Blacks in the Jewish Mind

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Jews and Racial Integration in the North, 1945–1966

Jewish life is social, rather than spiritual. . . . One half of Jewish identity is the product of Gentile exclusiveness and the other half is the product of Jewish association. —Mordecai Kaplan

All too often, the legitimate association of Jews with each other for relevant group purposes is used as a rationale for irrelevant exclusion of others. —Manheim Shapiro

From the time that the Supreme Court declared race segregation in public schools unconstitutional on May 17, 1954, until around 1960, the story of racial segregation and the battle to end it was primarily a story of the South and the border region, where segregation was enforced as a matter of law. But by 1960 the number of Black Americans living in Northern cities had swelled considerably, moving the focus of the fight for equality to the North. Between 1950 and 1960 the twelve largest cities gained nearly two million Black residents. Whereas in 1950 the resident population of only one of these cities contained a Black component approaching 20 percent, by 1960 Blacks made up a fifth of the population in seven and a majority of the population in Washington, D.C.¹ The problem of Black inequality was no longer a problem primarily associated with the Mississippi Delta or the newly emerging cities of the South but rather affected the big cities of the North (and the West) such as New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, as well as a host of smaller cities.² While segregation by race or ethnicity was outlawed in the North, residential patterns tended to reflect the voluntary decisions of individuals who preferred to live close to others of the same cultural background, giving rise to a spatial arrangement
that included substantial ethnic and racial segregation. The existence of these subcommunities became more important for many white ethnics, whose ties to an ethnic subculture had become more tenuous in cities where public interactions between individuals were increasingly fluid.\(^3\)

In an environment in which racial consciousness had been raised to new heights by the civil rights movement, the comparatively depressed condition of Black neighborhoods became increasingly obvious. The continued migration from the South of Blacks with poor job skills and low levels of education had combined with a changing economy, increased suburbanization, and continuing racial prejudice to intensify the physical deprivation and isolation experienced by Black communities. The pattern of segregation by ethnic subcommunity gave many the impression that discrimination and prejudice in the North were at the heart of the problem of racial inequality, just as it had been in the South, and suggested that the existing patterns of informal group interaction would have to be substantially modified.

Inevitably, American Jews found themselves at a peculiar impasse with regard to the demands for racial integration. As Jews gained wider acceptance and continued to assimilate, living lives that in their most important aspects were increasingly similar to the lives of other Americans, a concrete and distinct Jewish culture continued to recede. American Jews still identified as Jews, but that identification was based far less on the religio-cultural structure that earlier generations of American Jews had than on a sense of Jewish belonging and community. The sociologist Milton Gordon’s distinction between the cultural behavior patterns and the social structure of ethnic groups was perhaps nowhere more relevant than in the case of the Jews.\(^4\) Gordon identified a pattern whereby ethnic groups in America subordinate their ethnic viewpoints in the sphere of public life but privately rely heavily on ethnic-based social institutions. American Jews, in large measure, expressed their identity as Jews by associating with and living among other Jews, which put the very essence of Jewish identity on a collision course with the growing civil rights demand for racial integration. The two dominant modes of postwar Jewish identity, Jewish support for civil rights and the maintenance of autonomous Jewish communities, came into direct conflict.
The Jewish Problem with Integration

The question of equality for Black Americans in the Northern cities was far more complicated than it had been in the rigidly segregated Jim Crow South. The most prominent Black spokespersons and their white allies adhered to a program of full and equal citizenship for Black Americans, but as it became less clear what true equality really meant in the North, confusion set in over the best way to go about achieving it. "Equality under the new conditions of urban life," wrote the historian of race and nationality Oscar Handlin, "is far more complex than under the rigidly defined relationships of the Jim Crow system. . . . [In the North] the law does not single the Negro out for special liabilities. . . . Yet the Black man remains unequal."5 The Black American in the North suffered from a different kind of separateness, termed de facto segregation, "the result of his concentration in distinct residential districts and the product of a cycle in which lack of skill condemns him to inferior jobs, poor income, poor ghetto housing and slum schools."6 In this sense, the obstacles to social and economic mobility that Blacks faced were similar to those faced by other groups that migrated in large numbers to America's cities. There were, however, a number of substantial differences that made the problems of Black Americans more difficult to overcome. First, the lines that separated white ethnic groups were clearly nowhere as strong as the residential and occupational color line that served to exclude Blacks.7 In general, Black adjustment was made more difficult by dark skin and the low status conferred upon those who possessed it. The second difference was the changed spatial and political arrangement of the large metropolitan areas in the years after World War II. Thanks to a combination of postwar affluence, new technology in home building, and federal government subsidies, large numbers of white Americans in the late 1940s and 1950s realized their dream of home ownership and left the cities for newly built suburban communities. The infiltration of Blacks into the large cities of the North after the war was accompanied by a commensurate departure of a newly expanded white middle class.8 White suburbanization was accompanied by the relocation of businesses and jobs to the suburbs and the wider use of automobiles, both of which served to magnify the social differentiation among income groups separated not only by geography but by access to jobs and services. In short, while Blacks possessed significant political power in the cities by the late 1950s, the problem they encountered, according to one analyst of the race crisis, "is that this new political power is being exercised in a governmental unit,
the suburb-constricted city, which is totally inadequate to meet the Negro's many problems." 9

All of these developments pointed to the fact that the disabilities that afflicted Black Americans as a result of generations of deprivation would not immediately disappear once legal obstacles were abrogated. Nevertheless, the successes of the legal battle against segregation in the South proved powerful enough so that the one-dimensional nature of the race problem there was superimposed on the multidimensional nature of the problem in the North. Most civil rights leaders came to regard racial segregation as the root cause of Black inequality, and racial balance as the only solution. In arriving at the conclusions they did and in sticking with their Southern strategies, one historian wrote of the civil rights activists, "they have paradoxically accepted the contention of the white supremacist that there is really no difference between the North and the South, that the one region does directly by law what the other does indirectly by practice." 10

The Black demand for a new order in the North came almost inevitably on the heels of the decolonization of Africa and the emergence of independent African states. In less than twenty years after the end of World War II, thirty-one independent Black African nations had been formed. In identifying with the new countries of Africa, Black Americans were not really rekindling their identities as long-lost Africans as much as they were reshaping their identities as Americans and assuming a more bold and assertive posture. This assertiveness manifested itself not only in student sit-ins in the South beginning in 1960, in the fight of young Blacks like James Meredith for desegregated public schools and universities, or in the efforts of ordinary Black Southerners who marched past hostile crowds in Montgomery and elsewhere but also in the general commitment of the major civil rights organizations to "direct action" demonstrations in the North. The mood was captured in the phrase "New Negro" and differed from all similar phases in Black history in that this time a significant number of whites, bolstered by rising incomes and a deepened appreciation for the injustices suffered by Blacks, were sympathetic toward Black efforts to gain full legal equality. 11 As one magazine editorial put it, "the Negro revolution may be blocked here and diverted there, but it cannot be stopped.... Now, with a high and marvelous anger, [Blacks] take to the picket lines, the streets and the jails, brimming with the assurance that they sacrifice in behalf of their children's freedom." 12

One of the more significant developments in the civil rights movement of the early 1960s was a growing hostility on the part of militants of all
races toward white liberals and Black moderates, who were accused of being committed to "gradualism," "legalism," and compromise. "The liberal's anguish stems from one of those tenacious liberal illusions," wrote one militant, "that, contrary evidence notwithstanding, they could achieve integration at no cost or inconvenience to themselves." 13 Civil rights militants downplayed the fact that the climate for significant racial change had been largely achieved by white liberals and that some of the demands being made by Blacks regarding the end of de facto segregation, such as bussing white children into predominantly Black schools to achieve racial balance, appeared antithetical to certain liberal ideals. 14 Nevertheless, Jews were implicated in the militant attacks if for no other reason than their preponderance among postwar liberals. The white liberal who is attacked as a hypocrite "is generally (even if this is not spelled out) the white Jewish liberal," wrote the sociologist Nathan Glazer, "and it could hardly be otherwise, in view of the predominance of Jews among liberals." 15 Even after the legal victories that culminated in the 1954 Brown decision, Jewish liberalism continued to manifest itself in support for liberal political candidates and in Jews' disproportionate involvement in civil rights groups like the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Also noteworthy was the work of Jewish activists like Arnold Aronson of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Isaiah Minkoff of the National Jewish Community Relations Council, Rabbi Joachim Prinz of the American Jewish Congress, Kivie Kaplan of the NAACP, and Joseph Rauh of Americans for Democratic Action, all of whom played outstanding roles in organizing the historic March on Washington in the summer of 1963 and the passage of the 1964 and 1965 civil rights acts, the crowning achievements of the civil rights revolution. 16

But Jews were implicated in the militant demands for integration in another, more problematic way. In a widely read article, Nathan Glazer explained that mandatory racial integration challenged group life in the North as no other ethnic group demands ever had before it and that for many white ethnics this constituted an unfair burden. Social networks that run along ethnic, religious, and racial lines largely determined an individual's fate, wrote Glazer, but the "new Negro demands challenge the right to maintain these sub-communities far more radically than the demands of any other group in history . . . the force of present-day Negro demands is that the sub-community, because it either protects privileges or creates inequality, has no right to exist." 17 Put another way, the pressure for in-
tegration brought to bear by civil rights activists differed qualitatively from that of earlier immigrant groups in that it rejected the maintenance and improvement of the ghetto in favor of its dissolution.\textsuperscript{18}

But as American Jews moved away from the earlier forms of religious and cultural expression, Jewish identity came to rely even more intensely on Jewish fraternization. The sociologist Charles Liebman has suggested with regard to Jewish identity in the postwar period that “the essence of American Jewish identity, the core meaning of American Judaism for many American Jews, may very well be their social ties to one another.”\textsuperscript{19} It was not only that Jews in the postwar United States felt more comfortable among other Jews but that, as the historian Edward Shapiro points out, “associational Jewishness was the best way, and for some the only way, they knew of assuring Jewish continuity.”\textsuperscript{20} Other important critics have lent this development the gloss of their own sociological acumen. Addressing his colleagues in the Rabbinical Assembly in 1959, the founder of Reconstructionism, Mordecai Kaplan, wrote that “Jewish life is social, rather than spiritual. . . . One half of Jewish identity is the product of Gentile exclusiveness and the other half is the product of Jewish association.”\textsuperscript{21} The Jewish critic Leonard Fein has similarly described American Judaism as communal, rather than theological. “Ours is not a personal testament, but a collective and public commitment. . . . What defines the Jews \textit{as Jews} is community: not values, not ideology.”\textsuperscript{22}

The most popular forms of Jewish expression in the postwar decades continued to be contributing widely to Jewish organizations, philanthropies, and synagogues, living in close proximity to other Jews, and sending offspring to Jewish summer camps—actions that brought Jews into social proximity.\textsuperscript{23} This characteristic of American Jewish life has sometimes been called the “civil religion” of American Jewry, a reference to the specific way in which American Jews have, despite an enormous amount of ideological disunity, managed to build an identity as one component of \textit{K*lal Yisrael}, or the “people of Israel.”\textsuperscript{24} Faced with the familiar modern dilemma of balancing full integration with maintaining group distinctiveness, American Jews managed through their secular organizations to “achieve unity, purpose, and identity as a moral community which transcends (without excluding) the overtly religious ideology and practice of the denominational movements of American Judaism.”\textsuperscript{25} Without fully recognizing that they were doing so, American Jews created an American Jewish polity, a “matrix of voluntary organizations and associations which carry out functions of community wide concern.”\textsuperscript{26} Beyond the federation, an organi-
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zational structure designed to reduce the costs and burdens on potential contributors of multiple charitable campaigns, other secular organizations, such as the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, Hadassah, B’nai B’rith, and synagogue-based social clubs, provided a framework for identification and social contact within the context of a respectable communal rationale. The concerns of the major Jewish organizations may have shifted significantly during the postwar era, from, say, an emphasis on immigration settlement to Jewish defense and support for Israel, but there is little doubt that the Jewish polity had become the principal focus of Jewish religious faith and unity in America.

Nothing, however, seemed to bring Jews closer together than the neighborhoods in which they lived. The historian Deborah Dash Moore has shown that in the 1950s second- and third-generation Jews continued to cluster in predominantly Jewish communities at almost the same rate as the Jews of the immigrant generation, even though new residential opportunities were opening up. In these ethnic enclaves, Jews were able to express their Jewishness unselfconsciously. “They turned to their neighborhoods to translate what Jewishness meant into a livable reality and to their public institutions to give expression to the varied content of Jewish ethnicity,” Moore explains. The associational patterns of the Jewish neighborhood were strengthened with networks of occupational ties. “Through residential concentration, New York Jews often acquired a psychological attitude of a majority, in a country where they were a small minority. The clustering of thousands of Jews into city neighborhoods made Jewish living comfortable and natural.” In New York and other large cities, temples and synagogues as institutions espousing particular religious doctrines had become peripheral to the interests of most Jews. Philanthropic, mutual-aid, and fraternal organizations had emerged as the principle outlet for Jewish extracurricular activities.

Even during what Nathan Glazer termed the “Jewish Revival” of the 1950s, American Jews did not really demonstrate any strong religious drive but rather looked to the flourishing new synagogues and community centers to meet the social needs of individual Jews. In his search to find a basis for Jewish continuity in the postwar decades, Glazer focused on the attraction of the “holy community,” the idea that Jews are bound together, rather than on the acceptance of a specific set of beliefs. For this reason, Glazer wrote, “since the Second World War, Jews have moved from one concentrated Jewish area only to create new ones—and largely out of their own desires.”

That Jewish self-segregation had become more important with the thin-
ning of Jewish identity in the postwar decades can be seen in a *Commentary* article from 1958, in which a Jewish writer tells of the difficulties he faced when he considered selling his North Shore Long Island home to a non-Jewish family. The author writes that the Jews were “herding” themselves back into ghettos, not out of a fear of anti-Semitism, but out of a fear of their own Jewishness. “They have so few positive reasons why they’re Jews they’re afraid to live in a mixed area where they might have to stand up and be identified. So they flock to these all-Jewish communities where they can be anonymous and the problem doesn’t exist.” The tone of the article is one of exasperation at these parochial attitudes, but the author finally relented and sold his home to Jews. “So North Shore Community Homes can relax now,” the article concluded.32

That Black demands for racial integration would be particularly troublesome for Jewish communities did not escape the notice of some Black activists. While the Black image of the Jew as a nonwhite would go through a significant transition in the late 1960s, inspiring a whole new dynamic in race relations, a number of Black writers acknowledged that Blacks traditionally viewed Jews as something other than just another white ethnic group.33 In the late 1940s James Baldwin wrote that Blacks believe the Jew “has suffered enough himself to know what suffering means” and that an “understanding is expected of the Jew such as none but the most naive and visionary Negro has ever expected of the American gentile.”34 But in terms of racial integration, at least one well-known Black journalist suggested that Jewish racial otherness in some cities was the single greatest obstacle to achieving racial balance. In his book *The Negro Revolt*, Louis Lomax wrote that while Jews were more than just another group of whites, “they are a people with a tradition, which, as both a theoretical and practical matter, offends Negroes.”35 Lomax accused the Jews of being more opposed to integration than other whites not because they hated or discriminated against Blacks but because they strove to realize that element of their Jewishness that called for “togetherness.” Lomax believed that Blacks in cities with large Jewish populations were discriminated against, not primarily because they were Black but because they were gentiles. Following this logic, Lomax asked a series of pertinent questions: “How do you satisfy a Jew’s right to live among other Jews without abrogating my right to rent or buy the house next to his? What modern Solomon can mediate the conflict that arises when I try to rent a store on Harlem’s 125th Street from a Jewish landlord who wants another Jew to have the space?” While the Black American was inspired by the ambition “to get
the hell out of the Negro ghetto” as soon as he could, Lomax wrote, the Jew was “motivated in precisely the opposite direction.” 36

Other civil rights activists were less understanding of Jewish “togetherness” than Lomax, and this led to virulent attacks on the predominantly Jewish leadership of the garment trade unions. 37 The largest Jewish-led unions, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and the United Hebrew Trades, had been historically friendlier toward Blacks than most other trade unions, but it was precisely this friendliness that made them, rather than the more exclusionary Irish and Italian building trades unions, the target of civil rights activists. 38 Despite the unions' historical willingness to reach out to Blacks, by the 1960s garment union old-timers were engaging in strategies designed to keep recently hired Black and Puerto Rican employees out of the increasingly scarce better-paying jobs. 39 But the ILGWU’s efforts to respond to the shrinking of the white ethnic labor pool by hiring Blacks and Puerto Ricans in the first place reveals that the attack on the Jewish-led labor unions as an enclave of Jewish solidarity was anachronistic. While the unions had been in the past perhaps the most important ethnic-based organizations for Jews, by the time of the civil rights attacks they had become increasingly less Jewish, and young Jews were not looking to them as a source of future economic mobility or Jewish communal sustenance. While Jewish leaders continued to dominate the unions, by the late 1950s they were dealing increasingly with non-Jewish workers. 40

Nevertheless, in pointing out the importance to Jews of voluntary association, Black critics like Lomax exhibited keen insight. The decline of the Jewish-dominated unions was just one element of the broader disappearance of the immigrant stamp on Jewish life, and many Jews sought to associate closely with Jews in other venues precisely because the institutions of the immigrant generation were dying. The evolution of civil rights liberalism from desegregation in the South to racial integration in the North had, in a sense, forced Jews to decide the mode of identity to which they were most committed: liberalism or community. As the walls of exclusion began to fall, the need for Jews to prove that they were like everyone else began to give way to a need to prove that they were still somehow different. Jewish commitment to liberalism and the cause of equal rights for all had been, for more than a decade, the predominant mode of expressing that difference. By clinging to the liberal ideal of full equality for individuals and aligning themselves with Blacks, American Jews were assured that they were performing a very particular Jewish moral function. But the advent
of the integration movement in the North forced Jews to ask themselves the meaning of this stance. Black demands for integration and racial balance posed serious questions for Jews dependent for a living Jewish identity on neighborhood uniformity, Jewish community centers, day schools, summer camps, and other communal arrangements.

Aware of this conflict, a small number of Jewish writers began to question the assumptions upon which many Jews predicated their unconditional alliance with the civil rights movement. C. Bezalel Sherman, a sociologist and writer associated with the Labor Zionist monthly *Jewish Frontier*, agreed that Jews had a responsibility to support Black rights but argued that the headlong stride for complete racial balance would only intensify de facto segregation and that it would be particularly deleterious for the Jewish community, for whom the loss of neighborhood schools would severely impact attendance at afternoon schools. “Jewish education, the most important instrument of Jewish group survival, would thus be destroyed to the benefit of no one.”

Abraham Duker, the Yeshiva University historian and librarian, shared Sherman’s concern. Duker believed that proposals to bus children out of neighborhood schools to achieve greater racial balance posed a serious threat. “*[W]e . . . are struggling for cultural and religious survival, and as a group we have rights to both. Negro spokesmen have shown little understanding of this aspect of Jewish life.*”

For the most part, though, the identification with the struggle of Blacks proved too powerful for liberal Jewish communal leaders to realistically assess the condition of the Jewish community and its interests relating to racial integration. Rather than deal openly with the major cultural problems associated with growing freedom and assimilation, liberal Jewish leaders defined the well-being of the Jewish community as one with the success of an increasingly militant fight for racial integration. Many believed that Jewish ambivalence over any aspect of the militant civil rights program itself posed the greatest threat to American Jews as Jews, and identified integration as a moral imperative on which the future of the Jews in the United States was staked. Obviously aware of the problems of Jewish communal erosion, many of these leaders argued that, by providing the Jewish community with an opportunity to renew its commitment to the Jewish ethical tradition, the new militance of the civil rights movement would work to strengthen Jewish identity. In this sense, Jewish continuity and survival had become so linked in the mind of liberal Jewish leaders with active participation in the fight for racial integration that the possibility of
a clash between Jewish communal survival and the civil rights movement was rarely entertained.

Jewish Civil Rights Militants and Integration

The idea that the integrity of the American Jewish community was inextricably linked to the growing militance of civil rights protest was perhaps most memorably stated at the historic March on Washington in August 1963 by Rabbi Joachim Prinz of the American Jewish Congress, a refugee from Nazi Germany. Rabbi Prinz declared that the Jewish historic experience of three and a half thousand years commanded that Jews speak out. “[I]t is not merely sympathy and compassion for the Black people of America that motivates us,” Prinz declared. “It is above all and beyond all such sympathies and emotions a sense of complete identification and solidarity born of our own painful historical experience.” Without making explicit his support for a program of full integration, Rabbi Prinz made it known that there were no Jewish concerns about integration that superseded the importance of support for the militant civil rights program. “Even those who believe that we have our own problems and should have little time to meddle in this understand that we would forfeit our place in America as a spiritual and religious force if we were to stay out.”43

Abraham Joshua Heschel, perhaps the most influential Jewish theologian of the postwar period, also maintained that the march toward full racial integration could result in a spiritual renewal for American Jews. A professor of ethics and Jewish mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary and a refugee from Nazi Germany, Heschel became the chief spiritual spokesman for American Judaism during the 1950s and 60s. Heschel was extremely active in the civil rights movement and marched alongside Martin Luther King and Ralph Bunche at the head of the famous 1963 civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery. But he made his biggest splash two years before the march, at the 1963 National Conference on Religion and Race in Chicago. At this centennial commemoration for Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, Heschel noted that the first racial dialogue took place between Moses and Pharaoh, and he described racism as the world’s greatest threat to mankind.44 Heschel believed strongly that nobody was free of the obligation to be a civil rights activist, proclaiming at one point that “There is an evil which most of us condone and are even guilty
of: *indifference to evil*" and excoriating all Americans for their complicity in the evil of racial injustice. "Some are guilty, but all are responsible."45 A genuinely powerful and original theologian, Heschel went so far as to define the Jewish community in relationship to the struggle for civil rights. Speaking directly to his coreligionists, Heschel articulated what became perhaps the most characteristic impulse of liberal Jewish expression. "The plight of the Negro must become our most important concern. Seen in the light of our religious tradition, the Negro problem is God's gift to America, the test of our integrity, a magnificent spiritual opportunity."46

By the early 1960s, large numbers of American Jewish leaders and intellectuals had identified so strongly with Heschel's belief that they neglected to address the specific complications for Jews that stemmed from the prospect of unimpeded racial integration. As race militants, these Jewish spokespersons joined in the attack on the white middle class in general and on the Jewish middle class in particular, identifying Jewish purpose with civil rights militance and often substituting civil rights activism for the more difficult task of developing a sustainable, functional mode of Jewish living in the United States. These Jewish critics showed little sympathy for middle-class Jews caught between their belief in racial justice and their desire to maintain distinctive Jewish communities and institutions in both the cities and the suburbs of postwar America.

One of the more outspoken critics was Charles Silberman, a journalist and editor at *Fortune* magazine, whose widely read and highly regarded 1964 volume, *Crisis in Black and White*, was one of the first efforts to attack the theory that the problems of Blacks in Northern cities were similar to those of other immigrants and to emphasize the special difficulties caused by color and race discrimination.47 Silberman believed that American Jews had not adequately understood the shift in the civil rights struggle from the early legal battles to the more militant techniques of the early 1960s. "The fight for racial justice has radically changed character and direction in the past several years, but we Jews—and by 'we Jews' I mean the leadership of the major Jewish religious and lay organizations, not just our benighted rank and file—have not changed with it," Silberman wrote.48 Silberman insisted that as a "committed Jew," he was sure that "our own survival is at stake, for our inaction undermines that passion for freedom and that commitment to justice which always have been a justification of our survival as a people."49 Attacking the Jewish middle class for being bound to material gain and for failing to support serious social change, Silberman described their mind-set: "We’d like to participate in the fight
for racial justice, all right, but not if it means that we must soil the middle-
class garments of respectability all of us—rabbis and laymen—have learned
to wear."

Ironically, at the same time that he excoriated the middle class for its lack of involvement in the civil rights struggle, Silberman castigated white liberals for their support of Black causes, which had kept Blacks in a state of dependency. "White philanthropy, white liberalism, white sympathy and support... have had a similar effect of preventing African-Americans from standing on their feet." The result, according to Silberman, "has been a serious strain between African-Americans and white liberals; including... Jewish white liberals." Perhaps the most radical attack by a Jewish leader on middle-class Jews with regard to civil rights was that of the well-known rabbi and activist Arnold Jacob Wolf. In his essay "The Negro Revolution and Jewish Theology," Wolf accused the entire Jewish community of being incurably racist and "bourgeois." For Wolf, the Jews were the people who kept the racist and evil capitalist system going. Wolf explained that Jews, like the people in his own congregation, were largely entrepreneurs, advertising executives, promoters, small manufacturers, salespeople, and tax experts whose function in American society it was "to grease the wheels of capitalism—that very capitalism which first fires and last hires Negro workers, that very capitalism whose profits are squeezed from machines destined to displace the Negro as America's muscle." Wolf argued that the "American Jew lives by his superiority to and distance from the American Negro and the American poor" and that the Jewish community made showy gestures that looked supportive of Black rights but nevertheless did not put at risk the Jews' own position in America. The Jew "will approve of integration, but oppose every possible step toward it. He will support non-violence... but never participate in direct action.... The bourgeois Jew will hold art fairs for civil rights organizations and not demand to know where the money goes, because he does not really care."

After upbraiding American Jews for their alignment with ineffectual Democratic policies, Wolf issued a political litmus test of his own, surmising that Jews must serve God politically by becoming a "pressure group for higher taxation... for mental health... [and] for civil rights."

The Jewish race militants were so convinced of the moral primacy of civil rights and that the fate of the Jews was tied to a program of militant activism that at least one of them drew an analogy between Jewish hesitance on racial integration and the indifference of average Germans to the Holocaust. Rabbi Henry Cohen of Philadelphia insisted that "some Jews are
as indifferent to the fate of the Negro as were so many Germans to the fate of the Jew! But while Cohen chose the citizens of Nazi Germany as a mode of comparison, two prominent Jewish sociologists, B. Z. Sobel and May L. Sobel, were convinced that middle-class Jews were more analogous to the antebellum Quakers. The Sobels worried about Jewish continuity, but they identified the threat to continuity in the possible Jewish withdrawal from civil rights activism, not in the challenge posed by racial integration to Jewish association. It was their opinion that the pressure from rank-and-file Jews on Jewish organizations to withdraw from the civil rights movement was leading the Jewish community the way of the Quakers. The Quaker church, the Sobels explained, had been opposed to slavery before the Civil War and had cleansed its own house of slaveholders but had refused to take up cause with the abolitionists or to risk a North/South split in the church. They consequently lost support and membership, becoming a quaint but insignificant religious group because of their inability to “move beyond the level of liberalism which had become institutionalized by the 18th century.” The alleged Jewish withdrawal from civil rights was a similar case, and Jews were losing sight of their “central binding mission,” putting the Jewish community’s survival into serious doubt. The “Jews of the past saw in their lives a mission to live the Torah, to speak to the world of the one true God, and of a latter age to bear the message of prophetic justice and social melioration. There is no comparable central idea for them as a group in the 20th century,” the Sobels wrote. For the Sobels, the commitment to civil rights could now form the basis for solidarity and a “guiding idea” for the Jewish community. The Sobels urged community leaders to act as a “goad and a rod” to push the Jewish community into action, even in the face of open hostility. “Large-scale work in and with the Negro community must be undertaken, even in the face of a rebuff from the revolutionary Negro leadership, and work in the Jewish community should be intensified even in the face of violent reaction.”

That Jewish race militants saw the struggle for racial integration as the primary vehicle for a strong Jewish identity could be seen in the way some of them viewed the alienated Jewish youth from the North who made up such a large contingent of the civil rights volunteers in the South throughout the early 1960s. Charles Silberman believed that many of these youth had drifted away from Judaism because the Jewish community lacked a commitment to social action. “Can we find no way by which young Jews can participate in the civil rights movement as Jews?” he asked. Silberman was not alone in his belief that the way to stronger Jewish identity among
Jewish youth was through greater civil rights activism. Albert Chernin, the director of community consultation for the National Jewish Community Advisory Council, noted that many of the young Jewish students who took part in Freedom Summer in Mississippi in 1964 and did not identify as Jews were in fact acting as Jews but simply did not know it. According to Chernin, it was the job of Jewish community relations agencies to make them know it. A former Anti-Defamation League official, Murray Friedman, ventured to argue that the youngsters who participated in direct action protests in the South were acting as Jews in the sense that Judaism contains large doses of egalitarianism. “It is as if these boys were wearing their Yarmulkes without knowing it,” said Friedman. Marvin Schick, an orthodox Jewish writer and a New York City mayoral aid, even urged the orthodox community to meet alienated youth on their own turf. While he ruled out making religious compromises with this alienated youth, Schick felt that advocacy of civil rights by the orthodox community “can help to prepare the way for a relationship with alienated young Jews.”

But, by all indications, it was unlikely that the adoption of more militant civil rights activities by the Jewish rank-and-file could have inspired a closer connection with young Jews who had identified more strongly with left-leaning social movements. Many of these activists consciously rejected any Jewish motive for their actions. One young Jewish “freedom fighter” who participated in a symposium in 1965 insisted that “it would be more accurate to call my background progressive, rather than Jewish.” Another participant explained that he decided to participate in Mississippi in the summer of 1964 because he identified more with being an American than with being a Jew. “I got involved in this great conflict with myself as to my role as a Jewish American,” he explained. “Was I to be the one to be pushing for the development of the State of Israel? Was I a Jew in that sense, or was I an American? I concluded that I was an American and that this [civil rights] was the struggle that was being fought.” Another participant explained his problem with defining Jewishness as his motivation for participating in “Freedom Summer.” “The trouble with this question is that when we say, what is there about being a Jew that brought you down [South], well, all kinds of people are down, Christians are down, and agnostics and atheists.” The young man explained that he thought it was “destructive” to bring “one’s Jewish tradition and background into this.”

Similarly, the two most famous young Jews to participate in, and ultimately to give their lives to, the civil rights struggle in the South, Andrew
Goodman and Michael Schwerner, were quite ambivalent about their Jewish identity. These two idealists and civil rights martyrs were killed by white racists along with their Black companion, James Earl Chaney, in the summer of 1964 in Mississippi. It is reasonable to assume that Goodman was influenced more by his Communist background than by his Jewish background. Goodman’s parents were sympathizers who often held fundraisers in the 1950s in their Manhattan apartment for professors accused of Communist ties. The convicted Communist spy Alger Hiss was a visitor to the Goodman home. Schwerner identified himself as an atheist who believed in the infinite perfectibility of men. Deciding at age thirteen not to become a bar mitzvah, he later declared that he was not Jewish but rather “only” a man.67 There seems to have been an interesting generational dynamic going on among the Jews of the left which would become far more pronounced with the radicalization of the youth movement in the late 1960s. Whereas the promise of universal equality had made leftism in all its varieties appealing to earlier generations of young Jews marked with the indelible etchings of the Jewish ghetto, later generations of young Jews seemed to have absorbed much of the older generation’s universalism but little of the Jewish ghetto. It seems more accurate to say that those Jewish youth who found meaning only in civil rights activism had not been running away from a static or “irrelevant” Judaism but in fact had never really been affected by any meaningful Jewish experience. As the journalist Jack Newfield put it, the young alienated Jews were “the children of economic surplus and spiritual starvation who sought to give meaning to their lives by identifying them with a cause greater than their own personal needs.”68

The reaction of Jewish race militants to the issue of rising Black anti-Semitism revealed that, in some cases, their commitment to radical racial change transcended even the most rudimentary concerns about basic communal defense and safety. The most conspicuous instance of Black anti-Semitism was the growing popularity of the Black nationalist Nation of Islam. The seething poverty of most Black slums made the nationalist philosophy of the Black Muslims appealing. The Nation of Islam, which derived much of its philosophy from Marcus Garvey and the Moorish Temple Movement of Noble Drew Ali of the 1920s and 1930s, preached Black supremacy, racial segregation, social uplift, and economic self-reliance. The philosophy of the group, led by “Messenger of Allah” Elijah Muhammad and his second-in-command, Malcolm X, taught that Blacks were God’s original creation and that “out of the weak of the Black Nation, the present Caucasian race was created.” The central myth of the Black Muslims in-
volves a Black scientist named Yakub who created the evil white race in a cave laboratory as an experiment to spite God and his favorite tribe, the Black tribe of Shabazz. The first group of white people to emerge from Yakub’s cave were the Jews, who went on to inhabit Europe and become civilized. It is ironic that in attempting to explain the historical subjugation of Blacks, the Nation of Islam adopted Western, Christian, and even Jewish motifs in their mythology. Apparently, Elijah Muhammad himself was pegged for the biblical figure of Moses, charged with leading his people out of the United States, the Black man’s Egypt. While Jews were thought to be devils just like all other whites, they were singled out as especially malicious. “Jews are the Negro’s worst enemies among whites,” wrote the Black Muslim Minister Jeremiah X. “Unlike other whites, Jews make it a practice to study Negroes; thus they are able to get next to him [sic] better than other whites. He uses the knowledge thus obtained to get close to the Negro, thereby being in a position to stab him with a knife.”

It is noteworthy that despite the Black Muslim rejection of Christianity, the image of the Jew in Nation of Islam rhetoric remained pretty much the standard fare of Christian anti-Semitism—namely, that of the Jewish conspiratorial usurer, exploiter, and thief. In a standard speech at Temple Number Seven in Harlem, Malcolm X explained that the Jews “know how to rob you, they know how to be your landlord, they know how to be your grocer, they know how to be your lawyer, they know how to join the NAACP and become the president. . . . They know how to control everything you got.” Malcolm continued “Goldberg always catches ya’. If Goldberg can’t catch ya’, Goldstein’ll catch ya’. And if Goldstein don’t catch ya’, Greenberg will catch ya’.” Like so many others during this era of growing militance, Malcolm took aim at Jews for their liberalism. On a nationwide broadcast Malcolm said about sheriff Jim Clark of Selma, Alabama, the man who used cattle prods on civil rights demonstrators, “Clark is a wolf but the Jewish liberal is a fox, and the wolf is better because with him you know where you are.” Some of Malcolm’s fulminations were aimed at displacing Jews from their historic role as victims. “Everybody talks about the six million Jews,” he complained, “but I was reading a book the other day that showed that one hundred million of us [Black Americans] were kidnapped and brought to this country—one hundred million. Now everybody’s wet-eyed over a handful of Jews who brought it on themselves. What about our one hundred million?”

Black anti-Semitism did not spring forth only from the Black Muslims. By the early 1960s, angry and more militant young Black leaders like Cecil
Jews demonstrated significant anti-Semitism. The most notorious case was the February 3, 1966, meeting of the board of education in Mount Vernon, New York, called to discuss desegregation of the local schools. When no progress was made toward integration, Clifford A. Brown, the educational chairman of the Mount Vernon chapter of the Congress for Racial Equality, shouted: "Hitler made one mistake when he didn’t kill enough of you Jews." James Farmer, the national director of CORE, ordered an investigation to determine the "context" in which Mr. Brown made his remark but went on to say that "also intolerable" were the school board's delaying tactics in ending de facto segregation in the city's schools. Farmer's unwillingness to unconditionally denounce Brown for his comments prompted Will Maslow, the executive director of the American Jewish Congress and a long-time civil rights lawyer, to resign from the national advisory board of CORE.

Jews also had reason to believe that many Blacks shared the anti-Semitism of some of their leaders. A 1964 study by the University of California Survey Research Center found that Blacks were significantly more likely than whites to accept economic stereotypes about Jews, with 54 percent of Black Americans ranking "high" on a scale of economic anti-Semitism. Malcolm X's declaration in January 1964 that "the streets are going to run with blood" and that "Black people are going to explode" was followed that summer by a riot in Harlem, the first of a string of 329 riots to take place in 257 cities across the country between 1964 and 1968. While factors other than anti-Semitism were clearly at the heart of these disturbances, in the summer riots of 1964 cries of "Let's get the Jews" were reported in the press. One report had it that Jews owned as many as 80 percent of the furniture stores, 60 percent of the food markets, and 54 percent of the liquor stores burned and looted in the 1965 riot in the Watts section of Los Angeles.

While many Black leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Roy Wilkins, were quick and thorough in condemning manifestations of Black anti-Semitism, even friendly Black leaders were inclined to soft-pedal the issue. At a convention of the American Jewish Congress in 1966, the civil rights leader and staunch alliance builder Bayard Rustin said that he wanted "to point out that the term anti-Semitism as applied to Negroes and white
Christians in this country is not the same thing, and cannot be the same thing. . . . There is no feeling among black people in this country that they are superior to Jews, nor is there among black people in the country a belief that, somehow, Judaism is in a fix." 78

While this kind of response is to have been expected from Black leaders eager to keep attention focused on racial injustice against Black Americans, a much stronger response would have been expected from American Jewish leaders and intellectuals who had, since the Holocaust, become extremely sensitive to even the most superficial manifestations of anti-Semitism. But for many Jewish race militants, the importance of racial integration was so essential to their definition of Jewishness that they tolerated a level of anti-Semitism from various segments of the Black community that they would probably never have tolerated from white anti-Semites. The commitment of these Jewish race militants to civil rights and racial integration was so complete that any Jewish impulse toward self-defense and recoil was subordinated in defining the religious imperatives of the Jew. Thus, at the same 1966 American Jewish Congress convention addressed by Bayard Rustin, Charles Silberman delivered an address in which he claimed "anti-Semitism is irrelevant to a consideration of Jewish responsibility because, in the most fundamental sense, that responsibility stems from us and not from Negroes." This statement came as a particular surprise since Silberman claimed to have been not three feet away from CORE official Clifford A. Brown in Mount Vernon when he made his statement about Hitler and the Jews. Nevertheless, it was what Silberman called the "mirror image" of Black anti-Semitism—"Jewish anti-Negroism"—that concerned him most. Jewish "anti-Negroism" referred to the "race prejudice . . . very deeply rooted in the American Jewish community" and "the Jewish opposition to school integration, to housing integration, etc." 79 Jews, in short, were against integration, and this was tantamount to racism. "Unfortunately, the leaders of the Jewish community have not addressed themselves to . . . the . . . emergence of full-fledged, as well as rhetorically camouflaged, Jewish anti-Negroism." 80

At the same conference, Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld, the president of the American Jewish Congress, made a similar point. "I do not serve the cause of Negro emancipation because I expect the Negro to love me in return," he stated. Lelyveld criticized Jews who wanted to focus Jewish energies and resources on Jewish education and Jewish culture, rather than on integration and civil rights, arguing that the Jewish community had the re-
sources to do both. “This is a professional intellectual rationalization of that disinclination to be ‘involved’ which is so widespread in our time. It is so much more comfortable to divert one’s gaze.”81

Albert Vorspan, an official of the Reform movement’s Union of American Hebrew Congregations, attacked those he believed were considering withdrawing from the civil rights movement because of Black anti-Semitism. Vorspan wrote, “We are not in the fight for human rights because we want Negroes to like us . . . but because it is our task as Americans, our religious imperative as Jews, and our duty as human beings.”82

Some Jewish race militants argued that the anti-Semitism of the Black Muslims was not as bad as white anti-Semitism and did not hold Blacks responsible for the kinds of attitudes they held. Often, it was explained, Black anti-Semitism was merely a reaction to white racism or economic circumstances. Along these lines, Rabbi Kurt Flascher differentiated the Black Muslim anti-Semitism from that of white right-wing anti-Semites like George Lincoln Rockwell. “We differentiate between an out-and-out anti-Semite like Rockwell, whose entire program is to preach the extermination of the Jews, period, and the Black Muslims, which is essentially a reaction to the racism and the terror and the brutalities to which the Negro people are exposed.”83

Morris Schappes, the long-time radical and editor of the Marxist-oriented Jewish Currents, also expressed understanding for the racism and anti-Semitism of the Muslims, saying that it was similar to Jewish prejudice against non-Jews arising from the history of anti-Semitism. “I can understand the Black Muslims’ attitude and feeling, because I think it arises from the same frustration and fear,” wrote Schappes.84

At the 1964 convention of the American Jewish Congress, Shad Polier, an AJC official, reiterated his belief that Black anti-Semitism was essentially the result of a search for scapegoats, but he added that he did not believe that it or Black nationalism was “pervasive or enduring.” What concerned Polier most was that Jews might respond by leaving the struggle for civil rights. “What concerns me, as a Jew,” Polier said, “is not so much the phenomenon of Negro anti-Semitism but the response of the Jew to that phenomenon. It is all too easy and natural for the response to be one of resentment, fear, and hostility. . . . I am concerned lest these things happen to the Jew.” Polier said he had faith that this would not happen because “the Jew will not betray his heritage.”85 At the same meeting, Stanley Lowell, chairman of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, also reproached Jews who would shirk their responsibilities in the struggle
for equality because the “latent anti-Semitism of a fraction of the Negro community is now more open and apparent.”86

While some Jewish race militants blamed Jews for Black anti-Semitism, which they believed was primarily a reaction to Jewish and white opposition to integration, others took a more indirect attack, arguing that Black anti-Semitism was essentially economic in nature, and blamed Jews for exploiting Blacks. Paradoxically, some of the race militants who took this approach found themselves admonishing Jews for their opposition to integration while demanding that they remove themselves as business owners from Black communities. The fear that Jews might be disproportionately responsible for Black economic exploitation was based on the old socialist belief that economic relations between sellers and buyers must always be hostile and on the mistaken notion that the objects of irrational prejudice could somehow reduce the amount of prejudice aimed at them by simply changing their behavior. Many Jewish race militants were bolstered in these beliefs by a selective reading of the work of the sociologist David Caplovitz, who found that the residents of poor neighborhoods were not only more likely to pay more for inferior goods and services but were also more likely to be taken in by dishonest and semidishonest marketing and financing schemes.87 Interestingly, while Caplovitz made no attempt to quantify the Jewish element in ghetto business enterprise, he concluded that merchant-consumer relationships may take a variety of forms. While admitting that the outcome of these relationships may be hostile, Caplovitz stated that “It is of some interest that the [Jewish] salesmen are sometimes viewed as friends. I suspect that a more thorough study might show that the poor often turn to the merchants with whom they deal for a variety of services apart from merchandise... the poor may consider the merchants as their allies.”88 Anecdotal evidence from Black Americans like the comedian Dick Gregory and the economist Walter Williams, both of whom credit Jewish storekeepers in their predominantly Black neighborhoods with extending themselves to residents personally and financially, has tended to corroborate this view.89

While the nature of the economy of slum areas and the roles of the participants in it remains complex, many Jewish leaders chose to emphasize Caplovitz’s negative findings regarding the sinister role of ghetto merchants and salespeople and used this to explain Black anti-Semitism. The well-known rabbi and author Harold Schulweis of Temple Beth Abraham in Oakland, California wrote of his experience in which a Black friend had told a joke implying that Jews exploit Blacks economically and insisted
that, because of the truthful essence of this joke, Blacks had a right to be anti-Semitic. After this experience, Rabbi Schulweis did his own research and diligently read not only Caplovitz’s work but writings by such militant Blacks as Jeremiah X, James Baldwin, and Louis Lomax, and he concluded that his Black friend was right—Blacks have a right to hate Jews. “I will not deny it,” wrote Schulweis, “I do not relish the thought of meeting up with my Black friend again.” The solution for Jews in Schulweis’s determination was to remove themselves from the Black ghetto altogether. “There is always an alternative to complicity with evil. The alternative for the Jew is to get out. GET OUT. This is no way for Jews to make a living.”

The line of reasoning that asked Jews to integrate more fully with Black Americans while simultaneously demanding that Jews dismantle any remaining neighborhood contact with Blacks by closing or selling Jewish-owned shops and buildings in Black neighborhoods found adherents on the editorial board of the Reconstructionist. The editors of this prominent Jewish journal of opinion claimed that “anti-Semitism” tended to escalate with the rise in retail prices “because Jewish retailers are held most responsible.” It was recommended that a large fund be established to settle Jewish storekeepers in other neighborhoods. Strangely, just as they had recommended the separation of certain Blacks and American Jews, they simultaneously called for a cooperative effort to increase personal contacts between Jews and Blacks. “So long as Jews know only maids, porters and other menial workers, and so long as Negroes know only landlords and storekeepers, a wholesome and constructive dialogue between the two groups will never be achieved.”

Apparently, the Reconstructionist editors were beset by a peculiar class chauvinism that held that respectful relationships between Blacks and Jews could be achieved only by individuals who shared the same professional rank.

Many of the Jewish race militants did not consider that the emergence of populist and anti-Semitic elements from the civil rights movement might constitute a reasonable pretext for Jews to reevaluate their support for the more militant aspects of the civil rights movement and preferred to quell the complaints of the Jewish rank-and-file rather than address rising anti-Semitism among Blacks. In their effort to maintain their links to the Black cause, it seems some of the most liberal of the Jewish leaders forgot to stand up for the most important liberal ideals. The militance of some Jews on the issue of racial integration prevented them from making the cultural decay of American Jewry and the question of how the civil rights struggle
in the North affected Jews the first priority. In their one-dimensional use of the concepts of social justice and Jewish commitment, the race militants never acknowledged that hesitation among Jews on the issue of integration could have been, in some instances, an honest disagreement over the specific applications designed to achieve justice and equality for Blacks, rather than a disagreement over the general principles. While racism undoubtedly existed among American Jews, it seems probable that consideration of Black demands for integration involved an array of concerns that went to the heart of Jewish identity and communal survival.92

**Jewish Social Theorists and Integration**

Given the importance to American Jews of maintaining formal and informal group ties, it is not surprising that a few Jewish social theorists emerged as the most important champions of the view that Blacks constitute an ethnic group similar in kind to other ethnic groups, rather than a unique social category. While these theorists were likely to acknowledge the unique problems faced by Blacks, they generally sought, through the interpretation of race relations and the solutions to racial inequality that they advocated, to steer Black activism between the generally accepted parameters of urban group interaction. This view largely reflected ambivalence with respect to Jewish culture and ethnic attachment. Specifically, the liberal universalism that so many Jewish intellectuals shared, and the value it placed on the primacy of individual choice in human relations, prevented them from seeing the ethnic group as anything more than a conduit for values that may provide the individual with useful economic tools but that could not be a dynamic and structurally central force in a person's life. Accordingly, they acknowledged that slavery and racism had taken a huge toll on the Black sense of identity and unity and that Blacks had first to become a united ethnic group with a strong sense of history and culture if they were to better compete in the urban environment. But they generally insisted that this unity be based not on race militance or on a strict color consciousness, which might inhibit or restrain individual Blacks from participating in a common culture or from attaining cherished personal aspirations. As a result, these theorists often found themselves in the awkward position of espousing Black solidarity and self-help, while rejecting Black nationalist solutions that appeared to threaten individual autonomy. To put it another way, through their interpretation of race relations in the United
States, some Jewish social theorists hoped to encourage the making of a Black ethnic group along the lines of the liberal Jewish one into which they themselves had been born. Whether this liberal pluralistic model of group relations, in which the primacy of individual choice is preserved along with the existence of ethnic subcommunities, was an appropriate one for Black Americans has become a topic of heated debate among scholars and activists over the past couple of decades. But few have acknowledged that this model of liberal pluralism may not have been the social arrangement most conducive to Jewish communal sustenance.

While the reasons for the attachment of Jewish academics and intellectuals to liberal universalism are complex, a number of explanations have been proffered, including such psychological manifestations as "alienation," "marginality," and "self-hate." But the idea that Jewish intellectuals felt "alienated" or "marginalized" in a postwar America characterized by increasing levels of tolerance seems less robust than it might have before the war. While it is true that Jewish academics have been found to be relatively uncommitted to Jewish religion, they have also not been totally detached from ethnic group concerns. Rather, at least among those in the social sciences and the humanities, Jewish attraction to liberal universalism can probably best be explained in terms of an unapologetic urban cosmopolitanism. Jewish intellectuals were generally beneficiaries and advocates of the "cosmopolitan" ideal that was ascendant among American intellectuals through the mid-1960s and that promoted the view that the ability to apply reason to experience united all people and was more important than the inherited characteristics that divided them. The assumption upon which the ethos of cosmopolitanism was predicated, that the individual worth of human beings came not from the race or ethnic group into which they were born but from the ability to contribute to areas of knowledge in which all can equally share, carried tremendous appeal for second-generation Jewish intellectuals, many of whom still felt stigmatized by the immigrant ghettos of their youth. For these Jews, creating a society in which the inherited differences between people were tolerated but in which all men were considered the same under the skin was perhaps the most worthy objective.

This liberal cosmopolitanism impacted the view of a number of prominent Jewish sociologists and critics of ethnic groups in the United States, including such renowned figures as the sociologist Nathan Glazer and the influential social theorist Irving Kristol. Nobody did more than Glazer in the early 1960s to promote the idea that Blacks would soon constitute an
ethnic group in America's Northern cities, an equal among the family of American ethnic groups. In a number of well-known articles, and in his seminal sociological tract of 1963, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, written with Daniel P. Moynihan, Glazer set forth the ideas that would become for the next decade the guiding philosophy on American ethnic groups. Confronting directly the idea put forth by Will Herberg and others that American white ethnic groups had "melted" away in the decades immediately following World War II, Glazer argued that in fact the ethnic identities of most Americans, particularly in large urban areas, remained intact and meaningful for political, sociological, economic, and psychological purposes. By the third generation, Glazer believed, the descendants of immigrants had become "Americans" in dress, language, and most vital concerns, but he found that they still voted differently, had different ideas about sex and education, "and were still, in many essential ways, as different from one another as their grandfathers had been." While many interpreted Glazer's thesis as a celebration of ethnicity, in fact the key to the success of this plural system was the primacy of individual choice. "Individual choice, not law or rigid custom, determines the degree to which any individual participates, if at all, in the life of an ethnic group, and assimilation and acculturation proceed at a rate determined in large measure by individuals." 

Glazer treated Blacks in New York City as one group in a society made up of a number of ethnic and interest groups, which, as such, would fight to improve the lives of individuals through existing economic and political channels and, in some instances, through alliance with other ethnic groups. While the situation of Blacks was different in degree and intensity, their movement up the economic and social scale would closely resemble the upward movement of other ethnic groups. Unlike those in the South, Glazer argued that racial attitudes in the North were, at least in the legal and political realms, of the "American creed" and that, particularly in New York City, "the larger American experience of the Negro, based on slavery and repression in the South, would be overcome, as the Negro joined the rest of society, in conflict and accommodation, as an ethnic group." 

Irving Kristol was also disturbed by the idea of treating Blacks as a special "pathological" case because of their history of discrimination. In a provocative analysis, Kristol argued that the situation of Black Americans in Northern cities differed from that of previous ethnic groups in obvious ways but that the widespread similarities with other immigrant groups in Northern cities far outweighed these differences. Kristol believed not only
that increasing numbers of Blacks were joining the middle class but that there were in fact historical antecedents for the Black condition, particularly in the case of Irish immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century. If anti-Black prejudice in the mid-1960s was worse than anti-Irish prejudice ever was, Kristol argued, public policy was far more powerfully antidiscriminatory than it had been previously, and Blacks were securing much more assistance from government than any other group had before. “It is impossible to strike any kind of precise equation out of the opposed elements,” wrote Kristol, “but my own feeling is that they are not too far from balancing each other.”

It seems that for Glazer and Kristol, the problem for Blacks was not that they fell outside the ethnic pattern but that they had been so badly off within it and that this had a lot to do with the perceived lack of a definable and distinct culture that could unite Blacks in a community based on self-help. In this belief, they were undoubtedly influenced by the example of the American Jewish community, which itself had benefited from a long tradition of communal service and self-help, including the establishment of settlement houses, Young Men’s and Young Women’s Hebrew Associations, family desertion bureaus, educational alliances, and job training agencies. While it is difficult to determine how important these communal self-help efforts were for individual Jews, the stress that some Jewish ethnic theorists put on self-help as the central characteristic of successful ethnic groups reflected the secular and utilitarian standard by which they measured the value of ethnic-group belonging. This utilitarian view of ethnic groups can be seen in the thin and narrow lines along which the Jewish social theorists tried to walk with respect to Black solidarity under the program of “Black Power” and what this revealed about their attitudes toward the Jewish community. The qualifications with which they laced their calls for Black self-help, the virulence with which they criticized the movement toward Black solidarity on the basis of essentialist notions of race, reflected not only the liberal cosmopolitan approach to ethnic cultures but also the deep personal ambivalence with which they viewed Jewish ethnicity.

There is no doubt that the impulse for social organization and mutual self-help among Black Americans was stifled from the earliest days of enslavement. Slave codes brought to the United States from the Caribbean, and later adopted into American colonial and state laws, prevented the gathering of more than four or five slaves without a white person present. Along with the Black Codes, which prevented commiseration between slaves, these devices effectively muted the development of unity and the
sense of a shared fate. To be sure, free Blacks in both the North and South did organize themselves into a number of successful societies dedicated to self-improvement and uplift, but these were generally decimated by restrictive legislation in the South, and by immigrant agitation in the North. More important historically was the emergence of the self-help philosophy of Booker T. Washington at the turn of the century, which favored the development of usable job skills, and, of Marcus Garvey in the 1920s, who championed Black entrepreneurship and helped institute “Buy Black” campaigns. But, in the postwar era, the need to institutionalize Black self-help took a back seat to the fight for full legal rights associated with such organizations as the NAACP. By the late 1950s, the goal of legal equality had come to dominate Black life at the expense of the goals of communal self-improvement. This was one reason for the growing appeal of the Black Muslims in the 1960s. The Black Muslims had reached deep inside the Black community to activate the latent impulse for self-help that had been nurtured so effectively by Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey. While the Muslims did not relinquish the belief that whites were ultimately responsible for the degradation of Blacks, they did preach that the worst crime committed by whites was inculcating in Blacks the idea of their own inferiority. Accordingly, in what is widely considered to be one of the greatest ironies in American radicalism, the Muslims preached the virtues of chaste middle-class behavior and Black enterprise and became staunch advocates of values very similar to those associated with the white Protestant ethic.

While the Black Muslims remained a small minority in the Black community, attracting no more than one hundred thousand members and experiencing only marginal growth between 1960 and 1964, their call for Black self-help was a major impetus for the emergence of Black Power and Black separatism in the middle and late 1960s. The Black Power movement was the general description of that portion of the civil rights movement that became dissatisfied with integration and the principle of nonviolence. In the Northern cities, Black Power’s meaning became more vague, with some Black leaders using the slogan as a means for communal separation and other militants using it as a political tool to obtain such controversial demands as preferential hiring and communal control of school districts. Be that as it may, the one thing most Black Power activists agreed on was the need to sustain a more intense Black consciousness, the foundation for which was the sanctification of the historical legacy of white racism.
While the emphasis on race as a unifying theme may have been necessary and inevitable in a nation that had for so long justified its subjugation of Blacks on the basis of skin color, it caused some Jewish social theorists to sour on Black Power as a solution to Black problems. The difficulty emerged primarily because the Jewish theorists tended to view the ethnic group as a voluntary social construct that could assist individuals in making their way in the world but not as something that required complete separation and absolute loyalty. It seems likely that the centrality of individual choice in this view of pluralism had much to do with the attempt on the part of these theorists to balance the needs of the individual against the exigencies of group self-help by finding a Black nationalist alternative to the Black Muslims, one in which individual choice would be preserved and a narrow racial essentialism rejected.

Irving Kristol, for example, attempted to revive the self-help ideal of Booker T. Washington, claiming that militance was not “everything” and that no people could regain its dignity by forgetting its forefathers. Kristol drew an analogy between the Black separatist impulse to repudiate the Black “Uncle Tom” image and the similar impulse that had characterized Jewish nationalism in the nineteenth century. At that time Jews revised their own history by substituting fighting Jews like Bar-Kochba for the saintly self-effacing Jews like Rabbi Akiba, who negotiated with the Romans to preserve a “saving remnant” of Judaism. Just as Bar-Kochba was the Jewish equivalent of the Black slave rebel Nat Turner, and Rabbi Akiba the Jewish Uncle Tom, there was even a movement to replace surnames given the Jews by “gentile” authorities with Hebrew names, just as Blacks were looking to replace their “slave” names in the 1960s. Eventually, when Jews established the state of Israel and anti-Semitism declined, this tendency diminished, and Jews realized that the interpretation of their history as one long series of heroic rebellions omitted much that defined the character of the Jewish people. Now, too, Kristol felt, Blacks were in jeopardy of losing important parts of their history, including the dignity with which “Uncle Tom” and Booker T. Washington comported themselves, particularly Uncle Tom’s demonstration that even when Blacks were physically enslaved, they were never spiritually enslaved. “The Negro,” wrote Kristol, “having achieved equality, will still have to establish a satisfactory sense of his own identity. And on this question, there appears to be at present more confusion than is desirable.”

In order to take their place as a group among equals, Kristol argued, Blacks would have to be more of a community than they currently were, but those Black separatists who attacked the Black
middle class as submissive "Uncle Toms" were doing a terrible disservice. It was the economic success of the Black middle class, after all, that would have to form the basis for the success of Blacks in the future. For Kristol, with each step toward equality it was becoming more urgent for Black Americans to achieve a "proud and meaningful collective definition of their past," but he wondered if it was necessary for "the American Negro [to] deny his past and debase his present to seize his future?"

The most serious attempt to find a more moderate Black nationalism and to repudiate the racial extremism of the Black Muslims came from the sociologist Howard Brotz, whose landmark study *The Black Jews of Harlem* delved deeply into the question of cultural unity in the Black community. Like Glazer, Brotz believed that the goal of the Black American should be "nothing less than the transformation into a normal American ethnic community, with its pride and community loyalty which are based not on resentment or hatred of whites but on an inward self-respect resulting from achievement." But more clearly than the others, Brotz revealed his liberal faith in the ultimate goals of "normal American ethnic" communities: specifically, that they should be supportive and helpful to individuals, and that above all the primacy of individual choice as to the level of participation in ethnic life and belonging should be preserved. Brotz argued that the struggle for civil rights had been harmful to the development of the Black community in that the fight against segregation tended to draw attention away from building self-help mechanisms. But, for Brotz, both the accommodationism of Booker T. Washington and the "protest" leadership associated with the civil rights militance of W. E. B. Du Bois left little room for the building of a viable Black nationalism. One relegated Blacks to a separate but unequal existence, and the other enjoined dependence on white society. The key for achieving further success toward Black equality was the maintaining of ethnic choice for both Black and white communities. By this criterion, the doctrinaire Black nationalism of the Black Muslims failed as completely as the accommodationist and civil rights protest models, with its view that the only way for Blacks to gain respect was to leave the white community altogether or to dominate it. The problem with twentieth-century Black nationalist ideology as manifested by the Black Muslims and Marcus Garvey is that it responded not with the idea of a moral community but rather with the idea of a "sect" whose standards of Blackness an individual was not free to accept or reject. "Yet, is a Negro inwardly free if he feels less free to straighten his hair than a white person does to blacken himself in the sun?" asked Brotz.
The challenge facing Black leadership, as Brotz laid it out was to create a voluntary community with such pride so that white society would feel free to woo Blacks. It was in this vein that Brotz looked to the example of the Black Jews of Harlem.

Like Black Muslims, with whom they shared many views and with whom they may in fact share a founder, a man named W. Fard who had studied Judaism and influenced Marcus Garvey before converting to Islam, the Black Jews began to appear in the 1920s. They contended that Black Americans were really Ethiopian Hebrews, or Falashas, who were robbed of their religion and culture by slavery. Like the Muslims, they rejected the name “Negro,” insisted that they must recover their religion again to become a viable community, emphasized entrepreneurship and sober living, and rejected pork and other foods, sexual promiscuity, and conspicuous consumption. But the Black Jews were not enamored of the absolute racial withdrawal from the white world or the unconditional race loyalty that the Muslims practiced, and this made them attractive to Brotz as the basis for a Black nationalist alternative. The emphasis for the Black Jews was on achievement, and their own educational institutions were considered a supplement to the public schools rather than a replacement. Brotz felt that this positioned the Black Jews well to influence individual Black success while fostering a certain amount of integration and acceptance, the hallmarks of the liberal approach to American ethnic groups.

It was not surprising that Nathan Glazer responded enthusiastically to Brotz’s work, hailing his book as “the single most important intellectual contribution to the understanding of the Negro revolution that has yet been written.” The value that Glazer saw in Brotz’s contribution was that it underscored the idea that assimilation in the United States had always been partial—that at some point the dominant groups expected that the assimilating group would want to hold back and maintain its cohesiveness. But unwittingly, in championing the moderate nationalism of the Black Jews, Brotz and Glazer neglected to consider the important potential implications for the Jewish community. Characteristically, both writers dismissed the religious impulse toward Judaism of the Black Jews as secondary to the social advantages such a religious identification might offer for Blacks. As a culture, Judaism was useful for Blacks only insofar as it provided a tool by which they could gain communal autonomy and solidarity and thereby enhance the social and economic status of Black individuals. “From my sociological point of view,” wrote Brotz, “it is this rather than the purely religious considerations which are the crucial aspect of this
Neither Glazer nor Brotz considered that the religious impulse of Blacks toward Judaism, despite its mixture of mythology and theological distortion, could have provided renewed vigor and purpose to a Jewish community that had lost its ideological consensus. For these theorists, the cultural autonomy exhibited by the Black Jews, and the widening of the opportunities for assimilation this autonomy might bring, was of paramount importance. On the Jewish side of the issue, Brotz and Glazer simply never considered that the lack of a religious consensus among Jews presented a problem that might be addressed by the introduction of new and enthusiastic adherents to Judaic religious doctrines. The sociologist Milton Himmelfarb ventured to explain the lack of missionary fervor on the part of liberal Jews in general. "Diffident about our religion and tradition among ourselves," he wrote, "we can scarcely be expected to commend them to others. . . . In the United States, we could probably welcome a fair number of Negroes into our midst, if we wanted to. That would be good for them—so a Jew ought to assume—and especially good for us." Rabbi Stephen Schwarzchild, the editor of the quarterly Judaism, took Brotz to task for his hands-off approach toward the Black Jews. The "only cogent question is whether these Negroes are now or are becoming Jews . . . perhaps Judaism will do for them, and they for us, exactly what the diagnosis of our common disease requires," Schwarzchild wrote.

In the case of Nathan Glazer, it is particularly noteworthy that he did not see the Black Jews as an important spiritual opportunity for American Jewry, for he had by this time written extensively of the spiritual crisis plaguing American Judaism. In Beyond the Melting Pot, Glazer accurately described a Jewish community in New York that seemed to be losing its purpose. The failure of American Jews to develop a "satisfying pattern of Jewish middle-class life," Glazer wrote, "reflects the general unease of American middle-class life, as well as the specific Jewish dilemma of finding, in this amorphous society, a balance between separation and the loss of identity." Nevertheless, Glazer believed that the solution to the crisis of American Jewry lay, not in looking inward, in reevaluating religious commitments and practices, or in reaching out to Black Jews, but rather in maintaining the historical commitment to liberal and radical causes. It was not, after all, the Jewish religion that had constituted the primary Jewish contribution to American life, according to Glazer, but rather the achievements of "gifted young Jews" in the arts, radical politics, and the labor movement. Glazer wondered where, with the disappearing of these "de facto" Jewish environments, these energetic young Jews would con-
continue to come from. “One wonders about the supply of such young people in the future,” wrote Glazer, “will they emerge from the comfortable middle-class group? One also wonders where they will go.”

Like so many other Jewish leaders, Glazer turned to the battle for racial integration as a way by which American Jews could revitalize themselves as a group and maintain their commitment to liberal and radical (i.e., Jewish) causes. Glazer’s recommendation, astounding in light of the central role played by secular communal agencies in American Jewish life and identity, was the wholesale turnover of Jewish agencies to Blacks. Entering a major debate within communal circles regarding the purpose of Jewish agencies in the United States, Glazer categorically sided with those leaders who felt Jewish energies and resources should be shifted toward a focus on the needy non-Jewish and nonwhite groups of the inner cities, and he used his considerable scholarly erudition to defend this position.

Despite the severe crisis of purpose American Jews were experiencing, Glazer argued that, among the three dominant ethnic minorities in the cities at the beginning of the 1960s—Catholics, Jews, and Blacks—Jewish needs were the least and their communal resources the greatest. Although Jews had not had many civic or political dealings with Protestants in the big cities, it was the WASPS whom they most resembled in their reform-mindedness, abhorrence of machine politics, and support for civil service laws. Moreover, to the extent that Jews wanted to maintain a separate subculture, Glazer pointed out that rarely did they demand help from the government in doing so. Compared to Catholics, who were concerned with the imposition of strict moral codes in the public sphere and public support of parochial schools, and Blacks, who looked to the public realm to right the wrongs of discrimination, “the Jewish group is the one that is capable of the greatest objectivity.” If American Judaism was to survive, Glazer believed, it would have to develop a tradition of “non-self-interested action for others.” Jews must no longer “take it for granted . . . that their educational enterprises and welfare agencies should exist only to serve Jews, that in effect their responsibility in providing services for those damaged by life remains restricted to their own group,” Glazer wrote. But simply providing services for needy non-Jewish groups was not enough. Glazer suggested that Jewish agencies become public agencies rather than just “Jewish” agencies. This included the wholesale turning over of Jewish community centers and synagogue centers and intergroup relations agencies—“if one could think of any way of doing it”—to the Black community. “It would help us all in the end, if we could.” For Glazer,
the turning over of Jewish communal agencies to Blacks was one way Jews could continue to be Jews.

The question of the destiny of Black Americans and American Jews in Glazer's early work brings us to the heart of a major interpretive debate in the field of ethnic group sociology. Glazer's liberal version of urban group dynamics as expressed in Beyond the Melting Pot and other works has in recent decades become the prototype for contemporary neoconservative ethnic analysis, having been redefined as such by radical scholars who reject the "ethnic" view of Black Americans and who caution against pounding "the square peg of race into the round whole of ethnicity." But Glazer himself did not see his work from the early 1960s in a conservative light, and when we look at that work more closely it becomes apparent that he held views about the special needs of the Black community that only a short time later he himself would forcefully repudiate.

Far from being someone who denied the unique difficulties faced by Blacks in the urban environment, Glazer was in fact quite sensitive to the special needs of Blacks and willing to consider substantial changes to the established pattern of group relations if it meant racial progress. For example, despite what he had written about preserving the integrity of ethnic group social networks, Glazer favored a militant approach to public school integration and empathized with Black parents who did not want to send their children to all-Black schools. "Negro parents cannot take the position that Irish or Jewish or Italian parents took before them—all this will change. . . . Their history is different, their situation is different, their sense of self-confidence and self-worth is different." In light of this, Glazer supported the policy of "permissive zoning" championed by many integrationists and opposed by many white groups, not on the grounds that it would achieve the racial balance for which it was designed but rather on the grounds that it would provide greater freedom for the parents of Black children in poor neighborhoods.

Perhaps the most surprising element of Glazer's early work concerned the issue of race preferences. By 1965 Glazer noticed that the substantial increases in funding for Black school districts had resulted in so little educational progress that the efficacy of continued increases in public spending had been thrown into doubt. In a move that seems ironic for the scholar who would later become the most articulate opponent of affirmative action, Glazer supported hiring professionals in social welfare, including teachers, on a racial group basis, a policy he felt might improve chances for the success of Black and Puerto Rican students. It was within the Black and
Puerto Rican communities, Glazer felt, that the pressure for achievement, change, and improvement of the lower classes would most likely be found. “I think we can draw degrees of understanding and commitment from Negroes to help Negroes, Puerto Ricans to help Puerto Ricans, that we cannot in general expect to draw from professionals of other groups.” This recommendation for preferential hiring would be “a special American way to the welfare state,” in Glazer’s view.133

Years later, Glazer would appropriately describe the kinds of positions he took in the early 1960s as “mildly radical,” and this “mild” radicalism was as evident in the solutions he recommended for Black problems as they were in the solutions he recommended for Jewish problems.134 If Glazer’s recommendation that young Jews pursue “non-self-interested action for others” came to fruition in the involvement of Jewish youngsters in the radical political movements of the late 1960s, if race preferences in hiring would eventually become institutionalized, and if the consequences of both these developments were enough to make Glazer himself their most important and persuasive critic, one can only conclude that it might have been better never to have suggested what it would only later become necessary to repudiate.135

**Jewish Communal Services and Racial Integration**

Glazer’s suggestion that Jewish agencies be turned over or dedicated to the cause of Blacks placed him in the middle of a major debate within the world of Jewish communal services. After World War II, differences arose in the ranks of Jewish communal service organizations over the division of resources between the concerns of society at large and those that were specifically Jewish. The vast institutional network of Jewish communal agencies found fewer and fewer Jews among its social service clientele, and Jewish communal leadership struggled over redefining those agencies’ mission.

Some Jewish commentators felt that Glazer’s suggestion of turning over Jewish agencies to Blacks was an invitation to greater Black anti-Semitism. C. Bezalel Sherman thought that the wholesale conversion of Jewish facilities into facilities for serving Blacks would go far toward creating expectations of Jews that were impossible to meet. “In essence, this is another way of attributing to the Jews greater responsibility for poverty among Negros. . . . Noble on the surface, such suggestions are in reality a disservice
to the Negro community, whose crying need is self-improvement as part of its fight for equality.”136 Lloyd Gartner, a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary, also thought it would probably not make sense for decaying Jewish agencies to convert into vibrant Black agencies because it would be most beneficial for Blacks to get the experience of establishing these institutions themselves.137 William Avrunin of the Detroit Jewish Welfare Federation argued that, while Jews as individuals had a responsibility to take action to improve community services in communities where there were no Jews, this should not be done by Jewish agencies on a sectarian basis. “[T]he problems of the inner cities are far too vast for Jewish agencies to shoulder the burden alone,” Avrunin concluded.138

On balance, however, Glazer’s suggestion was popular among Jewish communal service leaders, most of whom believed that Jewish agencies had a part to play in the care of non-Jewish populations, that this role was indeed obligatory rather than optional, and that the Jewishness of the agency pointed to that obligation rather than called it into question.139 Rabbi Seymour Cohen of Chicago, the vice president of the Synagogue Council of America, exclaimed that the Jewish community “has an abundance of resources—the experience and basic know-how in the field of family life” and asked if it would “be too much to ask that some of our skill be used to help the Negro family?” Cohen reported with pride that a number of Jewish community agencies had turned over their facilities to the Black community, pointing specifically to the establishment of the Anna B. Waldman center, the successor to the famed Irene Kaufman Settlement House in Pittsburgh.140

Many Jewish communal service leaders emphasized the idea that Judaism and Jewish institutions must maintain their “relevance” to the modern world in order to ensure Jewish continuity and that serving Black and other needy communities was an essential part of doing this. Once again, the attack on the Jewish middle class was integral to this argument. One participant at the 1963 annual meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service in Cleveland, Ohio, believed that it was the Jewish “skill of voluntary community involvement” that was the true Jewish contribution to American life and that that skill was indeed threatened by the move of the middle class to the suburbs.141 Manheim Shapiro, an official of the American Jewish Committee and the editor of The Jewish Digest, attempted to redefine just what constituted a “Jewish purpose” regarding the obligations of Jewish agencies. Shapiro raised the question of whether it would not be a worthy “Jewish purpose” to provide services as Jews for
Blacks who needed them and could not otherwise obtain them. While there were circumstances in which “Jewish purposes” were served by having agencies be exclusively Jewish in composition, Shapiro attacked Jewish associationalism as a form of identity and maintained that it often served no sound Jewish purpose. “All too often, the legitimate association of Jews with each other for relevant group purposes is used as a rationale for irrelevant exclusion of others.” Shapiro took the opportunity to express his hostility toward the suburban Jewish “ghettos” by lambasting the Jewish tendency toward social exclusion. “Not only do they [the Jews] fail to meet Negroes, they also fail to meet white Christians on a friendly basis, and they even fail to meet other Jews of a background or commitment other than their own. In lives which are narrow and confined, in which comfort, convenience and sameness are the goals, we will have little opportunity to live out our belief in equality.”

One of the more thoughtful responses regarding the role of Jewish communal agencies in the civil rights struggle came from Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, a noted historian of Zionism and a longtime leader in Jewish organizational life. At the annual convention of Jewish Communal Service in 1964, Hertzberg said that “segregation is immoral and abhorrent to Judaism,” but he was ambivalent regarding the role of Jewish agencies in achieving integration. Hertzberg believed that, along with anti-Semitism, philanthropy was the only issue around which modern Jews have been able to unify themselves. “During the last two centuries,” Hertzberg said, “Jews who have been able to agree on nothing else have found it possible to construct a community in which all share equally, and as Jews, on the basis of overarching responsibility for less fortunate Jews.” The problem for Hertzberg with using anti-Semitism and philanthropy as unifying forces was that they shared the unfortunate characteristic of eventually working against Jewish particularism by expanding their focus to populations other than Jews. Just as many Enlightenment Jews left the folds of Judaism to join radical forces and fight anti-Semitism by changing society under the rubric that “bigotry is indivisible,” so too does Jewish charity respond to the “classic Jewish warrant” that “we must take care of the poor who present themselves to us without regard to race, creed, or color.” The more successful Jews are in providing charity to other populations, the less of a solidifying agent Jewish charity becomes. “Like anti-Semitism, charity, which was imagined as a last bastion of Jewish particularism, is the shading off into an activity which inevitably acts to dissolve the specific Jewish community.”
Hertzberg took issue with the arguments that Jews could not close off their charities to human suffering of any kind or refrain from contributing as Jews to the wider democratic society and argued that safeguarding a particular identity was not in itself an affront to other people. Jews "owe an obligation to say to ourselves and the Negro community that, from the Negro perspective, civil rights is indeed the problem, for Jews . . . it is one of several problems. It certainly does not outrank for them the question of their own spiritual and cultural survival in America, or their concern for the rest of world Jewry," Hertzberg wrote.¹⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, most of the discussants at the National Conference of Jewish Communal service did not agree with Rabbi Hertzberg that the civil rights struggle and Jewish communal services run at cross purposes. Participants on the whole shared Nathan Glazer's view that Jewish agencies had a part to play in the civil rights struggle and that this was not only obligatory but would in fact work to restore Jewish purpose. The thrust of this position was that the aims and purposes of Jewish agencies and the need to remain "relevant" to contemporary problems pointed to that role rather than away from it.¹⁴⁸ The view of Albert Chernin, the director of community consultation for the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, was representative. Chernin expressed concern that Rabbi Hertzberg's vision of a clash between Jewish survival and the civil rights revolution might shift the focus from what he saw as the fundamental threat to Jewish survival—"indifferentism and irrelevance." Chernin wrote that the universal nature of the Black struggle was not a threat to Jewish particularism because the essence of the Jewish experience was that it fostered a humanistic attitude and that the whole purpose of Jewish existence was to perpetuate the universal truths to which it was committed. "[T]he urgent business of Jewish community relations agencies, for that matter all Jewish agencies, is civil rights and Jewish survival," Chernin wrote. "They do not collide; on the contrary, they may be mutually reinforcing."¹⁴⁹

The predominant view of some of the most distinguished Jewish social scientists and leaders of Jewish communal service was that the Jewish community could find meaning and purpose by participating in the Black fight for equality. The preoccupation of some Jewish social theorists with the development of a positive Black subculture reflected the positive social and economic experience American Jews had enjoyed as an ethnic subculture in the United States and the particular affection they felt for the new freedom and opportunities that had opened for them as individuals. But it also embodied the belief that the motive force underlying group unity should
be voluntary and nonideological, a reflection of the liberal Jewish commitment to individualism and choice. For these Jewish figures, the test of group effectiveness was not the structure that the group provided to an individual's life, or the meaning one found in its core beliefs, values, and rituals, or the loyalty and obligations it demanded of its members, but rather how well it defended the social and economic interests of individuals. Most of these Jews held fast to this belief in analyzing the conditions of both the Black and the Jewish communities. For the Jewish social theorists Nathan Glazer, Howard Brotz, and Irving Kristol, as long as the ethnic group in question fostered the development of its individual members, it was viewed positively. Internal development and strengthening of group ties were acceptable so long as the long-range focus was on moving members up and out into the larger general culture. While Jewish social scientists and Jewish communal service leaders in general seemed aware of the growing cultural malaise of the Jewish community, few bothered to set a new direction for American Jews beyond attempting to revive, and in some cases radicalize, a civil rights liberalism that was quickly coming to the end of its life as a viable mode of Jewish identity.

**Labor Zionism and De Facto Segregation**

One group of Jewish thinkers that was consistently engaged with issues concerning Blacks were the Labor Zionists who wrote for the journal *Jewish Frontier*. The Labor Zionist movement in the United States is of particular interest in that its premises became, during the 1930s and 1940s, the basis upon which mainstream American Jewry would throw its support behind the creation of a Jewish state. Through its various youth groups, its intellectual leadership (which included such luminaries as Hayim Greenberg, Mordecai Kaplan, and Horace Kallen), and its influence at the pivotal Biltmore Conference of 1942 and the American Jewish Conference in 1943, the Labor Zionists were able to define a Jewish nationalism in accord with the predominantly liberal religious and political character of American Jews. To a large extent, it was the Labor Zionist doctrine, a mixture of socialism and Zionism, that guided the activities of the *Yishuv*, the Jewish community in Palestine before the State of Israel was founded, as well as the first socialist government of the state of Israel under David Ben Gurion.

More interesting for the purposes of this book, the writers at *Jewish Frontier*, an English-language monthly that began publication in 1934, were,
in the words of the sociologist Marshall Sklare, the “Jewy Jews.” These writers were distinguished from most liberal Jewish intellectuals, including the famed “New York Intellectuals,” in that they were boldly committed to a combination of Jewish nationalism, socialism, anti-Communism, and democracy. They aspired to be “nationalist without being chauvinist” and in this way separated themselves from Jews associated with liberal intellectual forums such as the Menorah Journal, Commentary, and Reconstructionist, all of which were generally less committed to a strong Jewish nationalism. 151

The Labor Zionists were never of one mind on any political issue, but they expressed a uniform ambivalence about the compatibility of American liberalism and a strong and unified Jewish community. For example, the 1966 Labor Zionist Organization of America convention broke out in a huge debate over the issue of compensatory race preferences in employment. While the final convention statement contained an endorsement of compensatory race preferences in educational opportunity, it stopped short of endorsing them in the field of employment, where it asked for only the “expansion of opportunities.” Those on both sides of the issue used the principles of Labor Zionism to arrive at their conclusions. The side that favored preferential treatment for Blacks in employment argued that, just as the Jewish people needed to gain access to its own land in order to achieve equality with other nations and utilized a form of international preference to obtain such access, so, too, did Blacks need preferred access to jobs to achieve equality with other groups in America. The delegates who opposed preferential treatment argued that the lesson of Labor Zionism, which emphasized the settlement and farming of the land in Palestine, was that a group of people can achieve equality and dignity only through its own labor, and not through the device of aid distributed on the basis of something other than merit. 152

An even more provocative debate ensued over a proposal to counteract Black anti-Semitism by removing the Jewish presence in Black ghettos. The convention never did resolve this debate, and the proposal was never added to the final statement of the convention on the Zionist grounds that Jews should maintain their place and conduct themselves with dignity wherever they were. “Particularly resented,” wrote Daniel Mann, “is any suggestion that the Jew as a Jew is responsible for anti-Semitism; this is precisely the ‘defense mentality’ which has been bitterly opposed by Zionists for years.” 153 The convention also rejected the proposition that Jewish agencies should be maintained by Jewish funds for the primary purpose
of funding programs for Black neighborhoods and clientele, a position favored, as previously discussed, by many Jewish communal service leaders.

Nevertheless, after World War II, and especially after the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, the Labor Zionists experienced an identity crisis not dissimilar to that of other American Jews. As fighters and advocates for the Jews in America, Labor Zionists were quite sensitive to the nature of group life in the United States, but they were haunted and confused by their commitment to two sometimes conflicting goals: the Zionist commitment to Jewish peoplehood and the socialist commitment to universal equality. Equality was perhaps the one word most expressive of the Labor Zionist ideology: equality for Israel in the family of nations, equality for the Jews as an ethnic group in the United States, and equality as a social principle. In the end, despite the sincere commitment to the principle of Jewish communal strength, the commitment to social equality seemed to win out, leaving many of the Labor Zionists only a stone’s throw away from the civil rights positions advocated by the majority of liberal Jewish leaders.

The ambivalence of the Labor Zionists toward racial integration was demonstrated in the debate tripped off by an article published in 1964 by Marie Syrkin, “Can Minorities Oppose ‘De Facto’ Segregation?” In this controversial essay, Syrkin, the strong-minded daughter of the socialist Zionist theoretician Nachman Syrkin, argued that, except for avowed assimilationists, Jews had never made complete integration a goal and that the insistence of large segments of the Black community for complete integration posed a huge problem for American Jews.

Specifically, Syrkin explained that she had grown up in New York City in neighborhoods that were predominantly Jewish and had therefore attended predominantly Jewish public schools. While it was difficult to determine how much of this segregation was voluntary and how much forced, Jews never believed that the relative lack of gentiles in their presence was evidence of discrimination. Syrkin believed that in the Jews’ struggle to achieve greater economic, social, and educational mobility, the emphasis was almost always on better housing and better education, “not on the enforced presence of non-Jews on the premises.” Syrkin wrote extensively on American education systems for such liberal journals as Common Ground, the official journal of the Common Council for American Unity, but broke with many of her liberal colleagues by insisting that, if the schools reflected the population of the surrounding area and its residential distribution and the school board had not been found guilty of
excluding particular students, this could not reasonably be called segregation, for segregation implied a willful process of exclusion. Syrkin concluded that “a minority may justly oppose the quality of housing, schooling or job opportunities available to it, but with what grace can it object to a preponderance of its own people?”

What disturbed Labor Zionist writers about Syrkin’s article was that it took the problem of their movement’s clashing ideals head on. The suggestion of American Labor Zionists that vibrant Jewish communities could obtain in places other than Israel had never been put to a real test. While most of the Labor Zionists agreed that the traditional cohesion supplied by the Jewish religion had been shattered, few had been willing to offer a viable program for regaining it. Syrkin did just that when she argued that if Labor Zionist philosophy were to bear any fruit, it would require the “flesh and bones of a culture and a society—the Jewish neighborhood, the Jewish language, Jewish creative arts, Jewish cuisine—a sense of community.” Like other Jewish leaders and intellectuals, many Labor Zionists balked at this difficult proposal because of its open opposition to what they viewed as the legitimate struggle for Black integration. A symposium in Jewish Frontier held shortly after Syrkin’s article appeared indicates that while Labor Zionists believed in the right of Jews and other minorities to self-segregate, their sensitivity to Black demands and their commitment to equality seemed to override this important Labor Zionist principle.

Many writers in the symposium agreed that Jews, as a persecuted minority, had much of interest to say about the race problem, but they maintained that Blacks faced special problems that Syrkin had ignored in her essay. “Let us at least afford to the Negro the same uniqueness that we have claimed in the past as Jews. When we discuss problems of education, let us do so with reference to the very special problem of the Negro as regards education,” wrote Aaron Kohn, a member of the Central Committee of the Labor Zionist Organization of America. “When we discuss the problems of racial imbalance, let us realize the very special conditions for the Negro created by racial imbalance . . . and in considering these unique racial problems let us be prepared to arrive at solutions equal to the proportions of the problem.”

Daniel Mann, the executive director of the Labor Zionist Organization of America, insisted that the differences between Blacks and Jews were not only enormous but crucial, primarily because, with minor exceptions, Blacks did not have their own unique culture to live by in their own segregated communities. “Not only did you tear my ancestors away from
their origins,” wrote Mann of the Black American viewpoint, “but now you bar my access to your identity which should also be mine.”

Perhaps, though, the most reasonable and articulate response of the Labor Zionists to Syrkin's article was the answer supplied by the Zionist scholar Ben Halpern. Halpern criticized Syrkin's article for being too general and rejected some of its specific implications. How, Halpern asked, can we compare segregated trains, buses, or restaurants to schools? Certainly, Halpern insisted, the use of buses or trains carried nowhere near the same consequences as the type of school one attended. Schools were indeed compulsory, Halpern argued, because they were vital to success in achieving liberty, equality, and fraternity and should therefore be subject to de facto desegregation before buses and cafeterias. Syrkin, Halpern felt, was repulsed by demands for enforced de facto desegregation because of the Jewish situation, not necessarily because of the situation of Blacks. Halpern, in turn, was repulsed by Syrkin's unabashedness in thinking only of the impact on the Jewish community. Halpern noted that very few Black leaders feared the assimilation of their people but that assimilation was seen as a very real threat among Jews. “To oppose de facto segregation,” wrote Halpern, “is in the eyes of the Jewish survivalist, to support assimilation. . . . But cannot Jewish leaders have enough sympathy with the Negro situation to understand if this reaction is not shared by the Negro leadership?”

While Halpern appropriately asked Syrkin to see the Black position, the question he and the other respondents failed to address was the one asked by Syrkin herself in her article: How could a minority “survive without either a sacrifice of its identity or its equality,” particularly in a society that was moving toward representative equality and forced integration? In the end, the majority of Jewish thinkers associated with Labor Zionism, sensitized to the Black condition by Jewish history, arrived at a view of Black demands for full integration not so very different from that of the Jewish race militants and liberal social theorists. Like the other Jewish leaders and intellectuals, in negotiating the questions concerning group life in America that had been brought to the surface by the Black demand for integration, the Labor Zionists became consumed by the very real needs and demands of Blacks and neglected to address the pressing needs of the Jewish community for unity, direction, and inner purpose.