other contemporary American Jewish writer."

That is the way I feel about my pictures. I want to invent a new Judaica for the art of painting, inspired by what amazes and excites me about the Jews, their crazy genius and their discontents and my own history and destiny among them. But life is short now.

What am I to make of a Diasporist Art no longer bound up with Yiddish and Hebrew culture and a Merciful God? Assimilation in general art culture is not possible for me anymore. I'm too old, and crazy incorrect for half the art crowd. I leave Assimilation to other Jews who would join the busy art world where Assimilation is just as seductive as it was for those German Jews of seventy years ago and their doomed symbiosis. Of course, don't worry, America will be different and OK! Montaigne, descended from converso Jews, says: "We must reserve a back shop wholly our own." Well, in a spirit of self-Reform, I dare to be wholly my own back shop Jew. Thus, I'm not exactly a representative voice of the Jews, but who was? the Viennese playwright, Theodor Herzl, with his idea of Uganda as a Jewish National Home? Spinoza, who the Jews excommunicated? or maybe the three guys who probably influenced our time most—Marx, Freud and Einstein—who may never have set foot in shul? At least I got married in orthodox shul, but that's another story. No, like Kafka asked: "What have I in common with Jews?" But, unlike Kafka, Proust and all my other precursor-fathers, my answer to Kafka's question is: everything in common, as well as nothing. I'll tell you what I mean: Isaiah Berlin once pounded his fist on my dinner-table in London and said: "A Jew is a Jew like a table is a table."



Kitaj, *Kafka*, 2004, charcoal on paper

R.B. Kitaj and the State of “Jew-on-the-Brain”

By David N. Myers

R.B. Kitaj is afflicted with a peculiar malady. It is what his friend Philip Roth calls in *The Counterlife*, “Jew-on-the-brain.” The main symptom of this malady is an obsessive concern with the Jewish question in all its forms (that can become, in a compensatory fashion worthy of Oliver Sacks’s scrutiny, the source of creative inspiration). The targets of this obsession are varied, ranging from Heinrich Heine to Theodor Herzl, from Franz Kafka to Jacques Derrida, from Max Baer to Shawn Green. What unites these figures, and hence triggers the obsessive interest, is the condition of “Jewishness,” created out of the vexing mix of Gentile tolerance and intolerance toward the Jew. One consequence is that the creative Jew dwells in a state of constant tension, in which he acquires perfect command of the reigning cultural vernacular and yet insists, as an act of cultural defiance, on bending the notes of that vernacular into a new language.

It is this tension that activates Kitaj’s “Jew-on-the-brain.” But it is also this tension that makes him the object of inquiry—both as an artist and as a thinker—by others with the same condition. For example, I am drawn to the explosive colors and thematic richness of his paintings, but equally so to his textualism. By this term, I do not mean his strict construction of a foundational text, but quite the opposite: his erudite and often wild, written glosses on his paintings. Of course, precisely that which so compels his many admirers has frequently maddened Kitaj’s critics, who believe, as one London review claimed in 1994, that “no amount of exegesis will improve paintings that fail for pictorial reasons” (Aulich and Lunch 31).

It is here that Kitaj emerges as a new and very different kind of iconoclast—not in the sense of one who “destroys images and pictures set up as objects of veneration” (as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term), but as one who destroys the idea of

the sacred autonomy of images and pictures. His textualist iconoclasm at once undermines a key verity of modern art and yet restores the primacy of the classical Jewish commentarial imperative. Kitaj was not always conscious of the Jewish pedigree of this imperative, but, as he relates in the *First Diasporist Manifesto*, he always felt himself to be “a Diasporist painter from the start” (31). The road toward his awakening as a Jewish/Diasporist painter began in the late 1950s, when he encountered Aby Warburg’s writings on iconography, which revealed to him the links in earlier art among image, idea, and articulated thought. Meanwhile, Kitaj’s self-awareness as a Jew was raised during the early 1960s, as he followed with avid interest the Eichmann trial via Hannah Arendt’s dispatches from Jerusalem. By the 1970s, “as my Jewish obsession began to unfold,” he relates, “the vast literature of Jewish commentary, exegesis, and Midrash encouraged me to write about some of my pictures in a new spirit” (*How to Reach* 72 15). Ever since, Kitaj’s art has become more avowedly Jewish, exemplary of the kind of “Diasporist painting” that he now understands to be “unfolding commentary on its life-source, the contemplation of a transience, a *Midrash*,” the products of which are “secular Responsa or reactions to one’s transient restlessness, un-at-homeness, groundlessness” (*First Diasporist Manifesto* 29, 31). Enchanted by his discovery of the Tradition and its malleability, Kitaj the midrashist weaves his own brand of what he has called “strange Jewishness,” as we will see below.

Estrangement is the currency of this Jewish realm, as we notice in his veneration of Kafka, his invention of the fictional Joe Singer in his paintings, and, of course, in the two Diasporist manifestos he has written (in 1989 and 2005). In the first manifesto, this estrangement surfaces when Kitaj admits that “the Diasporist lives and paints in two or more societies at once,” not fully belonging to either (19). In the second, Kitaj reveals more layers of his estrangement: “My country is the American Diaspora of the Jews. One of my desires here is not to assimilate in symbiosis with the regular art blend but to listen to my strange Jews and IDEA appearing in my pictures beyond assimilation” (*How to Reach* 72 13).

Kitaj’s sense of Diasporist alienation is not merely geographic. To be sure, his alienation from the London art scene—with which he did battle for decades—was real. And the somnolence of Westwood, where he currently resides, can be a bit disconcerting in its own way. But Kitaj’s estrangement is at least as much cultural as territorial—and as much temporal as spatial. As an unabashed artist *and* textualist, as one who loves and is “littered with ideas” (according to a contemptuous critic), Kitaj might well have found more comfort in another era—an era before “the end of ideology,” in which one felt unabashed about fusing art, literature, politics, and ideas together, even about writing manifestos (*The End of Ideology* 374). In that era, Kitaj might well have found other “strange Jews,” caught in the throes of alienation from all forms of orthodoxy, with whom to converse about their shared concerns. Rather than sitting alone in his Westwood coffee house every morning, he might have encountered his favored intellectuals—Ahad Ha-am, Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin, maybe even Aby Warburg—

in the cafés of early twentieth-century Europe. They might have talked late into the night about pressing issues: new trends in philosophy, the allures of Kabbalah (especially its hermeneutics), the idea of “l’art pour l’art,” the respective merits of various Jewish ideological strains.

In that setting, Kitaj would have to make no apologies for his textualism, the impulse to gloss his painted images with written words. His coffee house colleagues would immediately recognize this act as a decidedly modern, secular, iconoclastic, and Jewish invocation of the Tradition. Nor would they be taken aback by his willing embrace of the idea of Jewish Art, from which so many of his contemporaries have fled. On the contrary, they would be excited by his assertion that “I am Jewish Art in my soul’s desire to paint radical pictures, on my own personal Diasporist terms at the limit-points of Jewish Modernism, where Kafka, Celan, Proust, Freud, Soutine, Philip Roth and a hundred other Jewish radicals have gone before me, but almost no painters” (*How to Reach* 72 8).

Kitaj’s café comrades would know that he was not the first to wrap himself in the cloak of Jewish Art. They might have remembered Moritz Oppenheim (1800–1882), regarded as “the first Jewish painter” in modern Europe who evoked the warmth and openness of traditional Jewish family life (Cohen 167). They might also have known of a somewhat later figure, the Frenchman Alphonse Lévy (1843–1918), who gained renown for his depictions of the rural Jewish life of Alsace. They would surely have known of attempts by various European artists and cultural activists in the early twentieth century to advance the idea of a Jewish art as part of a broader Jewish national renaissance through journals such as *Ost und West* or the bilingual *Rimon/Milgroim*.

At first glance, the affinity between these earlier activists and Kitaj’s “Jewish Art” would seem promising—a possible reunion of long-lost relatives. Who after all ever dares to speak today of a Jewish art? Who today is as obsessed with the Jewish Question? On closer inspection, though, the resemblance fades. Kitaj’s own vision of a Jewish Art is too ironic for earlier twentieth-century adepts of the idea such as E. M. Lilien, Davis Trietsch, Hermann Struck, and Lesser Ury (Rosenfeld 95). Whereas they believed that Jewish art was an expression of the iron-clad “soul of the nation,” Kitaj believes his distinctive variant—“Diasporist painting”—“is enacted under peculiar historical and personal freedoms, stresses, dislocations, rupture and momentum” (*First Diasporist Manifesto* 19).

That is all well and good; it is consistent with Kitaj’s strong identification with Kafka for whom Jewishness was at once a burden, an ineluctable condition, and an opening to endless interpretive possibilities. And perhaps we could say at this point *dayenu*, “enough”; we’ve reached as much of an understanding of Kitaj’s “strange Jewishness” as is possible. What confounds this conclusion—and what forces us to re-examine his estrangement—is that in Kitaj’s new painting (2004), as its title indicates, “K Enters the Castle at Last.” Why so? Has the modern(ist) Jew finally entered—and closed behind him—the gates of interpretation? Has fixed meaning been found? Indeed, has Kitaj the wizened skeptic become a baal *teshuvah*, a convert to belief?

There are conflicting responses to these questions. On one hand, Kitaj has mobilized his decades-long interest in Kabbalah to fashion a startling new theological stance: “DEVEKUT! This highest ideal of the mystical life, this Communion with God, seems within my reach—the reach of a Jewish Art no less!” (*How to Reach* 72 10). The agnostic seeker of the *First Diasporist Manifesto* has found his way, it seems, to faith, using the well-known means of the Kabbalist. But a breathtakingly iconoclastic faith it is! As he continues in the *Second Manifesto*: “I have come to believe fitfully in my Sandra [Kitaj’s late wife and the subject of much of his recent work] as Shekhina—the female aspect of God according to Kabbala (via Scholem).”¹ This assertion is no accident, as Kitaj later affirms in a proposition that moves between the Hasidism of the Baal Shem Tov and the subversion of Sabbetai Zevi:² “The Name of God is SANDRA in my art. I am the Master of God’s Name in my own painting” (*How to Reach* 72 10, 12).

Painting—and text—have thus become a bold new profession of faith in which his late wife Sandra becomes the Female Godhead, at a far remove from Orthodoxy but unmistakably Jewish in its bending of the notes of Tradition. This faith seems to be a novel stage of Kitaj’s Jewish Art; possessed of a new claim to the divine, and yet idiosyncratic, indeed heretical, enough to satisfy the Diasporist’s standard of creative alienation.

There are few adherents to this ideology, few who will pick up the cudgels of the first or second Diasporist manifesto. Once upon a time there were prominent ideologues of Diasporism—Zhitlowski, Dubnow, Medem, Peretz—who marshaled the attention of hundreds of thousands of Jews. Kitaj’s Diasporism harks back to that time, when intense ideological debate prompted frequent attempts to answer the Jewish Question in an extraordinary intellectual culture. But there are few comrades, or even pointed rivals, to take up Kitaj’s Diasporism. Rather, he fashions the idea of Jewish Art, and his surprising new faith, in the isolation of his studio.

What drives Kitaj? It is, to return to the point I made at the beginning of this essay, his incurable case of “Jew-on-the-brain.” His obsession separates him from his friends, especially his fellow artists from the London period (e.g., Freud, Auerbach, Hockney), whose lives and work are hardly touched by the Jewish Question. It even separates him from his hero Kafka, at least in one regard. While Kafka was keenly interested in Jews and the Jewish condition (along with his friends in Prague), he rarely if ever uttered the word “Jew” in his work. By contrast, Kitaj names the Jew over and over again, demonstrating irreverence for the norms of polite company and an unwillingness to leave the Jewish Question to the anti-Semites.

And so R. B. Kitaj continues reading, writing, thinking, and painting “Jewishly” without cease. This deep engagement makes him more than a Diasporist; he is a curious kind of Rebbe, one who lacks a congregation, but heeds the ancient rabbinic imperative to turn the text over again and again—and in the process, audaciously reinvents Jewish Tradition. He invents it through his painting and glosses, but now with increasing frequency, in this last phase of his Diasporist existence, through list-making. This activity gestures toward a new, barely sacred canon, an iconoclastic

chain of Jewish creativity of which he is the latest link. Mindful of his own predilection for list-making and as homage to a dear friend, I conclude by suggesting that R. B. Kitaj—along with Daniel Boyarin, Alain Finkielkraut, Moshe Idel, Cynthia Ozick, Philip Roth, George Steiner, Tom Stoppard, Michael Walzer, and Leon Wieseltier—is one of the ten most interesting Jewish intellectuals alive today.

Notes

- ¹ Kitaj is referring to Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), the towering scholar of Kabbalah whose research transformed the subject from a source of disdain and shame to a central feature of Jewish intellectual history from antiquity to the modern age.
- ² The Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760) was the legendary founder of Hasidism, the powerful movement of religious revivalism that gained hundreds of thousands of adherents among Eastern European Jews in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Kitaj here plays off of the Hebrew term *baal shem tov*, which means “master of the good name.” At the same time, he hints at the remarkable and idiosyncratic claims of Sabbetai Zevi (1626–1676), the false messiah from Smyrna who drew heavily upon kabbalistic imagery to assert his own divine-like powers.

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Education

Summer Camp, Postwar American Jewish Youth and the Redemption of Judaism

By Riv-Ellen Prell

One of the least studied, documented, or discussed aspects of Jewish education is educational summer camps. Until recently, the rapid growth of these camps in the 1940s and continuing into the 1950s was little remarked upon.¹ Nonetheless, summer camping has had an enormous impact on American Judaism. Indeed, a closer look at these camps, those who led them and those who attended them, provides clues to understanding some significant changes in American Jewish religious and cultural life that began in the late 1960s. These changes include, among others, the recruitment of men and women to the American rabbinate, the appearance of a generation of American graduate students who created the contemporary field of Jewish studies, alterations of synagogue liturgy and styles of worship across denominations, and demands for equality in Judaism.²

Summer camps are easy to overlook as a significant feature of Jewish culture and communal life. The activities associated with camp—canoeing, romances, songs, and cabin life, for example—hardly seem to constitute the essential elements of religious transformation. However, summer camping, like youth groups, while rarely viewed as part of formal Jewish education, has been more recently understood to be an example of “informal education” (Chazan). Rather than defining education as something that happens exclusively in classrooms, it may be better understood to take many forms.

Informal learning in the setting of summer camp can often be especially effective—both in terms of what is taught and how it is taught. In camp, values, attitudes, and larger principles tend to be more strongly stressed than the sort of “discrete knowledge” one associates with classroom-based education. Most importantly, in a camp environment one is encouraged to learn with and from one’s peers, as well as from adults who tend to function somewhat outside of the normal trappings of authority. Leaders and counselors who have the most contact with campers are usually only slightly older than their charges. Camp is also removed from daily life and has the advantage of offering freedom within the constraints of daily schedules and the boundaries of its physical space, which makes it particularly appealing for pre- and early teens.

Jewish children in America have attended summer camps since the late nineteenth century. Poor children attended “fresh air camps,” which were designed to improve their diets and give them the opportunity to spend time in nature. Children of more affluent communities also were encouraged to enjoy the pleasures of the outdoors. Over time, Jewish Community Centers and Federations therefore developed camps that served a variety of social classes (Isaacman 247–248; Joselit 16–17).

Middle-class Jews, early in the twentieth century, established the predominant pattern for summer camping for their children. They sent them to private summer camps with other Jewish children for ostensibly social rather than religious reasons. Such camps had little or no Jewish “content” as their main concern. Instead, like most summer camps, they focused on the outdoors and crafts. They evoked Native American traditions, took Native American names, and solidified Jewish socializing without overt efforts to reinforce a religious agenda.³

However, throughout the 1920s and 1930s a small number of educators developed camps whose mission was to teach, in one way or another, about Jewish life and, for some, Judaism. Camp Boiberik (founded in 1928), for example, offered children a complete Yiddish environment outside of the city during the summer months. These campers were often pupils of Yiddish supplementary schools such as the Sholem Aleichem Folk Shul (a Yiddish school movement).⁴ The Zionist Camp Kvtza (founded in 1935 under the umbrella of the Habonim youth movement of Labor Zionism) created a socialist Zionist environment in camp for children that included collective work projects and Hebrew language instruction.⁵ Jewish educators in New York also built camps to provide both education and summer leisure for city children.⁶

These innovative camps were unique because of their commitments to education. In the 1940s, however, Jewish educational camping picked up momentum and the sheer number of camps, as well as the intensity of their education, set them apart, to some extent, from those that preceded them. Zionist camps, in particular, featured more intensive Hebrew language instruction and continued earlier camps’ interests in Jewish history, music and dance. After World War II, Jewish denominations established their own camps for the first time and recruited synagogues to encourage children to participate.

Educational Jewish summer camps often differed in their respective visions of

what the future of American and World Jewry should be. What they *did* share, however, was their leaders' yearning to socialize Jewish children in a manner that they believed was often lacking at home. They saw the long months of summer as an extraordinary opportunity to shape a new generation of Jews.

This essay reflects, in particular, on the context of Jewish summer camps in the 1950s. That culture took root amidst dramatic changes that American Jews experienced in their lives. These experiences led to lively debates about how to raise the new Baby Boom children. As professionals, rabbis and other Jewish leaders created various schools, camps, and youth groups, they reflected on what lay ahead for the Jewish people and the role that young Jews would play in a new era. Their concerns shaped the groups and institutions that sought to help socialize a new generation of American Jews.

The aim of this essay is neither to catalogue all of the important summer camps that Jewish children attended, nor to specifically evaluate the curricula used in the camps. Rather, I wish to examine the cultural currents of the period that refocused the era on a "child-centered Judaism." In that context, summer camps not only occupied the time of a new and more affluent generation of Jewish children, but responded to a sense of crisis concerning the future of Jewish life. In the shadow of the Holocaust, how to make Jewish children Jews began to emerge as a different, more compelling and urgent task.

The story I wish to tell does not include as much of the texture of camp life as would be ideal for a general history of Jewish summer camping. Such discussion would best include the personal experiences of the children who flourished and the ones who were miserable, the counselors and leaders who were charismatic and the ones who failed. In addition, it would give intimate details of the romances, sex, tears, food, and pranks that were so integral to the camp experience. While I have collected accounts of all of these experiences, my purpose is considerably different in this essay. I am more concerned here with the manner in which summer camps were envisioned as a means to create a new, postwar Judaism. Hence, the voices that help to shape the narrative of summer camping in this essay are of those who created and embraced that vision. The aim of this discussion is therefore not so much to consider what Jewish summer camps were in their mundane, day-to-day realities, but rather more to get a sense of the visions for a new American Judaism embodied in them.

There has been remarkably little systematic research conducted until very recently regarding the impact of Jewish summer camps on the broader Jewish American culture. Quantitative measures of strong Jewish identity routinely focus on membership in Jewish organizations, including synagogues, participation in Jewish communal life, observance of Jewish rituals, and marriage and friendships to and with other Jews. Men and women who attended Jewish schools, including day schools and yeshivas, usually score the highest on such measures. A recent analysis of the 2000/2001 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) demonstrated that men and women who attended Jewish summer camps, participated in Jewish youth activities and continued

a supplementary Jewish education scored just as “high” on these quantitative measures as those who had only attended Jewish schools.⁷ This interesting finding underlines the power of informal education in relationship to other, more formal settings for Jewish education. It also suggests that the totality of camp experience in terms of peer relationships, alternative authority and the media of learning is a successful form of socialization in Jewish culture.

POSTWAR AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE

At the end of World War II American life changed dramatically, and Jews participated in that radical transformation.⁸ In the first half of the twentieth century Jewish life unfolded to a great degree in the urban Northeast, with another center in the Midwest. It then gradually began to shift, not only to the West and the South, but, most notably, to the suburbs of all of these regions as well. The majority of American Jews were native-born following the War, while at the same time the cultural markers of Jewishness were quickly disappearing, e.g., Yiddish as a shared language, dense urban, ethnic neighborhoods, and a strong tradition of secularism and political radicalism.

During this period American Jews participated in what commentators of the time called “religious revival,” which was concretely manifest in a building boom of new synagogues and synagogue schools in the suburbs. Not only did they join synagogues, they also supported all types of Jewish organizations devoted to philanthropy, especially in support of Israel. Cousins clubs and labor groups of an earlier era gave way to women’s organizations and synagogue sponsored young-married associations for many younger adults and new parents.⁹

As had been the case in the 1940s, Jews of the 1950s continued to show concern for refugees and the establishment of the State of Israel. But what took center stage was the creation of a new type of American Jewish life focused on synagogues, philanthropies, and organizations. These institutional foundations served as the basis for a shift of focus: Jews now worked to define America as a nation accepting and “tolerant” of religious and racial difference (Svonkin 8).

One of the most important transformations of the postwar era was the extent to which Jewish America perceived itself as “child centered.”¹⁰ A significant portion of Jewish life, particularly religion, began to center upon the new generation of Baby Boom children. As a result, the growth in Jewish education for children was truly dynamic. Religious education became one way to socialize Jewish children. While formal religious instruction had always been a part of communal Jewish life, the proliferation of synagogue schools and the number of children served by them constituted a transformation of truly historic proportions (Wertheimer). These new synagogue schools had the potential to solve two problems. They provided an experience for Jewish children who were being raised in suburbs parallel to that of their Christian friends and playmates, who attended Sunday schools. They also aimed to teach children about Jewish history, culture and practices.

Historian Lucy Dawidowicz characterized the generation of the parents of Baby Boomers as one of the least knowledgeable in modern Jewish history (97–99).¹¹ Immigrant parents of earlier generations often did not have the resources or opportunities to provide their children with effective formal Jewish educations; in turn, their children struggled to break free of what they saw as an Old World, unattractive and parochial religion and world-view. During the Depression, when anti-Semitism was at an all time high in the United States, and the horrors of Nazi fascism made the future seem all the more precarious and terrifying, Jewish life was often perceived by Jews to be an unattractive and oppressive burden. But as Jews emerged from the War and out of the tragedy of the Holocaust, they spoke about the need to help raise their children to be proud and knowledgeable about their heritage. They believed that their children's Jewish educations would help in that task.¹²

Postwar religious education was, nevertheless, anything but a simple or straightforward matter. Early sociological studies of synagogues, as well as contemporary journalistic accounts, make note of conflicts between educators and parents over not only what was to be taught, but how it was to be taught (Gans; Sklare and Greenblum). Some suburban parents emphasized the importance of teaching about Judaism in ways that would place no expectations on (largely secular) parents to practice what their children were learning. Educators often perceived families as unsupportive of their efforts, and a tug of war frequently ensued between families and the schools.

The paradox of the era is that Jews were growing both more and less religious at the same time, and doing both in new types of institutions and relationships. Membership in synagogues increased, but observance of Jewish rituals waned. The Day School movement in both Conservative and Orthodox Judaism created a strong cadre of committed and educated young Jews. However, the same era was marked by a rise in intermarriage, a social change that appeared to many Jewish community leaders to be an alarming problem.

A FOCUS ON YOUTH

As noted above, Jewish culture at this time focused attention on its youth, which was a social category that underwent something of a redefinition. Just as the new American category of “teenager” would become significant in the larger American culture during this period, for Jews, “youth” as an age-category took on a new prominence that necessitated organizational and ideological changes.¹³

For example, the youth movement of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Young Folks' Temple League, began at Temple Emanuel of New York City in 1928 and defined its target membership group as people between the ages 18 and 28. In 1948, this same group, now renamed the National Federation of Temple Youth, met for its Biennial Convention in Boston and undertook a major reorganization. One key element in making those changes was to define their target age group as “strictly teenagers.” Though the decision was controversial among the members, the

winning faction succeeded in convincing the membership that, in contrast with the past, youth now ended with the teen years (Goldman 20).

In synagogues and urban Jewish youth councils, “youth,” prior to and during the War, appeared to be equated to unmarried, young adults. It also connoted a period of apprenticeship, referring to people who were waiting in the wings for the opportunity to exercise full, adult leadership. The Brooklyn Jewish Youth Council, for example, in the late 1940s counted among its members college graduates employed professionally. They engaged in activities that paralleled those typically associated with “adults,” such as combating anti-Semitism and promoting “brotherhood.” These “youths” impatiently anticipated the time when they would join Jewish Community Relations Councils as “adults” (Brooklyn Jewish Youth Council).

Of the many changes wrought by widespread postwar Jewish suburbanization, the redefinition of youth was among the most important. Jewish organizations in the suburbs were new and outside the control of an established elite in large urban centers. They were run by a highly homogeneous group of adults: the parents of young children. At the same time, suburbanization signaled a change in the organization of family life. Children as a rule were no longer expected to contribute to the household economically. Families anticipated lengthy educations for their sons, and, to a lesser but growing extent, for their daughters. While the range of age for youth was therefore defined more narrowly, it also assumed economic and social dependence on the family for a longer period of time as the best means to greater economic and social success.

The explosion in synagogue membership was linked to strengthening denominations, particularly Conservative Judaism and to a lesser extent Reform Judaism. As Jewish denominations expanded their building programs, they likewise expanded youth programming, Jewish education, and camping and summer institutes in order to meet and shape the needs of American teens and preteens. In a very real sense, how Jewish parents defined the needs of their children drove the expansion of American Judaism, and a small number of Jewish leaders made the education and even reshaping of children their highest priority.

A REDEEMER GENERATION

Many rabbis and Jewish professionals were interested in youth because they were conscious of the need to build future leaders of the Jewish people. Historians Shuly Rubin Schwartz and Deborah Dash Moore both have argued that those men and women who were most active in the American Jewish community in the years immediately following World War II were beset by anxiety about their ability to lead. They feared that the Jewish people no longer had institutions or leaders comparable to those wiped out in Europe during the Holocaust (Moore 2; Schwartz 13–14). Robert Gordis, the editor of the new journal *Conservative Judaism*, observed in its first issue in January, 1945, “It is a commonplace that the destruction of the great centers of cultural and religious vitality in Europe has catapulted American Jewry into a position of leadership

and responsibility undreamt of twenty-five years ago, for which, incidentally, we are far from adequately prepared" ("Editorial" 33).

Gordis noted that Mordecai Kaplan, of the Jewish Theological Seminary, "graphically outlined the waste of human resources involved in our failure to save at least a minority of our children for intensive Jewish training and intelligent leadership." Gordis further noted that at a gathering of Conservative rabbis, "following [Kaplan's] moving address, the Rabbinical Assembly voted to set up a Committee on Leadership Personnel, which will seek to stimulate each rabbi to give personal attention to promising youngsters in his congregational school, so that the 'saving remnant' may be redeemed from the apathy and ignorance prevailing in most communities" ("Editorial" 33).

In that same speech, Kaplan also emphasized the importance of public school education for American democracy. His insistence on Jewish children attending secular schools, as opposed to day schools or *yeshivot*, suggested that it was Jewish supplementary schools and especially youth organizations that would bear the burden of creating a redeemer generation. Mordecai Kaplan drew on a long theological tradition in Judaism when he referred to the postwar generation as a saving remnant. He laid claim to the significance of Jewish youth when he suggested that they were the most important Jews who remained following the near-destruction of European Jewry. They were the remnant of the People Israel on whom the future of the Jewish people rested. In turn, it was the responsibility of rabbis and educators to "redeem" them from their parents' world, which Kaplan characterized as apathetic and ignorant. As they must be redeemed, so children would redeem the Jewish people. Kaplan's theological language was potent. Just as Gordis evoked the burden of responsibility for his generation in light of the Holocaust, Kaplan and others looked to the next generation to redeem those losses.

Although leaders of Reform Judaism in parallel publications mentioned neither the Holocaust nor the anxious necessity for a replacement generation, they developed an aggressive youth program. Eugene Borowitz, the noted Reform rabbi, theologian and educator, explained in an interview that his generation of young, postwar rabbis was committed above all to the importance of democracy as a continuing American ideal and goal.¹⁴ In this patriotic context they believed in the younger generation and were enthusiastic about their potential to become a new type of American Jew.

VULNERABLE REDEEMERS

Still, these same educators, rabbis, and Jewish denominational leaders were anything but sanguine about how to turn American teens from the "saving remnant" into Jewish "redeemers." Ironically, their discourse about highly "vulnerable" suburban teenagers resonated with a much earlier concern, namely social workers' and Jewish leaders' anxieties about the children of immigrants—but in an almost reciprocal manner. Granted, there was agreement on the main point: The primary source of youth's vulnerability in both eras was perceived to be their Jewish parents, and in both eras experts saw these parents as wholly inadequate to the task at hand. However, on the one hand, immigrant

parents were viewed as deficient because they were foreign-born and thus out of step with their American children. On the other hand, the new generation of Baby Boomer parents was considered deficient precisely because it was *more* familiar with America than Judaism.¹⁵

Popular Jewish magazines published after the War dealt consistently with the problem of Jewish children's identities and parental inadequacies. For example, writing for the *United Synagogue Review*, the magazine of the Conservative laity's organization, Earl X. Free, a clinical psychologist, discussed the problem of Jewish identity in children. He wrote that the "problem of the Jewish child" was not the "fact of his or her Jewishness," but the problem of his or her Jewish parents:

In the vast majority of cases, Jewish parents encounter little difficulty in helping the children to identify themselves as boys or girls, as students, or law-abiding citizens. Why? Because in each of these areas the parents are certain of their own identity and therefore can play the role of model for the child. But is this true when it comes to the problem of Jewish identification. They ask, "How can I help my Jewish child in his search for an identity?" What they mean is "How can I give my child a Jewish identity?" Is it possible that this problem stems from the fact that parents are not too sure of their own Jewish role? They have experienced prejudice, ostracism, perhaps outright persecution solely because they are Jews, and they are fearful that by giving this identity to their children they are exposing them to similar grief. (Free 10–11)

Other articles and experts focused on the problem of Jewish families celebrating Christmas. As one 1955 article explained, Christmas is a "parental problem," not a problem for children. If Jewish parents were comfortable with saying "no," there would be no problem. The message of the article was that Baby Boom parents were not comfortable, and hence they, and not their children, created the crisis in maintaining boundaries between Jews and the larger society (Gordon 1–5).

For some, the failure of Jewish parents to be Jewish and to teach their children to be Jews was not a small matter. The absence of Jewish values, many feared, was creating a troubled generation. In the United States in this period, anxiety about "juvenile delinquency" was so great that in 1954 and 1955 the United States Senate's Kefauver Committee convened hearings on the topic of addressing comic book and television violence and its effects on youth (Nyberg). Middle class Jews were similarly concerned. For example, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (part of the Reform Movement) convened a national committee on juvenile delinquency in 1955 (Central Conference of American Rabbis 73–84). These rabbis were worried that Jewish youth were not only troubled, but that the reason for this was because they were also lacking in requisite Jewish values. The committee found little to report; apparently Jewish teens did not seem to be as much in crisis as was originally thought.

Louis Finkelstein, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, directed his staff in 1954 to keep a scrapbook of all of the media reports of a crime committed on August 19, 1954, in Brooklyn, in which four Jewish boys were responsible for the grizzly beating and drowning of an African American vagrant. This postwar event was a media sensation. The ringleader turned out to be a severely disturbed young man. The father of his co-defendant and friend told the press that his son had his own television in his room, wanted for nothing and had no reason to do such a thing. The senselessness of the criminal act rocked the Jewish community's confidence about its future.

Clearly, this was precisely what Finkelstein feared when he wrote that "we Jews have produced a 'lost generation' with all its evils of juvenile delinquency and gangsterism."¹⁶ He did not explain why he wanted to collect press clippings on this crime, but his instructions seem less motivated by fears of wide spread anti-Semitic reactions and rather more in terms of the question then popularized in the Jewish print media: "where have we gone wrong?"¹⁷ Despite the advantages of education, the comforts of the middle class, and the freedom of American Jews, how could such horrifying behavior take place? Jewish parents questioned whether they were successfully guiding their children toward proper values and a healthy identity, and whether the freedom and comforts of the American middle class were sufficient to properly raise Jewish children.

Inadequate parenting and the erosion of Jewish values were both linked to a third anxiety of the time—the impact of suburbanization on Jewish life. A lively debate ensued in the 1950s over the effect of this residential revolution on the lives of Jews and their children. There was a strong consensus on the part of some writers, analysts, and rabbis that the suburbs created "a drive for Jewish belongingness" that necessitated communal organizations. As one commentator put it, "the Christians have their church; the Jews have their synagogues. These same individuals, were they to have remained in the Bronx, Brooklyn or the Lower East Side, would never have dreamed of doing many of these things they now do through social pressure and the desire to conform" (Fleischman 24).

This need among suburban Jews for "belongingness" was treated by many commentators of the time, both inside and outside the Jewish community, with deep suspicion. To be sure, a highly secular generation of Jewish parents embraced their Jewish identity after the War, for a variety of reasons. Some writers and rabbis focused on the Holocaust as the source for this surge in Jewish identity. Others wrote about both Marxism and science failing to provide answers for all of life's problems. Others pointed to the desire of parents for their children to "fit in."¹⁸ However, there were also quite a number of Jews who were deeply distrustful of the suburban mode of Jewishness that departed so dramatically from the urban, immigrant, Orthodox world they knew so well (despite the fact that they had largely rejected this "Old World Judaism"). Suburban life was accused of being "artificial," "inauthentic," and "conformist."¹⁹ In every way it contrasted with urban Jewish life, which had been the norm for American Jews in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It lacked cultural density as

manifest in an array of Jewish institutions, and it made Jews a minority in their neighborhoods, instead of the majority they had always been in their urban districts. For this reason many Jewish writers, professionals and rabbis sometimes took a hard look at suburban Jews' motivations for belonging to synagogues.

One example of how this suspicion was expressed focused on Jewish education for children. Theodore Frankel, for example, wrote for *Commentary* on a "Suburban Jewish Sunday School" in 1958. He quotes Dr. L. H. Grunnebaum, chairman of the Temple religious school committee, who had become increasingly pessimistic about religious school education during the 1950s. Dr. Grunnebaum's report suggested that for eighty percent of the adult Temple members from Scarsdale and White Plains (New York suburbs) the motivation to join the synagogue was lack of access to a Christian social life:

If he wants his child to become a soundly and smoothly integrated participant in suburban life, he had better join a congregation and send his [child] to Sunday School. No wonder the children suffer from a kind of mild schizophrenia. Here are the rabbi, director, cantor and teachers; there are the parents. Here is supernaturalism, prayer, the Ten Commandments, Jewish customs . . . There is science, atomic facts, sex and American ways and values. So it comes about that the attempt to make children more secure as members of the Jewish community has in many cases the opposite result. Uncertainty and insecurity are increased and the children's suspicion of adult hypocrisy is strengthened.²⁰

Overall, the body of writing about Jewish suburbia that I have surveyed presents both hope and disappointment. In particular, it reveals an anxiety that what might have been a real opportunity for Jewish community building and socialization either had been squandered because of "conformism" or had created the kind of "schizophrenia" about which Theodore Frankel hyperbolically wrote. For many, there was a persistent concern that the suburbs were hardly the ideal environment in which to raise the future leaders of the Jewish world. In short, the Baby Boom generation was viewed as both redeemer and suburban stranger; the only hope for the Jewish people and unable to serve as a "saving remnant" due to their parents' inadequacies.

One of the central solutions that emerged to resolve the problems of inadequate parents, suburbanization, and the loss of Jewish values was to find ways to foster in children a Jewish identity that could be nurtured in a venue independent of their home environment. Because of the inadequacies of the suburban Jewish home, Jewish schools, youth groups and camps were conceptualized by their founders and leaders as incubators of a more authentic Judaism. One could no longer count on Jews being Jewish simply due to the normal circumstances of their lives. In the minds of many Jewish leaders and scholars of the time, one had to become Jewish by achievement rather than by ascription.

POSTWAR SUMMER CAMPS

Jewish summer camps, like other youth-oriented activities, flourished after the War. Conservative Judaism's first camp began in 1947. Reform Judaism developed its first summer camp (referred to as an "institute") in 1951. While the Orthodox Movement did not sponsor a specific camp, Camp Moshava, affiliated with an Orthodox-Zionist movement, B'nai Akiba, drew Orthodox campers who often were part of the Orthodox Union youth movement as well.²¹

The inter-relationship between Jewish educational summer camps was complex. Some leaders claimed to have no knowledge of what others were doing. As one Reform rabbi told me when I asked him if he knew that Camp Ramah, affiliated with the Conservative Movement, was grappling with similar issues to the ones at the Olin Sang Ruby Union Institute, a Wisconsin Reform camp, he responded, "Camp Ramah was about Hebrew. That was all we knew."²²

Habonim-Dror camps of the Labor Zionist movement claimed to have pioneered many of the programs that were later taken up by more popular denominational camps (Goldberg and King 263). Similarly, the highly successful Ramah camps of the Conservative Movement were begun and staffed by men and women who had been part of Camp Massad, committed to educating campers in Hebrew and normalizing it as the language of the camp. Although Ramah's organizers rejected much of what they deemed "ideological" about Massad, its influence was nonetheless pervasive (Schwartz 18–20).²³

Through the collection of the American Jewish Archives, which includes the records of several camps, one can trace the same men and women who worked in a variety of different camps in the 1940s and 1950s. Similarly, music and other forms of art and dance moved from camp to camp via counselors and specialists.²⁴

Despite many striking differences among camps that were denominational and those committed to different movements within Zionism, Jewish summer camping shared an approach to Jewish life and had broader implications for the practice of Judaism. Camping emphasized the importance of "experience" and the power of deriving "personal meaning" from that experience. Summer camps' modes of educating were able to span the significant divides among Reform and Orthodox Judaism, Zionist and even anti-Zionist campers, and through the camp experience Baby Boomers learned to expect Judaism to speak to them powerfully and personally. These ideas were clearly influenced, in part, by John Dewey's concept that education was of central importance to democracy as well as his focus on enrichment through the educational experience.

Denominational and Zionist camps also shared a commitment to year-round, informal education. Virtually all of the camps were connected to national movements of youth groups and institutes that kept campers in contact with one another throughout the year. Regional conclaves and boards reinforced not only the ties of friendship and relationships with adult leaders, but reiterated the ideas and goals of the movement or denomination beyond the summer months.

THE NOVEL AND THE EXPERIENTIAL

The leaders of postwar Jewish summer camping were committed to the principle that Judaism could flourish in America. Long past the period of Jewish immigration at the end of the nineteenth century, the issue of who were the true custodians of Jewish identity remained a live and passionate concern—still hotly debated in the mid-twentieth century (Prell, “Community”). Indeed, an even more basic concern was inevitably tied to this point: Could an authentic Judaism ever truly flourish in America? Obviously, American Jewish denominations claimed that was and had to be the case.

Still, an anxiety about authenticity persisted. American rabbis sought to convince their native-born congregants that Judaism was not merely concerned with obligation and the heritage of a tragic history, nor was it mired in the Old World of their parents. Rather, Judaism belonged in an open society where Jews had a choice about their behavior and beliefs. The educational Jewish summer camps took as their mission to make Judaism, Jewish life and/or Zionism a “normal” and integrated part of American life for children. Everything that happened in summer camp followed from this principle that the founders and leaders of the camps believed was at odds with the world outside of camp, especially the secular, Jewish family (Reimer).

Following the War, most camps tended to stress that Judaism was pleasurable, and joyful, and at the same time must be taken as exceptionally serious. Their leaders presented Judaism in contrast to the worldview of elderly men whom children saw at their Conservative or Orthodox synagogues; Judaism could and should also engage youngsters. Deborah Dash Moore coined the term “spiritual recreation” to describe Brandeis Camp, which flourished in Southern California during this period (123–152). A number of camps, Zionist and denominational, drew on similar methods—if not always the same educational principles—in their transmission of Judaism.

Summer camps constructed a Judaism apart from synagogue, home, and normal life. The Judaism of summer camp was often experienced by campers as novel, entirely different from anything else that they had ever experienced, although it was never presented as some sort of new “invention.” Instead, camp leaders depicted their efforts in terms of a new fusion in which Judaism, and in some cases Zionism, united with the American ideals of freedom. What stands out as particularly compelling about the camps was the importance of the modes of constructing this alternative Judaism. Emphasis was placed on the experiential and experimental—new aesthetics, role-playing (see below), and efforts to create “meaningfulness,” among others.

These new experiences not only served as a means to critically examine postwar American Judaism, but even more served as a catalyst for a redefinition of Jewish culture by the late 1970s. These Jewish educational pioneers turned out to be cultural pioneers as well, shaping a counter-cultural Judaism for the Baby Boom generation. Whether or not they had the foresight to understand precisely the implications for the future of what they were doing is quite another question.

Zionist camps’ major focus was the remaking of Zion in America. Habonim

campers, for example, created *kibbutzim*, building their facilities with their own hands.²⁵ They also disallowed private property in camp, creating instead a common fund of all campers' money. The campers were also required to share all "care packages" that were sent to them from home. By abolishing "private property" and becoming "pioneers" through physical labor, they emulated the building of the then new nation of Israel in camps throughout the United States. They further solemnized the ideals of Zionism by celebrating Zionist holidays such as the birthdays of Theodore Herzl and Hayyim Bialik,

Denominational camps offered a religious variation on a new way of experiencing Jewish life. They drew, for example, on what were in the late 1940s and early 1950s relatively unfamiliar rituals and holidays—*Havdalah* (the ritual that completes the observance of the Sabbath) and *Tisha B'av* (the one summer holiday that marks the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem). The camps also created innovative ways to celebrate familiar observances, particularly *Shabbat* (the Sabbath).²⁶ The camps emphasized the drama, beauty, and uniqueness of each of these celebrations. In the end, each camp created an approach and an aesthetic to the experience of Judaism that was readily recognizable to other campers.

The letters of one camper who attended the Wisconsin campus of Camp Ramah provides a snapshot of how this approach to the transmission of Judaism at camp actually operated. Her letters began in 1958 when she was twelve and concluded in 1962. In her first summer at camp she reported to her parents that "this is the week before Tisha B'av and we aren't supposed to eat any meat. We don't have to be that religious if we don't want to, but I'm going to since I decided to be as religious as possible."²⁷ She described to her parents how they observed *Tisha B'av*:

It started after maarive [evening service] when we walked down to the lake and saw aycha [Hebrew title of the biblical book of Lamentations] burning. It was written and hung on the raft and we sang as we watched it burn. Then we walked silently in single file to the Bate Am [assembly hall]. Torches held on both side of bate Am [sic] marked the way. We all sat in circles srife [cabin] by srife and sang aycha. The only light was a large light in the center dimly aluminating [sic] the huge room. Murals portraying [the prophet] Jeremiah were hung on the walls.²⁸

The following year she wrote to her parents that they had a "typical Tisha B'av." She added, however:

Last night they didn't burn Acha on the raft. We went right from the Hador Ochel [dining hall] to the Bet Am in between a path of torches. It was solemn, but not as impressive as last year. I guess they felt we were making too much ado about a minor holiday (supposedly) and that all we remember is the burning and not the prayers. Also Acha is holy from the Bible and it's sort of showing disrespect for it.²⁹

In 1962, now in the oldest group at the Canada Ramah campus, she wrote to her parents again:

I took part in a modern dance during a Tisha B'Av presentation today. We just learned it yesterday and we were a little shaky, but we set the tone for a serious discussion which followed. Last night was very dramatic and typically Ramah-ish with the burning of the word AYCh (in hebrew)—Lamentations—across the lake, and a procession to the Bet Am Gadol [large assembly hall] along a torch lit road; to sit on the concrete floor and read (in Hebrew) aycha. Today we also had discussions and lectures within the framework of Tisha B'av.³⁰

Over these four years, this young woman captured the emotional, experimental, and serious nature of the Judaism she learned about. She was impressed by the emotional power of a new ritual, its spectacle, the debates over its appropriateness, and her own participation in it. By her last year, she could identify the experiential and aesthetic combination as “Ramah-ish.” What she wrote about the celebration of *Tisha B'av* is a simple example that could be multiplied many times over.

An Orthodox Zionist camp, Moshava, allowed and encouraged campers to approach observance differently from home and school. One former camper from the 1960s told me, “religion was not debatable, but in certain ways it was very flexible. You could come to prayers in shorts. In the morning long pants, but at Mincha [the afternoon service] shorts. At the time it felt like flexibility. It wasn't anything goes. [But] some things were more important and some things less.”³¹ Paradoxically, it was that flexibility, in combination with greater religious observance, that created for him an experience of Judaism that contrasted with both home and his yeshiva high school. For example, he was unaccustomed to praying three times a day, nor was this the custom of his father. However, at camp, more stringent—if somewhat more casual—observance was the norm.

All summer camps create “cultures,” built on songs, athletic events such as color wars, banquets, and a host of other traditions. These Jewish educational camps built their camp cultures on articulations of Judaism or Zionism, or both. They created camps, therefore, that were not simply special places and experiences, but also an alternative form of Jewish practice to be recreated and emulated outside of camp.

ROLE-PLAYS AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In many of the camps, the experiential, typically embodied in role-playing, was a crucial element of pedagogy. Enacting alternative realities allowed campers to learn something by experiencing it. This method offered an approach to learning lessons of history, ethics, morality, and social responsibility. In addition, the role-play, like other camp activities, joined the medium and the message. How one learned was as important as what one learned.

Role-playing reflected a broader desire on the part of educators to make camp activities meaningful. In liberal denominations, how to get campers to experience and appreciate prayer as more than an empty, rote repetition was, for example, a subject of multiple role-playing programs. Counselors roused their campers at sunrise and urged them to emulate the great rabbis of the past by taking to heart the power of prayer to “renew the world each morning” (Ramah Archive folder 32). One camper from the early 1960s remembered his counselors’ approach to prayer:

“Attention” was a key word. We were taught *Birkat Ha Mazon* [grace after meals] that way. They taught us that the Kotsker Rebbe used to say “do it each time as though it were the first.” The *madrachim* [counselors], “wanted everything to be an EXPERIENCE” as though I did it for the first time.³²

In role-plays such as this, the focus on meaning coupled with experience was central to Jewish educational camp life.

Programming for the Union Institute in Oconomowac, Wisconsin, the Reform movement’s first summer camp, was summarized and evaluated in the camp’s program books. These provide many examples of role-playing as a key medium of informal education. Campers depicted life in the sweat-shops and the rise of the unions in early twentieth-century, immigrant New York.³³ They were asked to portray slaves who were forced to build Pharaoh’s pyramids in order to experience the oppression of slavery in a unit titled “Exodus in Jewish History, an Adventure toward Freedom.” A camper wrote in the camp newspaper, “we were at Sang Hall when some Egyptians attacked us. They made us march [missing word] build a pyramid for the pharaoh. We also carried hay. We crossed the sea and went to Mt. Sinai.”³⁴

In 1961 campers engaged in experiments in creating “oppressor” and “oppressed” classes for a period of days in order to experience both sides of racism and anti-Semitism. The staff named the dominant group WASPS (White Anglo Saxon Protestants) and gave the acronym BLIKS to the oppressed group. Later the campers learned that BLIKS stood for Black Kikes, a double racial slur. Campers came to the dining hall one day to find the WASPS seated at tables with tablecloths while the BLIKS’ tables had none. The next day the process was reversed. A camper sermonized about the experience at the conclusion of the experiment. He said, “dear God, give us the wisdom to know that we are all God’s children and that we should all be treated the same regardless of race, color or creed. Give us the ability to honor these differences and to respect each individual for himself.”³⁵

One group put the Reform Movement on trial for changing Judaism and conducted a mock trial over a week. Reform Judaism was accused of “1. Modifying worship practices so as to make them less ‘Jewish’. 2. Undermining faith in the bible. 3. Substituting a Messianic age for a personal Messiah and thus distorting Judaism. 4. Making changes in Jewish religion for the sake of making religion easy.” A jury of twenty-four campers was selected and asked to be seated in the jury box. Four teams of

campers with two counselors acted as defense attorneys, with each team taking one of the accusations. A counselor was prosecutor. Three judges, two campers and one counselor, asked questions. The vote was 'not guilty' on three counts and 'guilty' on the fourth, that Reform Judaism had made religion easy.³⁶

The staff undertook to teach their campers the "meaning" of the Psalms by having them portray experiences to which its sentiments might be applied. They included such familiar moments as being accepted to Harvard University ("I will give thanks unto the Lord with my whole heart"), and taking an exam ("God is my refuge and strength"). A member of the staff reflected on the role plays as follows: "They present plays to show that the Psalms have something significant to say on every occasion of great emotional stress or joy. The scenes depicted illustrate doubt, despair, and exaltation."³⁷

In 1960, a Habonim camper described the "extra added attractions" of "Dictator Day" (a take-off on George Orwell's novel *1984*) and a day devoted to "revolution" (Fineman). Herzl Camp, a Midwestern independent camp, staged a "Communist invasion" in the 1950s, telling campers that the country had been taken over and then urging them to think about how to respond.³⁸ Each of these role-plays asked the campers to experience historical, political and religious events personally, in order to heighten the "experiential" dimension of Jewish life.

This experiential dimension of learning was linked to the use of Hebrew language in educational camps in interesting ways. Children who attended these camps not only received formal instruction in Modern and Biblical Hebrew, they also encountered the language in myriad settings.³⁹ They learned to canoe and play baseball, for example, using Hebrew words for all of the required skills, vocabulary that was circulated among camps over the years. Every building and activity was given a Hebrew name in even the least intensively Hebrew camps. In this manner, Hebrew became integrated into the cultural experience of campers and, to varying degrees, became the norm of experience, which was the intention of camp educators.

Role-plays and other experiential learning techniques, then, ranged from the fun and engaging to the difficult and disturbing. These educational techniques served as a critical medium for teaching children and heightening their sense of engagement and involvement in what was defined for them as Jewish life.

THE ROLE MODEL

What tends to make summer camps especially memorable for adolescents is that camps transform their relationship to authority. The life of camp exists outside of the structures of school and home, and hence, relationships with adults take on new and different meanings. Adults, whether they are a few decades or a few years older than campers, tend to become models to admire precisely because their relationships to teenagers are more playful and relaxed, and so less ostensibly authoritarian. Often, campers recall being taken very seriously by adults in a way that was especially powerful for youngsters unused to being treated in a more egalitarian fashion.

Different camps offered different adult models and different relationships to authority. For example, a Moshava camper recalled his counselors as the first people in his life “with whom he could identify.” Thirty years later he still marveled at what it meant to him to study Talmud at 10:00 a.m. with a person he had played basketball with at 9:00 a.m. He contrasted this positive memory of learning with a bitter one. He recalled an encounter with his Yeshiva principal in his senior year of high school. Despite being an excellent student, he was called to the office for inappropriate behavior. The teenager retorted angrily, “I identify more with Peter Fonda (the star of the popular counter cultural film of the time *Easy Rider*) than the Talmud teacher.” While his school provided no useful models for his life, Camp Moshava served to do precisely the opposite.⁴⁰

In the Reform institutes, the camp rabbi seemed to most exemplify what the camp represented. One late 1950s camper recalled leaving his summer camp wanting only to become a rabbi like the one he encountered that year.⁴¹ Many former campers commented on how wonderful it was to have a rabbi to talk to and spend time with in a relaxed and casual environment. Many marveled at seeing a rabbi in swimming trunks.

Marc Lee Raphael, a distinguished scholar of American Jewish history and a rabbi reflected on his experience at Saratoga Camp in California in 1957 that led to his decision to become a rabbi in his “Diary of a Los Angeles Jew”:

When I heard that there would be a Saturday afternoon campers vs. staff softball game...I assumed (correctly) that I would pitch. And I assumed as well that rabbis (and rabbinical students) would be relatively poor batters, especially immigrant rabbis. This was mostly true, but Alfred Gottschalk, a 27 year old German-born immigrant who had been ordained as a rabbi at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati that June, was an exception. I already knew him at camp as an inspiring teacher, but was surprised to discover that he was also a fearsome hitter, and his home run off my blazing windmill windup fastball not only won the game for the staff but led to my career decision. I had a feeling during the camp session that I wanted to be like the rabbi teachers with whom I was studying, but when one of them blasted that home run I knew for sure that one could be a rabbi and a normal person at the same time.

At Conservative Camp Ramah, the scholar or professor in residence, often a faculty member from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, was the most highly regarded role model for campers. The ideal of study and the centrality of traditional texts were core concepts of the educational vision of the Ramah movement that he, or in later years, she embodied. Campers took classes with and participated in discussions led by the scholar. The relationship to the scholar was, however, neither intimate nor playful. Seymour Fox, an early architect of the educational philosophy of Camp Ramah, also served as Dean of the Teachers’ Institute of the Jewish Theological

Seminary of America from 1959 to 1966. In combination with other faculty, he envisioned an environment that was both supportive and challenging. For example, the cabin, with its young counselors, was envisioned as the “home/heaven,” where campers would feel appreciated, unconditionally cared for and comfortable. Outside the cabin, during classes, sports, and arts, campers were called upon to achieve and to act within more conventional relationships of authority.⁴²

This “philosophy of the bunk” was evident in a report written by then head counselor (*Rosh Mahon*), Chaim Potok, later to become a famous American novelist. In 1963 he wrote about the camp staff’s training seminar prior to the opening of the camp season. Their goal was to learn how to engage campers in the cabins in “emotional” conversations based on “self-discovery” and “self-realization.” This approach to communication became known as “Schwab talk,” named for Joseph Schwab, the philosopher of education at the University of Chicago whose theories influenced the leadership of Camp Ramah. They believed that the cabin was an important place to build trust with a positive alternative to parents, i.e., the counselor, and also could serve as the place to encourage campers to open up and express their fears and hopes.⁴³ Building on that confidence they could then undertake the intensive activities such as classes, dance or sports aimed to cultivate and develop excellence and leadership.

At Tel Yehuda, the camp of Young Judea (a pan-Zionist American youth movement), it was the teacher, giving children the story of the Jews, who was most often viewed as a charismatic figure. One former counselor and teacher whom I interviewed described ending each summer by telling the campers that none of their time together really mattered. “You will all assimilate anyway,” he predicted darkly. Each summer he orchestrated this ending, during which the campers would deny that inevitability and struggle to convince him he was wrong, and then he would dramatically relent, agreeing that they would make a difference. To him, it was an excellent gauge of how well they internalized the Jewish history he had taught them and also served to emphasize how his role as their teacher had become so important to them.⁴⁴

Alternative role models were especially important for camps that conceived of their work as more than providing a summer of fun. Their visions included creating new leaders and fostering new ways of being Jewish. Some Zionist camps encouraged immigration to Israel, while others simply hoped to teach campers to value Israel as of central importance to the Jewish people. Role models embodied the message of the camps just as role-playing did. Emulating a counselor or teacher meant rethinking one’s future.

TRANSFORMING ORDINARY LIFE

The medium of experience was only one side of the construction of a new Judaism. Its other face was the capacity of Judaism to transform American experience. Camp Ramah’s idealized approach to sports provides an example. Because sports and athletic competence persisted as a source of anxiety associated with Jewish masculinity well

into the late twentieth century, the presence of sports at camp was particularly important. In fact, one man, a long-time camper and staffer, recalled success at baseball, in combination with excellent Torah reading skills, as the quotidian required for attracting young women.⁴⁵

For more than fifty years of men describing and recounting what was unique about Camp Ramah, sports stories repeatedly emerged in their narratives. Gerson Cohen, first a camper and then counselor, who later became an important scholar and faculty member and finally Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, recalled being chastised by Shalom Spiegel, a professor in residence at the camp, for violating the strictures of Talmudic law (*halakha*). Because Cohen refereed a game in which his wife was a participant, he violated a prohibition against judging a group in which one has a relative. The rules of the game involved Jewish law, in addition to those required by the sport (Cohen 41).

Rabbi Neil Gilman, a former counselor and later faculty member of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, recalled urging his campers to play aggressively and then being called aside during his first summer at Ramah. His rabbi-supervisor admonished him that this behavior was unacceptable. Gilman asked, “do you play to lose?” He was told, “yes. That [i.e., winning] is not what we value.”⁴⁶ These examples from Ramah’s earliest years suggest that the Jewish version of American sports transformed play to make it conform to Jewish ethical standards, even while athletics still remained a critical portal through which to affirm the “Americanness” of young Jewish men.

Zionist camps were, for ideological reasons, even bolder in their vision of challenging American norms as the sole model for campers’ values. Habonim’s communal camper property was a good example of living an alternative to American life. Indeed, one former camper who attended both Habonim and Ramah in the early 1960s explained that Ramah made its campers good Americans while Habonim explicitly challenged American values.⁴⁷

INCUBATOR JUDAISM

In role-playing, “aestheticized” ritual, role models and alternatives to the larger world, Judaism or Zionism (or both) was presented as a highly desirable goal for the lives of campers. Founders of camps, particularly in their early years, emphasized that the camp environment created an ideal—even a utopian—space. Gilman, a staff member in the 1950s, described Ramah as creating an “eschatological moment in the Conservative movement.” He believed that, upon leaving camp, the campers “returned to history,” by which he meant that they not only went home, but re-entered ordinary time.⁴⁸ In ordinary time, they encountered not the ideal Jewish world of camp, but the mundane world of non-observant families, suburbs that personified crass conformism and Americanism, and synagogues with an uninspiring educational agenda.

The Reform institutes struggled with the same problems of reentry into ordinary life—even though the earliest sessions lasted a mere twelve days in contrast to Ramah’s

eight weeks. In both Conservative and Reform settings, the Judaism presented in camps challenged the assumptions of ordinary life in Jewish communities. This was a challenge that worked both ways, for the returning camper was also challenged as he or she compared the vision of Judaism fostered in the camps with Judaism at home.

Counselors and campers alike referred to visitors' day as "invasions" and the return home as a "loss." The 14-year-old camper whose letters were cited above wrote to her parents about a visitors' day that they did not attend: "The parents have started to invade—last night at Kabbalat Shabbat already. We feel like animals in a cage or something. Someone cracked, 'Throw them a peanut, maybe they'll go away.'"⁴⁹

A former 1960s camper from the Orthodox-Zionist Camp Moshava explained to me that virtually every summer his Holocaust-survivor parents traveled to Israel to see family members, and he was often asked to accompany them. He explained his reluctance to do so: "Camp Moshava was my Israel. I had Israeli counselors and a world that felt more Israel to me than the real Israel. After one summer there [in Israel] I never went again during the years I attended Moshava."⁵⁰

When she was fifteen, one Ramah camper wrote in her 1968 diary at the beginning of the school year, "Only 276 days until camp."⁵¹ These adolescent sentiments about summer camp may be typical, given camp's intense peer culture and the pleasure of separation from home. Still, something special seems to have promoted the intensity of attachment that many Jewish campers felt about their summer experiences.

To evoke the imagery found in the work of the distinguished anthropologist Victor Turner, the world of camp was "really real"; in contrast, ordinary life was its mere imitation. Turner defined the "liminal" as a dimension of social life "betwixt and between" ordinary social structures. In ritual, the liminal period is often the occasion for cultural inversions such as masquerading or rule breaking that, for example, precedes and follows the coronations of monarchs or the movement from autumn to winter. However, liminal periods or spaces can exist in society as well. Summer vacations, journeys, and summer camp can also be understood as liminal periods. They are always distinguished by relationships, activities, and experiences that are the opposite of normal life, that undermine normal relationships of authority, and that allow novel ways of experiencing reality.

Indeed, the 1968 diarist penned an alternative creation story in early September, which she copied over into her diary in an entry that appeared in early April. She wrote in part, "in the beginning, G-d created Ramah. On the first day, He created the nature. He made the rocks, the boating short cut, the beautiful overnight valley, the mosquitoes, the wasps, the lake . . . On the third day, G-d created the mood—a special feeling that would set in, so that everything would be perfect." She did note that on the fourth day God created the classes, which she wrote "were not all so good."⁵² But her entry makes the point clearly. Ramah, for her, created an alternative world that was the product of a second creation. The Moshava camper, cited above, similarly viewed his Zionist camp as the "real" Israel, despite the fact that he remained in the United States. In the

liminal space of summer camp, reality meant the opposite of the ordinary.

Camping, then, served as a powerful educational tool for transforming those campers and counselors who came year after year to live in their alternative world. Perhaps all alternative environments serve as critiques of the world(s) they leave behind. To be sure, Jewish educational summer camps not only offered the freedom and pleasure associated with summer camping; they also enforced religious obligations and conducted classes, and some gave and graded examinations. Zionist camps involved not only hard physical labor, but required campers to promote the collective welfare. All of these elements were designed to transform the Baby Boom generation.

Moshe Davis, a founder of Camp Ramah and a counselor at Camp Massad, summarized the philosophy of many camps: “The whole day was now under our supervision. Until then you would come to a [prayer] service and you would come to [afternoon] school, but you didn’t live as a Jew in a civilization” (cited in Joselit 18–19). The totality and unity of experience—whether a given camp was integrating prayer, study and canoeing or building a cabin, learning Jewish history, and imagining immigration to Israel—inculcated the child into an alternative world whose aim was nothing less than creating a new generation of transformed Jews.

CITIZENS AND JEWS

While a meaningful engagement with Judaism was clearly important for denominational camps and Zionism was a major goal for camps founded under that banner, another set of questions concerning Jews and America was also central to the leaders of Jewish summer camping. Walter Ackerman, a long-time director of the California campus of Camp Ramah, offered an interesting perspective on this point. He commented, “what should be the relationship between America and what we are doing was the key question for us. All major Jewish educational issues were tied to this.”⁵³ Ackerman, himself the product of socialist Zionism, explained that, following World War II, this question preoccupied all camps—Zionist, religious and non-denominational. In response to America’s defeat of Nazism, loyalty to America was very high on American Jewry’s agenda. The question of how American Jews showed their national loyalties was a central concern for those who created summer camping in the postwar period.

Most Jewish educational camps, though not all, were, in one way or another, deeply committed to promoting American democracy and its superiority over communism among campers. Camp staffs had students plan programs and bunk activities, develop projects and in many other ways see themselves as active, independent young men and women who espoused American democratic ideals and practice. While most camps did have a structure imposed hierarchically, particularly concerning observance and educational goals, campers were still involved in many forms of decision making—the experiential was linked to the democratic. Ackerman called Camp Ramah an offshoot of the “progressive vision of the child saving movements” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Dorph 5–6). Camp Ramah was more self-conscious

about this aim than other camps, but the vision was widely shared.⁵⁴

In light of this, the place of gender roles in summer camping is quite interesting. The immediate postwar years are thought of as highly gender-differentiated, a repressive last gasp before Second Wave Feminism, a period that historians define from the late 1960s to the present, in contrast to the first wave of feminism, the period that culminated in the passage of suffrage for women (Evans). However, denominational summer camps, in particular, were settings where gender equality was promoted long before it entered the mainstream of congregational life. The Reform movement was self-conscious about recruiting the first generation of women rabbis from among its campers, and almost all of those women rabbis were products of its summer institutes.

In the Conservative Camp Ramah movement, girls were allowed to lead the grace after meals and to sit with boys during prayer services long before these changes were adopted by the Rabbinical Assembly of the movement (B. Cohen 62). There were still many differences between girls and boys in terms of Jewish life, and boys continued to have higher status because of the assumptions of traditional Jewish law coupled with the values of 1950s American culture. Nevertheless, camps must be seen also as liberal settings that challenged gender hierarchy.

What is particularly notable about many of the Jewish educational camps of the 1950s and 1960s is the extent to which they integrated American politics into the life of the camp. A number of recent histories of American Jews challenge how extensively they actually shared a liberal consensus (see Dollinger; Staub). No such question can be raised about Conservative and Reform camps as well as some Zionist camps in this respect. These camps were important sites for developing ideas about what it meant to be a Jew in the United States, as well as Israel (in the case of Zionist camps). Civil rights, communism, the Cold War, presidential politics, mock trials, presidential elections and, somewhat later, the war in Viet Nam were pervasive concerns in Jewish educational summer camps.

The role-plays, described above, consistently dealt with issues of prejudice and identification with the Civil Rights movement of African Americans. For example, Camp Ramah featured a Civil Rights Opera, "The Circus of Life," in Hebrew, that was written by one camp's director of drama and music, Rabbi Effry Spectre. The written script of the play distributed to campers included Hebrew vocabulary sheets (a practice in all dramatic productions). The word list included Hebrew translations of "ghettos," "the brotherhood of man," "the color of your skin," "the real estate value of the neighborhood," "to terrify," and other terms especially applicable to the lesson being taught.⁵⁵

In 1963, at a Ramah camp in the Poconos, another counselor of the oldest age group staged a re-creation of the powerful events related to Civil Rights that occurred that summer. In the space of a few days in June of that year, African American students had integrated the University of Alabama, President John F. Kennedy had given his strongest Civil Rights speech, laying out a program of integration, and shortly there-

after, Civil Rights worker Medger Evers had been killed in cold blood. Campers re-enacted these events in an English language staging. They played the roles of Mrs. Evers, of the students integrating the university, of Governor George Wallace as he stood in the doorway staging a symbolic protest to integration, and finally of John Kennedy delivering his speech. Rabbi Shalom Podwal, their counselor, reflected back on his work with campers on this performance:

We were doing something that they realized was going to have very lasting significance. They were involved in these historical events that were going to have very lasting historical significance—through this as a way of identifying with these historical individuals. We had discussions through the summer in the bunk on Shabbat afternoon and during rest periods. We would mention Hebrew prophets and that this is the right thing to do, and we the Jewish people have to identify strongly with what the Negroes are going through. No one challenged that. They accepted that.⁵⁶

Although American Jews in the 1960s voted overwhelmingly Democratic and were generally supportive of Civil Rights, issues raised at camp were still controversial. Rabbinic support for Civil Rights in mainstream America was hardly universal. Debates over the responsibilities of Southern Jews, tactics for social change, and the integration of schools divided the organized Jewish community (Diner 268–74; Staub 76–111). In the midst of this internal debate, Reform and Conservative camps not only took progressive stands, more significantly, they gave these issues Jewish content. They situated the struggle for Civil Rights within a Jewish context and linked it to Jewish texts and imperatives. In doing so, camp leadership asserted the Jewishness of liberal, political activism.

Postwar educational Jewish camps created citizens, as summer camping has in the United States for more than a century. Though Zionist and non-Zionist camps idealized quite different relationships to America for their campers, they shared other views of American Jews as citizens. Above all, many of these camps asserted a powerful relationship between Judaism and politics. Put more precisely, the camps suggested that Judaism had a unique perspective on African American Civil Rights and, by the 1970s, on the war in Viet Nam. They asserted that Judaism demanded active intervention in the events of the day.

THE POSTWAR JEWISH YOUTH CULTURE

This story of postwar Judaism and its redemptive generation is, of course, a familiar one. Generational struggle—among Jews and among other ethnic and cultural groups—did not begin or end with the Jews of the 1950s. But what was unique in this era was the hope that the members of this generation could and would redeem society by changing their families and synagogues.

It is no accident that the immigrant literature and films of the 1920s either begin

with orphaned children or end with them. The literary deaths of older generations stand in for the creation of new worlds. However, the effort to create a redeemer generation in the 1950s differed in some interesting ways from the well-worn narrative that begins transformation by celebrating the end of the generation of unredeemable parents. Rabbi Gilman put it eloquently when he described the child-saving mission of Camp Ramah. They believed—naively he says in retrospect—that at Camp Ramah “we would change the child, the child would change the family, the family the synagogue, the synagogue the community, and eventually we would usher in the Messianic era.”⁵⁷

More than imagining the ability to sow seeds of change, what visionaries might not have foreseen is the extent to which their campers would take them seriously. Many camp attendees set about transforming American Judaism as well as participating in the student movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. And many did immigrate to Israel. As one woman told me wryly, “our parents sent us to the most inexpensive camp they could find, and it made Zionists of us” (Goldberg and King 263).

A loosely defined movement committed to the transformation of the American synagogue that began at the end of the 1960s and continues into the twenty-first century, draws powerfully on a vision of conduct and culture that its partisans encountered in summer camps. The call to end the formality and hierarchy of synagogue services, the aim to create non-unison praying, the promotion of communal singing over classical, cantorial music, the advocacy of greater democracy in the leadership of services and the desire for discussions of weekly Torah portions over sermons—all of these reflect values that came out of the summer camp experience (see Aron for an example of the “movement for synagogue transformation”; Prell). Moreover, the aesthetics of summer camps both anticipated and matched exceptionally well the aesthetics of the 1960s counterculture.

What young Jewish leaders of the counterculture, a period normally defined as the decade from 1965 to 1975, sought was not nostalgia, but an alternative vision for American Judaism that they had originally embraced in camping, particularly, but not exclusively, in the Conservative Movement. Indeed, the importance of education, the serious intention to make a modern form of Judaism all it could be, a liberal view of America as more embracing of difference rather than demanding cultural homogeneity: these became the values of a rising counterculture of ever increasing influence whose impact is all the more clear as the twenty-first century begins. What is less recognized is that the origins of this counterculture were deeply rooted in the 1950s’ summer camp experiences that were shared by men and women who pioneered Jewish feminism as rabbis, theologians and teachers, who became the first scholars hired to teach in newly created Jewish Studies departments, and who led many other examples of innovation in Jewish life in Israel and America.⁵⁸

Notes

- ¹ Sarna, "The Crucial Decade," includes the following dates for the founding of these camps: Brandeis Camp Institute (1941), Massad (1941), Ramah in Wisconsin (1947), Ramah in the Poconos (1950) and what later became known as Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute (1951–1952). All were founded between 1941 and 1951–1952, as were a range of lesser known but still influential camps, including Camps Aguda (1941), Avodah (1943), Yavneh (1944), Galil (1944), Lown (1946), and Sharon (1946?). The 1940s and early 1950s also marked a turning point in the character of the whole Jewish camping movement.
- ² Isaacman produced the most complete survey of Jewish summer camping in the 1960s, including a useful historical discussion of the various types of camps sponsored by Jewish organizations. See also, Joselit and Mittleman. This publication is a catalogue of an exhibition on Jewish summer camping. Camp Ramah of the Conservative Movement has been the subject of a number of dissertations. A review of that scholarship may be found in Shargel.
- ³ See Sarna, "The Crucial Decade," who details the variations in summer camps attended by Jewish children in the twentieth century. For a reflection on this phenomenon see Berkson (7). On Native American themes in Jewish camp see Kaplan (6–7).
- ⁴ A history of Camp Boiberik may be found in Lehrer. Differences among Yiddish camps often reflected political orientations as well.
- ⁵ Zionist camps were committed to creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine. They were usually associated with various Zionist movements that reflected different political visions of a Jewish state. Habonim was an affiliate of the Labor Zionist movement. See Goldberg and King.
- ⁶ For example, one of the founders of American Jewish education, Sampson Benderly, developed and guided Camp Achvah. Camp Cejwin (founded in 1919) was affiliated with The Central Jewish Institute. For Camp Achvah see Gannes (61–69). On Camp Cejwin see Berkson (7–8).
- ⁷ Steven M. Cohen discussed these findings in "Jewish Education and Its Differential Impact on Adult Jewish Identity."
- ⁸ The best recent histories of American Jewish life and culture are: Diner; and Sarna, *American Judaism*. The best recent histories of the postwar period are Moore; and Shapiro. This essay draws on these works, among others, for a discussion of the period.
- ⁹ See the books cited above on postwar American Jewry. For a scholarly discussion of "religious revival," see Ellwood; Lederhendler (93–109) reviews this debate. For popular discussions of religious revival in the American Jewish press of the period see Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance"; Rosenberg and Segal (14–16); and Kaplan, "The Meaning of the Current Religious Upsurge" (12–16).
- ¹⁰ The sociologist Herbert Gans coined the term "child centered."
- ¹¹ She states that three quarters of Jewish parents failed to give their children Jewish educations during the Depression years.
- ¹² Research in the period that included these findings was conducted by Gans.
- ¹³ The notion of a "youth culture" in the United States can be traced back as early as the

nineteenth century; however, the separation of young adults from family and workplace that marks the emergence of youth increased beginning in the 1920s with increased high school and college attendance. Teenager as a term, as well as a connection to youth culture, emerged after World War II. See Grabner (13–16). See Modell (217–233) for a discussion of the link between the postwar teenager and growing affluence.

¹⁴ Interviewed by the author in New York City, March 2001.

¹⁵ Examples of criticisms of parents in both eras may be found in Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans* (145–63) and Prell, “Family Economy/Family Relations.”

¹⁶ Louis Finkelstein, “The Seminary’s Ten-Year Plan to Reclaim Jewish Youth to Religious and Ethnical Life” 3. Thanks to Michael Greenbaum for sharing a copy of this document with me which is in his personal collection.

¹⁷ The scrapbook and the clippings from the press are among the Finkelstein papers in the archive of the Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism in America, Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

¹⁸ Ellwood addresses some of these issues for Christians in *The 1950s Spiritual Marketplace*. Jewish writers in *Commentary*, for example, reflected on these issues. See Gersh (211–12); Rossman; Howe (555, 558).

¹⁹ See discussion of suburbanization below.

²⁰ This passage is excerpted from a report that Frankel includes in his article.

²¹ There is no extant written source on the history of this camp according to a number of historians I have consulted who are experts on Orthodox Judaism in America. The general consensus is that the camp began after World War II during the 1940s.

²² Author interview with Eugene Borowitz, New York City, March 2001.

²³ See also, author interview with Sylvia Ettenberg, New York City, March 2001.

²⁴ The American Jewish Archives are located in Cincinnati, Ohio at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

²⁵ The best discussion of Habonim camping appears in Goldberg and King (263–86). The discussion of Habonim camps that follows is derived from this work.

²⁶ Eugene Borowitz recounted how he began introducing *Havdalah* at Reform institutes after the War, a custom he experienced in shul with his father (interview with author, New York City, March 2001).

²⁷ Letter of Phyllis Weisbard to her parents, 21 July 1958, given to the author.

²⁸ Letter, 27 July 1958, given to the author.

²⁹ Letter, 13 August 1959, given to the author.

³⁰ Letter, 9 August 1962, given to the author.

³¹ Anonymous interview with author, Philadelphia, September 2003.

³² Anonymous interview with author, Jerusalem, May 2001. The reference is to Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk.

³³ Program Book of the Union Institute, Oconomowac, Wisconsin, 22 July 1961. These documents were unprocessed at the American Jewish Archive at the time of my research in 2001.

³⁴ Program Book of the Union Institute, Oconomowac, Wisconsin, Junior Session, 1961. These documents were unprocessed at the American Jewish Archive at the time of my research in 2001.

- ³⁵ The sermon and the details of the experiment were included in the Program Book of the Union Institute, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, 14 July 1961, Intermediate Session I, 11–23 July 1961. These documents were unprocessed at the American Jewish Archive at the time of my research in 2001.
- ³⁶ Program Book, Union Institute, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, 1962, Junior session of Intermediate Session I. These papers were unprocessed at the American Jewish Archive at the time of my research in 2001.
- ³⁷ “Program Review for High School Session.” Union Institute at Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, July 1961. These papers were unprocessed at the American Jewish Archive when I worked there in 2001.
- ³⁸ Anonymous interview with author, New York City, September 2000.
- ³⁹ Camp Masaad pioneered the use of intensive Hebrew instruction.
- ⁴⁰ Anonymous interview with author, Philadelphia, September 2003.
- ⁴¹ Anonymous interview with author, Washington, DC, March 2001.
- ⁴² For an overview of the early years of Camp Ramah see Brown (836–38); Fox (19–38); and Schwartz.
- ⁴³ Camp Ramah Archives, Ramah Nayack, 1963, pp. 3–5.
- ⁴⁴ Anonymous interview with author, Philadelphia, April, 2004.
- ⁴⁵ Anonymous interview with author, New York City, September 2000.
- ⁴⁶ Rabbi Neil Gilman interview with author, New York City, March 2001.
- ⁴⁷ Anonymous interview with author, Philadelphia, April 2004.
- ⁴⁸ Rabbi Neil Gilman interview with author, New York City, March 2001.
- ⁴⁹ Letter of Phyllis Weisbard, 7 July 1960, given to author; anonymous interview with author, New York City, September 2000.
- ⁵⁰ Anonymous interview with author, Philadelphia, September 2003.
- ⁵¹ Anonymous diary from 1968 given to author.
- ⁵² Anonymous 1968 diary given to the author.
- ⁵³ Author interview with Walter Ackerman, Jerusalem, May 2001.
- ⁵⁴ To this point no scholars have systematically studied Jewish summer camps other than Camp Ramah, hence one cannot be definitive on this point. However, interviews cited above about other camps suggest these issues were of importance to other camps as well.
- ⁵⁵ “The Circus of Life,” Rabbi Effry Spectre. Translated and adapted by Mr. Stuart Kelman and Rabbi Jack Bloom. Hebrew and English manuscript in author’s files.
- ⁵⁶ Telephone interview with Rabbi Shalom Podwell, Chicago, 7 November 2000.
- ⁵⁷ Neil Gilman interview with author, New York City, March 2001.
- ⁵⁸ The author wishes to thank the following institutions for funding this research: University of Minnesota, Lucius Littauer Foundation, Hadassah International Jewish Women’s Research Center, American Jewish Archives, and especially the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania.

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Culture

Faultlines: The Seven Socio-Ecologies of Jewish Los Angeles

By Bruce A. Phillips

Within the field of American Jewish sociology, local Jewish community population studies have been largely underutilized. Prior to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey local studies served as proxy for American Jewry as a whole. For example, Sidney Goldstein and Calvin Goldscheider used the Providence Jewish population survey to study generational change among American Jews (Goldstein and Goldscheider). Both Steven M. Cohen and Calvin Goldscheider used the Boston Jewish population survey to study American Jewish assimilation (Cohen; Goldscheider). Peter Medding and Gary A. Tobin combined multiple local Jewish population surveys to create a composite of American Jewry to study the impact of intermarriage (Medding, Tobin et al.). However, once the data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey became available for analysis, social scientists largely abandoned local population studies in favor of true national data. The only exception is Ira Sheskin's study of how Jewish communities differ. Even here, however, the emphasis is on communal variations on a national scale as opposed to discussing any individual community (Sheskin).

Although no longer needed as a surrogate for national data, local Jewish population surveys provide the only way to understand American Jews in the context of their

local communities. As such, local studies of American Jews could potentially become part of the larger study of what scholars term “spatial assimilation.” A number of important books and articles have recently used U.S. census data to study ethnic, immigrant, and racial groups in the context of the cities and metropolitan areas in which they reside (see, for example: Waldinger; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr; Massey and Denton; Alba et al.). Their common focus is the relationship between community residence and assimilation. For example, in what ways do Hispanics who live in suburbs differ from those who live in barrios, and in what ways do Hispanics in predominantly Anglo suburbs differ from those in suburbs that are largely Hispanic? The same questions might well be asked about Jews. It was largely assumed in the 1960s that suburbanization was an expression of Jewish assimilation (Sklare and Greenblum; Kramer and Leventman), and the issue of Jewish spatial assimilation in the suburbs has gone unexamined ever since. Data from the decades that have followed, however, can provide for some new conclusions.

Los Angeles is a particularly apt community in which to examine this question of Jewish spatial assimilation because there has been a major Jewish population shift from the nation’s Northeast and Midwest to the South and West (Goldstein and Goldstein). In moving to the West and South, American Jews are relocating from industrial cities to post-industrial cities. As Michael Dear has argued, the West is characterized by postmodern cities for which Los Angeles is the paradigm (Dear and Flusty, “Los Angeles as Postmodern Urbanism”). Understanding how Jews fit into the Los Angeles landscape has substantive implications for other Jewish communities, and the analytical approach used here may well serve as a model for a comparison of different Jewish communities.

This paper has three goals. First, as discussed above, it revisits the assumption that suburbanization goes along with assimilation. Second, it re-conceptualizes Los Angeles Jewry in the context of the “Los Angeles School of Urbanism,” which seeks to understand Los Angeles in its own terms, rather than as an aberration from established models of urban theory. Third, it serves as a resource for the Los Angeles Jewish community in that this is the first published comparison of the 1979 and 1996 Los Angeles Jewish population surveys, the data upon which this analysis is based. Using these two studies together should help the organizations and institutions of Los Angeles Jewry see some of the changes that have taken place during the eighteen years that separate the 1979 and 1996 Jewish population surveys.¹ Charting all of Los Angeles’ demographic changes is beyond the scope of this paper, but a number of important findings will be highlighted below in the context of discussing specific geographic sub-areas.

IN SEARCH OF LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles County is made up of multiple neighborhoods and communities. Many of them are well known beyond Southern California: “Beverly Hills 90210,” “Fresh Prince of Bel Air,” and even “Straight Outa’ Compton.” But we might well ask: Where do Jews

fit in within this vast array of neighborhoods and communities that make up Greater Los Angeles? The City of Los Angeles has signs designating such neighborhoods as “Koreatown” and “Little Ethiopia.” The “Crenshaw District” is typically used in the media to signify the largest African American concentration. Beyond the boundaries of the city of Los Angeles one can find “Little Saigon” and “Little India.” Glendale is widely known to be Armenian just as Monterey Park is known to be Asian. So where do we locate “Jewish Los Angeles,” if, indeed, such a locus (or loci) can be situated at all?

The best means to start such an inquiry will be to consider what we mean by Los Angeles in the first place. The “Los Angeles” that is the focus of this discussion consists of the areas for which data has been gathered by the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles: Los Angeles County minus the San Gabriel and Pomona valleys and Long Beach,² but including eastern Ventura County, i.e., the Conejo Valley communities out to the Camarillo grade.

In order to place Jews in the larger context of Los Angeles one must have a both comprehensive and comprehensible sense of Los Angeles. But how does one make sense of a Los Angeles that has been proverbially described as a hundred communities in search of a city? The classic urban model developed at the University of Chicago consists of an urban core industrial area surrounded by concentric rings of settlements. In the inner ring are working class neighborhoods; beyond them are suburbs. Although the principal work of the “Chicago School”—Robert Park’s *The City* (Park, Burgess and McKenzie)—was published eight decades ago, it remains the preeminent model. As metropolitan areas developed beyond the first ring of suburbs, the terms introduced to describe them, such as “boomburbs” and “exurbs,” have simply expanded the Chicago School model (Dear).

Los Angeles, however, does not fit this model and has generally been treated as an anomaly both in architectural and urban-theory circles (Dear and Flusty, “The Resistible Rise of the L.A. School”). In the 1990s a diverse group of social scientists, planners, and architects associated primarily with the University of Southern California and the University of California at Los Angeles promulgated the “Los Angeles School of Urbanism.” This Los Angeles School argues that L.A. is not an aberration but rather the prototype of the post-industrial metropolis that has come to prominence particularly in the West and Southwest. Proponents of a Los Angeles School of Urbanism include not only their own work, but the earlier work of others that sought to understand Los Angeles in its own terms. One such scholar is the architectural historian Reyner Banham, whose seminal work *Los Angeles, the Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Banham) argued that the built environment of Los Angeles was not a random collection of the bizarre but rather a remarkably coherent response to the surrounding physical environment (Banham 5).

Banham interpreted the built-environment of Los Angeles as the product of four broad ecologies, each with its own distinctive architecture: Surfurbia, Foothills, Plains of Id, and Autopia. *Surfurbia* is the strip of beach communities stretching from Malibu

to Balboa (Banham 23–25). Originally resort towns accessible by the Pacific Electric “Red Cars,” they had become “surfurbs” in the 1960s. The *Foothill* ecology includes the many canyons such as Mandeville Canyon and Benedict Canyon. These are among the most expensive properties in Los Angeles, set far above what Banham refers to as the “madding crowd” (Banham 143–45). Banham’s *Plains of Id* refers to the great expanse of indistinguishable cities found in the San Gabriel Valley and south of downtown such as Norwalk, Bell Gardens, Artesia, Paramount, Cudahy, Downey, and Santa Fe Springs. The cities in the San Gabriel Valley were originally farming communities that became suburbs as land speculators created new subdivisions along the expanding Pacific Electric rail lines. The cities south of downtown, on the other hand, grew up around the industrial expansion between downtown and the Port of Los Angeles in San Pedro (Banham 77–80). These cities, too, grew around the Pacific Electric rail lines. Writing in the late 1940s, the early and astute observer of Los Angeles Carey McWilliams observed that these communities were more like small towns than suburbs. He attributed this to the influence of Midwestern migration to Southern California (McWilliams).

Banham describes *Autopia* not as a specific region, but as a culture and architectural style built around the automobile (Banham 195–98). Historically, the San Fernando Valley personifies *Autopia* because, unlike older cities and communities, it was developed around the automobile. The Red Car lines were already being dismantled when the San Fernando Valley was being built up in the years after the Second World War (Bottles 220).

In this analysis, I have adapted Banham’s typological system of categorization to include two important social distinctions that he did not discuss: the Valley versus the City, and Westside versus Eastside. The recent movement for San Fernando Valley secession from Los Angeles in order to establish a politically independent urban center “over the hill,” attests to the extent to which the Valley considers itself a separate entity (Sonenshein). This movement began in the 1970s and culminated in a failed ballot measure in 2002.³

The “Westside” has always been an important distinction for all Angelinos, as exemplified by the strenuous objections to the possibility of introducing a new area code overlay to west Los Angeles in 1999. Objections were so strenuous that the decision to create a second area code for the Westside (“424”) was stopped when the State Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications Committee voted eight to one to approve the Area Code Relief Act (AB 818) (Haynes). The “310” area code has come to symbolize living on the Westside in the same way that “212” symbolizes Manhattan.

The “Westside” for both Jews and Angelinos has shifted over the course of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the century “Westlake Park”⁴ on Alvarado was the western edge of Los Angeles. Western Avenue was also once a demarcation, but it is now considered urban. Prior to World War II, Jews referred to Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles as the “Eastside,” while the “Westside” alluded to West Adams and Fairfax.

The Westside Jewish Community Center, built in the early 1950s, is near the corner of Fairfax and Olympic—in 1953 it was the “Westside.”

There are many indications that both Fairfax and Pico-Robertson are now considered urban. School Board, Board of Supervisors, and Congressional districts were redrawn following the 2000 Census to join parts of Pico-Robertson and Fairfax with West Adams and Baldwin Hills.⁵ For example, during the 1990s, Pico-Robertson was part of the 29th Congressional District, represented by Henry Waxman. This district has been described as follows: “The affluent communities of Los Angeles’ Westside, including Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, Westwood and Hancock Park, have been collected into this solidly Democratic district that has been dominated by liberal Jewish politicians” (“Summary Description”). Following the 2000 Census, Waxman’s 29th Congressional District became the 30th and traded some territory in order to remain affluent and democratic (and Jewish). The southern portion of the old 29th (stretching from parts of Fairfax and Pico-Robertson down to the African American enclaves of Ladera Heights, View Park, and Baldwin Hills) became part of Diane Watson’s new 33rd Congressional District. Zip Codes 90048 (Fairfax) and 90035 (Pico-Robertson) were split between the 29th and the 33rd. Replacing that acreage, Waxman’s new 30th District received parts of the West Valley (“California’s Redistricting Plan”). Since Diane Watson is African-American and Henry Waxman is Jewish, and since politicians want to preserve districts that are safe for re-election, it is clear that the experts in the Democratic Party had decided that most of Pico-Robertson and part of the Fairfax District no longer belonged to the “liberal Westside.”

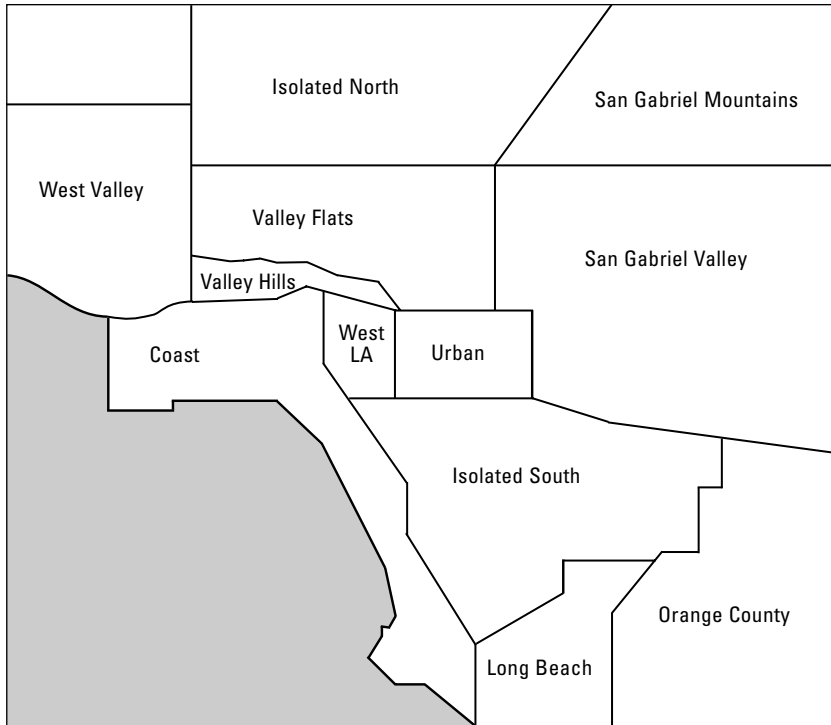
Another indicator of the ambiguous status of Pico-Robertson is the School Board re-districting of the Pico-Robertson and Beverlywood neighborhoods surrounding Hamilton High School. In 2002 the district boundaries of Los Angeles Unified School District Board members were re-drawn so that these neighborhoods became part of District One instead of District Four (Ellenson). District Four includes Westwood, Bel Air, Brentwood, Pacific Palisades, Woodland Hills, Encino and other affluent communities (“Board of Education District 4”). District One, on the other hand, consists of mid-Wilshire, West Adams, Palms, and the sections of South Central Los Angeles abutting Inglewood (“Board of Education District 1”). It includes two schools that recently lost their accreditation: Mount Vernon Middle School (Cary) and Crenshaw High School (Pleasant). In other words, Marlene Canter (the Board member representing District Four and who is Jewish) ceded these neighborhoods to predominantly minority District One in exchange for communities in the Valley perceived to be more solidly affluent (and Jewish).

Perhaps most telling is how the *Los Angeles Times* has treated the Fairfax District. Before it introduced the California Section of the daily paper, the Fairfax District received the “Metro” section while adjoining Beverly Hills received the “Westside” section. Thus, the *Los Angeles Times*, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and the California Democratic Party all agree that these neighborhoods are no longer part of the “Westside.”

In this paper I expand Banham's "ecologies" to include the social distinctions discussed above, and so I call them "socio-ecologies." As the School of Social Ecology at University of California, Irvine explains, "social ecology is concerned with the relationships between human populations and their environments" (School of Social Ecology). From a Jewish perspective, there are seven "socio-ecologies":

1. The *Coastline*: This is the same as "Surfurbia." It extends from Malibu at the north end to Palos Verdes at the south end and encompasses beach cities such as Santa Monica, Hermosa Beach, Redondo Beach, and El Segundo. Unlike Banham's Surfurbia, the Coastline socio-ecology does not include Orange County because there is no documented social research on the Jews of Orange County.
2. *West Los Angeles*: West Los Angeles consists of Beverly Hills, Sawtelle, Westwood, Brentwood, Mar Vista, Cheviot Hills, and Culver City. Much of West Los Angeles is made up of canyon areas that Banham identified as the "foothill" ecology, but for Jews, these are integral to the "Westside."
3. The *Urban* socio-ecology is made up of Pico-Robertson, Fairfax and all L.A. communities to the east.
4. The *Valley Hills* socio-ecology also corresponds to the Banham's "foothill" ecology on the north face of the Santa Monica mountains. It includes zip codes for Studio City, Sherman Oaks, Encino, Tarzana, and Woodland Hills.
5. The *Valley Flats* are the rest of the communities in the San Fernando Valley located on the Valley floor.
6. The *West Valley* consists of the Conejo and Simi Valleys. About half of the West Valley is in Ventura County.
7. The socio-ecology *Jewishly Isolated Areas* refers to communities that are non-contiguous with other areas of Jewish settlement. All the other areas are contiguous with at least one other. For example, West Los Angeles abuts the Urban Area, and West Valley is next to the Valley Hills, which in turn is contiguous with the Valley Flats. The communities in these more isolated areas are relatively distant from the rest of Jewish Los Angeles. Most of the interviews in the Isolated Areas were conducted in the "Plains of Id," south of downtown.⁶ In recent years a second Isolated Area has sprung up in the Santa Clarita Valley.⁷ In the population surveys upon which this analysis is based, there were only twenty-five interviews conducted in the northern Isolated Area, so when the north and south Isolated Areas are broken out separately, the results must be interpreted with caution due to the limitations of the data.

The seven socio-ecologies used in this analysis diverge in some important ways



from the traditional conceptualization of Jewish Los Angeles used in population surveys and planning documents of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles for the past fifty years. In the San Fernando Valley, for example, communities were grouped on north-south axes so that population data were reported for Encino and Reseda together and Studio City was reported along with North Hollywood. In the socio-ecology framework used here, Encino and Studio City are part of the “Valley Hills” and North Hollywood and Reseda are in the Valley Flats.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

As stated earlier, this paper is based on a re-analysis of the 1979 and 1996 Los Angeles Jewish Population Surveys. The 1979 Jewish Population used screened Jewish households from a random sample of all telephone numbers in Los Angeles County (minus Long Beach),⁸ and it was the first to use Random Digit Dialing (RDD), a methodology that has become the basis for almost all local Jewish community surveys as well as both the 1990 and 2001 National Jewish Population Surveys. The 1996 study used a dual frame sample that combined an RDD sample of 1,080 interviews with 1,483 households sampled from a list of contributors to the Los Angeles Jewish Federation. It also included seventy-two interviews with 1,979 respondents re-contacted almost two decades later. The distribution of interviews by ecology in each survey is reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Completed Interviews by Jewish Ecology and Year of Study

Environment	1979	1996			
	RDD	RDD	Federation List	1979 Re-interview	All 1996
Urban	214	170	117	13	300
West LA	132	196	329	18	543
Coastline	180	360	663	18	1,041
Valley Flats	95	93	127	13	233
Valley Hills	64	75	110	6	191
West Valley	50	91	98	3	192
Isolated	35	95	39	1	135
San Gabriel Valley	53	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	823	1080	1483	72	2635

“Los Angeles” can include multiple levels of geography. At its broadest, Los Angeles refers to the metropolitan area. For this analysis, the Los Angeles Metro Area consists of Los Angeles County plus eastern Ventura County along Route 101 as far as the Camarillo grade. This is the area used for broad analyses. The more detailed analyses exclude Long Beach, the San Gabriel Valley, and the Pomona Valley. The Jewish Federation of Greater Long Beach & West Orange County chose not to participate in either the 1979 or the 1996 Los Angeles Jewish population survey, and the San Gabriel and Pomona valleys were included in the 1979 study but not the one of 1996. What used to be the “Eastern Region” of the Los Angeles Jewish Federation seceded and became The Jewish Federation of the San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys shortly before the 1996 Jewish population survey and declined to participate in the 1996 survey. Jewish population estimates for Long Beach, the Pomona Valley, and the San Gabriel Valley were taken from the *American Jewish Yearbook*⁹ and are used where relevant.

JEWISH MOVEMENT IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

The student of Los Angeles Jewish demography is fortunate that the Los Angeles Jewish Federation had commissioned a number of demographic surveys by Dr. Fred Massarik of the University of California, Los Angeles going back to 1953 (Massarik, 1953, 1959 and 1968). Table 2 and Chart A show the changing distribution of the Los Angeles Jewish population in the second half of the twentieth century. Unfortunately the communities that were examined in the 1953, 1958, and 1968 surveys could not be translated into the socio-ecologies described above because only the published reports are available, not the raw data.¹⁰ Nonetheless Chart A shows a singular pattern. Although the Jewish population in all areas consistently grew over the past half century, there was only one major change in the distribution: the Valley share¹¹ increased

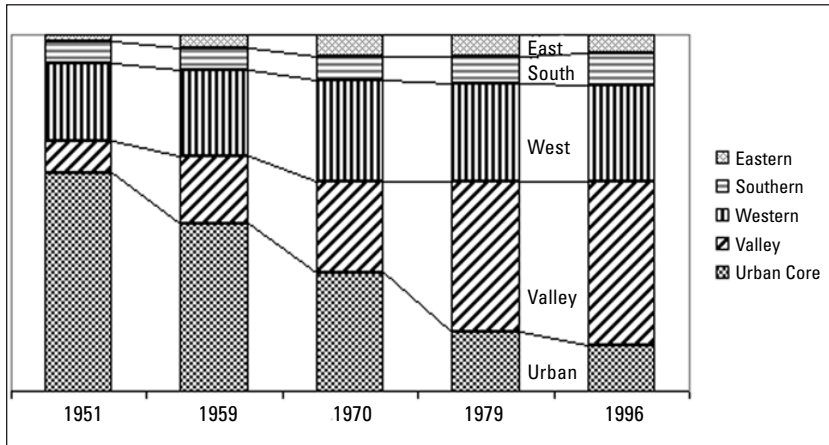
from 9% in 1951 to 46% in 1996, and the urban share decreased from 61% to 13% over the same time period. The greatest drop in urban share took place during the 1970s. The share of the population in the Eastern region has remained steady at 6% or less since 1970. The percentage in the Southern region grew gradually to 9% by 1996.

Table 2: Distribution of Jewish Population, 1953–1996

Region	1953	1958	1968	1979	1996
Urban Core	61%	47%	33%	17%	13%
Valley	9%	19%	26%	42%	46%
Western Area	22%	24%	28%	28%	27%
Southern	6%	6%	7%	8%	9%
Eastern	2%	4%	6%	6%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Phillips

Chart A: Distribution of Jewish Population, 1951–1996

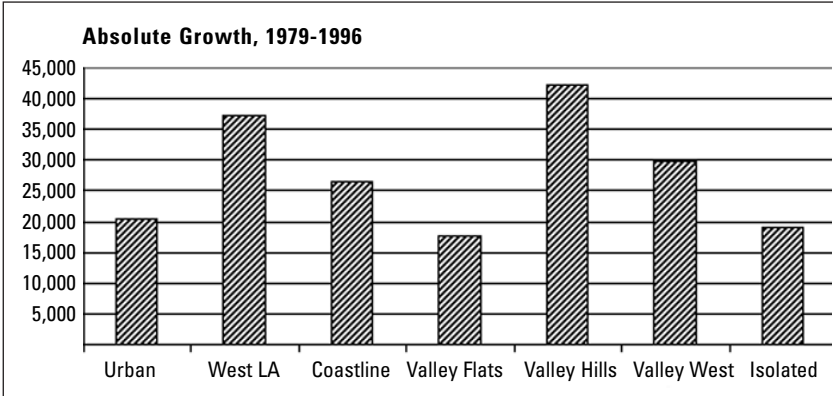


The overall distribution of the Jewish population by socio-ecology can be examined by comparing the 1979 and 1996 surveys. The Jewish population distribution remained stable between 1979 and 1996 with three exceptions: the “Urban” socio-ecology percentage decreased by 3% and the Valley Flats by 4%. Conversely, the percentage in the Valley Hills socio-ecology grew by 4%. The Isolated Areas percentage increased 2%, and most of the growth was north of the San Fernando Valley in Valencia, Santa Clarita, Palmdale, and Lancaster. There is evidence that the northern Isolated Area has become less isolated since 1996, as there are now four congregations in the Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys¹² in addition to Chabad of the Santa Clarita Valley. If the Jewish population in the northernmost part of Los Angeles County continues to grow, the Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys might evolve into a socio-ecology of their own,

which we may call “North County.” Unfortunately, the 1979 and 1996 surveys did not contain sufficient interviews to break it out separately. As will be shown later, the Jewish population density in the North County was sparse in the 1996 survey, and thus it was combined with the southern isolated area in the “Isolated” socio-ecology.

While the Jewish population in all seven socio-ecologies grew between 1979 and 1996, not all of them grew to the same extent. The greatest absolute growth was in the Valley Hills, followed by West Los Angeles and the West Valley. The Valley Flats experienced the least Jewish population growth (Chart B). Another way to understand Jewish

Chart B: *Jewish Population Growth by Socio-Ecology, 1979–1996*



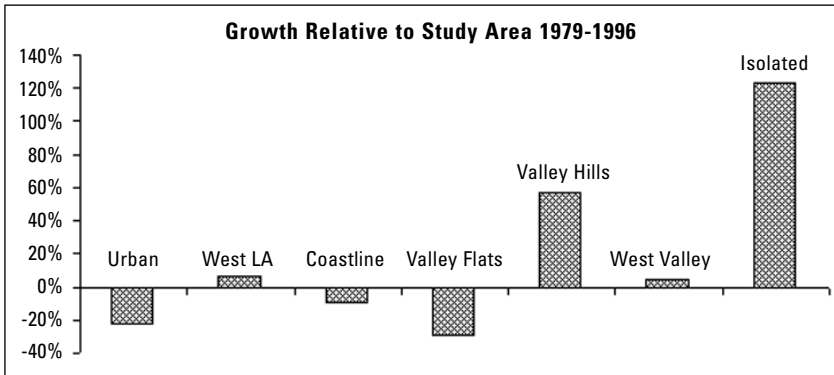
population growth is in relative terms by comparing the percentage of growth in each socio-ecology with the overall rate for all seven socio-ecologies combined (Chart C). Columns below the line indicate that the socio-ecology grew more slowly than all the socio-ecologies combined, and columns above indicate that the socio-ecology grew at a faster rate. Two socio-ecologies stand out with a substantially higher growth rate: the Valley Hills and the Isolated Areas (mostly in the northern Isolated Area). The Urban socio-ecology and the Valley Flats stand out with substantially lower rates of growth. Again, all areas grew in absolute numbers—the focus here is on relative growth rates. The Isolated Areas began with a small number of Jews, and the rapid growth only moved it from 3% to 5% of the total Jewish population. Nonetheless, both its relative and absolute growth make it a place to watch. In both absolute and relative terms, the population growth in the Valley Hills is especially dramatic and indicates the emergence of an important Jewish population center.

That the West Valley did not grow much faster than all seven socio-ecologies combined will come as a surprise to some. The conventional wisdom in the Los Angeles Jewish community is that this is the new Jewish hot-spot. For example, a recent article in the *Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles* noted that “Many Jewish organizations are now focusing their efforts on the West Valley and Conejo Valley” (Fehler). The author further observes that:

My family and I moved to the Conejo Valley for the typical reasons: safer neighborhoods, better schools and, yes, to be around other Jews like us. I consider that move to be the best thing I have done for my family. I have never met anyone who has made the move who regrets it. Yes, for those who work in downtown Los Angeles, it's a bit of a shlep, but the rewards outweigh any of the downsides, by far.

The West Valley has also seen significant institutional growth. The offices of the Valley Alliance sub-division of the Los Angeles Jewish Federation are in the West Valley, sharing the site with the New Jewish Community Center (JCC) at Milken. The JCC also houses the New Jewish High School of the Conejo Valley. In addition, the Heschel West Day School opened recently in Agoura Hills. The operative word in the West Valley is “new.” However, even though the emergence of a Jewish population center and important new Jewish institutions in the West Valley give this socio-ecology significant visibility, their greater growth has been documented in the more established Valley Hills socio-ecology. The growth of the Valley Hills thus begs the question of how it is different from the West Valley, the area presumed to have grown the most.

Chart C: Jewish Population Growth by Socio-Ecology, 1979–1996



UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIO-ECOLOGIES WHERE JEWS LIVE

Over the half-century spanning the 1953 and 1996 Los Angeles population surveys, the Jewish population has steadily increased in all parts of the Los Angeles and Ventura counties. One trend nonetheless stands out: the proportion of Jews living in the Southern Area, the Western Area, and the San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys has remained remarkably stable, while the Valley replaced the Urban Core in terms of Jewish population share.

It is important to note that Jews and Anglos are not dispersed in the same areas in equal proportions (Table 3). Anglos (that is, the non-Jewish non-Hispanic whites) are five times as likely as Jews to live in the Eastern Valley¹³ and the Isolated Areas

(37% vs. 7%). Conversely, Jews are two and a half times as likely as Anglos to live in West Los Angeles, the West Valley, and the Valley Hills. Jews are also more urban than Anglos, as they are 1.6 times as likely to live in the Urban socio-ecology. Jews and Anglos, however, are equally likely to live in Long Beach, the Coastline communities, and the Valley Flats.

Table 3: Distribution of Jewish and Anglo Population by Ecology, Los Angeles + Eastern Ventura County

Ecology	Jews	Anglo
Isolated	4%	25%
Eastern Valleys	3%	13%
Long Beach	5%	5%
Coastline	14%	13%
Valley Flats	15%	18%
West Valley	14%	10%
Urban	14%	9%
West LA	17%	6%
Valley Hills	14%	2%
Total	100%	100%

JEWISH DENSITY

Given that Jews are more likely than Anglo non-Jews to live in particular socio-ecologies, their presence should be statistically evident in areas of Jewish preference. This is indeed the case. Table 4 combines the Jewish population estimate for each socio-ecology (based on the 1996 Jewish population survey) with the population estimates calculated from the 2000 Census,¹⁴ using four categories: Jews as a percent of the entire population of the socio-ecology, non-Jewish Anglos as a percent of the entire population,¹⁵ non-Jewish non-Anglos (e.g. Hispanics, African-Americans, Asians) as a percent of the entire population, and Jews as a percent of the Anglo population. It is evident from this table that ethno-racial composition and Jewish density vary dramatically by socio-ecology, and the most visible “Jewish areas,” such as Fairfax and Pico-Robertson, are not all that Jewish. The Jewish character of Fairfax, for example, is widely recognized by the local media, which tends to report Jewish stories “live from the Fairfax district” in the same way that Asian stories are reported from Koreatown, Hispanic stories from East Los Angeles, and African American stories from “South Central” and the “Crenshaw district.” Fairfax and Pico-Robertson are unquestionably the most *visibly* Jewish sections of Los Angeles, since they contain much Hebrew signage for bakeries, delis, Israeli and kosher restaurants, book stores and Judaica shops. There are many orthodox synagogues on both Pico Boulevard and La Brea (in the Fairfax area). West Hollywood, just to the north of the Fairfax District (often considered part of it) has a visible Russian émigré presence with much signage in Russian along its streets. As Table 4 shows, even the most widely recognized Jewish Urban neighborhoods are only 22% Jewish (although Jews make up almost half of the white, non-Hispanic population). Overall the Urban socio-ecology is only 4% Jewish, and, if just the zip codes where Jews are known to live are considered,¹⁶ Jewish density increases only to 7%, about the same as the Los Angeles area¹⁷ overall. Finally, it is notable in Table 4 that Jews are over-represented among Anglos in the Urban socio-ecology at 30%, compared to 21% overall.

The Urban socio-ecology is heavily non-white (87%), and even the most visible Jewish neighborhoods are more than half non-Anglo (54%).

The Valley Flats socio-ecology resembles the Urban socio-ecology in that the majority of its residents are non-Anglo (63%) and it has a low Jewish population density (7%). Jews were interviewed in twenty-six out of the thirty-two zip codes that constitute the Valley Flats, and the picture changes little if only these twenty-six zip codes are considered (data not shown). In other words, Jewish density is low in the Valley Flats because (1) there are six zip codes with virtually no Jews at all¹⁸ and (2) there are not many Jews relative to the general population in the twenty-six zip codes where Jews reside. Still, the Valley Flats covers many square miles, and one might assume that the most visibly Jewish areas of the Valley Flats (North Hollywood, and “Valley Village”) are predominantly Jewish. But even though a vibrant orthodox community can be found in this part of the Valley Flats along with the very active Valley Cities Jewish Community Center, Jewish visibility does not translate into Jewish numbers. Indeed, this visibly orthodox section of the Valley Flats is only 7% Jewish.

Table 4: Jewish Density and Racial Composition by Ecology

	% Jewish	% Anglo Non-Jews	% Non-Jewish Non-Anglo	Total	Jews as % of Anglo
Urban—all	4	9	87	100%	30%
Urban-Jewish zips*	7	13	81	100%	34%
Urban-Visible Jewish**	22	24	54	100%	47%
West LA	26	31	43	100%	45%
Coastline	12	44	44	100%	21%
Valley Flats	7	31	63	100%	17%
Valley Hills	48	30	22	100%	61%
West Valley	16	51	33	100%	24%
South Isolated—all zips	1	15	85	100%	4%
South Isolated—Jewish zips**	1	11	88	100%	12%
North Isolated	3	55	42	100%	4%
Long Beach***	15	36	49	100%	30%
Eastern***	1	11	88	100%	6%
ALL	6	22	72	100%	21%

* Zip codes in which Jews were interviewed in the 1996 Los Angeles Jewish Population Survey

** Fairfax, West Hollywood, and Pico Robertson zip codes

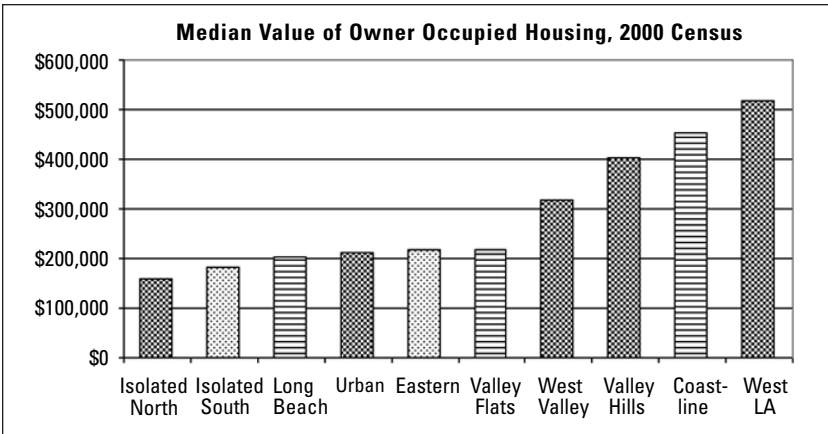
*** These are based on estimates taken from the American Jewish Year Book and not from actual research.

In terms of population, the most Jewish socio-ecology is the Valley Hills (48% Jewish), followed by West Los Angeles (26%). Even more dramatic, Jews account for

61% of the Anglo population in the Valley Hills, and 45% in West Los Angeles. The Coastline communities are less Jewish: Jews make up only 12% of the overall population and only 21% of the Anglo population. This is a socio-ecology where Jews and Anglo non-Jews are equally likely to live. Consistent with their designation as “isolated,” Jews are under-represented in the Isolated Areas. Even in the newly developed and rapidly growing Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys at the north end of Los Angeles County, Jews make up only 3% of the population. In other words, this newly emerging destination of “white flight”¹⁹ is no more Jewish than the Urban socio-ecology.

Jews are more likely than Anglos to live in three out of the four most expensive socio-ecologies shown in Chart D: West Los Angeles, West Valley, and Valley Hills. These were the first, third, and fourth most expensive socio-ecologies according to the 2000 U.S. Census.²⁰ Jews and Anglos were equally likely to reside in Coastline communities, the second most expensive socio-ecology. The median home values in the Valley Flats, Eastern Valleys, Urban neighborhoods, Isolated Areas and Long Beach were similar to each other and considerably less than the four most expensive socio-ecologies. Of the five less expensive areas, Jews were over-represented only in the Urban socio-ecology, relative to Anglos. Thus, Jews are over-represented in the most affluent neighborhoods with the exception of the Coastline, where they are equally represented, and in the traditionally Jewish Urban socio-ecologies. Unfortunately, the San Gabriel Valley was not included in the 1996 survey, and thus such affluent areas as San Marino and La Canada could not be included in this analysis.

Chart D: Housing Value by Socio-Ecology, 2000



As one would expect, the four most expensive socio-ecologies also have the highest household incomes (Chart E). From most affluent to least, they are: West Valley, Coastline, West Los Angeles, and Valley Hills. Chart E shows that the greatest difference is between the four most affluent areas and all the rest. The pattern of Jewish income

in 1996 resembles the overall pattern of income from the 2000 Census (Chart F), and hence the four most affluent socio-ecologies in general are also the four most affluent socio-ecologies for Jews. The Urban zip codes are similarly the least affluent both for Jews and the general population. Although the sample size for the Northern Isolated Area is small, it is broken out separately in Chart F because it is an area of potential Jewish growth. Jewish as well as all households in this newer Northern Isolated Area are more affluent than those in the older Southern Isolated Area.

Chart E: *Median Income, 1999, by Socio-Ecology*

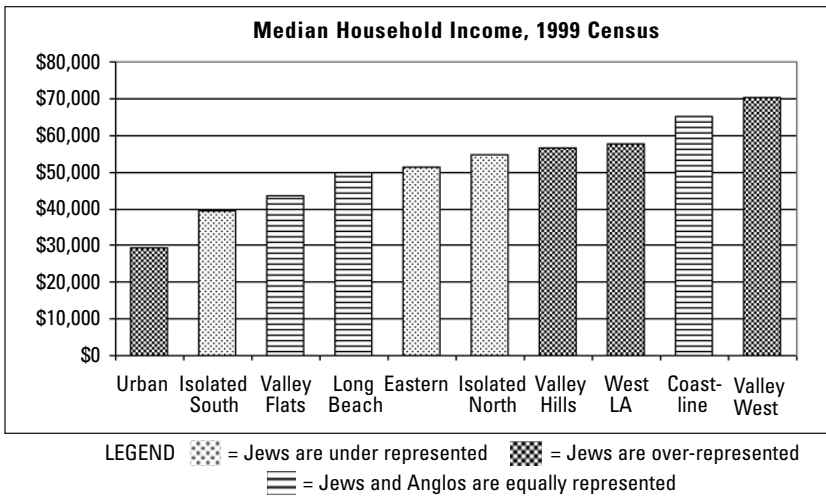
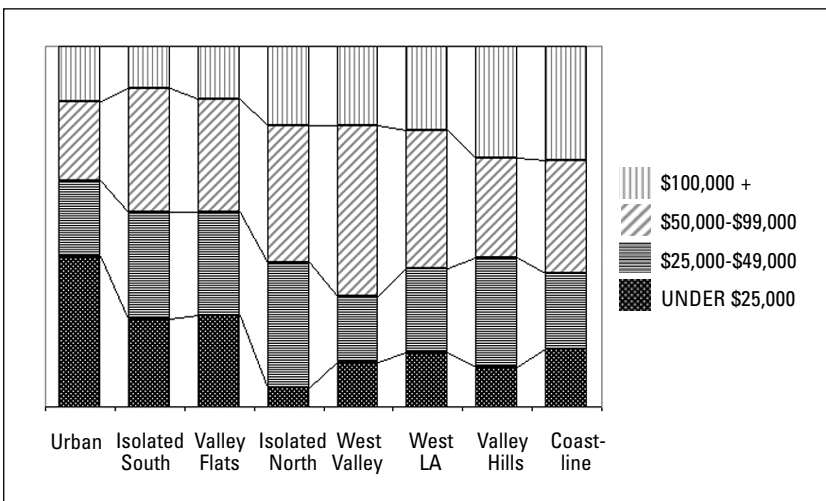


Chart F: *Jewish Household Income, 1996, by Socio-Ecology*



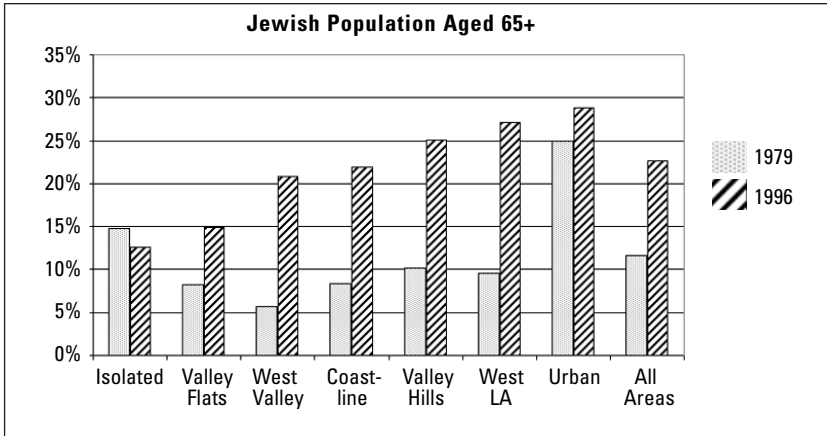
THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE SEVEN SOCIO-ECOLOGIES

AGE

Like persons, given local areas with stable populations can each go through a life cycle of its own. Absent extensive “in-and-out” migration, young couples will have children and couples with children will become “empty-nesters” over time. As spouses die and couples divorce, older couples become older singles. Migration out of an area can accelerate these trends if, for example, young families leave established areas and move to outer suburbs in search of affordable housing. Such life cycle changes are evident in Los Angeles, but not always in the expected direction.

Los Angeles Jewry has aged since 1979 (Chart G), with the percentage of the Jewish population age sixty-five and older doubling from 12% to 23%. Similarly, the proportion of elderly has grown in all the socio-ecologies, save for the Isolated Areas. Just as in 1979, the Urban neighborhoods remain the oldest in 1996, but there is an important difference. In 1979, as can be seen in Chart G, the Urban neighborhoods were the only socio-ecology with a significant proportion of Jews, aged sixty-five and older. The proportion of Jewish seniors in Urban neighborhoods was between 1.7 and 4.4 times greater than in any other socio-ecology. However, by 1996 the proportion of Jewish seniors in Urban neighborhoods (29%) was only slightly higher than in West Los Angeles (27%). The most remarkable growth in the percentage of Jewish seniors was in the West Valley, where the proportion of seniors increased from 6% in 1979 to 21% in 1996.

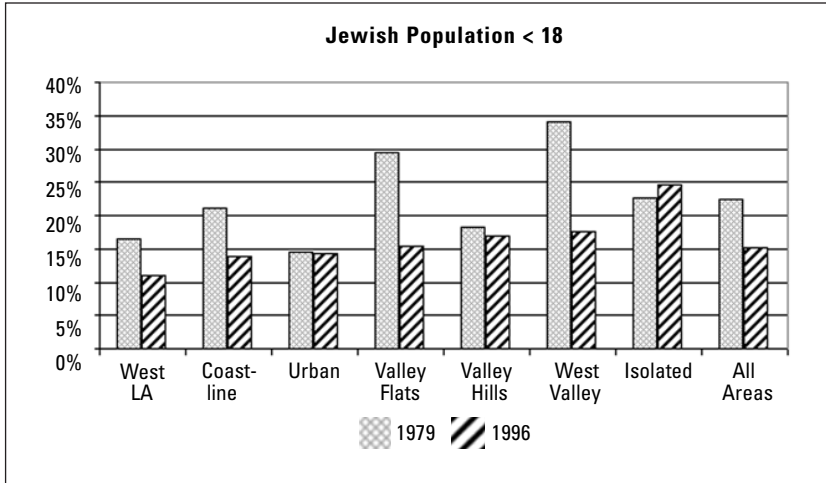
Chart G: Jewish Population 65+by Ecology, 1979 & 1996



Turning to the other end of the age spectrum, the proportion of children in the Jewish population of Los Angeles declined significantly between 1979 and 1996 from 22% to 15%. Among the socio-ecologies, the most precipitous declines were in the West Valley and Valley Flats, where the proportion of children declined almost by half. The proportion of children also declined in the Coastline communities and West Los

Angeles. As expected, the proportion of children increased slightly in the Isolated Areas, in part because of Jewish growth in the family-friendly Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys. Not expected, however, was that the proportion of children in the Urban neighborhoods remained stable—an indication of sustained vitality.

Chart H: *Jewish Population < 18 by Socio-Ecology, 1979 & 1996*

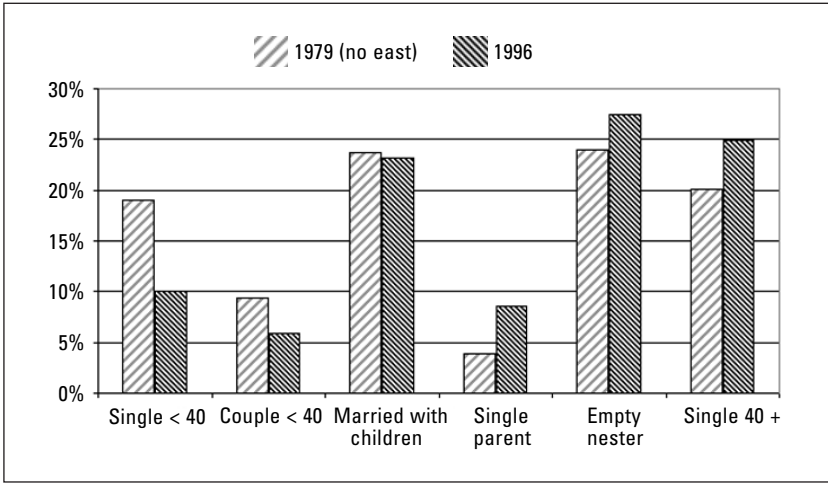


HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

The aging of the Los Angeles Jewish population is also evident in the changing household composition. As can be seen in Chart I, since 1979 the proportion of younger households (both couples and singles) declined from 28% to 16%, with the steepest decline in the proportion of young couples without children. Conversely, the proportion of “empty-nesters” and older (forty plus) singles increased. The proportion of married couples with children declined only slightly from 24% to 23%, which is effectively no change at all. This is significant because nationally the proportion of Jewish married couples with children declined from 26% to 20%.²¹ Similarly, the proportion of married couples in the San Francisco Area declined sharply from 34% to 22% between 1986 and 2004.²² As one would expect, the proportion of single parent families more than doubled from 4% in 1979 to 9% in 1996. Taken together, the proportion of households with children increased slightly from 28% to 32% between 1979 and 1996. This increase in the proportion of households with children would initially seem at odds with the observation made earlier that the proportion of the population under eighteen declined between 1979 and 1996. The apparent inconsistency is resolved by taking family size into consideration. In 1979 households with children had an average of 1.7 children per family. In 1996 this ratio had declined to 0.9 children per family.

The distribution of Jewish household composition is not expected to be uniform throughout Los Angeles. To the contrary, Jewish neighborhoods in urban areas are

Chart I: Jewish Household Composition, 1979 & 1996



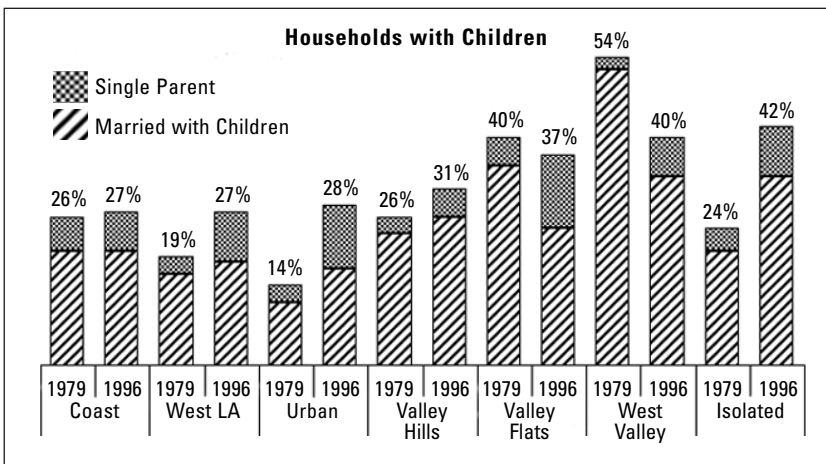
generally thought of as elderly and poor, while newer suburbs and exurbs are expected to have more families with children that moved there in search of affordable housing and better schools. Older suburbs, typically settled during the postwar Baby Boom, are usually thought of as aging in place fifty years later. The young couples, who moved there and raised their children there, have remained in their homes and become older “empty nesters.” Los Angeles Jewry somewhat conforms to this pattern, but with some unexpected surprises. As mentioned, the Isolated Areas in 1996 included the Santa Clarita Valley in the northernmost section of Los Angeles County, which has many new housing developments designed for young families in search of affordable housing. As expected, these exurbs, which include the West Valley and the Isolated Areas, had the highest proportion of families with children: 42% in the Isolated Areas and 40% in the West Valley. The proportion of households with children increased in the Isolated Areas, in part because of the growth of the Santa Clarita Valley. The proportion of households with children in the West Valley remained high relative to other areas, although it actually declined from 54% to 40%. This decline is explained at least in part by the pattern of aging taking place there. As Chart L shows, the proportion of “empty-nesters” (couples forty and older with no children remaining at home) in the West Valley increased from 21% in 1979 to 32% in 1996. There was a corresponding decline in the proportion of young couples without children in the West Valley from 12% down to 5%. Yet another indication of the aging of the West Valley is the decline in the percentage of Jews under ten years of age from 17% in 1979 to 11% in 1996 (data not shown).

The proportion of households with children in the Valley Flats declined slightly, but single parent families became more prominent in that same socio-ecology. The proportion of households with children increased in the Valley Hills from 26% to 31%,

with the ratio of single-parent families to couples with children remaining essentially constant. The proportion of households with children also increased in West Los Angeles, due primarily to an increase in the percentage of single-parent families. The proportion of households with children in Coastline communities did not change, and the relative proportion of single-parent families among them also remained constant.

The most dramatic and least expected change in household age occurred in the Urban neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are historically the oldest and were expected to die out as the Jewish residents aged. It was this expectation that led the Jewish Centers Association to recommend closing the Westside Jewish Community Center a half century after it opened (Ballon, “Krayzelburg”; “Members Rally”; “Westside JCC Bash”). However, instead of simply getting older, the Urban neighborhoods have experienced a familial regeneration. The proportion of households with children in the Urban socio-ecology doubled, fueled by an increase in the percentage of both couples with children and single-parent families.

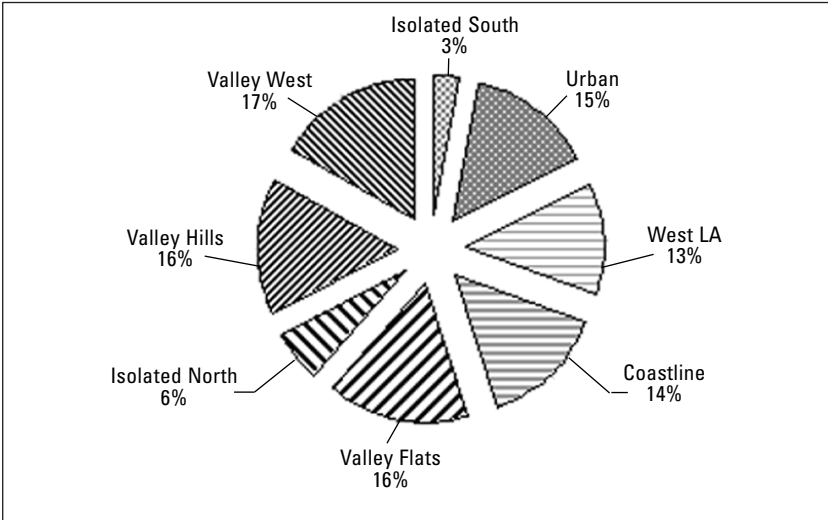
Chart J: *Households with Children by Socio-Ecology, 1979 & 1996*



With the exception of the two Isolated Areas, Jewish children are almost equally distributed among all the socio-ecologies (Chart K). In terms of Jewish “urban renewal,” this is significant because there are almost as many children in the Urban neighborhoods as there are in the exurban family oriented West Valley. Overall, the balance of children tips toward the north: 55% of all Jewish children live in the San Fernando, Conejo, Antelope, Santa Clarita, and Simi Valleys. Although fewer Jewish children are found in the four non-Valley socio-ecologies, these neighborhoods are also more concentrated into a smaller geographic area, as can be seen in Map A. This represents an important difference between the Valleys and the rest of Jewish Los Angeles.

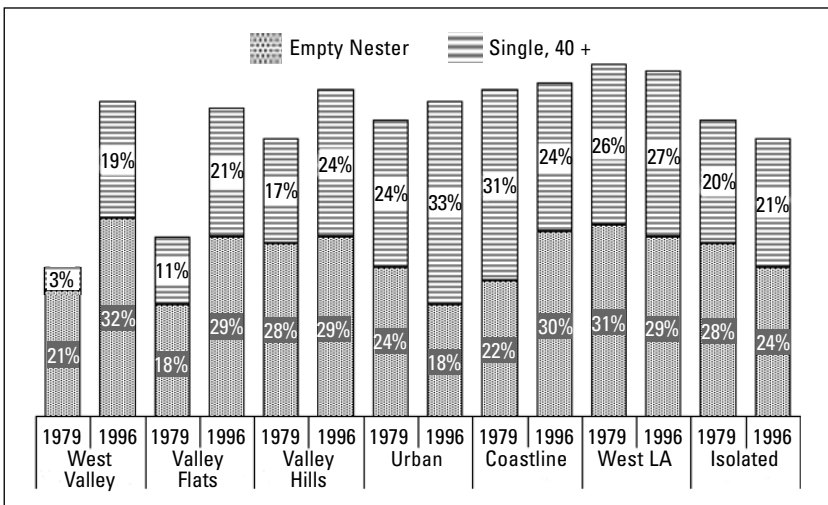
Another way to look at the life-cycle of communities is the proportion of older singles and empty-nesters.²³ As neighborhoods and communities age, this will be

Chart K: *Distribution of Jewish Children by Socio-Ecology, 1996*



reflected in the relative proportion of households at the older end of the life cycle. Such aging is most evident in the Valley Flats and West Valley, where the proportions of empty nesters increased dramatically (Chart L). The proportion of empty nesters remained steady in the Valley Hills, but the proportion of older singles increased. In the Urban neighborhoods, there was a drop in the proportion of empty-nesters and an increase in the proportion of older singles. Thus the Urban socio-ecology of Jewish Los Angeles is experiencing both an end-of-the-life cycle as well as a renewal.

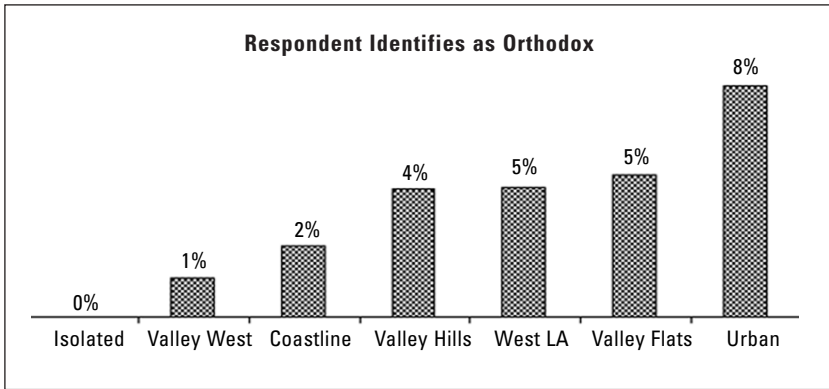
Chart L: *Empty-Nesters and Older Singles by Socio-Ecology, 1979 & 1996*



JEWISH DIMENSIONS

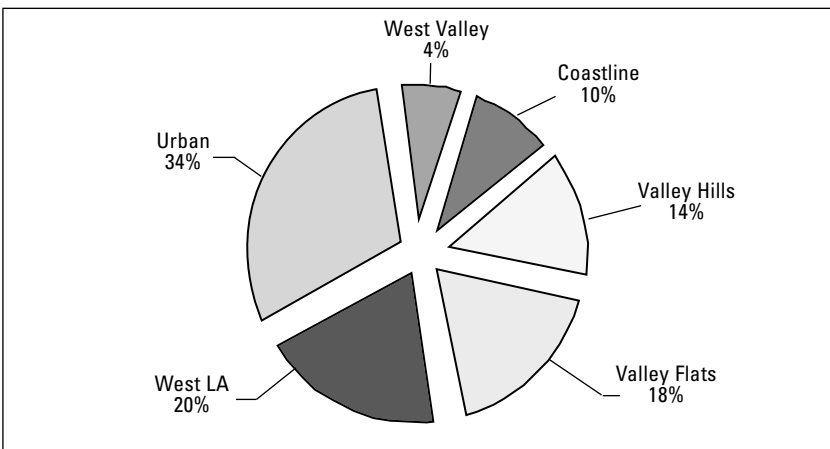
The literature on ethnic assimilation understands suburbanization as spatial assimilation. Moving into the suburbs represents moving in with the Anglo (white, non-Jewish) population. As discussed above, Jews have not dispersed equally and randomly throughout suburban Los Angeles. Rather, they have concentrated in particular areas such as West Los Angeles, the Valley Hills, and the West Valley. Are their Jewish behaviors in keeping with this relative lack of dispersion?

Chart M: *Orthodox Identification by Socio-Ecology, 1996*



One would expect Orthodox Jews to be concentrated in Urban neighborhoods which are older, well-established, and within walking distance of synagogues. This is only partially the case. While Urban respondents in the 1996 Jewish Population Survey are more likely to identify as Orthodox than respondents in the other socio-ecologies (Chart M); still, only a minority identify themselves in this way (8%). Moreover, there

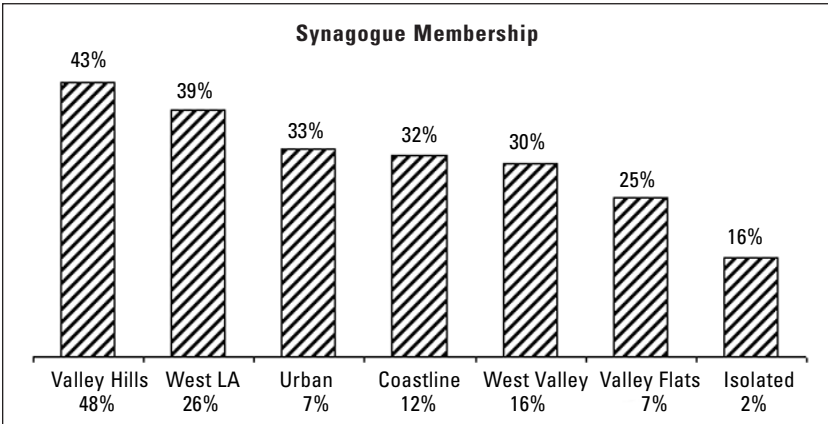
Chart N: *Distribution of Orthodox Identification by Socio-Ecology, 1996*



are many more Orthodox house holds found outside of the Urban socio-ecology than within it (Chart N).

Synagogue membership is highest in the “most Jewish” areas, which suggests that Jews with a religious orientation concentrate in “Jewish” areas. Chart O shows synagogue membership to be highest in the Valley Hills, which is 48% Jewish, and in West Los Angeles, which is 26% Jewish. With the exception of the Urban socio-ecology, the lower the Jewish density in a given area, the lower the rate of synagogue membership. The Urban socio-ecology, which is only 7% Jewish in the zip codes where Jews reside, nonetheless has the third highest rate of synagogue membership. There could also be a factor of self-selection here, as some Jews seek out the ambience of the old Jewish neighborhoods.

Chart O: *Synagogue Membership by Socio-Ecology, 1996*



Income also plays a role in synagogue membership, and as mentioned previously, some socio-ecologies are more affluent than others. To what extent are the socio-ecological differences in affiliation simply income differences? Table 5 shows that synagogue membership increases with income from only 19% among the least affluent households to 49% among the most affluent. Within the four income categories, the association between socio-ecology and synagogue membership persists, although not consistently. However, if only the highest income category is considered, for whom the cost of synagogue membership would not be an important barrier to joining, the pattern remains: with the exception of the Urban neighborhoods, the communities with the highest Jewish densities also had the highest rates of synagogue membership (Chart P).

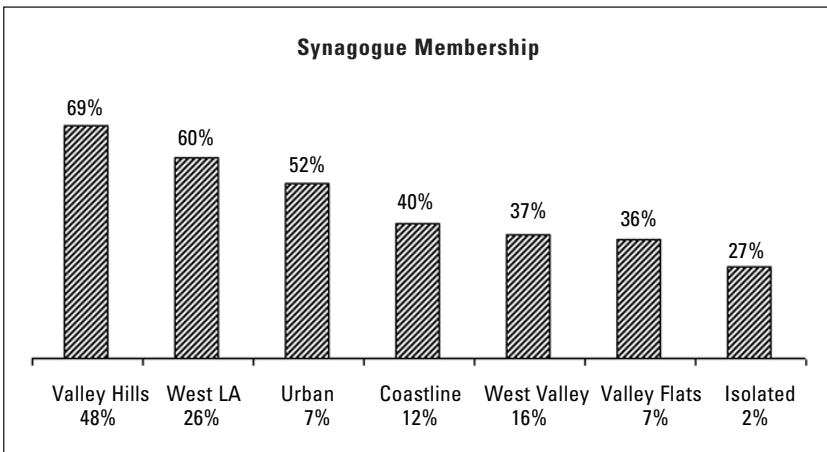
In the same way that the seven socio-ecologies differ from each other, Los Angeles is different from the rest of Southern California. Using synagogue membership as an indicator of “Jewishness,” the data from the 2000–2001 National Jewish Population Survey²⁴ were used to compare Los Angeles County with the six surround-

ing counties: Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Diego. The synagogue membership rate for Los Angeles County in the National Jewish Population Survey is 26%, compared with 15% for rest of Southern California. Thus, in the larger context of Southern California, Los Angeles is itself a kind of Jewish neighborhood. Given the continuous growth of Southern California Jewry from migration into the region, the different rates of synagogue membership computed from the National Jewish Population Survey suggest that Los Angeles is attracting Jews with a stronger religious orientation than the surrounding areas. This makes sense given the earlier observation that the Anglo population of Los Angeles has decreased while the Jewish population has increased.

Table 5: *Synagogue Membership by Socio-Ecology and Income*
 (% reporting synagogue membership)

Socio-Ecology	Household Income			
	UNDER \$25,000	\$25,000–\$49,999	\$50,000–\$99,999	\$100,000 and over
Valley Hills	41%	38%	32%	69%
West LA	9%	27%	34%	60%
Urban	20%	32%	37%	52%
Coastline	16%	21%	34%	40%
West Valley	11%	42%	25%	37%
Valley Flats	20%	17%	28%	36%
Isolated	16%	4%	25%	27%
All Areas	19%	26%	31%	49%

Chart P: *Synagogue Membership Among Households Earning \$100,000 or more by Socio-Ecology, 1996*



CONCLUSION

At the most general methodological level, this paper has shown that local Jewish population surveys should not be undertaken and analyzed in an intellectual vacuum. The geographic re-conceptualization of Los Angeles in terms of the “Los Angeles School of Urbanism” undertaken here has revealed trends not evident using the traditional geographic divisions shared by most Jewish institutions. The traditional geographic divisions are useful for administrative purposes,²⁵ but they hide more than they reveal about the actual make-up of Jewish Los Angeles. For example, differentiating between the Valley Hills and Valley Flats reveals two very different socio-ecologies.

In substantive terms, this analysis of Los Angeles has shown that suburbanization and assimilation are not the same process. Affluent Jewish suburbs such as West Los Angeles and the Valley Hills are arguably the “most Jewish” sections of Los Angeles. In fact, it could well be argued that suburban communities such as the Valley Hills are in the process of replacing (and have surely joined) the classic urban Jewish neighborhoods such as Fairfax and Pico-Robertson as the “heart of Jewish Los Angeles.” Much of Los Angeles contains numerous ethnic, racial, and immigrant concentrations (Allen and Turner; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr), and the residential patterns of Jews are consistent with this patchwork of concentrations. This raises a question for future and comparative research: to what extent is the Los Angeles pattern unique to Los Angeles? Is the emergence of densely Jewish and highly synagogue-affiliated suburbs the result of the ethnic and racial balkanization of Los Angeles, or is it part of a larger trend in other American cities?

All the published studies of spatial assimilation and residential concentration in Los Angeles are based on census data.²⁶ As such they have little or no information about Jews.²⁷ The analysis of the 1979 and 1996 Jewish population surveys presented here demonstrates that a consideration of statistics on Jews enriches the overall understanding of Los Angeles.

Finally, from a Jewish communal perspective there are important questions left hanging that only a new study can address. Among these are: What has happened in the Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys where the Jewish population was just beginning to grow? Has the urban regeneration continued? Has the development of downtown and Hollywood attracted Jews back into the city? Like the ending of an old-time radio serial, we can only hope that there will be a next study sometime in the future for us to “tune in to next time.”

Notes

- ¹ The 1979 survey was conducted by the author. The 1996 Jewish Population Survey was conducted by Dr. Lester “Pini” Herman. The methodology of the 1979 survey is described in Phillips, “Los Angeles Jewry.” The methodology of the 1996 survey can be found in Herman 16–19. Appendix A compares the samples of the two studies.
- ² These are separate Federations and they declined to participate in the Jewish population survey.
- ³ It was defeated in a city-wide vote.
- ⁴ Renamed MacArthur Park.
- ⁵ These are largely African American communities.
- ⁶ Vernon, Bell, Compton, Gardena, Huntington Park, Lynwood, South Gate, Harbor City, Lomita, San Pedro, and Carson.
- ⁷ Newhall, Santa Clarita, Canyon Country, Valencia, Stevenson Ranch, Acton, Lancaster, and Palmdale.
- ⁸ For a complete description see Phillips.
- ⁹ The *American Jewish Yearbook* is published annually by the American Jewish Committee. It includes a section on local Jewish population estimates submitted to and compiled by the Research Department of the Council of Jewish Federations (now the United Jewish Communities).
- ¹⁰ For example, Encino which is in the Valley Hills ecology is reported together with Reseda which is in the Valley Flats ecology.
- ¹¹ The “Valley” here refers to the San Fernando, Conejo, Simi, and Santa Clarita valleys combined.
- ¹² Or Emet—Independent; Temple Beth Ami—Reform; Congregation Beth Shalom—Conservative; Beth Knesset *Bamidbar*—Reform.
- ¹³ That is, the San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys.
- ¹⁴ Census data are available on-line at the zip code level. Population totals by race and Hispanic status were aggregated for each socio-ecology.
- ¹⁵ The percentage of non-Jewish Anglos = (% white non-Hispanic)-(% Jewish).
- ¹⁶ I.e., at least one Jewish household was interviewed in that zip code.
- ¹⁷ I.e., Los Angeles County + Eastern Ventura County.
- ¹⁸ There are so few that none were interviewed within the sample of the 1996 Jewish population survey.
- ¹⁹ These are the areas where “racial” incidents and “hate crimes” against African-Americans are most likely to occur.
- ²⁰ Census data by zip code are available online from the Census. Census data were aggregated by zip code to calculate median home value for all owner-occupied households in each socio-ecology.
- ²¹ Computed from the 1990 and 2000 National Jewish Population Surveys.
- ²² Computed from the raw data in both surveys cited in the previous note.
- ²³ An empty nest household is a couple without children in which the wife is forty years old or older.

- ²⁴ The raw data for the National Jewish Population Survey, 2000–2001 are available from the North American Jewish Databank (www.jewishdatabank.org). Reports from the National Jewish Population Survey, 2000–2001 are available at www.ujc.org/njps.
- ²⁵ The Los Angeles Jewish Federation-Council has divided fundraising into the West (Santa Monica), Metro (Westwood, Beverly Hills, and urban Los Angeles), Southern (Everything south of the airport), and the “Valley Alliance.”
- ²⁶ These studies have been cited throughout this paper.
- ²⁷ “Russian ancestry” is sometimes used as a proxy for Jews, but it has limited applicability.

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The USC Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life

The American Jewish community has played a vital role in shaping the politics, culture, commerce and multiethnic character of Southern California and the American West. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, when entrepreneurs like Isaias Hellman, Levi Strauss and Adolph Sutro first ventured out West, American Jews became a major force in the establishment and development of the budding Western territories. Since 1970, the number of Jews in the West has more than tripled. This dramatic demographic shift has made California—specifically, Los Angeles—home to the second largest Jewish population in the United States.

Paralleling this shifting pattern of migration, Jewish voices in the West are today among the most prominent anywhere in the United States. Largely migrating from Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the East Coast of the United States, Jews have invigorated the West, where they exert a considerable presence in every sector of the economy—most notably in the media and the arts. With the emergence of Los Angeles as a world capital in entertainment and communications, the Jewish perspective and experience in the region are being amplified further. From artists and activists to scholars and professionals, Jews are significantly influencing the shape of things to come in the West and across the United States.

In recognition of these important demographic and societal changes, in 1998 the University of Southern California established a scholarly institute dedicated to studying contemporary Jewish life in America with special emphasis on the western United States. The Casden Institute explores issues related to the interface between the Jewish community and the broader, multifaceted cultures that form the nation—issues of relationship as much as of Jewishness itself. It is also enhancing the educational experience for students at USC and elsewhere by exposing them to the problems—and promise—of life in Los Angeles' ethnically, socially, culturally and economically diverse community. Scholars, students and community leaders examine the ongoing contributions of American Jews in the arts, business, media, literature, education, politics, law and social relations, as well as the relationships between Jewish Americans and other groups, including African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and Arab Americans. The Casden Institute's scholarly orientation and contemporary focus, combined with its location on the West Coast, set it apart from—and makes it an important complement to—the many excellent Jewish Studies programs across the nation that center on Judaism from an historical or religious perspective.

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