

Introduction

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Identity politics exploded in the United States in the 1970s. Awakened by student activists in the civil rights movement and the New Left, the politics of identity responded to the rise of black power. Feminism's insight that the personal is political as well as a turn toward a revival of European ethnicity provided language to express new insights regarding authority within the United States and abroad. As women came to identify what Betty Friedan called "the problem that has no name," they stirred others suffering from discrimination to find their voice.¹ "Sisterhood is powerful," like "Black is beautiful," inspired more than those who championed the slogans.² They became models for political action for Jews as for other Americans. The scholar Matthew Frye Jacobson dates the birth of identity politics "in the showdown over Zionism" at the Conference on New Politics in Chicago two months after the Israeli victory in the Six Day War "(and, not incidentally, in the slights that women . . . felt *as women* at that same meeting)."³ Reverberations of that stormy beginning would extend across two decades.

David W. Belin, born in 1928, an accomplished lawyer who had just finished serving on the Warren Commission investigating the death of President John F. Kennedy, seemed to be far removed from the younger generation of activists attending the Conference on New Politics. Yet he, too, would find himself drawn within the orbit of questions raised by identity politics. What did identity politics mean for American Jews? It meant trying to bring Jewishness together with political elements of an identity. Jewish identity acquired a self-conscious valence lacking for an earlier generation that had grown up in dense urban neighborhoods. Politics now extended into all reaches of society and culture, including Jewish life. What did it mean to be an American Jew? Was this a religious question? A question of ethnicity? Perhaps a political question? How did Jews understand

themselves as individuals and as members of a group in the United States? Although David Belin had grown up during the Great Depression in Iowa, coming east to attend college and the University of Michigan Law School, as a father of four children, a liberal, a lawyer, and a Jew active in the movement of Reform Judaism, he became increasingly engaged in seeking new ways to understand what it meant to be a contemporary American Jew. In 1991 he endowed a lecture series at the University of Michigan in American Jewish Public Affairs. He sought through these annual lectures to build a bridge between university scholars and American Jews. Eager to explore issues raised by identity politics as they affected American Jews, he turned mostly to members of the baby boom generation for some answers. Those answers, as well as the questions, form the basis of the articles collected in this volume.

I arrived at the University of Michigan in 2005 as director of Judaic Studies. I had been invited, a decade earlier, to give one of the early Belin lectures. Now I looked at a shelf full of published lectures, a rainbow of muted colors in soft covers, and realized that they opened a window on several decades of American Jewish life. Each one separately marked a particular moment in perspective. Taken together, however, they represent a generation of scholars grappling with questions raised by identity politics as they were configured among American Jews. Although most of these lectures were not in conversation with each other, publishing them together initiates a dialogue that enriches their individual insights.

These previously published essays reflect several layers of identity politics. On one level, they interrogate the recent past of American Jews, starting with their experiences of World War II. Without the flourishing of identity politics and the white ethnic revival, many questions about American Jewish history might never have been explored. Those who adopted identity politics often saw Jews as an ethnic group in the United States, one connected both to other Americans and to other Jews throughout the world and in the past. On another level, these essays express ideas nourished in universities during the turbulent 1970s and 1980s. Those years marked the expansion of Jewish studies as a field in the United States and the establishment of American Jewish studies as an area of specialization.⁴ There is, however, a third layer, a personal one. Most of the scholars writing about American Jewish affairs also participated in those affairs as activists. They agitated for equal rights for Jewish women, they built Jewish studies programs within universities, they took stands on the conflicts and wars between Israel and its neighbors, they struggled for new understand-

ings of Judaism in the wake of the radical evil of the Holocaust, and they experimented with innovative forms of Jewish religious life. These essays thus embody a type of knowledge drawn from participation as well as research, and they speak to audiences seeking to reconsider narratives of change and continuity.

Given the timeliness of these essays and their responsiveness to political questions of the moment, why, one might ask, should they be republished? The answer lies in their very timeliness, for they teach us not only about their subject but also about how issues were framed and debated during our *fin de siècle*, the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first. The authors of these articles include several—most notably Arthur Green, Alvin Rosenfeld, and the late Egon Mayer—who could be thought of as founding fathers of this new generation of Jewish scholars. Green in theology, Rosenfeld in literature, and Mayer in sociology influenced younger academics like Arnold Eisen. A slightly different relationship exists among the historians. Several come to their subject through the study of American history, including Hasia Diner, Stephen Whitfield, and Jonathan Sarna, while others approach through the portal of Jewish history, such as Paula Hyman and Jeffrey Gurock. Taken together they reveal the varied sources of American Jewish studies. Finally, one must note that in many cases these essays anticipate major books on the subject. Reading them now reveals how ideas took shape within the political pressures of the moment.

Those who embraced the politics of identity initially turned away from the vision of integration that had animated the civil rights movement in the years after World War II. Jacobson sees both conservative and liberal tendencies in this embrace of what he calls “Ellis Island ethnicity.” According to Jacobson, an antimodernism that imagined an immigrant past in warm colors of family solidarity and struggle fueled a new aggressiveness directed against affirmative action strategies adopted by African Americans in the late 1960s. Desires to rectify past injustices by creating a society where individuals would be judged not by group attributes yielded to calls for recognition of group differences and assertions of collective pride in seemingly unchangeable identities of ethnicity, race, and gender.⁵

In any case, white descendants of European immigrants pursued an aggressive form of politics symbolically recognized by the federal government in 1972 in the Ethnic Heritage Studies Program Act.⁶ This legislation underwrote programs in ethnic and immigration studies within and outside of universities. Such recognition helped to solidify the viability of identity

politics in the United States. Gays and lesbians adopted similar strategies of parades and protest, proclaiming the political significance of sexuality.

However, because individual identities are layered, debates over identity politics often forced individuals to decide which single identity mattered most. Did one's gender as a woman trump one's ethnicity as a Jew? Did one's homosexuality take precedence over one's racial identity? What happened when one expression of identity politics came into conflict with another? Should one speak out against anti-Semitism in the woman's movement?⁷ Should one defend Zionism from attack by civil rights advocates? Nowhere did these demands to choose a single identity resonate more than among American Jews because so many of them played leading roles as activists in the 1960s and 1970s civil rights, antiwar, and feminist movements, and as supporters of black power and the new white ethnics.⁸

That heritage of activism extended all the way back to the beginning of the twentieth century when immigrant Jews championed diverse radical movements for social change. Socialism, anarchism, trade unionism, and communism competed for their allegiances. During the Great Depression, ideological fissures fractured the radical Left into splinter groups that postwar anticommunist purges failed to heal. Divisions among Jews raised questions of loyalties: to Soviet Communism, to Socialist Zionism, to anti-Stalinist social democracy, even to anti-anti-Communist liberalism.⁹ Yet a new postwar synthesis emerged in the 1950s that often went by the name of liberalism. Many Jews supported integration and civil rights, social welfare programs and trade unionism, civil liberties and religious freedom, internationalism in the United Nations, and the new State of Israel. This synthesis shattered on the shoals of 1960s politics: desegregation in northern cities, the war in Vietnam, the arms race, and Israel's new status after the Six Day War.¹⁰

American Jews fiercely debated every "must" and "should" of their loyalties. Their collective identity seemed hopelessly hyphenated (though written without a hyphen). Were they Jewish Americans, analogous say to Italian Americans? Or were they American Jews, similar to American Catholics and Protestants? Did ethnicity matter more than religion? And what was ethnicity without religion, without language, without memory? What was the meaning of American? Did it suggest only citizenship or membership in a nation? Did it imply participation in a culture grounded in English and connected to a history of settlement? Could they as the children or grandchildren of Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe lay claim to this American language and history? What, in fact, did

“Jew” mean? Perhaps this was merely an expression of family sentiment, a way of identifying parents and grandparents. Or did it have a public dimension, referring to a long history of suffering and persecution? Maybe the term *Jew* suggested ties to biblical ancestors.

These arguments among American Jews reconsidered earlier struggles with issues of identity. In the years around World War I, immigrant and second-generation Jews debated whether and how they should prioritize their multiple identities. Were they Americans first? Jews first? Such philosophers as Horace Kallen, who argued for cultural pluralism, or political figures as Louis Brandeis, who championed Zionism as integral to being a good American Jew, disputed such writers as Israel Zangwill, who proclaimed the virtues of assimilation in the melting pot. In the 1970s additional categories appeared. Perhaps Jews were women first? And what did each of these identities mean? If one affirmed that one was “Jewish” first and foremost, did that mean a religious identity or a national one, an ethnic one or a political one? Soon, the language of identity politics entered these arguments. Jews had their “Uncle Jakes” analogous to “Uncle Toms” among African Americans.¹¹ “Jake” apparently pandered to gentile expectations of conciliatory Jewish behavior, refusing to defend aggressively Jewish interests. As the scholar Michael Staub has shown, arguments often escalated. They threatened, at times, to drive some Jews out of the Jewish community itself.¹²

American Jews engaged these debates at a moment when they had achieved an unprecedented level of security, affluence, integration, and freedom in the United States. As the only large community of Jews basically unscarred by the catastrophe of the Holocaust, American Jews entered the postwar world ready to accept a position of leadership among world Jewry. They simultaneously tackled twin challenges: to assist hundreds of thousands of Jews displaced by the war and to support the establishment of a struggling Jewish state in the context of a changing social, economic, and political scene in the United States. After the war American Jews left large cities like New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Cleveland where they had previously concentrated and settled in newer cities like Los Angeles and Miami. They also moved in large numbers to the suburbs. The generation that had gone to war used the GI Bill to help them attend college or professional school and obtain mortgages. They eagerly contributed funds to build synagogues and Jewish community centers in these new locales of Jewish life to nourish an American Jewish identity in their children, the baby boom generation. They also supported an extensive array of Jewish communal

organizations devoted to social welfare, recreation, health, and education. Looking at this American Jewish world in 1963, the philosopher Harold Weisberg observed with a mixture of awe and disdain that "Jewish life in the United States is expressed primarily through a culture of organizations."¹³ Belonging to a Jewish community took precedence over belief in Judaism among American Jews. Jewish accommodation to American congregational models of affiliation effectively papered over the fact that faith had not been the bedrock of Judaism.¹⁴ Since Jews did not want their children growing up feeling insecure or inadequate, they tackled enduring anti-Semitic barriers to Jewish advancement, especially discrimination in jobs, housing, and public accommodations like hotels. If the New York Jewish beauty Bess Myerson could be chosen Miss America in 1945, then Jews could be accepted as Americans without denying their Jewish identity.¹⁵ Or so they hoped.

Political arguments had always flourished among Jews, but in the wake of the depression and World War II a broad consensus had emerged. That consensus located Jews among the Democratic Party's urban wing. They supported the New Deal's social welfare provisions and they championed the rights of labor to unionize to negotiate from strength to secure a decent livelihood. They advocated a generous understanding of the public sphere; housing, utilities, transportation, education, libraries, and culture all deserved government support and regulation. Their optimism was tempered, however, by their experience of World War II and the mass murder of European Jews. These events prompted them to defend the idea and reality of a Jewish state, to seek international cooperation through the United Nations and an end to colonialism. The creation of Israel and other new nations in Africa and Asia in the postwar decades represented in their eyes the triumph of liberation movements. Jews similarly understood the struggle for civil rights at home, including fair employment practices and an end to discrimination in housing, resorts, and university education as efforts to achieve justice, to make the United States a more equal society.

After the war Jews also sought recognition as a legitimate American religious group. As the United States adopted the idea of the Judeo-Christian tradition as its distinctive democratic credo, Judaism achieved a measure of equality with Protestantism and Catholicism.¹⁶ Protestant, Catholic, Jew epitomized the American version of the Judeo-Christian tradition.¹⁷ But Jews did not just accept this context of interreligious understanding. In the postwar years Jewish organizations, especially the American Jewish Congress, mounted legal challenges to practices like Bible reading in the public

schools and Christmas and Easter celebrations that intertwined church and state.¹⁸ These cases increased the stress on the easy optimism that held the Judeo-Christian tradition together.

As many Jewish goals for civil rights and civil liberties were adequately met by the mid-1960s, Jewish political consensus eroded. Jews attacked during the McCarthy years as “communistic” were effectively frozen out of the community. Suburban and new urban politics raised different issues and required other coalitions from those in older large cities. Increasingly virulent argument dominated Jewish political debates as a new generation emerged.¹⁹ Maturation of Jewish baby boomers coincided with the rise of identity politics. They came to be associated with one another, but in unstable terms.

In the 1970s a Jewish counterculture arose in response to the black power movement and the cultural politics of other minority groups. Young Jews involved in loose-knit religious groups called a *havurah*, “incorporated much of the language of these movements into their own definitions of their ethnicity.” They were recasting Judaism as part of a generational rebellion against the synthesis their parents had crafted, “but this was not their only motivation,” argues anthropologist Riv-Ellen Prell.²⁰ They believed that social transformation was possible, and they “claimed that shared Jewish activities were important acts of protest.”²¹ They were reconfiguring Jewish politics, making the personal political. In the vision of one activist, this generation was transforming itself “from Jewish radicals to radical Jews.”²²

These engagements with issues of identity intersected with the tumultuous story of identity politics among Americans of every description. To simplify drastically, one path of identity politics began in the 1960s with organized activism for racial justice, and continued with opposition to the Vietnam War and agitation for women’s rights. In the 1980s this road wound through not altogether symbolic turf wars over race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. The trail ended at the mall, with Gen X in hot pursuit of identity-through-lifestyle, with personal investments in culture-as-virtual-politics, commitments that curiously enough have echoed aspects of counterculture conceits popular back in the late 1960s.

Weisberg had noticed as early as 1963 how much had changed in the ideologies of American Jews. He summarized these shifts: “the disappearance of assimilationism as a serious ideological option, the abandonment of secularist ideologies, the replacement of Marxist, humanist, and liberal ideologies with existentialist theologies and ideologies, the effective

armistice in the warfare between science and theology, the enormous growth of organized Jewish religion coupled with the serious decline of liberal theologies, the success of political Zionism and the subsequent, perhaps consequent, failure of Zionist ideologies and parties."²³ Less than a decade later another series of issues had risen to the forefront of the consciousness of young Jews: the Holocaust and its meanings, Israel and identification with Zionism, feminism as women's liberation, intermarriage and betrayal of Jewish community, the fate of Soviet Jewry and how it should be rescued, and the authority of Judaism and a religious identity. (Yiddish and homosexuality as alternative countercultural Jewish identities developed later in the final decades of the century.)

By the 1970s a specific, Jewishly inflected identity politics that stemmed from Jewish involvement in New Left politics animated American Jews. Voices of this counterculture, as Prell describes them, "emphasized the culpability of three institutions in the assimilation of American Jews."²⁴ These were the Jewish communal federations that coordinated fund-raising for local, national, and international organizations, large impersonal synagogues, and middle-class, materialistic, suburban Jewish families.

Young Jews disaffected from established Jewish communal organizations and bitterly opposed to their priorities and leadership mounted attacks that drew upon intriguing mixtures of support for Zionism, concern for the Holocaust, belief in feminism, and advocacy of public religious behavior. But rather than weld these issues into a coherent political program, they wielded them as clubs to attack "the establishment." Thus it was not unusual to see college-aged Jews demanding greater religious observance from Jewish organizations at the same time as they proudly asserted the importance of Jewish difference from other Americans and roundly condemned American Jews' failure to rescue coreligionists during the Holocaust. No particular logic connected religious observance with rescuing Jews during the Holocaust and militantly asserting Jewish difference from Christian Americans. Rather, the threads that linked Jewish identity politics stemmed from a confluence of political, social, and cultural trends in American society. It was partly a generational revolt, partly an effort to learn from history, partly the allure of the counterculture, partly a response to traumatic violent events that shook American cities, including political assassinations, student takeovers of universities, antiwar protests that ended in deaths, riots by African Americans, and strikes that pitted Jewish union members against black advocates of community control.

The historian Ezra Mendelsohn outlines a typology of Jewish politics in

the modern era before the heyday of identity politics. From the 1880s until after World War II people asked not “Who is a Jew?” but “What is a Jew?” Were Jews a nation, a people, a religious group, or just a group of individuals whose Jewishness was a private matter?²⁵ With the rise of identity politics, the question “Who is a Jew?” became more prominent. The possibility now arose that a Jew could lose her Jewish identity if she adopted the wrong politics. Can a Jew identify with black liberation? Or does that identification mean the person has betrayed his Jewishness? Can a Jew be a feminist? Can a feminist be a Jew? Are these contradictory identities or complementary ones? Are Jews necessarily feminists in some ideal typical sense? Is a Jew a supporter of Israel’s right to exist? Are Jews necessarily supporters of Israel’s right to exist? Does a Jew retain her Jewish rights within the community if she intermarries? No longer could one claim an identity as a Jew and then adopt whatever politics one desired. The issue was no longer, “What is to be done?” but rather, “Where do I stand?” Politics and identity were intertwined. The former helped to define the latter as much as the latter shaped the former.

Jews often referenced their identity politics using terms popular in the United States. Jewish Defense League (JDL) slogans referred to their perception that Jews had been tragically and damnably passive during the Holocaust. “Never Again” promised resistance to Nazi extermination. The JDL popularized the slogan along with “Every Jew a 22.” The latter referenced a 22-caliber gun for self-defense. The JDL adopted these slogans along with a militant stance modeled on the Black Panthers. Now, the slogans suggested, Jews would be armed and able to defend themselves against murderous anti-Semitism. But JDL used the phrases to mobilize lower-middle-class Jewish youth both to protect their urban neighborhoods from gangs and criminals and to struggle against the Communist Soviet state. They aimed in the latter case to win permission for Soviet Jews to emigrate by standing up to U.S. government authority and by challenging the priorities of Jewish communal organizations.²⁶

Jewish identity, ambiguously located among changing American interpretations of ethnicity, religion, people, and race, lent itself to political redefinition. For many Jews what mattered was politics, and politics therefore defined Jewish identity. Those politics centered on hotly contested issues, most notably feminism, Israel, the Holocaust, intermarriage, and religion. Two examples may suffice. “Radicals Invade Federation, Glue 200 Mezuzahs to Doors” announced a headline in a Los Angeles paper.²⁷ The chosen site for this political action—the Jewish Federation Council build-

ing—represented the pinnacle of the organized American Jewish community. The Federation coordinated fund-raising for many different Jewish health, welfare, social service, and recreational organizations. But it deliberately did not fund religious groups to avoid religious partisanship among proponents of Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Judaism. The Federation imagined itself as the civic space of American Jews, and that space, its leaders concurred, should be free of religious identification.²⁸ The college students conducting their Sunday-morning raid on the Federation disagreed. Their demand for public religious identification reflected a new aggressiveness among young Jews. It also expressed their conviction that pluralism and consensus politics produced an anemic Jewish community. The absence of mezuzahs on its doorframes symbolized the Federation's ignorance of its rich religious heritage. This outward sign of Jewish identification represented defiance toward a politics of accommodation in the eyes of the youth, though the mezuzah itself with its small parchment scroll quoting from the Shema (the Jewish prayer proclaiming the unity of God) had rarely been enlisted in such political gestures. Now the mezuzah was coming to stand for a generic Jewish identity rather than reflect a specific religious commitment. "Jewish Women Call for Change" declared the 1972 manifesto of Ezrat Nashim, a Jewish feminist consciousness-raising group.²⁹ Having committed themselves to feminist Jewish identity, these women struggled to make room within the Jewish community for their vision of Judaism. They demanded that women be granted membership in synagogues, be counted in a prayer minyan of ten adult Jews, and be allowed to participate fully in congregational life. Symbolism did not matter to them as it did for the two young women involved in the project to glue mezuzahs to the doorframes of the Federation building. Yet both groups of women were engaged in Jewish identity politics.

The activism of identity politics fractured the Jewish community. Although efforts to fight anti-Semitism continued to unite Jews of all stripes, a wide range of issues propelled American Jews into different camps divided by their understanding of who was a Jew.

Perhaps most divisive was the status of the State of Israel. After the Yom Kippur war of October 1973 a number of American Jewish activists organized Breira (Alternative). They argued for peaceful coexistence of Israelis and Palestinians. Although these ideas would form the basis of the Oslo accords twenty years later, in the mid-1970s they were considered provocative and inappropriate, threatening to undermine American support for Israel. Breira articulated a dissenting position among American Jews: recognize

Palestinians as a nation and urge that Israelis consider a two-state solution. Breira maintained that American Jews could simultaneously support and criticize Israel. Loyalty to and identification as Jews did not require accepting decisions of Israeli political figures. Indeed, the organization's very name challenged a phrase popular in Israel at the time, *eyn breira*, meaning "there is no choice" but to accept the status quo. After the victory of the Likud party in 1977 and Menachem Begin's election as prime minister, conservative American Jews orchestrated a deft attack on Breira that smeared the organization. Writers associated with Americans for a Safe Israel, a group founded in 1971 to "persuade American Jews to reject a 'peace for territory' solution and only accept 'peace for peace,'" tarred Breira's leaders and members as self-hating Jews, anti-Zionists with communist and socialist pasts, traitors to the Jewish community, or unwitting fellow travelers.³⁰ With Breira's demise, conflict over Israel among American Jews diminished. Neither New Jewish Agenda nor Americans for Peace Now, which emerged in the 1980s, mounted the sort of linked critiques of the American Jewish establishment and Israeli political leaders that had characterized Breira.

While conflict over Israel gradually became less intense due to suppression of dissent and emergence of consensus, conflict over the Holocaust and its meanings intensified in the 1980s and 1990s. In some ways connections drawn between the Holocaust and the subsequent establishment of Israel contributed to arguments about the meaning of the Holocaust. Increasingly Americans of all backgrounds recognized the significance of the genocide of European Jews. Yet the establishment of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which reflected that recognition, provoked debates over the uniqueness of the Holocaust. At stake was how one viewed the war, events leading up to the war, and what happened after it ended. Was this a singularly Jewish catastrophe with its roots in anti-Semitism, the culmination of centuries of persecution of Jews? Or was the extermination of European Jews one example of genocide in a century filled with mass murders? Many Americans tried to answer, "Both."³¹ As the Holocaust moved onto prime-time television in the nine-hour miniseries *Holocaust* that premiered in 1978, it also raised anew questions about how the Holocaust should be represented. Were popular culture portrayals inappropriate on the grounds of "taste" or "seriousness"? Discussions that had largely been confined to the Jewish press now took place in front of a large non-Jewish audience.³²

In the context of identity politics, it was no longer enough to remember the murder of European Jews, to see anti-Semitism as a form of racism,

to resolve to dismantle discrimination in the United States, and to support the right of Jews to have their own state. Such attitudes, which characterized the “Jewish greatest generation” that fought in World War II, lacked clarity and commitment in the eyes of their children. The Holocaust increasingly came to occupy a central place in the identity politics of American Jews. What one thought of the Holocaust, what lessons one derived from it, how one commemorated it mattered a great deal.³³ When her daughter came home from first grade and asked, “Where were you in the Holocaust, Mommy?” the feminist scholar Paula Hyman, born after the war, was moved to write an article in the *New York Times Magazine*. Hyman questioned the emphasis on role-playing enactments of Holocaust scenarios at Jewish summer camps and the centrality that the Holocaust had achieved in Jewish school curriculums. She asked whether Holocaust consciousness should stand at the emotional heart of Jewish study.³⁴ As the Holocaust entered Jewish identity politics, Jews stopped referring to it as a rationale for civil rights activism or opposition to McCarthyism. The Holocaust no longer served as a touchstone for liberal politics. It could not be summoned to justify building synagogues, or integrating bus stations and restaurants, or fighting poverty.³⁵

As Alvin Rosenfeld demonstrates in his article, the Holocaust became Americanized. Americans, Jewish Americans included, were disinclined to contemplate unfathomable evil as expressed in the systematic mass extermination of European Jews. The trade-off for greater recognition of the importance of the Holocaust seemed to be a dilution of its significance. Americans universalized the Holocaust. They began to apply the term to other catastrophes. Americans also searched for life-affirming messages in the Holocaust. The most notable example of this desire appeared in the popularity of Anne Frank’s diary. Americans preferred to emphasize not her miserable death in Bergen-Belsen at the age of fifteen but her optimistic affirmation of humanity’s fundamental goodness.

Rosenfeld points out that the usual division of those involved in the murder of European Jewry into three camps shifts in the United States. Instead of concentrating on the actions of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders, attention is paid to two new categories—rescuers and survivors. The change in focus obscures the primary importance of the former categories. Thus a popular movie like *Schindler’s List* portrays only tangentially the perpetrators and victims. Choosing Oskar Schindler and the Jews he rescued to be the subject of the film misrepresents the Holocaust. Through such reframing the event is fundamentally distorted. Most Jews were killed; most Nazis murdered Jews. Schindler and his Jews are the exception. The

desire to retrieve some “moral idealism from a history of mass murder” ultimately distorts understanding, making it ever more difficult to retain the sense of outrage and despair inherent in any effort to comprehend such a catastrophe.

One of the mysteries of the transformation and Americanization of the Holocaust into a component of the identity politics of American Jews is how it came to be accepted that American Jews ignored the Holocaust in the years after the end of World War II. Hasia Diner sets out to discover the trajectory of identity politics that connects a youthful attack upon the American Jewish establishment with the popularization of the Holocaust in American life.

In 1967 Arthur D. Morse, the executive television producer of *CBS Reports*, published a best-selling book, *While Six Million Died*, subtitled “a chronicle of American apathy.” As its cover proclaimed, Morse told “the breathtaking story of how America ducked chance after chance to save the Jews.”³⁶ The book marked an opening salvo in what would become a mounting attack on the Roosevelt administration for failing to rescue European Jews, one that paralleled efforts by American historians to knock Franklin Delano Roosevelt off the pedestal where American Jews and other liberals had placed him. Morse’s book was followed by scholarly studies; perhaps the most influential was David Wyman’s *The Abandonment of the Jews*, which appeared fifteen years later.

Diner suggests a parallel path, rooted in the rebellious identity politics of the 1970s. In those years young Jews adopted Morse’s critique, aiming it not at the Roosevelt administration but at the leadership of American Jews. Along with blaming American Jews for failing to rescue their European cousins, these young Jews also condemned American Jews for not remembering the Holocaust, not placing it at the forefront of their consciousness. The charges stuck. Indeed, a blue-ribbon commission headed by former Supreme Court justice Arthur Goldberg was impaneled in the 1980s to evaluate and judge American Jews. Held up to standards of identity politics, American Jews of the war years failed miserably. Where were the protests? The rallies? And as a mark of their lack of interest, they did not even care to mourn the deaths, to commemorate the cultural destruction, to ponder the meaning of the Holocaust.³⁷ Yet Diner shows that this powerful version of history is wrong. American Jews did remember, did mourn, did commemorate. The Holocaust remained burned in their consciousness. But the politics of identity erased it from history. The children didn’t realize what their parents had done.

Religious debates increasingly polarized American Jews as they inter-

nalized their spiritual identity. Arnold Eisen describes how a private Jewish consciousness comes to guide and shape American Jewish practice. The choices Jews make—what holidays to observe, what rituals to perform, what commandments to follow—derive from their own interior sense of identity. By the 1980s even moderately affiliated Jews had moved so far from their parents' Jewish "culture of organizations" that they rarely gave credence to communal norms in their assessment of their own behavior. In part this reflected their conviction that Jewishness was both ascribed and achieved. Thus Jews had choice, and yet they remained connected to other Jews through ancestors and children.

For Eisen, American Jews perform the politics of Jewish religious identities most dramatically within their families, around their private dining room tables at mealtimes. This reduces the risk that observance will enter the public non-Jewish sphere. In addition, by focusing Jewish religious practices on children, adults can minimize the extent of their own Jewish identities. "One is not affirming ethnic distinctiveness or religious truth," Eisen argues, by lighting Sabbath candles or blessing the wine, "but merely passing on a tradition, helping to bring the family together." A movement that may have started with affixing mezuzahs to the doorframes of the Federation building seems to have produced personal religious practices that express identity but are devoid of belief.

Of course, as another generation of children matured, they often disagreed with their parents' practices, either adopting more rigorous religious observance or intermarrying. Both actions challenged their parents' religious identities and politics. Young Jews who "returned" to Orthodox or Hasidic Judaism often refused to eat in their parents' homes because their parents did not keep sufficiently kosher kitchens. These children enacted their religious behaviors in public for all to see, and they emphasized the importance of strict interpretations of religious requirements.³⁸ At the other end of the spectrum, young Jews who intermarried often denied that they were still Jews, thus disrupting the chain of generations that had been so central to their parents' identities.

Jonathan Sarna sees both tendencies as extending back in American history. Both the drive for religious renewal and revitalization by a young, native-born generation and the desire to assimilate and intermarry with Christian Americans have long histories. Tensions between the two over the course of three centuries have strengthened pluralism in American Jewish life. The freedoms of the United States coupled with disestablishment of religion, especially at the national level, encouraged American Jews to develop competing and even contradictory traditions of behavior.

The competitive dimensions of contemporary religious pluralism can be seen most clearly in the changing fluid relationship of Orthodox and Conservative Jews. Whether in rabbinic leadership, synagogue practices, or membership, few distinctions sharply demarcated orthodox from conservative. But with the rise of identity politics in the 1970s, demands on Orthodoxy and Conservatism escalated. Feminist Jews urged the latter to move beyond mixed seating that had previously been the symbol of equality between men and women in American Judaism. Now feminists called for recognition of women as constituent members of a prayer quorum (*minyan*), acceptance of women as prayer leaders, training of women as rabbis, scholars, and cantors. Their demands were met. These dramatic changes aligned Conservative Judaism with an egalitarianism identified as American. By contrast, efforts to convince Orthodox rabbis to modify Jewish law (*halakhah*) to allow Jewish women to study traditional texts, or to permit them to form their own prayer groups, provoked as much opposition as support. Women had a place in Judaism, Orthodox leaders affirmed, but it was not identical to that of men.

The politics of religious identity extended into the public sphere beyond the synagogue. In the 1980s clothing styles for men and women came to mark religious identities. Orthodox women adopted modest forms of dress, wearing long skirts and blouses and covering their hair if married. Different types of head coverings for men, from knitted *kipot* to elaborate fur-trimmed hats, signified their allegiance to versions of Orthodoxy. Other public behaviors, including where one ate, entered the language of religious identity politics. Although one needed to know how to “read” the evidence, it was widely available for in-group members. The process of differentiation described by Jeffrey Gurock reached well beyond the rabbis and leaders he discusses. The politics of identity helped to draw rigid lines between two groups of religious Jews who once shared much in common.

New directions in Jewish theology in America accompanied these trends. In response to the rise of identity politics in religion, Arthur Green argues for a Jewish theology that includes all Jews. Indeed, the legacy of Hasidism, the pietist movement of mystical Judaism, is too valuable to remain only with its adherents. It belongs to all Jews because it speaks a rich language of sacred texts, of prayer and nature, and of God’s immanence. Green locates an Eastern European tradition of theologizing that connects contemporary Jewish thinkers with Hasidic masters of the nineteenth century. This tradition reaches American Jews through the exemplary career of renowned philosopher and civil rights activist Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who was born in Poland, educated in Germany, and immigrated

to the United States before World War II. Green places himself within this spiritual lineage. He emphasizes that Judaism is a garment “that is completely natural.” There is no need to defend Judaism or to define it in terms that are basically foreign to it. Instead, this neo-Hasidic religious reflection rests upon recovery of the “kabbalistic-hasidic tradition” that potentially possesses a power to transform American Jewish spirituality.

Although women have contributed to this new spirituality, the Jewish feminist movement has moved more often toward an egalitarian than a mystical understanding of Judaism. Paula Hyman speaks powerfully of Jewish feminism’s centrality to the identity of its adherents. They can no more part with their feminism than with their Judaism; both are integral to their personhood. Jewish feminists distinguished themselves from many of the Jewish women active in the American feminist movement by refusing to privilege one identity over another or to separate their identity as women from their identity as Jews. Since neither took priority, Jewish feminists conducted a dual struggle against sexism and discrimination in the Jewish community and against anti-Semitism in the feminist movement. They were remarkably successful. Within less than two decades from the early organizing years of the 1970s, women had broken down long-standing barriers to their participation as equals in Jewish religious life and won recognition as rabbis, scholars, and leaders. Their successes helped to establish feminism as an enduring fault-line separating Jewish religious groups. Simultaneously, Jewish women summoned the courage to speak out about anti-Semitism in diverse segments of the women’s movement. Their attacks on anti-Zionism, anti-Judaism, and stereotypes of Jewish women (e.g., as “Jewish American Princesses”) promoted healthy dialogue and gradually changed gentile women’s attitudes.³⁹

For Jewish women disappointed with radicalism, Jewish feminism also offered an alternative path. Because of its own radical critique of Judaism that reflected a deep commitment to Jewish identification, Jewish feminists spoke to Jews on the left in a common language. If feminists often disparaged the organized Jewish community and dissented from its policies, Jewish feminists provided a model of constructive engagement and critique. Situated between competing constituencies and claiming legitimacy in both, Jewish feminists provided a bridge back to Judaism. Betty Friedan, one of the founders of second-wave feminism, had been estranged from her Jewish identity but rediscovered its significance through the path blazed by Jewish feminists.

Questions of Jewish culture entered the realm of identity politics some-

what later than feminism. While Jews always enjoyed the game of identifying other Jews in popular culture, the issue of whether American Jewish culture even existed engaged them less often. Steven Whitfield tries to wrestle a position out of contradictory definitions of culture, of Jewishness, and of being American. He juggles multiple possibilities, from diffuse understandings of American Jewish culture that include all Jews and set no boundaries, to maximalist interpretations that limit American Jewish culture to works by Jews that explicitly deal with Jewish themes. The latter perversely truncates a writer's or artist's identity, reducing it to only some Jewish fraction, leaving unaccounted the American side. It is a dilemma exacerbated by struggles over identity politics. However, postmodern notions of hybridity may offer alternatives.

Perhaps the most enduring arena of identity politics can be found in the bitter debates over intermarriage. Both Egon Mayer and Sylvia Barack Fishman use measured language and similar social science methodologies to come to rather different conclusions. Mayer's optimism that "America is different" leads him to argue that intermarriage in the United States does not resemble the "radical assimilation" studied by Todd Endelman in Europe. Fishman's darker view of the same trends sees intermarriage destroying necessary boundaries demarcating Jews from other Americans. Without conversion to Judaism by the gentile spouse, intermarried families tend to compromise with the dominant Christian culture. Neither Fishman nor Mayer indulges in the polemics and name-calling that has characterized discussion of intermarriage. However, Mayer alludes to some of the provocative advertisements published by Orthodox Jews in response to the decision by Reform Jews to welcome converts to Judaism. Conversely, Fishman cites the imputation of "racism" leveled at Jews who desire endogamy.

Yet intermarriage has engendered hyperbolic rhetoric. Former prime minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu referred to rising intermarriage rates among American Jews as "a Silent Holocaust."⁴⁰ Fears for the future of Jewish life in America have focused on intermarriage. Statistics from the national Jewish population survey in 1990 fueled frantic efforts to revamp American Jewish organizational priorities. Fund-raising campaigns focused on "continuity," raising the specter of a North American continent with barely any Jews, bereft of political influence, a tiny minority due to intermarriage. Calls were heard to exclude Jews who intermarried from positions of authority, to keep them out of synagogue boardrooms and classrooms. Indeed, intermarriage vied with homosexuality as touchstones of identity politics at the end of the twentieth century.⁴¹ It is a tribute to their

scholarly commitments that both Mayer and Fishman, though they stand on opposite sides of the intermarriage fence, still speak with respect and civility about one of the hot political topics agitating American Jews.

The course of Jewish identity politics eventually narrowed. By the end of the twentieth century, as Mayer and Fishman suggest, Jewish identity politics had coalesced around either Jewishness as ineluctable or Jewishness as elective. Were Jews a chosen people or a choosy people? The idea of selecting affiliation, practice, or belief undermined the premise of identity politics since it suggested the mutability of identities and hence of any political ideologies codependent with them.

Identity politics have waned in the twenty-first century, but have not disappeared. A concern for social and racial justice, environmentalism, and questions of war and peace increasingly occupy the center of a new generation's political consciousness. Although it is too early to characterize their politics, the question "What is to be done?" has acquired fresh importance. This American Jewish generation seeks to differentiate itself from its parents, the baby boomers. Thus it seeks alternatives to identity politics in coalitions that bring Jews and their Jewishness to the forefront of efforts to make a better and more humane world.

Notes

1. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1963), 11.
2. Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Knopf, 1979).
3. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 225.
4. Paul Ritterband and Harold S. Wechsler, *Jewish Learning in American Universities: The First Century* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994), 211–15, 233–35.
5. Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 117–246.
6. Arthur A. Goren, "Inventing the 'New Pluralism,'" in *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 205–23, especially 220–22.
7. Letty Cottin Pogrebin writes in *Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 203, that only one of her articles "has won and lost friends and influenced people so dramatically that it could be called a cause celebre." That article, "Anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement" appeared in the June 1982 issue of *Ms.* magazine and allowed her to confront the conflict between her identity as a woman and a Jew. It is reprinted in *Deborah, Golda, and Me*, 205–28.
8. Debra L. Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 100–108, discusses the tensions for Jewish

women in Mississippi in the 1960s. "Acting in accord with one of several identities in a given political situation does not preclude bringing all of oneself to the situation," she writes (105).

9. Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left* (New York: Wiley, 1979).

10. On the 1940s and 1950s see Stuart Svonkin, *Jews against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); on the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s see Marc L. Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 129–41.

11. M. Jay Rosenberg, "To Jewish Uncle Toms," reprinted from *Jewish Frontier* (1969) in *The Jewish 1960s: An American Sourcebook*, ed. Michael E. Staub (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 232–36. The reference to "Uncle Jake" is on p. 229.

12. Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), especially chaps. 5 and 6.

13. Harold Weisberg, "Ideologies of American Jews," in *The American Jew: A Reappraisal*, ed. Oscar I. Janowsky (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1964), 347.

14. Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (New York: Schocken, 1972), 19–42.

15. Edward S. Shapiro, *A Time for Healing: American Jewry since World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 8–10.

16. Deborah Dash Moore, "Jewish GIs and the Creation of the Judeo-Christian Tradition," *Religion and American Culture* 8, no. 1 (1998): 31–54.

17. Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960).

18. Naomi Cohen, *Jews in Christian America: The Pursuit of Religious Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

19. Svonkin, *Jews against Prejudice*.

20. Riv-Ellen Prell, *Prayer and Community: The Havurah in American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 70.

21. Prell, *Prayer and Community*, 76.

22. Prell, *Prayer and Community*, 80.

23. Weisberg, "Ideologies of American Jews," 339.

24. Prell, *Prayer and Community*, 81.

25. Ezra Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5–35.

26. Janet L. Dolgin, *Jewish Identity and the JDL* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), especially chap. 3. "The broader categorization, Jew/non-Jew, was not based on action. These were categories of being," she writes; "it is the significance and meaning of *Jewishness* rather than Judaism with which JDL was concerned" (71–72).

27. *Jewish Post and Opinion*, November 14, 1969, 4, in Staub, *The Jewish 1960s*, 239.

28. Jonathan S. Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

29. Jacob Rader Marcus, ed. *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History* (New York: Ktav, 1981), 894–96.

30. Jack Wertheimer, "Breaking the Taboo: Critics of Israel and the American Jewish Establishment," in *Envisioning Israel: The Changing Ideals and Images of North American Jews*, ed. Allon Gal (Jerusalem: Magnes Press of the Hebrew University; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 401.
31. Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995).
32. Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 23-26.
33. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 1-15.
34. Paula Hyman, "New Debate on the Holocaust," *New York Times Magazine*, September 14, 1980.
35. Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 45-75.
36. Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Random House, 1967).
37. Seymour Maxwell Finger, *American Jewry during the Holocaust: A Report by the Research Director, His Staff, and Independent Research Scholars Retained by the Director for the American Jewish Commission on the Holocaust* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984).
38. Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," *Tradition* 28, no. 4 (1994): 64-130.
39. Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 292-302.
40. Samuel G. Freedman, *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 73-79.
41. See the contributors to *A Statement on the Jewish Future: Text and Responses* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1997).