PROJECT MUSE®

Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, and the American Racial Order:
Revisiting the American Council for Judaism in the
Twenty-First Century

Matthew Berkman

American Jewish History, Volume 105, Numbers 1/2, January/April
2021, pp. 127-155 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

➔ For additional information about this article
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/804151>

Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, and the American Racial Order: Revisiting the American Council for Judaism in the Twenty-First Century

Matthew Berkman

In recent years, Jewish communal agencies, civil liberties watchdogs, pro-Israel advocates, and supporters of Palestinian rights have publicly debated the meaning of antisemitism and the wisdom of introducing certain formal definitions to the adjudication of US civil rights law.¹ The self-assurance with which these political actors attempt to delimit the boundaries of antisemitism stands in marked contrast to the far less conclusive efforts of Jewish studies scholars to address fundamental definitional questions. As one recent overview observed, academic treatments of antisemitism increasingly find themselves stymied by “the absence of a general scholarly consensus about the very definition and dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation.”² Uncertainty as to whether “antisemitism” represents a coherent or useful category of analysis has in turn motivated scholarship that aims to historicize the term itself by mapping the ways its meanings have shifted over time in response to political developments and changing conceptions of Jewish communal interest.

1. See, Eric Cortellessa, “Congress Hears Testimony on Expanding Definition of Anti-Semitism,” *Times of Israel*, November 8, 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/congress-hears-testimony-on-expanding-definition-of-anti-semitism/>; Nathan Thrall, “How the Battle Over Israel and Anti-Semitism is Fracturing American Politics,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 28, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/28/magazine/battle-over-bds-israel-palestinians-antisemitism.html>; Peter Baker and Maggie Haberman, “Trump Targets Anti-Semitism and Israeli Boycotts on College Campuses,” *New York Times*, December 10, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/10/us/politics/trump-antisemitism-executive-order.html>; “Defining Anti-Semitism,” US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/defining-anti-semitism/>; “The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism,” <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org>.

2. Kalman Weiser, “Introduction,” in *Key Concepts in the Study of Antisemitism*, eds. Sol Goldberg, Scott Ury, and Kalman Weiser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 3. See also David Engel, “Away from a Definition of Antisemitism: An Essay in the Semantics of Historical Description,” in *Rethinking European Jewish History*, eds. Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman (Liverpool: Littman, 2009), 30–53 and Jonathan Judaken, “Rethinking Anti-Semitism: Introduction,” *American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (2018): 1122–38.

David Feldman, for example, traces the evolving usages of “antisemitism” by twentieth-century Anglo-Jewish spokesmen and concludes that the term functioned as a “flexible category that allowed Jews and non-Jews to make sense of and respond to successive political challenges.” As new threats emerged and as the relationship between Jews and the state was radically transformed after 1948, representatives of Britain’s Jewish community adapted their operative definitions of “antisemitism” in ways that invariably “drew attention to a value or project concerning Jewish rights that was being violated.”³ By examining those projects, Feldman demonstrates that Jewish communal constructions of antisemitism often reveal more about contemporaneous understandings of Jewish rights and interests than they do about antisemitism as a supposedly transhistorical phenomenon.

Like their British counterparts, American Jewish leaders have also articulated antisemitism differently at different points in time and revisiting those historical articulations can likewise shed light on the fears, priorities, and political imaginations of the actors who embraced them. Moreover, competing Jewish conceptions of antisemitism have occasionally come into conflict with one another, fueling intra-Jewish disputes and resource struggles that clarify the stakes of American Jewish politics in a given period. This article analyzes a conception of and political approach to antisemitism that, while now defunct, once exercised nearly unrivaled hegemony over American Jewish institutions before imploding in a blaze of communal conflict during the immediate postwar decades. An examination of its final institutional advocate, the American Council for Judaism, highlights this paradigm’s embeddedness in the pre-civil-rights American racial order and traces its obsolescence to the epochal social transformations of the 1960s. Central to the Council’s view of antisemitism, and to earlier iterations of the paradigm in question, was an understanding of Zionism as a racializing force. Established in the waning years of Jim Crow, the Council and its affluent leadership waged a rearguard battle against American Zionism and its ethnonational conception of Jewish identity, in an effort—as they saw it—to safeguard American Jews against antisemitism.

The analysis that follows excavates the largely forgotten post-1948 history of the Council; establishes its ideological continuity with earlier, more politically dominant forces in American Jewish life; and explores the linkages between its anti-Zionism, its approach to antisemitism, and

3. David Feldman, “Toward a History of the Term ‘Anti-Semitism,’” *American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (2018): 1147–48.

its conservative racial politics.⁴ Far from being of purely antiquarian significance, the history of the Council reveals how American Jewish constructions of antisemitism are in part a reflection of the way their proponents understand the position of Jews in the American racial order.⁵ The closing section sketches the development of the communal antisemitism paradigm that emerged hegemonic in the wake of the Council's downfall—the so-called “new antisemitism” paradigm—and highlights the role of reconstituted racial anxieties in its own formulation.⁶ Both

4. The only existing treatments of the Council's racial politics concern local Council chapters in Houston, Norfolk, and San Francisco. While Ben-Daniel sees the Council as embodying what Jodi Melamed calls “racial liberalism,” I use the term “racial conservatism” to distinguish the Council's approach to race from that of the mainstream Jewish organizations of that time. See, Tallie Ben-Daniel, “Zionism's Frontier Legacies: Colonial Masculinity and the American Council for Judaism in San Francisco,” *American Studies* 54, no. 4 (2016): 49–71; Kyle Stanton, “Hyman Judah Schachtel, Congregation Beth Israel, and the American Council for Judaism,” *Southern Jewish History* 22 (2019): 127–50; Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

5. On the concept of “racial order” as “a society's widely understood and accepted system of beliefs, laws, and practices that organizes relationships among groups understood to be races or ethnicities,” see, Jennifer L. Hochschild, Vesla M. Weaver, Traci Burch, “Destabilizing the American Racial Order,” *Daedalus* 140, no. 2 (2011): 152.

6. Since the 1970s, the “new antisemitism” has arguably been the dominant antisemitism paradigm espoused by American Jewish communal agencies. The new antisemitism is said to represent a strategic adaptation to post-Holocaust social prohibitions on “classical” Judeophobia. In this view, rather than targeting Jews *per se*, the new antisemitism targets Israel and its founding ideology, Zionism. The term was popularized (not coined) by Arnold Forster and Benjamin R. Epstein, *The New Anti-Semitism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974). For an excellent discussion of the concept's shifting referents, see, Jonathan Judaken, “So What's New? Rethinking the ‘New Antisemitism’ in a Global Age,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 42, nos. 4–5 (2008): 531–60. For earlier treatments, see, Nathan Perlmutter and Ruth Ann Perlmutter, *The Real Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Arbor House, 1982); Robert S. Wistrich, ed., *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* (London: Macmillan, 1990); Phyllis Chesler, *The New Anti-Semitism: The Current Crisis and What We Must Do About It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Abraham Foxman, *Never Again? The Threat of the New Anti-Semitism* (San Francisco: Harper, 2003); Alvin H. Rosenfeld, “Progressive” Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism (American Jewish Committee, 2006); Jeffrey Herf, ed., *Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism in Historical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Alvin H. Rosenfeld, ed., *Deciphering the New Antisemitism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015). For critiques, see, Judaken, “So What's New?”; Norman G. Finkelstein, *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Amy Kaplan, “The Old ‘New Anti-Semitism’ and Resurgent White Supremacy,” *Middle East Report* 283 (Summer 2017); Brian Klug, “The Collective Jew: Israel and the New Antisemitism,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 37, no. 2 (2003): 117–38; Brian Klug, “Interrogating ‘New Antisemitism,’” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013): 468–82; Neve Gordon, “The ‘New Anti-Semitism,’” *London Review of Books*, January 4, 2018, 18; Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); and Jewish Voice for Peace, ed., *On Antisemitism: Solidarity and the Struggle for Justice* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017).

the “new antisemitism” paradigm and the paradigm advanced by the Council link race, antisemitism, and anti-Zionism in a unique ideological assemblage intended to advance the interests of its adherents. Juxtaposing the two shows the American racial order as a persistent structuring force in intra-Jewish contests over the relationship between (anti-)Zionism and antisemitism.

Many aspects of the genesis of the “new antisemitism” paradigm are already well-known. In the aftermath of the Six-Day War, as Israel cemented its Cold War alliance with the United States, Jewish organizations pulled back from domestic struggles for racial and economic justice in favor of colorblind liberalism in the public sphere and a more Israel-centric program of communal regeneration internally.⁷ Following a transitional period in which Jewish organizations subsumed antisemitism under the broader rubric of “prejudice,” they reconceptualized it in the 1970s around the security of the Jewish state.⁸ While critical accounts of the new antisemitism paradigm correctly situate its development in the context of New Left and Black Power reactions to the 1967 war, a comparison with the Council reframes it as part of a longer history of American Jewish debate over the definition of antisemitism and its relationship to Jewish racial and national identity. In addition, the comparison contributes to the aforementioned project of historicizing prominent usages of the term “antisemitism” and, in this way, informing contemporary political and scholarly debates over antisemitism’s proper definition.

Most existing scholarship on the American Council for Judaism focuses on the period between its emergence out of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in 1942 and the establishment of Israel in 1948.⁹ The ensuing two decades of Council activities, by contrast, have

7. On Jews and the civil rights coalition, see, Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), chapter 4, and Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), chapter 8. On the culture of Jewish “survivalism” that developed in the 1970s and 1980s, see, Jonathan S. Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) and Matthew Berkman, “Transforming Philanthropy: Finance and Institutional Evolution at the Jewish Federation of New York, 1917–86,” *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no. 2 (2017): 146–95.

8. On antisemitism as “prejudice” see Stuart Svonkin, *Jews against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

9. Thomas Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); Jack Ross, *Rabbi Outcast: Elmer Berger and American Jewish Anti-Zionism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2011); Samuel Halperin, “Zionist Counterpropaganda: The Case of the American Council for Judaism,” *Southwestern Social Science*

received far less attention. American Jewish historians tend to justify this lacuna with reference to the Council's ideological marginality and its supposed numerical insignificance, particularly after 1948.¹⁰ But if the organization's self-reported membership of around twenty thousand in the late 1950s is a reliable estimate, then its popular following rivaled (and possibly exceeded) that of the more "mainstream" American Jewish Committee (AJC), whose members numbered only fourteen thousand earlier in the decade.¹¹ Indeed, the AJC's research director at the time surmised that Council adherents were "at least as numerous as ours."¹² Thus, neither the size of the Council nor its highly conflictual relationship with other Jewish organizations can justify its neglect by scholars of American Jewish history. Most importantly, whatever the Council's numbers, an analysis of its once-dominant antisemitism paradigm can help us make sense of the direction in which subsequent communal antisemitism paradigms have evolved—and may continue to evolve in the future.

Quarterly 41, no. 4 (1961): 450–63; Monty Noam Penkower, "The Genesis of the American Council for Judaism: A Quest for Identity in World War II," *American Jewish History* 86, no. 2 (1998): 167–94; Ellen Eisenberg, "Beyond San Francisco: The Failure of Anti-Zionism in Portland, Oregon," *American Jewish History* 86, no. 3 (1998): 309–21; Ben-Daniel, "Zionism's Frontier Legacies." For more on Ross's flawed book, see Geoffrey Levin, "Another Nation: Israel, American Jews, and Palestinian Rights, 1948–1977" (PhD diss., New York University, 2019), 19.

10. Howard Sachar writes that by the early 1950s, the Council's membership had declined from 15,000 to "barely three thousand." Howard Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 720. For passing mentions of the Council, see Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States: 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 222; Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 254, 289. See, also, Matthew Berkman, "Coercive Consensus: Jewish Federations, Ethnic Representation, and the Roots of American Pro-Israel Politics" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2018), chapter 4.

11. Thomas H. Loeb, Report of Membership and Publicity Committee, April 26, 1957, folder 7, box 6, American Council for Judaism collection (ACJ), American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (AJA). These official membership figures were disputed by critics, however. See, for instance, the "exposé" on the Council's "numbers game" by Albert Belton, a Council employee-turned-spy who spent years funneling confidential information about the Council to Zionist interlocutors. Albert Belton, "The Council's Very Own Numbers Game," folder 7, box 3, ACJ, AJA.

12. "Annual Report of the American Jewish Committee," *American Jewish Year Book* 51 (1950), 561; Memo from Milton Himmelfarb to John Slawson, December 29, 1949, American Jewish Committee Online Archive, <http://www.ajcarchives.org> (AJCOA).

THE AMERICAN COUNCIL FOR JUDAISM AND AMERICAN JEWISH ANTI-ZIONISM

At the turn of the twentieth century, opposition to ethnonational constructions of Jewish identity was a baseline political tenet of most major American Jewish institutions, whether religious or secular. The elite consensus in favor of a religious definition of Jewishness crystallized in the aftermath of Reconstruction, when reassertions of white supremacy at home and imperialism abroad intersected with Jewish mass migration and popular eugenic discourses to engender a surge of racial antisemitism.¹³ After 1897, the development of a more centrally organized Zionist movement anchored largely by recent Eastern European immigrants added a new dynamic of political conflict to existing divides between immigrant Jews and native-born Jewish elites of Central European (“German”) extraction.¹⁴ As Eric Goldstein has shown, the tendency of early Zionists to fortify their nation-building project with references to Jewish racial identity was increasingly seen by members of the Jewish establishment as a clear and present danger to their continued social integration with white American society. In response, establishment figures took countervailing measures to shore up Jewish whiteness in the popular imagination. “During the Spanish-American War,” writes Goldstein, “when national discourse was highly focused on discussions of racial hierarchy, Isaac Mayer Wise”—the godfather of Reform Judaism in the US—“carried on an unrelenting campaign in the *American Israelite* against the notion that Jews were distinct in race from other white Americans.” Reform leaders, believing that “the racial ‘chauvinism’ of the Zionists only added ammunition to the arsenal of the anti-Semites,” placed new emphasis on Judaism as a religious profession in the Protestant mold. The American Jewish Committee (AJC), then the leading vehicle for the political interests and humanitarian projects of the “German” Jewish elite, joined with other establishment groups to advocate the removal of certain racial classifications from census and

13. On the contests surrounding strictly religious definitions of Jewish identity in this period, see, Tisa Wenger, *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), chapter 4.

14. See, Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism*, 18–35; Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906–1966* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972), 104–5; Deborah Dash Moore, *B’nai B’rith and the Challenge of Ethnic Leadership* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 80–101; Mark A. Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism* (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 17–18; and Naomi W. Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897–1948* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 39–63.

immigration documents, and encouraged anthropological researchers to adduce proof of Jewish belonging to the “white race.”¹⁵

As the Zionist colonial project in Palestine progressed during the early decades of the twentieth century, the establishment struggled to balance its humanitarian commitments to Jews abroad with its opposition to Jewish ethnonationalism domestically. The term “non-Zionist” was coined to encapsulate the reigning viewpoint, signifying “opposition to a nationalist ideology, coupled with the support of practical programs of settlement and development in Palestine.”¹⁶ Indeed, as the most affluent segment of the American Jewish population, non-Zionists furnished the lion’s share of philanthropic donations to the inchoate Jewish community in Palestine. The AJC first modeled its non-Zionist approach to overseas political questions in response to the 1917 Balfour Declaration, a war-time edict committing Great Britain to the “establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” (whether “national home” implied political sovereignty was open to interpretation). While the AJC greeted the British declaration “with profound appreciation,” it was quick to underscore the document’s explicit guarantee of Jewish civil rights outside Palestine and to hail American Jews as “loyal and patriotic citizens” with an “unqualified allegiance to this country, which they love and cherish and of whose people they constitute an integral part.”¹⁷ In the coming decades, the AJC would navigate cautiously between the humanitarian requirements of the Palestinian Jewish community and the racialized strictures of American national identity. In addition to regularly proclaiming the undivided loyalties of American Jews, its leaders would occasionally repudiate what they saw as the excesses of Jewish nationalism, including demands for a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine.

Although popular Jewish attitudes swung dramatically in Zionism’s favor during World War I, until the late 1930s the non-Zionist viewpoint continued to dominate the most influential American Jewish institutions, if only by virtue of its proponents’ superior material endowments and inherited positions of authority. But the rise of Nazism and US entry into World War II catalyzed a series of events that ultimately proved fatal to the establishment’s pragmatic blend of racial assimilationism, Jewish anti-nationalism, and humanitarian commitment to overseas Jewry. In 1942,

15. Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 88, 93, 102–115.

16. Menahem Kaufman, *An Ambiguous Partnership: Non-Zionists and Zionists in America, 1939–1948* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 13.

17. Chronology of AJC Activities Concerning Palestine and Israel, December 2, 1954, AJCOA. A similar account of this episode appears in Wenger, *Religious Freedom*, 159.

following decades of tactical ambiguity, the Zionist movement finally declared its goal of establishing a sovereign Jewish “commonwealth” in Palestine, and soon launched a vigorous grassroots campaign aimed at securing US diplomatic support. The following year, the movement spearheaded an American Jewish Conference—in theory, a nationally representative Jewish assembly—that voted to endorse the Zionist program. In short, with mounting tragedy in Europe and US borders closed to Jewish refugees, American Zionists won popular Jewish support for a pro-statehood agenda.¹⁸ In the midst of these dramatic developments, parallel shifts were occurring within the Reform rabbinate, traditionally a bastion of anti-Zionist sentiment. The CCAR, the Reform movement’s rabbinical association, began to reverse its long-standing official opposition to Zionism by the mid-1930s. By the early 1940s, committed anti-Zionists had been reduced to a minority of the rabbinate. When the CCAR’s February 1942 assembly approved a last-minute resolution calling for the creation of an all-Jewish military force, a group of Reform rabbis long opposed to their movement’s nationalist drift seized the opportunity to form a new organization: the American Council for Judaism (“the Council”).¹⁹

As a rabbinic initiative, the Council sought a return to the “universal,” “prophetic” theology of classical Reform Judaism. But the invitation to the group’s inaugural conclave records an additional motivation: “We are convinced that the growing emphasis upon the racial and nationalistic aspects of Jewish thought is bound to have an adverse effect upon Jews, politically, socially and spiritually, no matter where they live.”²⁰ By 1948, most of the Council’s founding rabbis had resigned and it had developed into a predominantly lay anti-Zionist organization under the leadership of Sears, Roebuck heir Lessing Rosenwald and Rabbi Elmer Berger, the group’s intellectual lodestar.²¹ With those changes, the Council’s demographic profile came to resemble that of the American Jewish Committee—namely, upper-class, “German,” highly acculturated laypeople—and for a time membership in the two organizations overlapped. But whereas the AJC gradually tempered its hostility towards Zionism to avoid alienating communal sentiment, the Council took up anti-Zionism as its *raison d’être*. Council leaders viewed Zionists as a noisy and manipulative sect that preyed on the silent majority of American Jews. That

18. Shpiro, *From Philanthropy to Activism*; Cohen, *Not Free to Desist*, 256–60; Doreen Bierbrier, “The American Zionist Emergency Council: An Analysis of a Pressure Group,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (1970): 82–105.

19. Kolsky, *Jews against Zionism*, 29–55.

20. “For a Meeting of Non-Zionist Reform Rabbis...,” April 15, 1942, folder 1, box 6, ACJ, AJA.

21. Kolsky, *Jews against Zionism*, 57, 79.

majority, they believed, was largely oblivious to the dangers that Jewish nationalism posed to the civic status of American Jews—in part due to the capitulation of the existing non-Zionist leadership. Opposing the creation of a Jewish state to the bitter end, the Council testified before various American and international bodies in favor of increased Jewish immigration to the US and the transformation of Palestine into a non-sectarian liberal democracy. During the UN partition debate, Rosenwald, the Council's president and most nationally prominent figure, predicted that “a division of the country based on religious, racial, or ethnic groups is foredoomed to bloodshed, bitterness, and strife.”²²

The establishment of the State of Israel rattled the Council and provoked a crisis of confidence in which some of the group's staunchest advocates, such as Rabbi Louis Wolsey of Philadelphia, resigned, citing the obsolescence of anti-Zionism and the futility of continued resistance. But the majority of Council members soldiered on. Following the pivotal events of 1948-1949, the Council reimagined its mission as one of shielding American Jews from the broad-brush aspersions on their patriotism that its members believed would inevitably flow from the existence of a Jewish state and the ongoing public representations of Zionist ideologues. The Council greeted Israeli statehood by “emphatically declar[ing] that Israel is not the state or homeland of ‘the Jewish people,’” but rather “a foreign state” as far as “Americans of Jewish faith” were concerned. It predicted that Israel's claim to represent world Jewry would “impinge upon the authority of the government of every nation of the world over its citizens of Jewish faith,” eventually posing “a danger to Jewish citizens whose sole national rights and obligations belong exclusively to these governments.”²³ In rejecting the Zionist claim to represent a worldwide “Jewish people,” the Council echoed long-standing principles of the AJC, which continued for a time to declare itself “unalterably opposed” to “world Jewish nationalism.”²⁴ Unlike the Council, however, the AJC was willing to distinguish between hard nationalist doctrines and the softer (and, in its view, more understandable) pro-Israel sympathies of most American Jews. Council leaders, on the other hand, feared that Zionist exploitation of Jewish sentimentality would, if left unchecked, lead to the effective “nationalization” of Jewish Americans by a foreign government.

22. Lessing Rosenwald, “For a Unitary Palestine,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 26, 1947, 24.

23. “Claims of Israel Challenged Here: Judaism Council Warns They ‘Impinge Upon the Authority’ of Every Government,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1948, 4.

24. Executive Committee Minutes, October 22-23, 1949, AJCOA; Allen Lesser, *Israel's Impact, 1950-51* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 75.

Although the Council's perspective was continuous with earlier elite orientations towards Zionism and Jewish identity, some key differences distinguished the Council from its forebearers. The most important of these were contextual. On the world-historical level, the recent tragedy of European Jewry and the mere fact of Israel's existence made the Council's task immeasurably more difficult. Domestically, the Council represented a conservative racial politics that ran counter to nascent postwar efforts to rearticulate American national identity around an ideal of cultural pluralism. The Council was also far less temperamentally restrained than the pre-war establishment, openly flouting taboos against airing intra-Jewish conflicts in public. Even worse from the point of view of rival Jewish agencies was the fact that the Council's public pronouncements often appeared indistinguishable from the very "dual loyalty" charge it purportedly hoped to forestall. While anti-Zionism alone was more than enough to infuriate much of the postwar Jewish leadership, it was the Council's discourse on Jewish patriotic loyalties that eventually justified its blanket denunciation by nearly every sector of the organized Jewish community.²⁵

In the *New York Times*, for instance, Rosenwald cautioned against Israeli meddling in American Jewish affairs, noting, not without a touch of Cold War paranoia, that "more than one country has attempted to manipulate the political attitudes and loyalties of Americans who had an association with those countries due to common national origin, common religion, or common class interests."²⁶ This was a theme that Council officials and associates continually revisited, painting American Jews as both Zionism's unwitting victims and as potential sleeper agents susceptible to foreign manipulation. "The creation and recognition of a sovereign state of Israel has, with alarming speed, tremendously intensified the Jewish nationalists' desire to control our lives," Rosenwald told the Council's 1949 convention, "Emissaries of the Israeli state are in every nation of the world, mobilizing the financial resources of Jews to support the 'national home of the Jewish people.'"²⁷ Henry Smith Leiper, the associate general secretary of the World Council of Churches, warned a well-publicized Council gathering that "Americans of the Jewish faith must be on their guard against a 'dual nationality' that would divide their patriotic allegiance between Israel and the United States," thereby

25. In addition to the condemnation by the National Community Relations Advisory Council discussed below, the Council was formally condemned by all three major branches of American Judaism. See, folder 7, box 6, ACJ, AJA.

26. Lessing J. Rosenwald, "Position of American Jews: Belief Expressed as to Their Proper Attitude Toward Palestine," *New York Times*, January 29, 1948, 22.

27. "Stop World Drive, Israel Is Warned: L. J. Rosenwald Tells Judaism Council Nationalists Would Control Jews Here," April 23, 1949, 3.

“brand[ing] Jews in this country permanently as a national and ‘racial’ minority.”²⁸ As pro-Israelism became a major component of American Jewish identity over the course of the 1950s, Council leaders increasingly suspected Zionist organizations of infiltrating and manipulating communal institutions in order to project the image of a monolithic “Jewish community” unified in support of a foreign power.

The Council’s main approach to countering that perception was to relentlessly trumpet its dissenting perspective to the media and high-level government officials. Occasionally, the Council’s concerns overlapped with those of the mainstream Jewish “defense” agencies, though never completely. This was the case when it came to the Arab League’s boycott of Israel, for example. Though officially targeting the Jewish state, in practice the boycott affected American Jews as Jews, resulting in lost business, visa denials, and other trickle-down effects, regardless of the victim’s political commitments. The Council was among the first to decry the State Department’s acquiescence in the boycott, but unlike the Jewish defense organizations, which saw the boycott as an invidious example of Arab antisemitism, Council leaders framed it as an unfortunate vindication of their earlier predictions as to the likely effects of Zionism on the civil status of American Jews.²⁹ In other instances, the Council joined mainstream Jewish groups in pressing its case internationally, as when it issued a protest letter to Catholic bishops during the Vatican II proceedings. Responding to reports that the conclave had abandoned a proposed statement against antisemitism on the grounds that “Arab states would understand it as backing up Israel,” Council leaders urged the Church to rethink that decision, explaining that it was “predicated upon a serious, even though a widely held, misconception concerning the relationship of Judaism and Jews to Zionism and the State of Israel.”³⁰

Concern with antisemitism was thus an integral, even preeminent aspect of the Council’s anti-Zionist mission. Anxious Council leaders anticipated a day of reckoning—“and not too far off”—when non-Jewish Americans would turn against Zionism and all that would stand between American Jews and an outbreak of antisemitic persecution would be “the record of a group of Americans of Jewish faith who have seen through this entire problem.”³¹ George Levison of San Francisco, the Council’s chief foreign affairs analyst, predicted that:

28. “Jews Told to Shun ‘Dual Nationality’: It May Foster Anti-Semitism of Churches Warns Dr. Leiper of World Council,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1949.

29. National Executive Committee Minutes, January 27, 1953, folder 1, box 16, ACJ, AJA.

30. Letter from Clarence L. Coleman to Reverent Egidio Vagnozzi, July 2, 1963, folder 1, box 2, ACJ, AJA.

31. National Executive Committee Minutes, November 17 and 18, 1951, folder 1, box 16, ACJ, AJA.

a situation in the Middle East [would arise] which is going to be very damaging to the United States. Questions will be asked. How did it happen? We have already seen what has happened through the loss of China and the same may take place in the Middle East. If that should occur, the only record the Jews in the United States would have would be the Council's consistent denial of the Zionist position.³²

In response to his Jewish critics, Elmer Berger, the Council's longtime executive, maintained that by consistently drawing a line between Jews and Zionists, he had "done much to moderate Arab propaganda in the US," and that "eventually history will vindicate his role."³³ As Levison put it, "If Arab diplomats talk of the Zionists and the Israelis, rather than of the Jews, that is the result of Elmer's and the Council's work."³⁴ (Indeed, recent scholarship has shown that Berger made a significant impression on the Palestine Liberation Organization.³⁵) Privately, Berger even maintained that the Council's fervent anti-Zionism was, in the final instance, good for Israelis. "To whatever extent we can lay Zionism low," he told the Council's executive board, "[it] will be a contribution not only to the United States and to the dignity of American Jews, but the only hope which the people of the State of Israel have for their own survival."³⁶

But, not surprisingly, the private protestations of Council leaders did nothing to spare it from repeated formal denunciations by the rest of the organized Jewish community. Even the AJC, whose leaders sympathized in private with certain Council positions, concluded that its public jeremiads against Zionism were "unwittingly...giving enormous aid to the anti-Semites, who could ask nothing better than to be able to cite a Jewish organization in support of their charge that the Americanism of a substantial number of Jews is dubious."³⁷ In January 1950, the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC), an umbrella agency representing a wide array of local and national Jewish organizations, "vigorously condemned" the Council, describing it as a "numerically insignificant" but "highly vocal group of Jewish individuals" whose state-

32. National Executive Committee and Advisory Board Minutes, December 6-7, 1952, folder 1, box 15, ACJ, AJA.

33. Memo from Minkoff to CRC Executives, April 4, 1958, folder 10, box 53, National Community Relations Advisory Council Records (NCRAC), American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY (AJHS).

34. National Executive Committee Minutes, November 17-18, 1956, folder 2, box 16, ACJ, AJA.

35. Jonathan Marc Gribetz, "The PLO's Rabbi: Palestinian Nationalism and Reform Judaism," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 107, no. 1 (2017): 90-112.

36. National Advisory Board Minutes, April 26, 1956, folder 2, box 16, ACJ, AJA.

37. Executive Committee Minutes, October 22-23, 1949, AJCOA.

ments “constitute thinly veiled slurs on the allegiance of substantially the whole American Jewish community.”³⁸

While the animosity of Jewish officialdom no doubt impeded the growth of the Council, its collapse at the end of the 1960s is not fully explicable with reference to its communal pariah status. As suggested above, changing social and political realities made it increasingly difficult for the Council to secure its own institutional reproduction. Upon his sudden departure in 1968, Norton Mezvinsky, a young academic who had only recently been hired as the Council’s executive director, drew attention to the group’s “exceptionally old membership” and complained that “attempts to rejuvenate the organization by appealing to a younger audience” had been “constantly rebuffed.”³⁹ The roots of the Council’s reproductive failure lay, in large part, in its continued adherence to the racial vision that dominated American Jewish institutions at the turn of the twentieth century. That vision, in turn, informed the Council’s approach to the question of antisemitism.

ANTISEMITISM AND ANTI-PLURALISM

At the Council’s first national convention in 1945, Elmer Berger offered a distillation of the organization’s worldview that reflected the liberal self-image of classical Reform Judaism. “The Council,” he declared, “is the organized expression of a positive and far-reaching philosophy as to the destiny of Jews in the modern world.” Tracing its lineage to the Enlightenment and the “great, political revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,” Berger identified the Council with an emancipatory philosophy that “sought to free Jews from the isolation forced upon them on the pretext of separate race, national status, and aspirations during the middle ages.” By contrast, the Council’s nemesis, Jewish nationalism, thrived by exploiting the effects of centuries of antisemitic persecution. Zionism and its “self-appointed spokesmen,” Berger alleged, aimed “to retain a medieval control over a so-called ‘world-wide Jewish people’ and to prevent the emancipation of the individual Jew out of this ghetto, medieval entity.” It was the Council’s obligation to forcefully and publicly reject the idea that Jews comprise “a separate, unintegratable, segregated minority requiring special measures as a group.” In those lands where Jewish emancipation had taken hold, Berger added, it was only because Jews and non-Jews alike had embraced the “the universal principle”:

38. “NCRAC Denounces Council for Judaism,” press release, January 18, 1950, folder 9, box 75, NCRAC, AJHS.

39. “The American Council for Judaism: A Statement by Norton Mezvinsky,” May 27, 1968, folder 7, box 9, ACJ, AJA.

If Jews wished to share the privileges of a new world, they must accept its basic principles. In religion alone, they might be distinctive and different, since all of the new states recognized freedom of worship as one of the individual's inalienable rights. But in other respects the Jew was expected to integrate himself; to harmonize his life with the life of the nations into which, as an individual, he was being accepted on the basis of full equality.⁴⁰

This narrative informed the Council's most characteristic ideological claim—its uncompromising insistence on Jewishness as a strictly religious identification. In Berger's 1946 book, *The Jewish Dilemma*, he connected the question of Jewish identity with what would become the Council's approach to antisemitism. "It is the major pretension of anti-Semites," he wrote, "that Jews are a 'people' apart, upon one basis or another. Once that premise is granted, the fight against anti-Semitism is lost before it is begun." Berger did not deny the existence of ethnonationalist strains in traditional Jewish thought but rejected them as antithetical to human progress: "[T]o designate Jews as a religious group is a part of the heritage and tradition of liberalism and democracy in the Western World. To designate them as a national group is a vestige of the past." Originally a "universal religion" that "won many converts, even among the nobility of Rome," Judaism's ecumenical character was, according to Berger, forced into retreat by the Catholic Church, which "consciously and publicly sought to limit Judaism as the creed of 'one nation' called Jews." Thus positioned, it became possible for "a whole 'people' [to] be charged with the traits of any individual and every individual bore the burden of collective characteristics." Over time, leading Jews came to internalize Christian coercion, defending forced segregation on the pretext of communal self-preservation. So it was that the reactionary "Frederick William III, King of Prussia, was only too ready to join hands with anti-integrationist Jews," who convinced the monarch to squelch Germany's first Reform Temple. Early Zionists, Berger noted, enjoyed the support of sundry European antisemites, with whom they shared a corporate conception of "the Jew." It was likewise "part of Hitler's program for Jews to revive the 'Jewish community' concept in the occupied nations."⁴¹

Council leaders were of course not unaware that a strictly religious definition of Jewish identity clashed with the self-understandings of millions of American Jews who considered themselves Jewish by ethnicity, culture, or some other criterion. The 1942 vote to adopt the

40. Address by Rabbi Elmer Berger, January 14, 1945, folder 2, box 6, ACJ, AJA.

41. Elmer Berger, *The Jewish Dilemma* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1946), 29, 40, 47, 53, 55, 194, 237.

name “American Council for *Judaism*” ironically succeeded over the objections of several of the more prominent rabbis present, who—according to meeting minutes—“felt that so many of our people had so little interest in Judaism, that the title should include ‘Jew’ as well as ‘Judaism.’”⁴² (They also suggested that a more capacious name would help attract wealthy donors to the cause.) A decade later, the Council’s second president, Clarence Coleman, reported with some exasperation that “Council members as I observe them are not extremely interested in the history, traditions, concepts, or practice of Judaism,” and wagered that this assessment was “particularly true of important elements of the Council’s leadership.”⁴³ Yet, the rationale for upholding the pretense of religion in the face of all known reality was simple: the Council viewed religion as a politically “safe” category, one unlikely to arouse suspicions of racial otherness. “Religious differences,” the Council resolved at its 1952 convention, “are an accepted and respected part of American life, but the manufacture of cultural and external differences not required by the essential nature of our religion is to be deplored and avoided.”⁴⁴

Milton Himmelfarb, the AJC’s research director, correctly perceived in the Council’s “compulsive insistence on the exclusively religious nature of the Jewish community” a desire to stave off racialization by conforming to white, Christian social patterns. “Since Christianity is the accepted formal mode of society in the United States,” he wrote to AJC president John Slawson, “the Council hopes that the parallel mode, Judaism, will also be acceptable.” But the Council’s claim to champion a “prophetic” Judaism was, in Himmelfarb’s view, belied by its members’ retrograde racial attitudes:

The [Council-affiliated] Houston congregation...proclaims its allegiance to the “mission of Israel” and to “prophetic Judaism.” The Congregation describes

42. Meeting of the Provisional Committee for the Formation of the American Council for Judaism, December 7, 1942, folder 1, box 6, ACJ, AJA.

43. Memo from Clarence L. Coleman to National Executive Committee, October 3, 1958, folder 4, box 4, ACJ, AJA. Coleman’s assessment was later confirmed by a 1967 survey that classified Council members by ideological type. The largest category, comprising forty-five percent of the total membership, was the “Departer Type,” representing those who believed that “Judaism is a static and dormant tradition” and that “the best Jewish way of life” involved “the deliberate abandonment of ‘Jewish’ matters and positive attempts to assimilate to become an indistinguishable portion of the majority population.” Kazuo Kusano, “A Factor Analysis of Membership Types in the American Council for Judaism” (MA thesis, University of Washington, 1967), 118.

44. “Resolutions Adopted by the Eighth Annual Conference of the American Council for Judaism,” April 6, 1952, folder 16D, box 30, George A. Lundberg Papers (hereafter GAL), University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Seattle, WA (UWL).

itself as Jewish in religion, American in nationality, Caucasian in race, and adds openly that in excluding Negroes it is legislating only for itself...The mission of Israel would dictate that the congregation set an example in race relations in the South, that it be "a light of the nations"...Obviously, in a pinch prophetic Judaism and the mission of Israel are not taken very seriously... I have an idea the Council would look upon a man who tried to put prophetic Judaism into action as a dangerous and fanatical revolutionary, and a menace to American Jews.⁴⁵

The Council thus preached a liberalism that stopped short of embracing the democratic aspirations of African Americans and other non-white people. "We are thankful to be citizens of a country and to have shared in the building of a nation conceived in a spirit which knows neither special privilege nor inferior status for any man," the Council declared in its 1943 Statement of Principles, a full decade before the Supreme Court ended de jure racial segregation in public schools.⁴⁶ In fairness, prior to World War II, no major American Jewish organization asserted an identity of interest between African Americans and Jews or conceived "racism" as an overarching rubric for understanding both anti-Black and anti-Jewish oppression. The early Anti-Defamation League (ADL) fought against discrimination by "creed," not race, and even the exceptionally liberal American Jewish Congress (AJCongress) initially focused on issues of narrowly Jewish import.⁴⁷

But if racial blinders were a staple of organized American Jewry in the early twentieth century, the Council was unique in its unwillingness to discard them during the postwar period. With the (Zionist) AJCongress in the vanguard, the ADL, AJC, and other national Jewish agencies joined African American groups and labor unions in the postwar civil rights coalition. The Council did not. It hewed instead to the old "non-Zionist" insistence that Jews *qua* Jews must refrain from organizing themselves politically except to ensure their own equal treatment as individual citizens. An illustrative episode took place in 1958, when Virginia segregationist James J. Kilpatrick, editor of the *Richmond News-Leader*, published an attack on the local ADL branch. By expressing support for racial integration, Kilpatrick wrote, the League had provoked anti-

45. Memo from Milton Himmelfarb to John Slawson, June 6, 1945, AJC Subject Files Collection, Memoranda and Reports on American Jewry, 1945-1947, AJCOA. The Houston congregation in question is Congregation Beth Israel, discussed in Stanton, "Hyman Judah Schachtel, Congregation Beth Israel, and the American Council for Judaism."

46. "A Tentative Statement by Americans of Jewish Faith," June 8, 1943, folder 1, box 6, ACJ, AJA.

47. Goldstein, *Price of Whiteness*, 67.

semitism in the South where none had previously existed. National ADL leaders saw in Kilpatrick's editorial a threat of antisemitic reprisal should the organization continue to oppose the South's campaign of "massive resistance" to school desegregation.⁴⁸ But Council leaders viewed the controversy in a different light.

Caesar Cone, a Southern member of the Council's national advisory board, penned an approving letter to Kilpatrick and accused the national ADL of concocting antisemitic incidents to perpetuate its own existence.⁴⁹ Coleman, the Council president, endorsed Kilpatrick's editorial, and in a closed meeting Berger expressed agreement with the author's suggestion that "when [the ADL] start[s] dipping into muddy waters, they must expect to get wet."⁵⁰ By this, Berger meant that the ADL's civil rights activity had implicated Jews as Jews in the bitterest of national controversies, thereby earning it whatever opprobrium came its way. The previous year, the Council's Norfolk chapter had brought a resolution before the biennial conference of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, calling on the Reform body to refrain from publicly commenting on political matters. According to Kyle Stanton, while chapter members framed the resolution with respect to US policy towards Israel, its actual intent "was to restrain the UAHC's leadership, namely director Maurice Eisendrath, from making public statements supporting desegregation."⁵¹

In 1963, at the height of the struggle for Black equality, the Council was at last compelled to address "the civil rights issue." In a seven-to-four vote, the executive committee passed a resolution affirming the "essentially moral" proposition that "every person, regardless of race or faith, is entitled to full equality of human rights," and that "Judaism commits its adherents to translate its moral commitments into practical works." At the same time, it added that "No Jew or group of Jews... can speak for all members of the Jewish faith on the methods and procedures for implementing these religious ideals."⁵² The Council's only official intervention into American race relations, this four-line statement appears never to have been circulated beyond the organization's

48. Murray Friedman, "One Episode in Southern Jewry's Response to Desegregation: An Historical Memoir," *American Jewish Archives* 33 (1981): 175-6.

49. See, Letter from Kilpatrick to Cone, July 28, 1958 and letter from Cone to Benjamin Epstein, July 30, 1958, folder 1, box 30, Julian B. Feibelman Papers (JBF), AJA.

50. National Executive Committee Minutes, October 6, 1958, folder 2, box 16, ACJ, AJA; Friedman, "One Episode," 178.

51. Stanton, "Hyman Judah Schachtel, Congregation Beth Israel, and the American Council for Judaism," 140.

52. National Executive Committee Minutes, June 24, 1963, folder 3, box 16, ACJ, AJA.

membership. But as the content of the resolution suggests, to brand the Council “racist” without further comment would be to flatten a complicated ideological formation. Under the banner of anti-Zionism, the Council brought together several diverse constituencies, including racial liberals who chose to pursue action on civil rights through nonsectarian agencies, believing, as one Council leader put it, that “secular action by Jews segregates Jews from the rest of American life.”⁵³ There was also a vestigial cadre of classical Reform rabbis attempting to sustain their anti-nationalist interpretation of Judaism. Berger himself fell into both categories, neither of which imply racist attitudes.

On the other hand, a significant segment of the Council’s membership hailed from the South and Southwest, and it was largely on account of this group that the Council made its most egregious compromises. At a 1968 executive committee meeting, for example, Mezvinsky, the Council’s short-lived executive director, proposed a conference panel featuring two African American speakers—an idea that board members roundly rejected. One of them, describing himself a “staunch integrationist” and ACLU supporter, reminded his colleagues that “civil rights was, organizationally, none of our affair and involvement in it would lose us many of our Southern members.”⁵⁴ At the very least, then, the Council was unwilling to jeopardize its Southern constituency with public gestures of interracial solidarity.

Whether those constituents were themselves committed racists or simply fearful of retaliation by local Christians is impossible to know. One is struck, however, by the similarities between the Council’s rhetoric and that of some avowed Jewish segregationists. Consider the following characteristic statement of the Council’s perspective on minority rights and antisemitism contained in a 1961 pamphlet authored by Rosenwald, entitled “Credo of an American Jew”:

I have often been accused of attempting to be a “110 per cent American.” I *am* proud to be an American and I see no reason to apologize for saying so... In no way, as the words are generally understood, do I feel a part of a “minority group.” I hate the word “minority.” The law does not consider the rights or wrongs of ‘minorities’; rights and responsibilities are conferred on the *individual citizen*. The sooner we forget about minorities and the more we emphasize the individual, the better off we will be... The great majority of Christians today are willing to take the Jew at his ‘face value.’ The problem

53. National Executive Committee Minutes, April 9 and 10, 1967, folder 4, box 17, ACJ, AJA.

54. National Executive Committee Minutes, February 4 and 5, 1968, folder 4, box 17, ACJ, AJA.

is, in part at least, for the Jew to see to it that his ‘face value’ is a favorable one. In many ways some Jews are deficient in providing a favorable climate.⁵⁵

Now consider a 1957 pamphlet published by the Association of Citizens’ Councils of Mississippi, entitled “A Jewish View on Segregation.” Most of the tract is dedicated to defending racial segregation from a white, rather than a specifically Jewish, perspective. When the anonymous author—who describes himself as “a ‘Jewish American,’ not an American Jew”—does touch on Jewish matters, it is to distance himself from the actions of national Jewish organizations:

[E]very Jew knows he is an individual. Not richer or poorer or luckier or unluckier... because he is a Jew, but because of the sort of individual he, personally, is....National Jewish organizations...each purport to speak for all American Jewry...[N]othing could be further from the truth...[Jewish leaders] feel that since Jews have always and will always be a “minority” group, we must be vocal in the fight by another “minority” group in its efforts to achieve “status.” ...In many sections of the South the white people are the minority group...[T]he Jew who attempts to be neutral [on segregation] has no right to be surprised or amazed when the target he so readily presents is fired upon.⁵⁶

In short, the Council’s language of Americanism and individuality, and its opposition to corporate Jewish politics, made it an ideal home for Southern Jews anxious to fit in with their white Christian neighbors.

The Council’s racial conservatism was expressed most publicly in its opposition to the doctrine of cultural pluralism. In attempting to clarify the nature of the organization’s evolving ideological differences with the AJC, one Council leader pointed to the “Committee’s attitude... that it is quite proper and acceptable for Jews in America to constitute a separate group with its own distinct cultural life, separate and apart from America.” The Council, by contrast, maintained that “the ‘melting pot’ of America is merging all nationalities and cultures into a distinctive American culture of which Jews are, and must be, an integral part.”⁵⁷ Like postwar American Jewish organizations more generally, the Council turned to the discipline of sociology for models of human behavior that

55. Lessing Rosenwald, “Credo of an American Jew,” folder 8, box H8, World Jewish Congress collection (WJC), AJA. Kolsky dates “Credo” to 1961, *Jews against Zionism*, 224. The text appears to have been published first in the *Jewish Newsletter* and later released as a stand-alone pamphlet.

56. Anonymous, “A Jewish View on Segregation,” folder 21, box 1, JBF, AJA.

57. National Executive Committee Minutes, June 20, 1950, folder 1, box 16, ACJ, AJA.

would lend scientific credence to its political program and justify its warnings about the dangers of Zionism.⁵⁸

The main Council publication, *Issues* (previously known as *Council News*), became an outlet for writing that questioned the political wisdom of minority self-assertion. In one such article from 1962, for example, Professor Joseph Roucek, chair of sociology and political science at the University of Bridgeport, posed the question of “how to reconcile the claims of ‘cultural pluralism’ with the rights of the American people to protect their interests against the frequently proclaimed ‘minority rights,’ especially the political rights, which are frequently antagonistic, if not dangerous, to the interests of the official (or unofficial) policies of the United States?” Roucek’s answer was a moderate one as far as the Council is concerned: minority cultural expressions were acceptable so long as they remained separate from political activities, “particularly those which do not benefit the general interests of the American people.”⁵⁹ Absent further specification, one is left to infer that the phrase “general interests” references the perspective of an idealized white Christian subject.

In embracing cultural pluralism, the mainstream Jewish defense agencies mirrored a postwar shift in the social sciences away from “race psychology,” which purported to establish the intellectual superiority of whites, and towards the psychological study of racial *prejudice*.⁶⁰ This shift critically impacted the way Jewish organizations approached anti-semitism. As Stuart Svonkin explains, the AJC’s postwar collaborations with the Institute for Social Research helped popularize a conception of antisemitism—and prejudice more generally—as a psychopathology rooted in the aberrant dispositions of the “authoritarian personality.”⁶¹ The Institute’s preferred remedy looked something like psychotherapy on a mass scale: a sweeping program of democratic education “devoted to increasing the kind of self-awareness and self-determination that makes any kind of [fascist] manipulation impossible.”⁶² Jewish agencies quickly operationalized these findings, launching what Svonkin calls a “propaganda crusade” that utilized all forms of media “to combat negative ste-

58. On American Jews and sociology, see Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

59. Joseph S. Roucek, “Political Limits of Cultural Pluralism,” *Issues* 16, no. 2 (1962): 20–7.

60. See Franz Samelson, “From ‘Race Psychology’ to ‘Studies in Prejudice’: Some Observations on the Thematic Reversal in Social Psychology,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 14 (1978): 265–78.

61. Stuart Svonkin, *Jews against Prejudice*, 36.

62. Theodore Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Verso, 2019), 10.

reotypes of minority groups, to demonstrate the deleterious consequences of prejudice, and to emphasize the importance of intergroup harmony to the advancement of American interests at home and abroad.”⁶³ The idea of inoculating the public against antisemitic prejudice comported nicely with a pluralist liberalism that celebrated expressions of ethnic diversity as healthy and desirable. In its own analyses of antisemitism, however, the Council started from a different set of premises and arrived at correspondingly different conclusions.

At the Council’s 1957 annual convention, Dr. George Lundberg, chair of the University of Washington’s sociology department and a frequent Council collaborator, offered an alternative account of the origins of social prejudice. “There are many sets of conditions under which a community regards with hostility certain distinct subgroups,” Lundberg suggested. While “groups suspected of intellectual or biological inferiority” often become the targets of discrimination, “especially does prejudice tend to develop towards minorities who themselves profess superiority over the dominant majority.” Limiting himself to a discussion of “the distinctly Jewish antagonism,” Lundberg identified several forms of minority behavior said to “give rise to hostility on the part of the majority group,” including “conspicuous ethnocentrism,” “political influence out of proportion to their numbers,” and “allegiance to any foreign culture, cult, religion, or political group.” While he made clear that not *all* Jews exhibited such behavior, what mattered in his view was “the impression created by the pronouncements of leaders of highly articulate and well-organized factions of a minority group who undertake to speak for the whole group.” The most effective prophylactics against antisemitism, Lundberg concluded, were programs aimed at reducing excessive displays of ethnocentrism and separatism on the part of Jewish spokesmen.⁶⁴

This point of view, which as prominent a colleague as Nathan Glazer dismissed as “obviously anti-Semitic,” was positively received by Council leaders.⁶⁵ The idea that Jews could bring about or intensify antisemitism through their own provocative behavior was in fact a widely accepted premise among early-twentieth-century Jewish organizations. As part of its program to combat antisemitism, the ADL at one time issued instructional material to Jewish immigrants on proper dress and social

63. Svonkin, *Jews against Prejudice*, 42.

64. George A. Lundberg, “Pluralism, Integration and Assimilation,” Thirteenth Annual Conference of the American Council for Judaism, April 27, 1957, folder 8, box 6, ACJ, AJA.

65. Letter from Nathan Glazer to Jac Wasserman, October 9, 1952, folder 22B, box 1, GAL, UWL.

behavior.⁶⁶ So-called autogenic antisemitism remained a live concept in Jewish sociological research deep into the second half of the twentieth century.⁶⁷ But as an aspect of public-facing Jewish defense or “community relations” activity, this “victim-blaming” approach fell out of fashion during World War II and was thereafter supplanted by the prejudice-centered paradigm. Again, however, the Council proved to be the exception. In an essay excerpted in the January 1953 issue of *Council News*, Lundberg took aim at the “popularity of the psychoanalytic approach” that “absolves minorities from any responsibility whatsoever for any prejudice that may exist against them.” It remained an open question as to “how much of the total hostility to Jews at present is attributable to psychopathic personalities and how much is attributable to perfectly rational and justifiable grounds.”⁶⁸ Prudently, the Council’s editor chose *not* to excerpt the section of Lundberg’s essay in which the sociologist portrayed Nazi antisemitism as a “rational” response to the international Jewish boycott of Germany.⁶⁹ But the original paper, revisionist history and all, was received favorably by the Council’s upper echelons.⁷⁰

While it would be incorrect to conclude that Council leaders believed Jews responsible for all manifestations of antisemitism throughout history, they did view Zionism as stimulating Jewish racialization by antisemitic movements in both Europe and the US. Sidney Wallach, an early Council strategist, told the group’s 1945 meeting that “Zionist ideology has developed entirely under German influence...with its emphasis on ‘blood,’ race, [and] descent as the most determining factor in human life.”⁷¹ In 1956, the Council initiated an internal research project on the relationship between Zionism and Nazism. Under the direction of Rabbi Albert Belton, a Hungarian Holocaust survivor, the project aimed to trace “how the German government in very precise ways used statements and attitudes of Jews themselves, Zionists, in their propaganda directed at

66. Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters*, 71.

67. See Steven E. Frieder, “Social Indicators and Social Reports: A Review of Current Approaches and Their Implications,” April 1970, American Jewish Committee Information and Research Services, folder 27, box G9, American Jewish Committee records (AJC), AJA.

68. “Zionist Tactics Create Hostility, Lundberg Says,” *Council News*, January 1953.

69. “The Survival of the Moralistic-Legalistic Orientation in Sociology,” paper by George A. Lundberg delivered to the Sociological Research Association, September 2, 1952, folder 8, box 19, GAL, UWL.

70. Letter from Jac Wasserman to George Lundberg, September 8, 1952, folder 22B, box 1, GAL, UWL.

71. Address by Sidney Wallach, January 14, 1945, folder 2, box 6, ACJ, AJA. Wallach was quoting the historian Hans Kohn.

other Jews.”⁷² Discussing the progress of the study at an off-the-record session of the Council’s 1957 annual meeting, executive director Leonard Sussman reported that, having surveyed eighty percent of all relevant Nazi propaganda, Belton had “prove[n] the use by the Nazi movement of Zionist statements, reasoning and philosophy.” Emphasizing that he in no way intended to “imply that without Zionism there would have been no Hitler, no persecution and no World War,” Sussman said that “even without attributing a causal relationship, we must recognize the dangerous counter-integrative force that Zionism becomes for Jews in every nation outside of Israel.”⁷³

The Council’s conception of Zionism as racializing and “counter-integrative”—as an (at best) unwitting bedfellow of antisemitism—was at an earlier point in time the dominant position of American Jewish elites and institutions. In the racial context of post-Reconstruction America, when white supremacist conceptions of American national identity exercised nearly unchallenged hegemony, this framework underpinned a coherent program of communal self-defense for multiple generations of well-integrated, middle-class, European-descended Jews whom the law, at least, had always treated as white. Avoidance of racial politics and opposition to Zionism were both integral to elite efforts to signify Jews’ nationality as “American” at a time when “American” was synonymous with whiteness. But 1960 was not 1920. What the Council failed to anticipate was the broad public acceptance of cultural pluralism and racial liberalism that would develop over the course of the postwar decades. The racial, ethnic, and sexual upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, the mass disillusionment with the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and the emergence of new models of political and artistic expression and consumption all coalesced to weaken the symbolic power of national institutions and ratify alternative conceptions of civic belonging. The pursuit of individuality, mediated and legitimized by the market, displaced loyalty to race and nation for a substantial number of Americans. During that same period, Israel emerged as a muscular US ally in the Cold War, aided in part by an increasingly efficient pro-Israel lobby and consistently favorable media representations of Jews and Israel. Together, these developments swept away the political and cultural reference points tethering Council ideology to the lived realities of American Jews, engendering a crisis of institutional reproduction from which the organization would never recover.

72. National Executive Committee Minutes, November 17-18, 1956, folder 2, box 16, ACJ, AJA.

73. Report by Leonard R. Sussman, ACJ Executive Director, 13th Annual Conference, Advisory Board meeting, April 26, 1957, folder 7, box 6, ACJ, AJA.

TOWARDS NEW ANTISEMITISMS

Although the American Council for Judaism exists on paper to this day, its epitaph was written back in 1968, with the dismissal of its founding executive director, Elmer Berger. Berger's less-than-amicable divorce from the Council caused something of a split in an already weakened and internally divided organization.⁷⁴ Membership and fundraising dropped off and were never replenished, for reasons already noted. The Council's period of peak activity, 1942-1968, was a transitional era in American Jewish life—as in American life more generally. It began with the national mobilization against Nazi Germany, which successfully discredited overt expressions of antisemitism, and ended with the civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s. The weakening of institutionalized white supremacy as it had developed from the end of Reconstruction onward simultaneously transformed the racial status of American Jews in ways that would shift the political alignments of the major Jewish defense agencies.

For decades, Jewish groups had fought for anti-discrimination measures that would advance colorblind, merit-based selection in employment and higher education. With the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, that goal seemed to have been achieved. The following year, however, President Lyndon Johnson signed Executive Order 11246, mandating that federal contractors take “affirmative action” to ensure equal opportunity employment for underrepresented minorities. In implementing and overseeing Johnson's mandate, contractors and government agencies—as well as universities that adopted their own voluntary affirmative action policies—were required to categorize employees and applicants by race, gender, and ethnicity in order to identify underrepresentation and track progress towards its elimination.⁷⁵

While turn-of-the-century eugenicists and political antisemites had portrayed Jews as racially alien and degenerate, the legal whiteness of European-descended American Jews had never been seriously disputed. Nor, until the 1960s, were the consequences of that classification received by Jews as anything but favorable. But with the beginning of affirmative action and other government initiatives aimed at redistributing opportunities across identity-based lines, many Jewish men (women being among the chief beneficiaries of equal opportunity policies) now found themselves thrust into an aggrieved interest group with other middle-class

74. Elmer Berger, *Memoirs of an Anti-Zionist Jew* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1978), 108–30.

75. See, Faye J. Crosby and Cheryl VanDeVeer, eds. *Sex, Race, and Merit: Debating Affirmative Action in Education and Employment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 13–20.

whites who feared that their material prospects were in jeopardy. “By some sort of sociological ‘sleight-of-hand,’ six million Jews have become part of the ‘white majority,’” said ADL director Benjamin Epstein in a speech before the 1974 NCRAC plenary. “Government agencies concerned with ‘affirmative action’ already classify Jews as ‘other whites’ and there appears to be a tendency for that denial of Jewish identity to spread beyond the government bureaucracy.”⁷⁶

The late 1960s had witnessed a series of high-profile confrontations between Black and Jewish organizations—some centering on economic conflict in the inner cities, as with the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers’ strike, and some on the anti-Zionism (and occasionally antisemitism) of Black radicals following the Six-Day War. For Epstein, the drop-off in sympathy for Israel following its conquest of Arab land spoke to “an all-too-frequent blindness to the centrality for Jews of Israel’s survival as an independent and sovereign Jewish state.” Drawing on his recently published book, *The New Anti-Semitism*, he rearticulated these disparate antagonisms into a new composite diagnosis:

There is, in short, a clear relationship between “indifference” and even hostility to the Jewish community’s legitimate goal of fair and equal treatment in our pluralistic American society...and the indifference, even hostility toward Israel’s right of existence found in the “anti-Zionism” heard on the political Left, among some intellectuals, and in some church and liberal circles.

According to Epstein, the unifying thread of this “new antisemitism”—that which connected its domestic racial and Israel-oriented grievances—was an “ideological hostility to the corporate Jew.” Thus, it became possible to understand the left’s “anti-Zionist pronunciamientos,” which characterized Israel as a European, settler-colonial state, and affirmative action policies that classified American Jews as “other whites,” as two sides of the same coin. Both, in Epstein’s view, constituted attacks on “the legitimacy [of] Jews as a group,” and both reflected the fact that “the Jew in America is no longer perceived as a victim...nor even as a ‘minority group.’”⁷⁷

If classification as a victimized minority was anathema to Lessing Rosenwald, whose concept of Jewish security developed under conditions of hegemonic white supremacy, as far as the ADL was concerned, the inverse had become true in the post-civil rights era. By the 1970s, victimhood

76. “Jewish Security Today,” NJCRAC Plenary Session, June 23-26, 1974, folder 11, box 17, NCRAC, CJH.

77. Ibid.

was seen to confer political recognition and remedial benefits.⁷⁸ In their introduction to *The New Anti-Semitism*, Epstein and coauthor Arnold Forster argued that American Christians had become “so preoccupied with the problems of blacks” that antisemitism had fallen off the radar altogether: “No sooner had Jews won widespread sympathy because of their victimization during the Holocaust, no sooner had they begun en masse to climb the economic and social ladder, than they were replaced as principal victim and object of concern by nonwhite Americans.”⁷⁹ Reviewing the book for *Commentary* magazine, Earl Raab agreed that “increasingly the only ethnic groups which are seen as having legitimacy in America are those which are economically deprived.”⁸⁰

The idea that Jews had been unjustly “de-minoritized” had begun to appear in neoconservative writing around that time.⁸¹ A few years earlier, political scientist Aaron Wildavsky pointed to “the indisputable fact” that “sometime in the mid-1960s blacks replaced Jews as the nation’s number one oppressed minority,” with the result that “Jews were no longer spoken of as a minority, deprived, despised, downtrodden, or whatever.”⁸² This he attributed to Jews’ negative association—in the minds of left radicals, if not the broader public—with Israel’s newfound military supremacy. In the *New York Times Magazine*, Seymour Martin Lipset disputed the New Left charge that Israel dominates “people of color” by noting that “Arabs, being Semites, are as ‘white’ as Jews.” To frame Israel as a racial oppressor, he added, “is, of course, designed to eliminate sympathy for ‘white’ Jews as an oppressed people.”⁸³

The new antisemitism was thus a close approximation of the Council’s worldview: hostility to the “corporate Jew,” denial of Jewish ethnoracial particularity, and “indifference” to the interests of Israel as a Jewish state. While the Council’s concept of antisemitism centered on disintegrative forces—racializing movements that threatened to isolate Jews from the general population and destroy their individual personhood—the new

78. On Jewish participation in an emerging culture of victimhood, see Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Mariner Books, 2000), chapter 9.

79. Forster and Epstein, *The New Anti-Semitism*, 16.

80. Earl Raab, “Is There a New Anti-Semitism?” *Commentary*, May 1974, 53–5.

81. On the broader contributions of neoconservative writers to postwar discussions of American Jewish identity, see Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) and Matthew Frye Jacobson, “Hyphen Nation: Ethnicity in American Intellectual and Political Life,” in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, eds. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), 175–91.

82. Aaron Wildavsky, “The Search for the Oppressed,” *Freedom at Issue* 16 (1972): 14.

83. Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Socialism of Fools,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 3, 1971.

antisemitism was precisely the opposite: it assimilated Jews to the white majority and refused to acknowledge their collective interest in Israel. Similarly, while the Council's view reflected an America in which even Jewish elites felt only provisionally white, and where exclusion from whiteness carried grave consequences, the new antisemitism reflected an America in which the whiteness of European-descended Jews was firmly established in law, public policy, and the popular imagination, and in which American Jews were increasingly identified with state power through the vehicle of Israel.

For the ADL, whose business was combating antisemitism, redefining the latter in terms of "insensitivity, even hostility, to Jewish concerns" offered the organization a more capacious and flexible operational paradigm. Towards the end of his speech to NCRAC, Epstein called on Jewish defense agencies to chart a new, more self-interested political course. No longer could they afford to "enter into coalitions [with other minorities] at the expense of our own principles or by sacrificing Jewish interests merely to achieve coalition." In place of civil rights, Epstein proposed a program of Holocaust education and pro-Israel advocacy, coupled with a legal offensive against what he called "anti-white discrimination."⁸⁴ Going forward, opposition to affirmative action would form a major part of the Jewish communal agenda.⁸⁵

In making sense of the Anglo-Jewish embrace of the new antisemitism paradigm, David Feldman underscores the way "Israel transformed the relationship of Jews to state power" and thereby "fundamentally changed the relationship of Jews to the question of minorities."⁸⁶ While the American case certainly affirms that conclusion, it also draws attention to the role of race as a central axis of majority-minority distinction and political mobilization in the US. For both the Council in the 1950s and the ADL in subsequent decades, coming to terms with the indisputable fact of Jewish statehood meant anticipating its political impact on what they understood to be Jewish interests in a thoroughly racialized polity. Each articulated a view of antisemitism that reconciled Zionism and race, albeit in diametrically opposed ways.

Leaving aside premature claims of American "post-racialism," there is little evidence that racial considerations have ceased to factor into twenty-first-century debates about antisemitism and anti-Zionism. Yet, without making hard and fast predictions about the future of the domi-

84. Idem., "Jewish Security Today."

85. Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, "How Affirmative Action Fractured the Black-Jewish Alliance," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 52 (2006): 85–8; and Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), chapter six.

86. Feldman, "Toward a History of the Term 'Anti-Semitism'," 1149.

nant paradigm, one can observe important shifts in the social and political parameters that initially gave rise to the new antisemitism. Jews of color now represent a demographically significant segment of the American Jewish community, better organized to project their voices in ways that disrupt the taken-for-granted equation of Jews and whiteness.⁸⁷ Political divisions among Jews have also widened dramatically. Once a point of unity, Israel has become a persistent source of intra-Jewish conflict.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, “classical” antisemitism has witnessed a minor revival, heightening fears of renewed right-wing Judeophobia.⁸⁹

If current trends continue, the new antisemitism paradigm could find itself increasingly embattled. Indeed, some Jewish organizations have already begun to articulate alternative conceptions of antisemitism rooted in an understanding of American Jewry as a multiracial, multiethnic, and multinational diaspora.⁹⁰ If the Council’s conservative anti-Zionism reflected elite fears of racialization amidst the rise of Israel and a domestic environment characterized by hegemonic white supremacy, and if the new antisemitism paradigm fused middle-class anxieties about Jewish whiteness with concern for Israel’s security, these emerging alternatives reflect a more racially diverse Jewish community grappling with the

87. Josefin Dolsten, “Jews of Color Are Chronically Undercounted, Researchers Find,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 30, 2019. For a recent debate on the issue, see: Ira M. Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky, “How Many Jews of Color Are There?” *eJewish Philanthropy*, May 17, 2020, <https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/how-many-jews-of-color-are-there/>; Tema Smith, “Jews of Color Deserve an Accurate Count,” *The Forward*, May 19, 2020, <https://forward.com/opinion/446872/jews-of-color-deserve-an-accurate-count/>; and Marc L. Dollinger, “To Accurately Count Jews of Color, We Need to Radically Change Our Assumptions about Jews,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.jta.org/2020/05/20/opinion/to-accurately-count-jews-of-color-we-need-to-radically-change-our-assumptions-about-jews>.

88. See, Dov Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict over Israel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016) and Lisa Lerer and Elizabeth Dias, “Israel’s Alliance With Trump Creates New Tensions among American Jews,” *New York Times*, August 17, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/17/us/politics/trump-israel-jews.html>.

89. Judy Maltz, “Fearing for Their Safety, Third of U.S. Jews Say Shun Stars of David and Skullcaps,” *Haaretz*, October 23, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-pittsburgh-shooting-10-27-one-third-of-u-s-jews-antisemitism-safety-problem-1.8018830>.

90. See, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, *Understanding Antisemitism: An Offering to Our Movement*, <https://www.jfrej.org/assets/uploads/JFREJ-Understanding-Antisemitism-November-2017-v1-3-2.pdf>; Samuel Hayim Brody, “The Left and the New Fight against Antisemitism,” *Jewschool*, January 31, 2018, <https://jewschool.com/2018/01/30/863/left-new-fight-antisemitism/>; Ben Lorber, “Where Did the Past Go?” *Jewish Currents*, August 26, 2019, <https://jewishcurrents.org/where-did-the-past-go/>; Jewish Voice for Peace, *On Antisemitism*.

consequences of today's growing alliance between the American and Israeli ethnonationalist right. Though frontal challenges to the new antisemitism remain inchoate, the fate of the American Council for Judaism suggests the difficulty of sustaining an antisemitism paradigm at odds with the shifting racial parameters and political commitments of the Jews it purports to serve.