PART TWO

Jews and the American Liberal Tradition
Today, when the qualities that once differentiated Jews from other Americans have all but vanished, the distinctive political culture of Jews persists. They continue to be liberal, though no longer the most liberal group in the electorate. Today's brand of Jewish liberalism would hardly be recognizable to the immigrant generation. Liberalism is a dynamic, constantly evolving phenomenon. Survey research, which has become the preferred way of determining how liberal Jews are, merely presents a snapshot of its contemporary contours. Such research can tell us little of how Jewish liberalism evolved to become what it is today. Not only the persistence of Jewish liberalism but also the shape it has taken cry out for historical explanation. The thoughts that follow constitute an attempt to make sense of Jewish liberalism in its American historical context.

So disparate are the principles of liberalism that finding some internal logic is a daunting task. At the risk of oversimplification, we note that it is composed of the new relationship between the citizen and the secular state that grew out of the Enlightenment, as encompassed in the well-known slogan of the French Revolution: "Liberty, equality, fraternity." In the new civil society the citizen is as free to pursue happiness as the boundaries of the community allow. Whether that pursuit leads to some form of self-realization or the
accumulation of estate does not matter. He is equal to every other citizen, at least before the law. Fraternity in its simplest form is related to the right of citizens to associate in religious, social, and political institutions, to form a civil society mediating between the state and citizenry.

In our country these rights are embodied in the Constitution and especially in its Bill of Rights. Liberty is also assured by what John Adams called "political architecture," which keeps the legislative, judicial, and executive functions separated and checking each other. It is designed, as Woodrow Wilson once noted, to handcuff government. That was no accident, since it was believed that a government that was prevented from governing assured the citizenry its sphere of liberty: "That government governs best which governs least." The form that liberalism took in the early National period was thus more libertarian than egalitarian.

The perceptive reader will by now have noted what Marxist dialecticians like to call an "internal contradiction." Left to its own devices will liberty, which allows free rein for our unequal talents, not make a shambles of equality? That is what Tocqueville foresaw. The society of free and equal individuals envisaged by the French Revolution could exist only in theory. In reality a polis composed of free, private, individuated citizens had nothing to hold it together. The disparities in wealth and station inevitable in the free society would surely erode the bonds of fraternity as well. How can justice prevail in such a society? A government that is so empowered might regulate such inequities, but in order to secure liberty we have by design underpowered government. How then can such a system work?

The answer might well be that it has worked more by dint of the ever-increasing size of the gross national product than by the internal logic of its founding principles. The defenders of the libertarian variety of liberalism, which today substitutes for a conservative politics in America, argue that this is no accident. Liberty in the economic sphere has released such enormous new productive energies that we have become the first society in history in which insufficiency of goods and services is not a perpetual plague. That makes the grinding problem of how to distribute wealth equitably
far less stressful. If the economic pie is ever growing, less energy can be expended on the question of "who gets what."

From a historical point of view, all American politics is played out in the arena of liberalism. The American political dialogue has liberty at one end of its axis and equality at the other. That is why George Bush's use of the dreaded "L" word in the election of 1988 to put his opponent to rout is comical. From a historical perspective he qualifies as much for the liberal label as did Dukakis. There are no monarchists in America.

As the Enlightenment's favorite child, with very little of a feudal past, America could not legitimately produce a conservative ideology. Rather, in the liberal context, conservatives are those who try to get the government off the backs of the citizenry so that it can get on with the serious business of producing wealth. Conservatism in American politics is the tendency that, in the name of liberty, opposes expanding the government sector to furnish social welfare or even to regulate business. In contrast, the egalitarian-minded left wing of the Democratic party, to which most Jewish voters adhere, wants the wealth produced by private enterprise to be shared with those who have little to sustain themselves—the homeless, the unemployed, the handicapped, single parents, victims of AIDS, or whatever new group of unequals they can find. Predictably, liberals conceive of the government's taxing power as an instrument for the fairer distribution of wealth.

What liberalism does is what the Left has always done in parliamentary democracies. It seeks out the regnant inequity and places it on the political agenda. During the National period it sought to remove the remnants of feudalism, the payment of quit-rent, and property qualifications for the franchise. During the Jacksonian period the franchise was further liberalized and the United State Bank was attacked as a citadel of privilege that ought not to be strengthened by government authority. During the 1850s and the Civil War it sought to extend freedom and citizenship to the slaves. That was achieved through the civil rights amendments, especially the Fourteenth Amendment. The Progressives sensed that the trusts needed to be regulated because their power was not only corrupting the political process but also threatening to curtail lib-
erty. It was a case of checking private power as government power was checked.

The New Deal is noteworthy because it tilted liberalism away from its libertarian pole toward its egalitarian-statist one. That was not precisely a new trend. There had been deep government intrusions during the Civil War and the Progressive period. For example, the Freedmen's Bureau specifically designed for the rehabilitation of the former slaves set a precedent for government-sponsored social engineering in the nineteenth century. But it was the Depression with its foreboding of revolution that set the stage for a broader, more sustained effort at restructuring through the agency of government.

During the Depression a much larger sector of the public required government nurture. Not only would the freewheeling capitalism that characterized post-Civil War industrial development have to be controlled but the citizenry would also have to be assured some kind of security from the vagaries of the business cycle: social security to protect the unemployed and the aged, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to protect the resource of youth, even an attempt at conservation on a regional basis to protect human and natural resources (the Tennessee Valley Authority). Government became a permanent fifth wheel in the economy. The legislation of the first New Deal marked the deepest government intrusion yet into the economy and through it into the lives of the citizenry. With it came a tilt to the egalitarian side of liberalism.

But the recurrence of economic collapse in 1937 cast serious doubts on the efficacy of a welfare program paid for through deficit financing rather than through wealth produced by the economy. There was a retreat from structural reform toward the more limited policy of providing a stable economic environment in which capitalism might thrive. By the second New Deal we note a steady retreat from the government intrusion and social engineering that characterized the early years of the New Deal. Aware that the early program was not producing desired results, Roosevelt abandoned the notion of working with "big business" (his NRA had in any case been declared unconstitutional) in favor of business regulation. The government would now attempt to stabilize the economy indirectly through its fiscal policy, including new banking laws and a
strengthening of the existing Federal Reserve System. Under Thurmond Arnold, the antitrust division of the Justice Department was reactivated. The problems posed by the Depression were never fully resolved. The war started the economic machine pumping again. It pumped so well that, by the end of the war, managers were speaking of the “miracle of production” without which the Allied victory would not have been possible. The triumph of libertarianism, at least in the economic sphere, which can be noted in the “supply side” economics of the Reagan and Bush administrations, also grows out of the New Deal experience, especially the second New Deal and the wartime industrial mobilization.

Jewish liberals welcomed the New Deal’s welfare state programs, especially its positive attitude toward organized labor. The “trickle up” twist of its economic policy, which pumped millions of dollars into the economy through “make work,” placed the New Deal within ideological striking distance of Jewish political culture, which emphasized the just society in which the “forgotten man” would receive his due. (Rabbi Stephen Wise, the quintessential Jewish liberal of the first half of the twentieth century, took credit for the “forgotten man” phrase.) Jews, seeing the state as an instrument to help achieve a just society, were persistent in demanding that government do more. That tendency was buttressed by socialist ideology, which reinforced the statist aspect of Jewish political culture. American Jewry historically looked to government intercession for its brethren in the foreign policy arena. Now the second and third generation abandoned the pledge given to Peter Stuyvesant that Jews would always take care of their own. In 1933 hard-pressed Jewish social-work agencies removed Jewish dependent families from their rolls so that they might qualify for government relief. For Jews, power was granted to government but its leaders are assigned a matching responsibility to “repair the world.” Communalism is based on shared responsibility.

That penchant for the egalitarian aspects of liberalism was not yet fully present in American Jewish political culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Before the arrival of the East European Jews the Jewish political profile was kept low. The exposed position Jews assumed when they supported the Whigs in the Amer-
American Revolution was exceptional although, considering the liberal bias of the Revolution and the relationship of its principles to the Enlightenment, the support it received in the small Jewish community seemed natural. Less easily explained is their support of the physiocrat, anti-urban Jefferson over Alexander Hamilton, whose financial program was designed to buttress the very commercial sector of the economy with which Jews had cast their lot. Apparently even during the National period Jews earned like Episcopalians but voted like the then equivalent of Puerto Ricans. In the liberal context such altruism is not so strange. "It is an ironic fact," observes George Will, "that we are a nation of people who talk like Jefferson, yet we live like Hamiltonians." 5

Jews did not notably join in the struggle to abolish slavery, and with the exception of Louis Brandeis, who had not yet found his Jewish constituency, there was little interest in an ameliorative solution to the trust problem. 6 Socialist-oriented Jews preferred the totalistic solutions of socialism. The trust problem would be solved when government assumed ownership of the "means of production." There was a handful of acculturated Jews who involved themselves with progressive reform, especially its advocacy of municipal restructuring. But East European Jews, who were unfamiliar with the reform process, sought a total solution in the just society that socialism would bring.

Most first-generation East European Jews were not yet fully ready to enter the American political arena. In 1900 Jewish voting volume in New York City was low and socialist candidates ran poorly in Jewish districts, where the Republican was usually preferred. 7 Jews sought to solve their social, cultural, and economic problems by employing traditional instruments of communal organization that they believed could be recreated in the free environment of America. That was the thrust of the New York Kehillah, the American Jewish Committee, the Congress movement, and the Federation movement, all of which were established in the first two decades of the century.

Jewish liberalism became fully fashioned during the prosperous twenties and the Depression thirties. As the second generation became more involved with the problem of living in America, some of the European cast of Jewish political culture was abandoned. Dur-
ing the prewar period the thrust and energy of left-wing Jewish political culture was anchored in socialist ideology with its strong statist component. It was disseminated through the Jewish labor movement, a network of Yiddish schools and neighborhood social and fraternal clubs—the *landsmanshaftn*—and, above all, through the Yiddish press. These persisted in the twenties but would grow weaker as Yiddish-speaking culture declined.

The immigrant political culture was not alone in its concern for social justice. The Reform branch of Judaism had a strong social-action component active in everything from municipal reform to antilynching legislation. Stephen Wise, a Reform rabbi, served as a bridge to the secular liberals who found their home in the reconstituted American Jewish Congress, which he led. It too had a social-action commission. Rabbis Judah Magnes and Abba Hillel Silver were no less avid than Wise in their pursuit of liberal causes.

During the twenties the Jewish electorate shifted its allegiance to the Democratic party, which would become the home of egalitarian liberalism. In the 66th Congress (1919–1921) there were five Jewish Republican representatives and only one Democrat. By the 75th Congress (1937–1939) the situation was reversed. Of the ten Jewish representatives elected, nine were Democrats and only one was a Republican. The number of Jews voting for Socialist candidates like Eugene Debs was disproportionately high, about 38 percent in the election of 1920. They also showed a maverick tendency to veer off to third-party candidates like the Progressive Robert M. LaFollette, Jr., who received 22 percent of their vote in the election of 1924. But the drawing power of socialist candidates in Jewish districts declined in the twenties. The Lower East Side district, which had sent Meyer London to Congress, was gerrymandered out of existence in 1922, and Jewish districts in Williamsburg and Brownsville, which had a sizeable socialist vote, were disrupted by the split in the Socialist party.

The majority of Jewish voters were attracted to Al Smith, the Democrat reform governor of New York, who, although linked to the Tammany machine, displayed considerable political skill in creating the reform wing of the Democratic party. Smith, moreover, surrounded himself with a group of reform-minded Jewish advisors—Belle and Henry Moskowitz, Joseph Proskauer, Sam Rosen-
man, and Robert Moses—who were viewed with pride by Jewish voters. In the election of 1928, Jews gave Smith 72 percent of their vote. The liberal-urban-ethnic coalition, with its prominent role for Jewish advisors, which also would characterize Roosevelt’s New Deal, actually found its roots in the Smith administration during his tenure as governor of New York. The 82 percent of their ballots Jews awarded Roosevelt in the election of 1932, which rose to over 90 percent in the three subsequent presidential elections, was based squarely on the new constellation of forces that began in 1924 with second-generation Jewish voters. Even Jewish socialists felt compelled to vote for a high-born, reform-minded patrician, though we shall note that a third party had to be created so as not to compromise their socialist principles.

From the outset Jewish liberal political culture possessed both a statist and a libertarian/reformist wing, but the former outweighed the latter, especially when socialist-inclined Jewish voters are added to the scale. The acculturation process itself would, however, act to right the balance. Several developments in the twenties acted to weaken the socialist thrust while establishing the bases for a stronger libertarian one. While there was great concern about the restrictionism embodied in the immigration laws and the Harvard enrollment case and the virulent antisemitic rhetoric of Henry Ford’s *Dearborn Independent*, it was clear that these forces were not sufficiently strong to halt the headlong drive by Jews to achieve middle-class station, which they achieved a generation before other ethnics of the “new” immigration. By 1923 they had wrung a satisfactory agreement from Harvard, which, on the surface at least, seemed to establish a precedent to give their children access to the nation’s best universities.

By 1927 a humiliating public apology had also been wrung from Ford. The KKK and other nativist groups were much weakened by the end of the decade. Jewish students were flooding into law and medical schools in disproportionate numbers and professionalization was well underway. Jews, it became clear, were not the sons of workers nor would they produce sons who were workers. It seemed that even their sojourn in small business and manufacture would last only one generation. The prosperity of the twenties was fully
shared by Jews. Under such circumstances, preaching the imminent collapse of the market economy sounded increasingly hollow and discordant. Not only was a growing number of Jews involved in the small business of the Jewish ethnic economy, which lent it a natural libertarian coloration, but their children were also moving toward the professions through formal education and certification. In the decades after World War II, the education and professional level of Jewish liberals matched that of the latter-day non-Jewish Progressive reformers. Thousands of second- and third-generation Jews were exposed to the engine of American liberalism, the university. Once enrolled, Jewish students were far more prone to assume that there was a link between being educated and being liberal. Jewish liberalism, like its American counterpart, would be anchored in an educated middle class with pronounced elitist tendencies. A good part of the change in character of Jewish liberalism, its change from egalitarianism to libertarianism between 1920 and 1970, must be attributed to its changed class base.

The move to the center of the liberal spectrum was enhanced further by the collapse of the extreme Left in the Jewish political arena, where the most extreme egalitarianism and statism were anchored. The Russian Revolution had initially earned applause and support in the left wing of the Jewish community. It generated hope that a just society would finally be established in Russia in which Jews would share equally with other subject nationalities. Chaim Zhitlovsky, a well-known Jewish radical voice, for example, suggested that the newly established Communist International (Comintern) was “the only organization that seeks to realize the word of the prophets.” But even as the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) appropriated millions of dollars in partnership with the Soviet government to resettle thousands of impoverished Jews in the Crimea, the benevolent aura cast by the revolution faded. The Soviet policy of reshaping the Russian Jewish class structure and its hostile attitude toward religion and Jewish communalism had led to the exile of thousands of rabbis, Hebrew teachers, and Zionist and Bundist leaders. Many were never heard from again. The Crimean venture, on which so much hope was staked, developed into a social engineering scheme to reshape Russian Jewry into some-
thing that might better fit the Communist mold. Clearly the Soviet government had little use for a separate Jewish ethnic culture, whether religious or secular.\textsuperscript{15}

At the same time, the Communist party of the United States, following a strategy ordered by the Comintern, targeted the Jewish labor movement for penetration. It was viewed as a stepping stone to infiltrating the American labor movement. In 1926 that strategy led to a costly, mismanaged, 26-week strike that virtually destroyed the ILGWU. Communist organizers of the strike had not hesitated to use the union's security fund to keep their lost cause afloat.\textsuperscript{16} The costly strike taught Jewish labor leaders a bitter lesson regarding the willingness of the Communist party to exploit the unions for their own grand design. By 1929 the Communist threat had peaked. Jews of the "socialist persuasion," like Lillian Wald, Horace Kallen, and David Dubinsky, distrusted the heirs of Lenin who ruled from the Kremlin. Baruch Vladeck, managing editor of the Forwards, and Morris Hillquit, chairman of the national committee of the Socialist party, adamantly opposed extending diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union. The party underwent one of its many splits and the ILGWU again emerged in the thirties, under the leadership of David Dubinsky, firmly in the social-democratic fold and ready to accept ameliorative measures to improve the conditions of its rank and file. But by the mid-thirties the composition of the ILGWU, which more than any other Jewish agency pointed the way to the new liberalism, was paradoxically no longer predominantly Jewish.

That trend away from the statism of the totalitarian Left was disrupted by the Depression. The collapse of the economy after the crash of 1929 gave the failing Communist party another opportunity to root itself in the Jewish community. Many socialist-minded Jews became convinced that the long-awaited collapse of capitalism predicted by Marx had come to pass. The disaffection was especially strong among Jewish students whose career paths and hopes for attaining professional status had been disrupted. Some estimate that the Jewish membership of the Communist party may have reached 30 to 40 percent during the thirties.\textsuperscript{17} That membership actually represented a minuscule proportion of the Jewish population, but it was sufficient to pin the "radical" label onto American Jewry again. In reality, the purges of the thirties and the signing of
the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact in August 1939 caused a rapid decline of the Communist influence among Jews.

The most powerful influence on American Jewish liberalism was the overwhelming popularity of Roosevelt among average Jewish voters. It was said that Jews had “dray velten—die velt, yene velt, un Roosevelt” (“three worlds: this world, the next world, and Roosevelt”). The aura of the New Deal with its concern for the “forgotten man” and its social-welfare legislation fit neatly into Jewish political culture, which viewed government as an instrument to create the conditions for social justice. Indeed, the very term “New Deal” was thought to have been coined by Samuel Untermyer.18 The reformist, ameliorative New Deal program was within easy striking distance of the social-democratic principles to which many Jews were drawn.

American Jewish liberalism finally found a home and political address in the New Deal, but the first New Deal also reinforced the Jewish penchant for a liberalism with a strong statist component. The direct forging of that connection came through the ILGWU. Its leadership founded the American Labor party in 1935 in New York State. It called itself “the party of the permanent New Deal” and attracted thousands of Jewish voters to its banner. In the election of 1936, 40 percent of New York State’s Jewish voters cast their ballots for the ALP ticket. It also broke the hold of the Socialist party on the Jewish Left. In that year Norman Thomas, the Socialist party candidate, received eighty-seven thousand Jewish votes, compared with 250,000 cast for the ALP. It served as a bridge for thousands of socialist-oriented Jewish voters to enter the mainstream of American politics. When the ALP was penetrated by the still-vigorous Communist party in 1938, it changed its name to the Liberal party, the only party in American political history actually to carry the term “liberal” into the political arena.

The fate of American liberalism in the postwar era need not occupy us very long. With the exception of the Eisenhower years (1952–1960), liberal Democrats—Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson—occupied the White House between 1932 and 1968. Together with the Carter years (1976–1980), these Democratic administrations will probably go down in history as the liberal period, al-
though Carter was an outsider whose administration may mark the final exhaustion of egalitarian liberalism. The willingness to absorb social democrats like Michael Harrington may have been the wellspring of Johnson's War on Poverty. The new university-educated liberals, who had a proclivity for making public policy but were anticommmercial by career choice, may also account for the anti-business cast of these administrations. Their distaste for the acquisitive ethic led inevitably to the abandonment of the libertarian notion of equality of opportunity in favor of the egalitarian notion of equality of results, the high point of which was the imposition of affirmative action quotas. The new liberalism of the sixties challenged fundamental libertarian values like competition, equal opportunity, and free enterprise, values that the American electorate was not ready to give up. Prone to view itself as the protector of the oppressed, this "new class" was typical of intellectual elites in the West in its preference for public policy devoted to reshaping society. It was the inclination to social engineering manifest in the civil rights movement that took liberalism out of the mainstream of American politics.19

The counterthrust of the Reagan years was predictable. On the economic side we have already noted that the retreat from statism began during the second New Deal. During the prosperity of the postwar decades the swing to liberalism's libertarian pole was accelerated. While there was much hand wringing about government cost and the high taxes required to fund welfare programs (today called entitlement programs), there was little inclination among Republican libertarian liberals to remove the cushions that the New Deal had installed in the economy. Libertarians now talked of a social-service net that would let no one starve. Nevertheless, antigovernment bias persisted.

The libertarian-liberal victory of the Reagan years was played out on a world stage. The Cold War was fought against a totalitarian power and tended to bring statism into more disrepute, even while its exigencies caused a growth in government power and expenditures at home. Ultimately, the collapse of the world Communist movement gave a powerful impetus to the idea of a market-economy mechanism and privatization. These economic resonances of libertarian liberalism were bandied about in Eastern Europe with
the same fervor that "class struggle" once was. At home it was thought that even the public education system, once the stronghold of egalitarianism but now failing to develop the skilled work force requisite for an advanced industrial economy, would be improved by allowing the free market represented by the voucher system to work its wonders.

Unforeseen by libertarians was that, once the war was over and prosperity seemed assured, those hitherto neglected problems concerning race and social inequalities would be brought to the fore by liberalism playing its traditional role. As it turned out, whether such problems dealt with race or the destruction of the environment, they inevitably entailed increased government expenditures. Willy-nilly, American liberal politics became budget politics.

Unlike Europe, where the problem of class was uppermost, in America it was the unresolved problem of race that threatened, according to the Kerner Report of 1968, to split the nation into two contending parts. By the sixties the race problem had gained the highest priority on the liberal agenda. Accompanying the race question was a whole series of new problems: gender inequality, rights for the handicapped, gay rights, infants' rights, animal rights, and problems concerning the physical environment. Looming over all is the contentious question of abortion rights, which places the conundrum of the extent of human liberty in an entirely new context. It is a particularly vexing problem for conservatives, whose libertarian brand of liberalism would logically dictate a pro-abortion position. What greater liberty can there be than control over one's own body?

Now the best-informed and most activist constituency in the America electorate, Jews played an important role in the sundry "movements" that characterized the seventies and eighties. Survey research continued to find Jews "more liberal" than other groups. But sociologists who seemed most preoccupied with the problem did not often understand that liberalism was an ever-changing phenomenon. Their surveys failed to pay adequate attention to the fact that on certain issues impinging directly on the Jewish interest, such as affirmative action quotas, Jewish opinion was actually undergoing a significant transformation that placed Jews outside the
liberal consensus. This did not fully register since, on other issues such as support of welfare programs, the Jewish responses remained predictably liberal.

At the heart of that change was the long-range impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish mentalité. It undermined the optimistic assumption at the heart of liberalism, that there exists a "humanitarian spirit" or a "spirit of civilization" in the nation-state and the international order that could be mobilized to fill an ethical need. Most states had done little to rescue European Jewry during the Holocaust. Moreover, World War II and the postwar years contained some terrible lessons regarding the Soviet Union, a totalitarian state addicted to egalitarianism. For some it provided sufficient evidence that the American Founding Fathers had after all not been so far off the mark in their suspicion of state power. In both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, Jews had been subject to a special animus. The idea that the state itself might be malignant did not prevent most Jews from supporting the idea of a Jewish state. Many American Jews had come to believe that a state was a necessary step without which Jews would remain vulnerable. But there were some, like Hannah Arendt and Martin Buber and to some extent Judah Magnes, who saw even a Jewish state as retrogressive.

A second factor in transforming Jewish liberalism relates directly to the founding of that state in 1948. As early as 1940 the Zionist consensus had begun to change American Jewish political culture. After 1948 the care and support of the State of Israel became a major component of American Jewish identity. But support, as Brandeis had foreseen, did not mean that American Jews would have to settle there to build the new society. Rather, for American Zionists it meant political advocacy, the representation of Israel's case before the American seat of power. That, in turn, often required a partial abandoning of the universalism lying at the heart of Jewish liberalism. Increasingly Jewish liberals had to make difficult choices between the interests of Israel, the tenuous security of which required direct, sometimes preemptive use of military power, and such cherished universalist principles as the right of national self-determination, especially for Palestinians. The way Israel exercised power over its Palestinian population was particularly dis-
turbining to those Jewish liberals who had come to view civil rights as the central principle of liberalism.\textsuperscript{21}

Zionism particularized American Jewish political culture. It did something else as well. If with the creation of Israel Jewry reentered history, as Zionists were wont to claim, it seemed willy-nilly to draw American Jewry with it. American Jews came out from the behind-the-scenes role they traditionally played in politics as pundits, campaign managers, poll takers, the professionals, to become office holders and lobbyists. During the 1930s the number of Jews in Congress hovered around ten. The election of 1990 sent eight senators and thirty-three representatives to Congress. Today there are more PACs concerned with Israel and general Jewish causes than with the concerns of any other ethnic group. The result is a split in the Jewish electorate that is partly generational. Older Jewishly or Judaically committed Jews give the security of Israel the greatest priority and view the fulfillment of their liberal aspirations in terms of the welfare of the Jewish state. The younger group, strongly influenced by the war in Vietnam, is more concerned about traditional liberal values. Nurtured in America, many of these young liberals did not directly experience the bitter consequences that followed when Jews found themselves bereft of sovereign political power. Also, they were on a collision course with Israeli political culture, which was shaped by the power it exercised over an occupied people and by the need to assure its survival in a hostile region where it was often called upon to use its military power. Similarly, the separation of church and state, so central to the American Jewish sensibility, was less emphasized in Israel, where a Jewish state assured observant Jews the protected environment to live a religious life.

Another factor that altered the shape of Jewish liberalism in the sixties was the African American thrust finally to enter the mainstream of American life. The partnership between blacks and Jews on the civil rights issue had been well established before World War II. Jews had been instrumental in supporting black defense organizations like the NAACP, furnishing leadership training and legal resources, and supporting black colleges. During the twenties Louis Marshall, president of the American Jewish Committee, spon-
sored antilynching and anti-Ku Klux Klan legislation. Jewish impresarios played a major role in opening American popular culture to black artists. The affinity between blacks and Jews, which may have been based on a common feeling of victimization, was also reflected in their voting behavior. Politically both groups had found a niche in the left wing of the Democratic party during the New Deal period. They became Roosevelt's staunchest supporters.

If during the thirties there were worrisome signs of disharmony caused by the antisemitic oratory of black street-corner preachers and the targeting of Jewish stores for looting during several riots, it was underplayed in the Jewish press. That remained true even when some black spokesmen, including W. E. B. DuBois, opposed the admission of Jewish refugees, insisting that Germany had a legitimate grievance against Jews. One historian has suggested that Jewish support for black causes was a way for Jews to broaden their own rights without becoming conspicuous by advocating their group interest in creating a more open society. Whatever the motive, American Jews played an important role in advocating that equality be fully extended to the nation's African American citizens.

By the 1960s the black-Jewish linkage had begun to wear thin. A new group of younger black leaders pushed Jews out of leadership positions in the civil rights movement. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict serves as a historical marker for Jewish splitting off from a liberalism now almost wholly dominated by the civil rights issue. Preoccupied with the seeming intractability of the race problem, the left wing of liberalism advocated special entitlement laws to hasten the goal of black equality. Representative of such laws was affirmative action, which required quotas. Most Jews opposed the abandonment of the merit system that had smoothed their path to achievement of middle-class status in prior decades and protected their access to civil service employment.

By 1990 the Jewish liberal profile showed a marked differentiation on other liberal issues requiring direct government intervention. Blacks replaced Jews as the most intensely liberal-minded group in the electorate, especially on issues concerning government programs to assist minority groups. The Jewish liberal often found himself compelled to choose between the Jewish interest and the
liberal position. The polarization was widened by a growing sense that the black leadership was antisemitic. Leaders like Jesse Jackson reintroduced antisemitic currency, which had been all but ruled out in the political dialogue. Beneath it all was the question of resource allocation. Blacks, adopting the posture of an internal Third World nation, argued that monies given and lent to Israel would find better use in rehabilitating the people of the inner city. The argument then turned on the "who gets what" or spoils question, which has always been central in American politics.

Another reason for the Jewish swing to libertarian liberalism relates to what we may loosely identify as the American Jewish success story. It is no secret that by the 1960s Jews had achieved a numerically disproportionate position in the technocratic, cultural, governmental, and managerial elites who administer and shape American society. They are the ethnic group with the nation's highest per capita income and the highest professionalization. In the 1920s, when the foundations for that achievement were put in place, middle-class station was often achieved by aspiring Jews against considerable resistance and at great sacrifice by families living on the economic margin. There was an investment made in human capital. A son was sent to law school or medical school by the earnings of the entire family. Although there was some "suicidal altruism," that is, Jews who favored a public policy that automatically granted special advantage to victimized minorities as compensation, most Jews opposed policies that in the name of justice abandoned merit. Their own achievement stemmed from an individual effort in a free society. They had adhered to the rules, which had now been abandoned. Government-sponsored programs to raise specific groups to a level that Jews had achieved on their own did not sit well. In entrance professions like teaching, long a favorite channel for aspiring young Jews, affirmative action translated into blocked mobility channels, the equivalent of employment discrimination.

Much that was statist and egalitarian was now bound up with the race question. Some Jewish thinkers undoubtedly were aware that it was the Communist party, following the dictates contained in Stalin's writing on the national question, that advocated a highly separatist policy to solve the race problem. When the party
fell further into disrepute among Jews because of its hostility toward Israel and the undeniable evidence of virulent antisemitism in the Soviet Union and Poland, its stock declined even more. The capture of the “Negro question” by the extreme Left made it anathema to many Jews.25

Reinforcing all these reasons was a historical change that went almost unnoticed by social scientists. The institutions that supplied the motor force of the Jewish liberal enterprise, the Jewish labor movement, the Forwards, Workmen’s Circle, and the dozens of socialist-minded fraternities and summer camps, had by 1990 virtually vanished from the scene. Once the quintessential liberal agency for secular Jews, the American Jewish Congress is but a bare shadow of itself and has difficulty staying in business. Pressed by a triumphalist Orthodox branch, the Conservative and Reform movements have grown far more concerned with their Jewishness, which, we have seen, acts as a brake on highly universalistic liberal causes. By 1988 the Liberal party of New York State drew fewer voters than the Conservative party and was virtually defunct. The agencies that traditionally drew Jews to liberalism are much diminished in influence.

This does not mean that Jewish liberalism has totally lost its distinctive idealism. There is no scarcity of Jews who call on the political process and the state to do more, to seek justice. The need to search out the most pressing current inequity is insufficient to explain why so many young Jews continue to be political activists for causes as widely different as world peace and the welfare of striped bass in the Hudson. They want to instill a humanitarian conscience into the political process. Idealism is still a prized quality in American Jewish political culture.

On the surface, liberal politics is issue oriented, but beneath is the politics of redemption. It is that characteristic of Jewish liberalism that makes it so difficult to carry forward transactional politics, the kind preferred by American political culture. Dealing with prophets whose politics are based on righteousness is never an easy task. The issues of peace, the environment, or the homeless continue to draw a disproportionate number of liberal Jews, but they do not easily lend themselves to the politics of the possible. There
has developed over the generations a distinctive Jewish political style that places a high premium on commitment, on giving oneself over to the cause. In the first generation it was called *ibergegeben-kayt*, which, translated from the Yiddish, means "devotedness." This phenomenon also needs to be taken into account in explaining the persistence of Jewish liberalism. Such liberals reject the contemporary solutions that place so much faith in the free market economy not because they favor socialism, as did an important segment of the first generation. One suspects that the new generation does not understand the difference between a market and a command economy, and the relationship this distinction bears to the two kinds of liberalism. They reject the market economy as a mechanism that cares little about those who cannot make it or about what is happening to the environment. For the liberal *mentalité*, life should be more than merely the providing of goods and services. It should have transcendence.

Taking leave from the left wing of the liberal movement did not mean that Jewish liberals became politically homeless. In some sense the Jewish electorate has moved closer to the American mainstream. The old ethnic and regional constituencies that buttressed the New Deal have gradually been homogenized out of existence. The defeat of McGovern in 1972 may have been the last hurrah of the old liberalism. The program of the statist liberals has been largely rejected by the American electorate. Jewish liberalism today is less committed to government-sponsored social engineering and more particularistic in coming to terms with the Jewish interest when it is in conflict with a universalistic one. But Jews remain well within the liberal camp of the Democratic party. Fifty percent of the campaign funds of that party is raised by Jews, and 68 percent of its vote in a recent election went to the liberal candidate (Dukakis), compared with 46 percent of the general electorate. But that is a far cry from the over 90 percent awarded to Roosevelt in 1940 and 1944. Being Jewish still remains a more powerful determinant of the Jewish vote than being rich. In California 65 percent of Jewish voters with an annual income of over seventy-five thousand dollars voted for the Democratic candidate Diane Feinstein, com-
pared with 38 percent of non-Jews in the same income bracket. Seventy-three percent identify themselves as liberal, compared with 42.19 percent of non-Jews. Moreover, on liberal issues wealthy Jews differ hardly at all in their voting preference from less wealthy ones.26 But Jewish liberalism has changed its orientation from an emphasis on egalitarianism to an emphasis on libertarianism. That has happened because it has undergone two processes since World War II, Judaization and Americanization, that make it different from what it once was.

In historical terms, the Jewish political posture corresponds roughly to the liberalism of the second New Deal, which abandoned social engineering in favor of indirect regulation of the economy. Jews continue to favor an active regulatory role for the state but they want it done through existing instruments, the taxing power, monetary policy, rather than through direct intrusions like affirmative action. It is in the area of taxation and spending that the sharpest differentiation occurs between Jewish liberalism and that of the general white liberal voter. Despite their considerable per capita income, Jews are more inclined to favor high taxes to fund entitlement programs. For example, they give much greater support to programs like Aid to Dependent Children, all forms of income maintenance programs, even support for AIDS research and care, but they overwhelmingly reject restructuring the economy to prevent great disparities of wealth, direct intrusion such as affirmative action quotas, censorship of pornography, and regulation of gay lifestyle, and they are more than twice as likely as their fellow Americans to support abortions without restriction.27

In a word, there has developed an antistatist libertarian component in Jewish liberalism. As Jews see it, job placement, sexual orientation, family planning, and religion are in the private realm and therefore by right ought to be free of government interference. It is not, however, a complete libertarianism. Like other Americans, Jews have come to favor capital punishment, but in lower percentages. Jews, therefore, are no longer so politically deviant, especially if one compares their political profile with that of other highly educated, high-income groups. Their liberalism has been open minded, tolerant, forward looking, peace oriented, and humanitarian, yet also aware of its own group interest. It has lost confidence
that a just society can be created by government fiat. It is the liberalism of a secular, highly individuated, firmly middle-class yet ethnically conscious community. That should not surprise us. What else could it have been?

Notes


25. For a recent elaboration of how the race question has been exploited to alter liberal assumptions from equality to preference, see Jim Sleeper, The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race (New York: Norton, 1990).